



Sri Sarada Devi—The Holy Mother



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“उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य चरान्निबोधत ।”

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

## SALUTATIONS TO THE DIVINE MOTHER

सर्वमङ्गलमाङ्गल्ये शिवे सर्वार्थसाधिके ।  
शरण्ये त्र्यम्बके गौरि नारायणि नमोऽस्तु ते ॥ १ ॥  
सृष्टिस्थितिविनाशानां शक्तिभूते सनातनि ।  
गुणाश्रयेऽगुणमये नारायणि नमोऽस्तु ते ॥ २ ॥  
शरणागतदीनार्तपरित्राणपरायणे ।  
सर्वस्यार्तिहरे देवि नारायणि नमोऽस्तु ते ॥ ३ ॥

1. O Auspicious One, Thou art the source of all auspiciousness. Thou art the accomplisher of all cherished desires. Thou art the giver of refuge. Thou possessest the eye of wisdom and beautiful form. O Thou Power Divine, salutations to Thee!

2. O Eternal One, Thou art the energy of creation, maintenance, and destruction. Thou art the abode of all qualities, and yet beyond them. O Thou Power Divine, salutations to Thee!

3. O Mother, Thou ever savest those in poverty and pain, who take refuge in Thee. Thou art the remover of the misery of all, O Thou Power Divine, salutations to Thee!

—Devī-māhātmya (Chañḍī), XI. 10-12.

# S H E

BY ANIRVAN

The azure of the Void brooded in silence over the Earth in trance.  
From the abyss of Death shot forth the first ray of the darkly-luminous Aśvin, the  
harbinger of the new Life of Light.  
The depths were stirred, the Gods have awakened.  
The aching dream of Earth in travail bloomed into a White Lily,  
And Her petals softly opened to the kiss of the starlit night.  
'The Fire is Light, the Light is Fire, and Life an offering unto the Lord', rose the  
chant of Her soul in voiceless strains.

Then came the dawn and the first ray of the Sun.  
'The Sun is Light, the Light is Sun, and Life an offering unto the Lord', murmured  
Her yearning soul.  
The winkless Eye that is extended in heaven smiled upon Her and Her heart knew.

The crescent moon was growing into a full-orbed joy,  
And within Her the diaphanous Soma-cup was bubbling over with glorious dreams.  
The day had swooned into the twilight of a vague hope.

Then the Call came.  
The Call of the Void unto the Deep:  
'As the waters rush down the slopes and months fade into the radiance of Time,  
'So come unto Me, *svāhā!*'  
The magic of the night broke and the slumbering Fire blazed into a consuming flame.  
She heard, She came.  
And the winkless Eye smiled upon Her again and Her heart knew.

'All Life is an offering unto the Lord, *svāhā!*'  
'And all My Glory is an offering unto Thee, *svāhā!*'  
The Void of Love filled the Void of Life, and Light was born.  
The verdant dream of Adolescence bloomed into the White Lotus of Transcendence  
beyond the stars.  
She saw, She trembled.

'Who am I and who art Thou, and what are We?'  
'The Same that is enshrined in every heart,  
'The Same that suffers sorrow and death,  
'The Same that broods in silence beyond the Space.  
'In the depth of Non-Existence I dreamt of Thee,  
'And with My Titan strength I fashioned Thee out of the unhewn rock of Existence . . .  
'A corona of the Hidden Light.  
'Thou art Aditi, the Virgin Mother of Gods and Man,  
'Aditi whose shadow is Immortality and Death,  
'Aditi, the Spirit of the Earth whose golden bosom shines in the empyrean height,  
'Aditi, the Father, the Mother, and the Son. . .'

She looked up and He looked deep into Her eyes and Her heart knew.  
Her glorious dream melted into a tear.  
A tear that was a ransom for the past and a promise of the future,

# A HYMN TO SRI SĀRADĀ DEVI

## श्रीसारदादेवी स्तोत्रम्

BY SWAMI ABHEDANANDA

प्रकृति परमामभयां वरदां  
नररूपधरां जनतापहरां ।  
शरणागतसेवकतोषकरिं  
प्रणमामि परां जननीं जगताम् ॥१॥

1. O Prakriti Supreme in human form!  
Bestower of boon and bliss!  
Distress of souls removest Thou,  
And grantest them content and peace.  
Thy servants who surrender all to Thee  
Thou makest them contented and free.  
O Great Mother of the world,  
Be my salutations ever to Thee.

गुणहीनसुतानपराधयुतान्  
कृपयाद्य समुद्धर मोहगतान् ।  
तरणीं भवसागरपारकरिं  
प्रणमामि परां जननीं जगताम् ॥२॥

2. Through mercy do Thou this day save  
Thy sons bound in Maya's chain,  
Who have virtue none to say,  
Full of crimes and ever vain.  
O Thou art the only ship,  
To ferry across the worldly sea!  
O Great Mother of the world,  
Be my salutations ever to Thee.

विषयं कुसुमं परिहृत्य सदा  
चरणाम्बुखामृतशान्तिसुधां ।  
पिब भृङ्गमनो भवरोगहरां  
प्रणमामि परां जननीं जगताम् ॥३॥

3. Renounce, renounce, my mind-bee!  
The sense-flowers of the earth;  
Drink ever at the 'Lotus-feet'  
Delusion-destroying Peace-nectar.  
O Great Mother of the world,  
Be my salutations ever to Thee.

कृपां कुरु महादेवि सुतेषु प्रणतेषु च  
चरणाश्रयदानेन कृपामयि नमोऽस्तु ते ॥४॥

4. Pity, please, O Great Mother!  
Thy sons bowing to Thee anon,  
Grant them refuge at Thy feet,  
O Merciful One, salutations to Thee.

लज्जापटावृते नित्यं सारदे ज्ञानदायिके  
पापेभ्यो नः सदा रक्ष कृपामयि नमोऽस्तु ते ॥५॥

5. O Sāradā, Gracious Mother!  
Giver of wisdom, in 'modest veil',  
Protect us, please, I salute Thee,  
Evermore from sin and ail.

रामकृष्णगतप्राणां तन्नामश्रवणप्रियां  
तद्भावरञ्जिताकारां प्रणमामि मुहुर्मुहुः ॥६॥

6. Thy heart to Ramakrishna doth remain,  
To hear His name is joy to Thee,  
O Embodiment of His thought alone,  
I salute Thee over, over again.

पवित्रं चरितं यस्याः पवित्रं जीवनं तथा  
पवित्रतास्वरूपिण्यै तस्यै कुर्मो नमोनमः ॥७॥

7. Noble Thou hast a character,  
Pure is Thy life divine;  
Ever we bow to Thee, O Mother,  
Thou incarnate Purity fine!



देवीं प्रसन्नां प्रणतार्तिहन्त्रीं  
योगीन्द्रपूज्यां युगधर्मपार्त्रीं ।  
तां सारदां भक्तिविज्ञानदात्रीं  
दयास्वरूपां प्रणमामि नित्यं ॥८॥

स्नेहेन बध्नासि मनोऽस्मदीयं  
दोषानशेषान् सगुणीकरोषि ।  
अहेतुना नो दयसे सदोषान्  
स्वाङ्गे गृहीत्वा यदिदं विचित्रम् ॥९॥

प्रसीद मातर्विनयेन याचे  
नित्यं भव स्नेहवती सुतेषु ।  
प्रेमैकबिन्दुं चिरदग्धचित्ते  
विषिञ्च चित्तं कुरु नः सुशान्तम् ॥१०॥

जननीं सारदां देवीं रामकृष्णं जगद्गुरुं  
पादपद्मे तयोः श्रित्वा प्रणमामि मुहुर्मुहुः ॥११॥

8. O Sārādā, Goddess propitious,  
Killer of misery in souls resigned,  
Saviour of religion in every age,  
By Yogindra worshipped, O Mother  
kind,  
Givest Love and Wisdom Thou,  
Grace incarnate! to Thee I bow.

9. Through tie of 'Love' divine  
Bound Thou hast the heart of ours;  
Granting e'er Thy lap benign,  
O Wonder! how Thy mercy showers!  
By grace hast Thou made us holy,  
To virtue changed our endless folly.

10. Be loving and gracious to Thy sons,  
O Mother! I humbly beseech,  
Sprinkle in their hearts arid,  
A drop of love, to enjoy peace!

11. O Ramakrishna, the Teacher of all,  
And Mother Sārādā, Goddess divine!  
In bosom holding your Lotus Feet,  
Salutations to both be e'er mine.

## TO THE HOLY MOTHER

Hail, Holy Mother!  
Nourishing Spirit of the age!  
Awakened Womanhood!  
Awakener of thy sons in slumber!  
Shatter their dreams of ignorant peace,  
And their search for selfish pleasure.  
  
Scatter Thy light of life and love,  
Kindle the lamp of Knowledge in our hearts,  
That we can see Thy face benign,  
And we can know anew the stuff we are  
made of,

That Thou art the Self of our self.  
Yea, Thou art the ocean, and we, the waves—  
Rising, floating, sinking,—all in Thee.

Hail, Mother! Awakener of thy sons and  
daughters,  
No more in sleep and dream lull them down.  
Set them on their onward march,  
With the spirit of the brotherhood of man,  
And under the benign Motherhood of God.

—S. N.



# SRI SARADA DEVI—THE HOLY MOTHER

BY THE EDITOR

Sri Sarada Devi, or the Holy Mother—as she is well known among the devotees and followers of Sri Ramakrishna, was born on the 22nd December 1853. She was the illustrious consort of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the saint of Dakshineswar and the great prophet of religious harmony and spiritual renaissance in modern India. The first centennial anniversary of the birth of Sarada Devi came off on the 27th December 1953. This special number of the Prabuddha Bharata, issued in commemoration of The Holy Mother Birth Centenary, is a humble yet devout tribute to the hallowed memory of the sacred personality of the Holy Mother. She was an embodiment of grace, purity, and simplicity of the most exalted type, and though much less widely known than Sri Ramakrishna, she, as his wife, combined in herself the exemplary characteristics of a nun, a mother, and a spiritual teacher of a very high order. When considered in this light, one wonders whether she was not also an essential part of the same Power or Shakti, the same aspect of the Divine, which descended on earth, about seventeen years earlier than her, in the person of Sri Ramakrishna. Howsoever that be, the unique personality of the Holy Mother—in and through whom Sri Ramakrishna sought to give India and the world a myriad-faceted gem of the ideal of womanhood at its noblest and best—is beyond compare and has many valuable lessons for humanity. A closer study and understanding of the story of the glorious life of the Holy Mother is bound to help in popularizing the lofty ideals and qualities that have distinguished the women of our motherland through the ages.

It is therefore in the fitness of things that in this special issue are presented several interesting and informative articles bearing on

the life and teachings of the Holy Mother, as also select extracts from the writings on and the reminiscences of the Holy Mother, by various persons, some of whom had personally and intimately known her. In keeping with the spirit of the precious national heritage, which the Holy Mother's spiritual personality served to re-emphasize and re-interpret for the present and future generations, a number of articles, from learned contributors, are also presented herein, dealing in brief with the role of women in the various spheres of national life and their contributions in different epochs of our history from the Vedic to the modern times.

A great many people all over the world are well acquainted with the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. A majority of these may have just heard or read about Sri Sarada Devi, but not known much regarding the details of her superb life as the illustrious spiritual consort of Sri Ramakrishna. Her simple and unostentatious life, though spent mostly in the seclusion of domestic and rural setting, possesses a charm and serenity of unusual significance. On the surface there is such unutterable calm and unmatched self-effacement that her hallowed life, with its richness and divine glow, often defies any attempt at a quick and superficial analysis. The immeasurable depth of her personality was beyond the comprehension of many, while to some others she graciously revealed herself, willingly and occasionally drawing aside the curtain that hid the supernatural grandeur of her inner life. Yet, as the days and years pass and the world is getting to realize more and more the luminosity of the Holy Mother's hitherto little known personality, one can see in her, even from a distance, unmistakable indications of the dignity and splendour of every virtue that



the world holds dear and which may easily be reckoned superhuman.

The laws of the spiritual world take their own perfectly logical course, almost always bewildering and unfathomable even to those who are acclaimed as men of light and leading. Born in the tiny hamlet of Jayrambati, in the Bankura district of West Bengal, little Saradamani had something out of the ordinary, something distinctly less mundane and more celestial, in her ways and mental make-up. Her fond parents, Ramachandra Mukherji and Shyāmāsundari Devi, pious and upright, though poor, had a foreknowledge, through pleasant visions, that this first-born child of theirs was no other than a divine being come down to bless their home and probably the whole earth. Always simple in her habits, Saradamani smoothly stepped out of her infancy, having gone through the usual but essential home-training in vogue in her days. Those who were close to her could not fail to notice the fact that she was an infant prodigy with a flair for quickly picking up the substantial elements of character-building and cultural development even from the rural or primitive surroundings she was brought up in. Her future spiritual excellence showed itself in various ways while she was still a young girl. She would often be found absorbed in deep meditation and would extend extraordinary love and sympathy to the needy with maternal solicitude. Though she had no literary schooling worth the name, she surpassed many in those deeper cultural traits which form the aims and values of education.

Betrothed, as a young girl of five, to Sri Ramakrishna, whose native village Kamarpukur lay only four miles off from hers, Sarada Devi grew up all by herself in a peaceful and natural atmosphere, unsullied by the sophistication of urban artfulness. Here, too, one finds the hand of destiny in action. When a snitable bride for Sri Ramakrishna was being sought after, he himself announced that Sarada Devi was the one earmarked as his would-be wife. After her marriage, as she glided into her girlhood days, Sri Ramakrishna

called her to his side, in his native village, and bestowing on her the purest love he only was capable of doing, taught her many useful and precious things, both secular and spiritual. Even at that stage it became evident that Sri Ramakrishna was beginning to train her for the future mission and purpose he desired her to fulfil. Sarada also, with her innate intuitive vision, fully realized what her divine husband expected of her. With great devotion to him as her supreme guide, she easily and willingly allowed herself to be moulded by his expert hands. From Sri Ramakrishna, who had already advanced a long way in his spiritual quest, she learnt and treasured the divine purpose of life and felt more and more attracted to his path of godliness than to any of the ordinary pleasures of mundane existence.

As she advanced in age and entered her late teens, she left her village home and came to reside with Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. Notwithstanding the long years of separation between them, the cordiality and overflowing affection Sri Ramakrishna extended to her were something undreamt of by her. The subsequent life-story reads like a super-miracle. Though always in a God-intoxicated state of mind, Sri Ramakrishna never for a moment shunned his dear consort who had chosen to be by his side for whatever purpose she might be needed by her most esteemed lord. Strange to say, the loving husband, far from any thought of renouncing her, admitted her claims upon him as his wife and even permitted her to share his bed for nearly eight months. But each night would bring her more and better revelations about the purity and exalted state of Sri Ramakrishna when she would see for herself how utterly detached from his physical surroundings he would remain and how very often he would go into divine ecstasy, completely oblivious of the presence of his young wife beside him. Her mind, too, was no less stainless. For neither of them would for a moment be affected by the faintest touch of carnality. What to mention of their total absence of



carnality! While Sri Ramakrishna would be immersed in the bliss of Samadhi, for hours at a stretch, the Holy Mother would keep vigil, night after night, and watch and learn from the changing moods of the saintly husband by her side.

When one studies with a mind free from corporeal passions the conjugal life of Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother, one cannot but stand in awe before such a lofty and unprecedented example and exclaim, 'How different from the married life of the ordinary man and woman!' We say 'unprecedented' with justification, for, no world teacher of the stature of Sri Ramakrishna is known to have set such a perfect example of marital felicity and inviolate celibacy while living with his consort a harmonious, affectionate, and well-adjusted life. Further, standing on the conviction born of his unerring mystic realization of the Divine Shakti that resided in the Holy Mother, Sri Ramakrishna brought his own Sadhanas to a successful conclusion by formally worshipping Sarada Devi as the Divine Mother, following the rituals of the Tantric ceremony called *Ṣhodaśhī Pūjā*. As the consummation of the long series of his spiritual practices, Sri Ramakrishna finally perceived the Goddess Divine under the veil of his wife and surrendered himself and dedicated his all to the Mother of the universe manifested through the living symbol of Sarada Devi. He prostrated himself before her, uttering the prescribed salutation. Such worship of the wife by the husband was unknown in the past. Such reverence shown by the teacher to his pupil has no parallel in the history of mankind.

While Sri Ramakrishna tested himself in various ways in his relation to Sarada Devi and each time came out unscathed through the ordeals, the Holy Mother's own reaction to the attitude Sri Ramakrishna adopted towards her was most remarkable and is perfectly understandable. She was in no way behind her divine husband in her spiritual hankering. To say that she readily renounced all thought of sense-pleasure, most common in

family life, would naturally mean the pre-supposition that she perhaps cherished such thought sometime before she renounced it. But knowing as we do her divine origin and the purpose of her spiritual mission in the context of Sri Ramakrishna's immense contribution to the modern world, we can hardly entertain the idea that one who was the visible representation of the Mother Goddess of the universe could ever have felt the least trace of the body-idea. This is borne out by the fact that during the thirteen years or so of her spiritual training under Sri Ramakrishna, at Dakshineswar, she made rapid progress and scaled the exalted summits of Self-realization.

From what we know of the events of this wonderful period of their unique relationship as Guru and disciple, one thing becomes clear, viz. Sri Ramakrishna was definitely preparing her for her future task as his spiritual successor. He was not satisfied with making her an ideal wife. She was to be left behind, after him, to exemplify his great renunciation and catholicity. She was to be Sri Ramakrishna's final word in the perfection of Indian womanhood. In her was to be seen manifest motherly love of unprecedented dimensions. With this well-defined end in view, Sri Ramakrishna silently but steadily sought to arouse her sub-conscious potentiality through honour, adoration, and even direct references to her divinity. He imparted to her spiritual and mundane wisdom, beginning with details of domestic life and taking her up to the heights of Samadhi and realization of Brahman. The Holy Mother, too, on her side, was not slow in understanding and co-operating with the Master's (Sri Ramakrishna's) mission.

Referring to the Holy Mother, Sri Ramakrishna said: 'She (the Holy Mother) is Sarada, Sarasvati: she has come to impart knowledge. She has descended by covering up her beauty this time, lest impure people should come to grief by looking at her with impure minds'. Again he said: 'She is the communicator of knowledge; she is full of the rarest wisdom. Is she of the common run?



She is my Shakti (Power). During the days of his austerities, Sri Ramakrishna once had a vision of Sita and noticed that she wore bracelets with diamonds cut on the surface. Later, he had similar bracelets made specially for the Holy Mother and referring to them, humorously remarked, 'That is my relationship with her'.

Thus the Master never failed to notice the core of purity and spiritual eminence that lay hidden in the Holy Mother. He had said of her, in fun, 'She is a cat under ashes'. As a cat, covered with ashes, hides its true colour from people, so also are the real stature and glory of the Holy Mother remaining invisible to mortal eyes under her garb of modesty, humility, and absence of modernization. The Mother's own testimony is there to the effect that Sri Ramakrishna knew that she would have to continue his spiritual ministry and that he commissioned her to do accordingly. Long after, when one of her disciples asked her, 'Mother, other Incarnations left their bodies after their consorts had passed away. But why did the Master precede you this time?', the Holy Mother replied, 'My boy, you must be aware that the Master looked upon all in the world as Mother. He left me behind for manifesting that motherhood before all'. On another occasion she said: 'When the Master departed, I too wanted that I should go. But he appeared and said, "No, you stay on; there is much still undone". I found, at long last, in truth there is much to do'.

Naturally shy and retiring, and far from being proud of her spiritual attainments or of her being the life-companion of so eminent a saint as Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother continued to maintain her equanimity and guilelessness. But the sure-footed guide who was leading her up the slopes of spiritual self-revelation lost no opportunity in making her known to the world. Sri Ramakrishna was not unaware of the fact that a secular and sensate society could hardly appreciate, much less understand, such a character of immaculate purity as the Holy Mother's. Yet, for

one like her who would in future become the consoler, guide, and inspirer of numerous persons, there was every need of manifestation of the aspects of motherhood, preceptorship, and saintliness.

Sri Ramakrishna had been strengthening her power of spiritual ministration by teaching her various Mantras, made vibrant through the life he had breathed into them, and imparting instructions to her about the ways of initiation and the levels of spiritual life to which particular Mantras were suitable. Towards his last days, the Master's commission to the Holy Mother to be his spiritual successor was more explicit. 'Well, my dear,' said he to her, in a slightly aggrieved but feeling tone, 'Won't you do anything? Should this (pointing to his own body) alone do everything?' The Mother, conscious of her helplessness, said, 'I am a woman. What can I do?' The Master quickly corrected her, 'No, no, you will have to do much'.

Sri Ramakrishna passed into Life Eternal on 16th August 1886. The Holy Mother was in her thirty-third year. From now on, being alone, her life took a different course. The Master, to whose devoted service she had dedicated her mind and body in their entirety, was not present in flesh and blood. But his spiritual and divine presence was to her an ever inspiring and never-failing reality. Repeatedly she was consoled and assured by him in visions and ecstatic trances that he had not forsaken her but had just 'shifted from one room (earthly existence) to another (original divine source)'. She was, therefore, not to mourn any bereavement, not to dress and conduct herself as a widow would ordinarily do in Hindu society. For nearly thirty-four years after the Master, the Holy Mother ministered to the spiritual needs of thousands of sincere seekers of God. She lived her quiet life, as before, residing in or near Calcutta for a little over twenty years, till the time of her final exit from mortal ken. During the period of her spiritual ministry, the Holy Mother went on pilgrimage to holy places in North and South India. As the years passed and



the end (of which she alone was aware) drew near, the Mother was seen to be always full of love, grace, and sympathy. Women devotees and disciples, no less than men devotees and disciples, gathered round her from far and near. To the Sannyasins of the Ramakrishna Order she was the most affectionate Holy Mother (or Sri Sri Mā) and her guiding hand, full of hope and blessing, was to be seen active behind the smooth and successful expansion of the spiritual and humanitarian work of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. On the 21st of July 1920, the Holy Mother left the physical world, leaving behind an ideal of perfect womanhood worthy of emulation by women all over the world. To the women of India, in particular, the Holy Mother's life vividly presents, in characters of gold, a glowing example of wifedom and motherhood *par excellence*.

Befitting the name by which she was spontaneously venerated and addressed as the Holy Mother by householders and Sannyasins alike, the most dominant trait in her character, overshadowing every other feature, was her motherly love and concern. Everybody who came into touch with her, including such unique personalities as Swami Vivekananda and Sister Nivedita, were deeply impressed by her maternal affection which they all felt far exceeded the love they received from their own mothers. Her readiness to help all, irrespective of caste, creed, or colour, even regardless of their merits, was most striking. She was sweetness incarnate and grace abounding, and her simple words went home to the hearts of the listeners, giving them complete solace and satisfaction. The unique relation of perfect freedom between the Holy Mother and the women devotees from the West can hardly be described. At a time when orthodoxy and caste prejudices were strongly binding on society, the Holy Mother felt free to associate herself with all without any narrow discrimination. Like Sri Ramakrishna, her catholicity and generous heart welcomed and

encompassed the so-called 'low-caste' man, the non-Hindu, and the foreigner.

The precious heritage of the great and ideal women of India, of ancient and modern times, found true expression and fulfilment in the life of the Holy Mother. This peerless and ennobling example of Sri Sarada Devi—the Holy Mother needs to be placed prominently before our rising generation. Here one can find the principal features of a dynamic gospel of dignity, freedom, and character suited to the woman of today and tomorrow. The Holy Mother's life and teachings contain everything needed to harmonize the relationship between man and woman and to make more fruitful and less unhelpful the modern urge for awakening and equality on the part of woman. The Mother has shown women the way to domestic peace, individual self-fulfilment, and cultural and spiritual accomplishment with the least or no trace of conflict with men. A man or woman, by the conscious, unselfish, and purposeful discharge of his or her respective duties attains everything he or she desires here and hereafter. This much-needed message to mankind has been heralded by the advent of Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother.

India's forte is her spirituality. Hence the Indian woman is pre-eminently the preserver and sustainer of her motherland's spiritual values. Standing on the summit of spiritual enlightenment, the women of India can gain liberty, equality, and fraternity, in accordance with the Indian conception of these democratic principles. It is in this spirit of wishing the welfare and progress of Indian women that we venture to appeal to them to study and understand this unique life of Sri Sarada Devi. For, Sarada Devi stood like a perfect model, created by Sri Ramakrishna as the last word in the manifestation of womanly virtues, bringing over to our age whatever was salutary and helpful in the ancient heritage of the motherland and fulfilling at the same time the legitimate aspirations of modern womanhood everywhere.



# ON THE HOLY MOTHER

BY SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

You have not yet understood the wonderful significance of Mother's (Holy Mother's) life—none of you. But gradually you will know. Without Shakti (Power) there is no regeneration for the world. Why is it that our country is the weakest and the most backward of all countries? Because Shakti is held in dishonour there.<sup>1</sup> Mother has been born to revive that wonderful Shakti in India; and making her the nucleus, once more will Gārgis and Maitreyis be born into the world. Dear brother, you understand little now. But by degrees, you will come to know it all. Hence it is her Math that I want first. . . . Without the grace of Shakti nothing is to be accomplished. What do I find in America and Europe?—the worship of Shakti, the worship of Power. Yet they worship Her ignorantly through sense-gratification. Imagine, then, what a lot of good they will achieve who will worship Her with all purity, in a Sāttvika spirit, looking upon Her as their mother! I am coming to understand things clearer every day, my insight is opening out more and more. Hence we must first build a Math for Mother. First Mother and her daughters, then Father and his sons—can you understand this? . . . To me, Mother's grace is a hundred thousand times more valuable than Father's. Mother's grace, Mother's blessings are all paramount to me. . . . Please pardon me, I am a little bigoted here, as regards Mother. If but Mother orders, her demons can work anything. Brother, before proceeding to America I wrote to Mother to bless me. Her blessings came, and at one bound I cleared the ocean. There, you see. In this terrible winter I am lecturing from place to place and fighting against odds, so

<sup>1</sup> i.e. in India. The Swami is writing from America.

that funds may be collected for Mother's Math.

*(From a Letter, originally in Bengali, written to Swami Shivananda, from U.S.A. in 1894)*

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I was the only hope of the family,<sup>2</sup> the only one who could do anything to help them. I had to stand between my two worlds. On the one hand, I would have to see my mother and brothers starve unto death; on the other I had believed that this man's (Sri Ramakrishna's) ideas were for the good of India and the world, and had to be preached and worked out. . . . The natural affections of my boy's heart drawing me to my family—I could not bear to see those who were the nearest and dearest to me suffering. On the other hand, nobody to sympathize with me. Who would sympathize with the imaginations of a boy? Imaginations that cause so much suffering to others! Who would sympathize with me? None—except one.

That one's sympathy brought blessing and hope. She was a woman.<sup>3</sup> Our teacher, this great monk, was married when he was a boy, a mere child. When he became a young monk, and all this religious zeal was upon him, he came to see his wife. Although they had been married as children, they had not seen very much of each other until they were grown up. Then he came to his wife and said: 'Behold, I am your husband; you have a right to this body. But I cannot live the sex life, although I have married you. I leave it to your judgment'. And she wept and said: 'God speed you! The Lord bless you! Am I the woman to degrade you? If I can, I will help you. Go on in your work'.

<sup>2</sup> The Swami is referring to the period shortly before his embracing the monastic life.

<sup>3</sup> The Holy Mother.



That was the woman. The husband went on and became a monk, in his own way: and from a distance the wife went on helping as much as she could. And later, when the man had become a great spiritual giant, she came—really, she was the first disciple—and she spent the rest of her life taking care of the body of this man. . .

Well, that lady, his wife, was the only one who sympathized with the idea of those boys. But she was powerless. She was poorer than we were. Never mind! We plunged into the breach! . . .

Women will work out their own destinies—much better, too, than men can ever do for them. All the mischief to women has come because men undertook to shape the destiny of women. And I don't want to start with any initial mistake. . . . So, if I made this mistake of employing men to work out this women's part of the work, why, women will never get rid of that—it will have become a custom. But I have got an opportunity. I told you of the lady who was my Master's wife. We have all great respect for her. She never



SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

dictates to us. So it is quite safe. That part has to be accomplished.

*(From a Lecture—'My Life and Mission'—delivered in California, U.S.A., in 1900).*



# THE SPIRITUAL UNION OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND THE HOLY MOTHER

BY SWAMI SARADANANDA

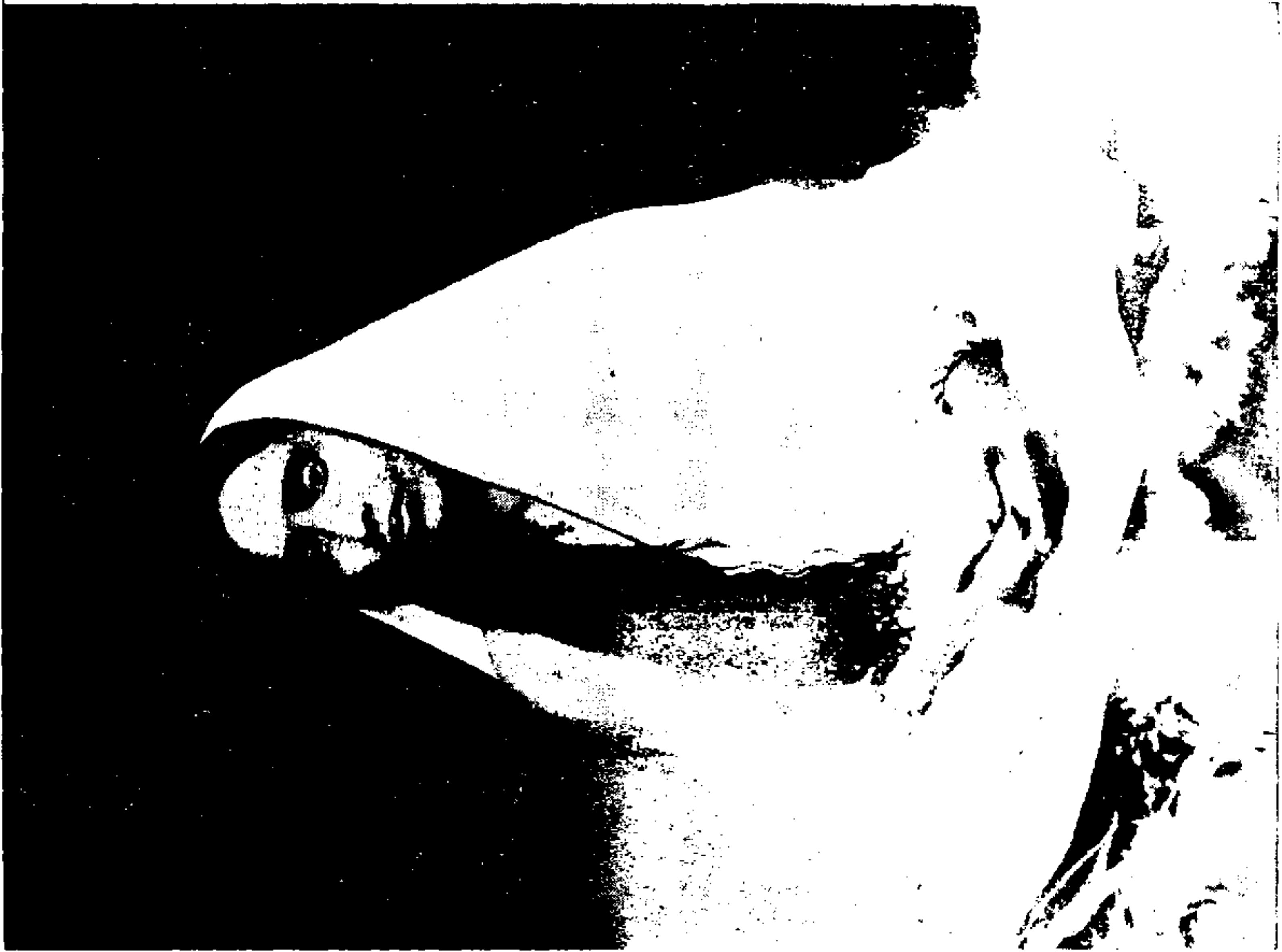
How few are those who make themselves and the society blessed by observing continence in married life according to capacity! How few are the wives who stand by the side of their husbands and urge them to undertake the high vows beneficent to the people, let alone speak of the realization of God! How few are the husbands, again, who know so much as that the aim of life is renunciation and teach it to their wives! Alas, Bhārat, just try to think and see into what a spineless beast you have been converted by the doctrine of Western materialism which regards worldly enjoyments as the be-all and end-all of life, and which has entered into your very marrow! Was it without any reason that Sri Ramakrishna said to his world-renouncing devotees, pointing out to them the defects in modern married life, 'Ah, (if it is wrong to make the enjoyment of worldly objects the all in all in life, then) do you think simply throwing a few flowers at the time of marriage will make it pure or free from blemishes?' It is indeed doubtful whether indulgence in sensual pleasure in married life was ever so excessive as it is now in Bharat. At the present time we have almost forgotten that besides the satisfaction of the senses, there is a very sacred and high purpose of marriage and this is why we are reducing ourselves to beings worse than beasts. It is only in order to destroy this beastliness of men and women of modern Bharat that the Master, the teacher of the people, was married. Like all the other acts of his life the act of marriage also was performed for the good of all.

'Whatever', said the Master, 'is done here (by me) is for you all. Ah, if I do all the sixteen parts (the whole) you may possibly do one. . . .' It is for this reason only that the Master took upon his shoulders the duties

and responsibilities of a married life and followed in practice that very high ideal before the eyes of all by actually discharging them to the furthest limit. If the Master had not been himself married, the lay disciples would have said, 'It is only because he is not married that he could talk glibly on continence. It is only because he has not made his wife his own and has never lived together with her that it is possible for him to read us long sermons'. It is only in order to counteract such foolish ideas that the Master was not only married but he had his wedded wife in the day of her youth by his side at Dakshineswar, when the state of divine madness in him became normal after he had seen the holy vision of the Divine Mother of the universe, and lived together with her, directly feeling the manifestation of the Mother Divine in her, worshipped her as the Mahāvidyā, the divine Shodashi, and then offered himself to her as the Divine. He lived together with her continually for eight months and even shared his bed with her ; and he himself went sometimes to Kamarpukur and sometimes to Jayrambati, to the house of his father-in-law and spent there a month or two, for the training of his wife and for her mental peace and happiness. . . .

The supremely revered Holy Mother says that the Master taught her then all the worldly things such as how to place the wick in the lamp, what sort of man each member of the household was, how to behave with each of them, and how to behave when she went to some one else's house. He taught her also devotional exercises, the reciting of the names and glories of God, meditation, Samadhi, and even the knowledge of Brahman. Oh, men rearing families, how many of you teach your own wives this way? How many





SRI SARADA DEVI



SRI RAMAKRISHNA

of you can have devotion to your wives, respect and love for them all your lives this way, if for some reason or other the very contemptible carnal relationship comes to an end forthwith? We, therefore, say that it was for you alone that this wonderful Incarnation of the age was married, and had no carnal relationship for even a single day with his wife and enacted with her this unique play (*līlā*) of love. This play was enacted only that you might learn that it was not for indulgence in sensual pleasure that the institution of marriage had come into being but that it carried a very high purpose with it ; only that both of you, wife and husband, might keep your aim fixed at this high ideal and be blessed by observing continence (Brahmacharya) according to your capacity in married life ; and only that you might prove a blessing to the modern society devoid of vigour, devoid of grace, and devoid of power, by producing heroic and virtuous children of wonderful intelligence and memory. It is for your benefit that the play which was not necessary to be shown to the world by its spiritual teachers of the past, Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, Sri Buddha, Sri Isa, Sri Shankara, Sri Chaitanya or any other, has been shown in this age by Sri Ramakrishna. This unseen and unheard of sacred mould of married life has been cast for the first time in the world as a result of lifelong severe austerities and Sādhanā. Now, as the Master used to say, 'Cast your own lives into that ideal mould and get them shaped after it'.

It was in order to teach us that the Master tied himself down to matrimony. We can know a little of what a high and sacred ideal he has left behind for us from the fact of Holy Mother's worshipping the Master all her life as the Mother of the universe. . . .

The Master paid attention to the performance of another great duty when he came this time to Kamarpukur. For, indifferent as the Master was, at first, to his wife's coming to Kamarpukur, now he was intent on giving her education and training for her well-being. Knowing that the Master was married, Totā Puri, his Guru, who initiated him into

Sannyasa, said to him at one time, 'What does it matter? He only may be regarded as really established in Brahman whose renunciation, detachment, discrimination, and knowledge remain intact in all respects in spite of his wife being with him; he alone may be regarded as having really attained the knowledge of Brahman, who can always look equally upon both men and women as the Self and can behave accordingly. Others, who have the knowledge of difference between men and women, might be Sādhakas, but are still far away from the knowledge of Brahman'. The above remark of Sri Totā Puri came to the Master's memory and induced him to test his knowledge attained by Sadhana extending over a long period, as well as to look to his wife's well-being.

The Master could never neglect or leave half-finished anything considered to be a duty. The same held good here too. He did not stop at partially educating his girl-wife, who depended entirely on him regarding everything of this world and of the other. He was, from now on, especially mindful that she might learn household duties, know people's character, put money to good use, above all, surrender her all to God and be an expert in behaving correctly according to place and time and circumstance. We have, in many other places, hinted how far-reaching was the result of that teaching which the Master imparted to her, placing before her his ideal life of unbroken continence. Therefore, suffice it to say here that the Holy Mother (as she is called by the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna) was happy and contented in all respects to have the Master's pure love, devoid of the slightest tinge of lust, could offer her lifelong worship to him as her chosen Ideal, and follow his footsteps and mould her life accordingly.

*(Extracts from the great work 'Sri Ramakrishna: The Great Master' by Swami Saradananda. Translated from the original Bengali, and published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras).*



# MY FIRST VISIT TO THE HOLY MOTHER\*

BY SWAMI VIRAJANANDA

It was October 1891. Though I had already passed about a year of my noviciate at the Baranagore monastery in the company of the Sannyasin disciples of the Master (Sri Ramakrishna), still I had no opportunity as yet to see the Holy Mother. Now at last, the fates seemed to be propitious. We learnt that Sri Sri Mā (the Holy Mother) had resolved to worship the goddess Jagaddhātri in her paternal home at Jayrāmbāti and that revered Sarat Mahārāj (Swami Sāradānandaji) was to go there with some other devotees, carrying from Calcutta the numerous articles necessary for the festival. Quite unexpectedly Sarat Maharaj asked me one day, 'Well, boy, would you like to accompany us?' I was overwhelmed with joy at this most welcome

proposal and made hurried preparations for the journey.

The party consisted of six—Sarat Maharaj, Sandel Mahāshaya,<sup>1</sup> Haramohan Mitra, Golāp Mā, Yogin Mā, and myself. We reached Burdwan by train and undertook the bullock-cart journey early at dawn. The night was passed at the Uchālan 'Chati'<sup>2</sup> and Kamar-pukur, the birthplace of Sri Ramakrishna, was reached only by next day noon. The quiet village surroundings and the sacred associations thrilled my heart. Since it was my first visit to the place, the remaining part of

\* Translated from the unpublished memoirs of Swami Virajananda in Bengali by Swami Shraddhananda.

<sup>1</sup> Vaikunthanāth Sanyāl, a householder disciple of the Master. <sup>2</sup> An inn.



HOLY MOTHER'S PATERNAL HOME AT JAYRAMBATI







But now comes the happy news  
 That thou art the Empress of the Universe  
 Shining on the left of the Great God Shiva!  
 Oh, the days when at every corner  
 People called my son-in-law the Nude-Shiva mad,  
 What calumny I had to tolerate!  
 But now they say, Shiva has kept some porters  
at his gate;  
 Even the gods Indra, Chandra, and Yama have to  
wait for an audience!  
 Well can I<sup>6</sup> guess the prosperity of Umā;  
 Otherwise why should Gauri<sup>7</sup> be so vain?  
 She cares not to cast a glance of compassion  
On Rādhikā, her own child!

a true picture of our own Holy Mother? Didi-Ma said, 'Well, in those days people called my son-in-law (Sri Ramakrishna) a lunatic. They expressed their grief at the lot of Sārādā. What amount of abuse they hurled at me too! There was no end to my silent agony. But today, see, how many men and women from respectable families are looking upon Sārādā as a goddess and worshipping her feet!'

During our stay at Jayrambati we visited Kamarpukur a number of times. That straw-hut where Sri Ramakrishna lived! What a charm it spread! In my heart of hearts I felt that we were treading a holy ground. The place seemed to be unearthly. A tangible sense of spirituality spread all through the atmosphere. While returning to Jayrambati we would bring from Kamarpukur Jilabi and Mithāi<sup>8</sup> for Mother. Most of it however would be given to us during our tiffin time when she would besmear Muri<sup>9</sup> with ghee and send the stuff with those sweets. With what avidity we devoured the palatable preparation!

The Jagaddhatri festival was over with great *éclat*. According to the family custom<sup>10</sup> the worship had been continued for three days. The clay image of the goddess was exceedingly beautiful, the face reflecting very vividly the divine compassion of the Mother of the Worlds. One felt that really she had come in flesh and

blood to accept the offerings of Her earthly children. Sri Mā herself would be seen stand-

<sup>10</sup> Although Jagaddhatri is worshipped in Bengal for one day only, it was a family custom at Jayrambati to worship for three days.



HOLY MOTHER'S MOTHER (DIDI-MĀ)

The song cast a spell on all of us who listened. Emotions rose high. Didn't the words bring

<sup>6</sup> Rādhikā, the composer of the song.

<sup>7</sup> Another name of Parvati.

<sup>8</sup> Kinds of sweetmeat. <sup>9</sup> Puffed rice.



ing near the place of worship with folded hands during *ārati* and sometimes fanning the goddess with *chāmar*. All the days she was intensely occupied with other ladies in arrangements for the Pujā and cooking. People from far and near had assembled to see the image. Many hundreds were sumptuously fed every-day. There was 'Jātra' (opera performance) on two nights, and to witness it men and women from villages all round poured in with great enthusiasm. The immersion-function was a moving sight. The Holy Mother as also other ladies burst into tears. We too were affected by the sorrow of the imminent separation and could check our tears only with a good deal of effort.

Days passed in supreme happiness. But as ill luck would have it, all the four of us simultaneously had a sudden attack of malaria a few days after the celebrations. In that small room we lay in adjoining beds shivering with high temperature. The worries of the Mother knew no bounds. One could hear her exclaim, 'Oh, what a pity! my sons are suffering so much. What a wretched out-of-the-way village this is. No sago and milk are available here!' She would now and then come near the door of our room and enquire about our condition from outside. How much affection and sympathy I noticed in her eyes then!

With a bowl in hand, the Holy Mother would go a-begging at the houses that kept cows for a little milk for her sick 'children'. People in those localities, mainly agricultural folk, paid more attention to bullocks that cultivated their lands. Cows were neglected and hence the output of milk was scanty. The Mother could barely collect half or one pound of milk. Anyway we recovered after some days and took to our normal diet. None of us had fallen victim to such a severe type of malarial fever before. It took a long time to get over the resultant weakness.

Our longer stay at Jayrambati would mean additional physical strain on the Mother, which in its turn might make her fall a prey to illness. So, as soon as we felt sufficiently strong to undertake the return journey we

decided to depart. Mother insisted on our staying for some time more to pick up a little more vigour. We however were firm in our resolve and ultimately secured her consent.

The bullock-carts were ready. We had finished our meals and took our seats after taking leave of the Mother. Didi-Ma, the 'uncles' (Holy Mother's brothers), and the neighbours surrounded the carts. The Holy Mother was standing at a distance in front of the backdoor of the house and silently watching the scene. Tears rolled down from her eyes. Her face had swelled and turned reddish. With the thought that we were going far away from the Mother, we too felt a pang in our hearts. I could hardly resist my tears. Golāp Mā and Yogin Mā too were weeping.

The carts moved on. Mother was slowly following us from a distance. Repeatedly we implored her to return but she would not listen. At last the carts passed by Tālpukur<sup>11</sup> and entered the extensive fields outside the village. As long as I could notice from inside the cart I found Mother standing by the side of the pond with her eyes fixed on us! While at home I had loved my mother intensely and she too had abundant affection for me. But could that love stand comparison with such unthought-of kindness and care as flowed from the Holy Mother? Nay, she is the mother of my innumerable past incarnations—the Mother of eternal time—the Mother of my very being!

I returned to the Baranagore monastery apparently with a great vacuum in my heart. But why should I call it a vacuum? Did I not fill myself with the super-mundane compassion of Sri Mā—the boundless grace of the all-loving Mother of the universe? From what scanty descriptions I had heard of her previously, I could little imagine what she actually was. Who could have pictured that she was such a Mother who would draw all my mind and soul and make me her very own! True, it had not been given to me to see

<sup>11</sup> A tank at the extremity of Jayrambati. There are a good number of Tāl (Palmyra) trees on all the four bunds. Hence the name.



the Father, but the Mother I have not missed! What limitless love and favour and that to an humble unworthy son! It is surely

incomprehensible for one who has not seen the Holy Mother and lived through this experience himself.

## SRI SARADA DEVI—THE HOLY MOTHER

BY SISTER NIVEDITA

I arrived in Calcutta, alone, in the beginning of November (1898). . . . The widow of Sri Ramakrishna—Sarada Devi, or 'the Holy Mother', as she is called amongst us—was living close by, with her community of ladies; and in the course of the day, I was accorded possession of an empty room in her house. . . .

Of the head of our little community, it seems almost presumptuous to speak. Her history is well known. How she was wedded at five, and forgotten by her husband till she was eighteen; how she then, with her mother's permission, made her way on foot from her village-home to the temple of Dakshin-eswar on the Ganges-side, and appeared before him; how he remembered the bond, but spoke of the ideals of the life he had adopted; and how she responded by bidding him God-speed in that life, and asking only to be taught by him as the Guru,—all these things have been told of her many times over. From that time she lived faithfully by his side for many years, in a building in the same garden, at once nun and wife, and always chief of his disciples. . . .



SISTER NIVEDITA



To me it has always appeared that she is Sri Ramakrishna's final word as to the ideal of Indian womanhood. But is she the last of an old order, or the beginning of a new? In her, one sees realized that wisdom and sweetness to which the simplest of women, may attain. And yet, to myself the stateliness of her courtesy and her great open mind are almost as wonderful as her sainthood. I have never known her hesitate, in giving utterance to large and generous judgment, however new or complex might be the question put before her. Her life is one long stillness of prayer. Her whole experience is of theocratic civilization. Yet she rises to the height of every situation. Is she tortured by the perversity of any about her? The only sign is a strange quiet and intensity that comes upon her. Does one carry to her some perplexity or mortification born of social developments beyond her ken? With unerring intuition she goes straight to the heart of the matter, and sets the questioner in the true attitude to the difficulty. Or is there need for severity. No foolish sentimentality causes her to waver. The novice whom she may condemn for so many years to beg his bread, will leave the place within the hour. He who has transgressed her code of delicacy and honour, will never enter her presence again. . . .

And yet is she, as one of her spiritual children said of her, speaking literally of her gift of song, 'full of music', all gentleness, all playfulness. And the room wherein she worships, withal, is filled with sweetness.

The Mother can read, and much of her time is passed with her *Rāmāyana*. But she does not write. Yet it is not to be supposed

that she is an uneducated woman. Not only has she had long and arduous experience in administration, secular and religious; but she has also travelled over a great part of India, visiting most of the chief places of pilgrimage. And it must be remembered that as the wife of Sri Ramakrishna she has had the highest opportunity of personal development that it is possible to enjoy. At every moment, she bears unconscious witness to this association with the great. But in nothing perhaps does it speak more loudly than in her instant power to penetrate a new religious feeling or idea.

I first realized this gift in the Holy Mother, on the occasion of a visit that she paid us in recent years, on the afternoon of a certain Easter-Day. Before that, probably, I had always been too much absorbed, when with her, in striving to learn what she represented, to think of observing her in the contrary position. On this particular occasion, however, after going over our whole house, the Mother and her party expressed a desire to rest in the chapel, and hear something of the meaning of the Christian festival. This was followed by Easter music, and singing, with our small French organ. And in the swiftness of her comprehension, and the depth of her sympathy with these resurrection-hymns, unimpeded by any foreignness or unfamiliarity in them, we saw revealed for the first time, one of the most impressive aspects of the great religious culture of Sarada Devi. The same power is seen to a certain extent, in all the women about her, who were touched by the hand of Sri Ramakrishna. But in her, it has all the strength and certainty of some high and arduous form of scholarship.

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'The more intensely a person practises spiritual disciplines the more quickly he attains to God. But even if he does not practise any spiritual discipline, he will attain to Him in the end—surely he will. Only he who spends his time idly, without practising prayer and meditation, will take time to attain to Him.'

—Sayings of the Holy Mother



## A LETTER FROM SISTER NIVEDITA TO THE HOLY MOTHER

Cambridge, Mass. 11.1911.

Beloved Mother - This morning, early, I went to church - to pray for Sara. All the people here were thinking of her, the Mother of them - and suddenly I thought of you. Your dear face, your loving look, your white Sari, your bracelets. It was all there. And it seemed to me that you were the Presence that had been there when I was in Sara's sickroom. And - do you know? - I thought I had been very foolish with you when, at the evening - service to Sri Ramakrishna, trying to meditate. Why did I not understand that it was quite enough like a little child, at your dear feet? Dear Mother! You are full of love! And it is not a fabled, violent

love, like mine, like the world's - but a gentle peace, that brings God to everyone, & wills ill to none. It is a golden radiance, full of joy. What a blessed Sunday that was, a few months ago, when I ran in to you, the last thing before I went on the Ganges, & came back to you for a moment, as soon as I could back! I felt such a wonderful freedom, in the hearing you gave me, and you welcome me! Dear Mother - I wish we could send you a wonderful hymn, or a prayer. But somehow when that would seem too bold, too full of love! Surely you are the best wonderful thing of God - Sri Ramakrishna's own choice of His

Love for the World - a token left with the children, in their loving hands, and we should be very still & quiet before you - except indeed for a little prayer! Surely the "wonderful things of God" are all quiet - beating unnoticed into our lives - the dew & the sunlight & the sweetener of Gardens & of the Ganges - These are the silent things, that are like you! Do send to poor Sara the mantle of your peace. Tell your thought, how? Then, of the high peace & love that within you has been - Tell that sweet benediction that trembles in God, like the dewdrop on the lotus-leaf, & sends it to the world. Love, ever, your loving Mother,  
Sister Nivedita



# MEMORIES OF THE HOLY MOTHER

BY SWAMI VISHUDDHANANDA

It was about the end of March 1911, when the Holy Mother visited Bangalore.

The surroundings of the Ramakrishna Ashrama at that time were quiet and charming. And even at the present time the Ashrama, with its extensive grounds, continues to preserve that solitude in spite of the rapid growth of the city. The compound is dotted with valuable fruit and flower trees. In front is the wide Bull Temple Road (Basavangudi) which leads to the temple of that name, which enshrines a huge image of Nandi (bull) and is visited by streams of pilgrims. The Mother and her women companions were accommodated in the Ashrama building, while the monks and devotees lived in temporary tents outside. As the happy news of the Mother's visit spread over the town, devotees began to come in great numbers, and the flowers they brought for offering sometimes formed into huge heaps.

At Bangalore the Mother stayed for about a week. One afternoon she was taken by me in a carriage to the cave temple of Gavipur, a little distance behind the Ashrama. The Mother got down and visited the temple and then returned to the Ashrama by the carriage. The whole time spent outside was not long. But whereas there was none there at the Ashrama besides the inmates, at the time of our going out, when we returned, we found the whole compound crowded with thousands of visitors. At the sound of the Mother's carriage they stood up instantaneously and then prostrated on the ground. The Mother, who was visibly moved by the sight, alighted from the carriage and stood there motionless for about five minutes, extending her right arm in blessing. A perfect silence reigned all round, and the whole atmosphere was surcharged with a divine inspiration which every one felt. The Mother then silently walked to

the Ashrama and sat down in the central room, where the devotees also gathered. Here again were enacted those speechless transmission and imbibition of transcendental bliss that the scriptures speak of. There was no question and no answer, and yet all doubts were resolved. Breaking that tangible silence the Mother said to me, who was by her side, 'What a pity, I don't know their language. What solace they would derive, if I could but speak a few words!' When I translated this for the devotees, they said, 'No, no; this is all right. Even as such our hearts are filled with bliss in your presence. No word of mouth is necessary on such an occasion'. Wonderful are the ways of the Mother and wonderful her children!

It was on another evening. There is a small hillock behind the Ashrama and within its compound. A little while before dark, the Mother climbed on its top along with one or two others and sat there enjoying the beauty of the setting sun. When this news reached Swami Ramakrishnananda, he was immediately transported to a new region. He hastened to the spot and said in amazement, 'Indeed the Mother has become a dweller on the mountain (Parvata-vāsini<sup>1</sup>). He was stout and began to pant as he climbed that low hillock; but nothing daunted he went up straight to the Mother and prostrating before her, laying his head on her feet, chanted three well-known verses from the *Chandī*, which are used as Mantras for the salutation of the Divine Mother, viz. beginning with 'Sarva-māṅgalamāṅgalye' (xi. 10-12). And he prayed fervently, 'Grace! Grace!' The Mother caressed his head, as though pacifying an importunate son.

<sup>1</sup> Which is a name of the Divine Mother dwelling in the Himalayas or the Vindhya hills.



# ON THE HOLY MOTHER

BY ROMAIN ROLLAND

His (Sri Ramakrishna's) mother wished him to be married, hoping that marriage would cure him of his divine enchantment. He made no demur; indeed, he showed an innocent pleasure at the thought. But what a strange marriage it was, not much more real (less real, indeed, in spirit) than his union with the Goddess! His bride (1859) was a child of five years old. . . . It was a union of souls and remained unconsummated—a Christian marriage so-called in the days of the Early Church—and later it became a beautiful thing. A tree must be judged by its fruits and in this case the fruits were of God, pure and not carnal love. Little Saradamani was to become the chaste sister of a big friend who venerated her, the immaculate companion of his trials and of his faith, the firm and serene soul, whom the disciples associated with his sanctity as the *Holy Mother*.<sup>1</sup>

For the time being the little girl returned according to the custom to the house of her parents after the ceremony of marriage had been performed, and did not see her husband again for the long period of eight or nine years, while her husband, who seemed to have regained some measure of calm at his mother's house, returned to his temple.<sup>2</sup>

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In May, 1867 . . . he (Sri Ramakrishna) went to rest for six or seven months in his own countryside of Kamarpukur after an absence of eight years. He gave himself up with the joy of a child to the familiar cordiality of the good people of the village, happy at the sight of their little Gadādhara, whose strange fame

<sup>1</sup> So she has been called. The Indian of good family has always had this exquisite custom of giving the name 'Mother' to all womanhood, however much younger than himself.

<sup>2</sup> Dakshineswar Temple.

had reached them and made them rather anxious. . . .

During this visit he learned to know his child wife. Sarada Devi was now fourteen years old. She lived with her parents, but she came to Kamarpukur when she knew her husband had arrived. The spiritual development of the little wife with her pure heart was greater than her age, and she understood at once her husband's mission and the part of pious affection and tender disinterestedness she was to play in it. She recognized him as her guide and put herself at his service.

Ramakrishna has at times been blamed, and very coarsely blamed, for having sacrificed her. She herself never showed any trace of it; she irradiated peace and serenity throughout her life on all who came in contact with her. Moreover there is a fact, which has never before been revealed except by Vivekananda, that Ramakrishna himself was gravely aware of his responsibility and offered his wife the greatest sacrifice of which he was capable if she demanded it—his mission.

'I have learnt', he said to her, 'to look upon every woman as Mother. That is the only idea I can have about you. But if you wish to draw me into the world (of Illusion), as I have been married to you, I am at your service'.

Here was something entirely new in the spirit of India. Hindu tradition lays down that a religious life *ipso facto* frees a man from every other obligation. Ramakrishna had more humanity and recognized that his wife had binding rights over him. She was, however, magnanimous enough to renounce them, and encouraged him in his mission. But Vivekananda specifically declares that it was 'by consent of his wife' that he was free to follow the life of his choice. Touched by



her innocence and self-sacrifice, Ramakrishna took upon himself the part of an elder brother. He devoted himself patiently during the months they were together to her education as a diligent wife and good manager.

\* \* \*

When in 1872 his wife came to him at Dakshineswar for the first time, the tenderness of Ramakrishna, a tenderness compounded of religious respect purged of all trace of desire and sensual disturbance, recognized the Goddess under her veil, and he made a solemn

avowal of it. One night in May, when everything had been prepared for worship, he made Sarada Devi sit in the seat of Kāli, and as priest he accomplished the ritual ceremonies, the Shodashi Puja, the adoration of womanhood. Both of them were in a condition of semi-conscious or super-conscious ecstasy. When he came to himself he hailed his companion as the Divine Mother. In his eyes She was incarnate in the living symbol of immaculate humanity.

(From 'Life of Ramakrishna')

## ON THE HOLY MOTHER

BY UPADHYAYA BRAHMABANDHAVA

[Bhavani Charan Banerjee, better known as Upadhyaya Brahmabandhava, was at first a staunch Brahmo and a follower of Keshab Chandra Sen. As a speaker and leader and as Editor of the Bengali daily *Sandhyā*, he was well known.]

Sri Ramakrishna worshipped womanhood in this lady [the Holy Mother], just stepping into the prime of her youth—yes, he worshipped her, not figuratively, but literally with all the details of a Hindu image-worship—and made an offering of his holy rosary at her feet. Since this consecration, Ramakrishna shone in his fullest splendour like the full moon with its bright halo. It is a beauty, unique in human history. Many saints and prophets there were who had renounced their wives for God; but this renunciation of Ramakrishna is no renunciation of an ordinary type, it is the height of acceptance. The light of the moon cannot

live apart from the moon. Nor did this lady, the incarnation of chastity, live apart from Sri Ramakrishna. Ever since that unique worship of the lady of sixteen, she was always by the side of Ramakrishna, even like his halo. Go once and sit for a while at the blessed feet of this lady, so reverentially worshipped by her divine consort, and if you can have her grace and blessings on you, then your sanctified self will be able to understand and realize Sri Ramakrishna, you will be blessed indeed.<sup>1</sup>

(Translated from the original of an article on 'Sri Ramakrishna' contributed to 'Swaraj', a Bengali monthly which has ceased publishing.)

<sup>1</sup> When this was written the Holy Mother was living.



# SARADAMANI DEVI\*

BY RAMANANDA CHATTERJEE

...It is generally found that the Sannyasins are either not married at all, or if married, they sever all relations with their wives, renounce them, and leave their homes. Paramahansa Ramakrishna was a Sannyasin, but he married at the age of twenty-four. His marriage did not take place when he had not arrived at the age of discretion or against his will. In fact it had his full approval, and it is recorded in his life that the choice

the same teacher do not turn out good and wise; we cannot make as fine ornaments of a lump of clay as of gold. . . .

Saradamani had seen her husband but once after the marriage, when she was in her seventh year. Her only memory of the occasion was that her husband's nephew Hriday had sought her out hiding in a secret corner and worshipped her feet with lotus flowers in spite of her great fear and shyness. About six years after that, when she was thirteen years old, she was taken (from Jayrambati) to her husband's house at Kamarpukur, where she stayed for a month. But Ramakrishna was then living at Dakshineswar and she could not meet him. She lived for another six weeks at Kamarpukur about six months later. But then also she did not see her husband. And then, three or four months after, the word came that Ramakrishna had come home and she had been sent for. She was now thirteen years and six or seven months old.



SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S HOUSE AT KAMARPUKUR

(A corner of the newly built Sri Ramakrishna temple is seen to the left)

of his bride was made under his own guidance. It is true that he did not live with her like an ordinary householder and in any physical relations; but neither did he forsake her, but rather kept her near him and made her his true helpmate by affectionate instructions and personal example. This is one of the specialities of Ramakrishna's life.

But Ramakrishna alone was not unique. His wife Saradamani Devi also shared this quality. May be that Ramakrishna himself taught and trained her, but the pupil also must have had the capacity to assimilate and avail herself of the teaching. All pupils of

Ramakrishna now set himself to the fulfilment of a noble duty. He did not care whether his wife came to him or not. But when she did come to Kamarpukur he engaged himself earnestly in her education and welfare. . . .

The pure-hearted girl felt an indescribable joy in living in the divine company of Rama-

\*Excerpts from the article of Sri Ramananda Chatterjee, Founder-Editor of the well-known Indian Monthly *Modern Review*, which appeared in his Bengali monthly, *Prabasi*, and was published in the June 1927 issue of the *Modern Review*, in English translation, and reproduced in the July 1927 issue of *Prabuddha Bharata*.—Ed., P.B.





A VIEW OF JAYRAMBATI VILLAGE  
(The dome of the Mother's temple is rising high  
in the background)

krishna and being blessed with his selfless love and care. In later days she often spoke of this great happiness to the women disciples of her husband. 'Since then', she would say, 'I always felt as if a pitcher filled with bliss had been installed in my heart. I cannot tell you how full I felt of that calm, steady, and divine joy'.<sup>1</sup> . . .

<sup>1</sup> All passages in this article which are within marks of quotation are taken from the Bengali book named *Rāmakṛṣṇa-līlā-prasaṅga*.

Ramakrishna also devoted his attention to the discharge of his duties to his wife, and availed himself of his leisure hours to instruct her on the end and aim of human life and its duties. It is said that it was at that time that he said to his wife, 'Just as Uncle Moon is the uncle of all children, so is God nearest and dearest to all. Everyone has the right to call on Him. And whoever will call on Him will be blessed by His vision. If you call on Him, you also will see Him'. . . .

It is said that one day (at Dakshineswar) while shampooing her husband's feet, she asked him, 'Who do you think I am?' To which Ramakrishna replied, 'The Mother who is in the shrine gave birth to this body and is now living in the *nahabat*,<sup>2</sup> even She is now shampooing my feet. Really, I tell you, I find you an embodiment of the Divine Mother Herself'. Ramakrishna found in all

<sup>2</sup> A small room at some distance from the temple enclosure, intended for the temple music.

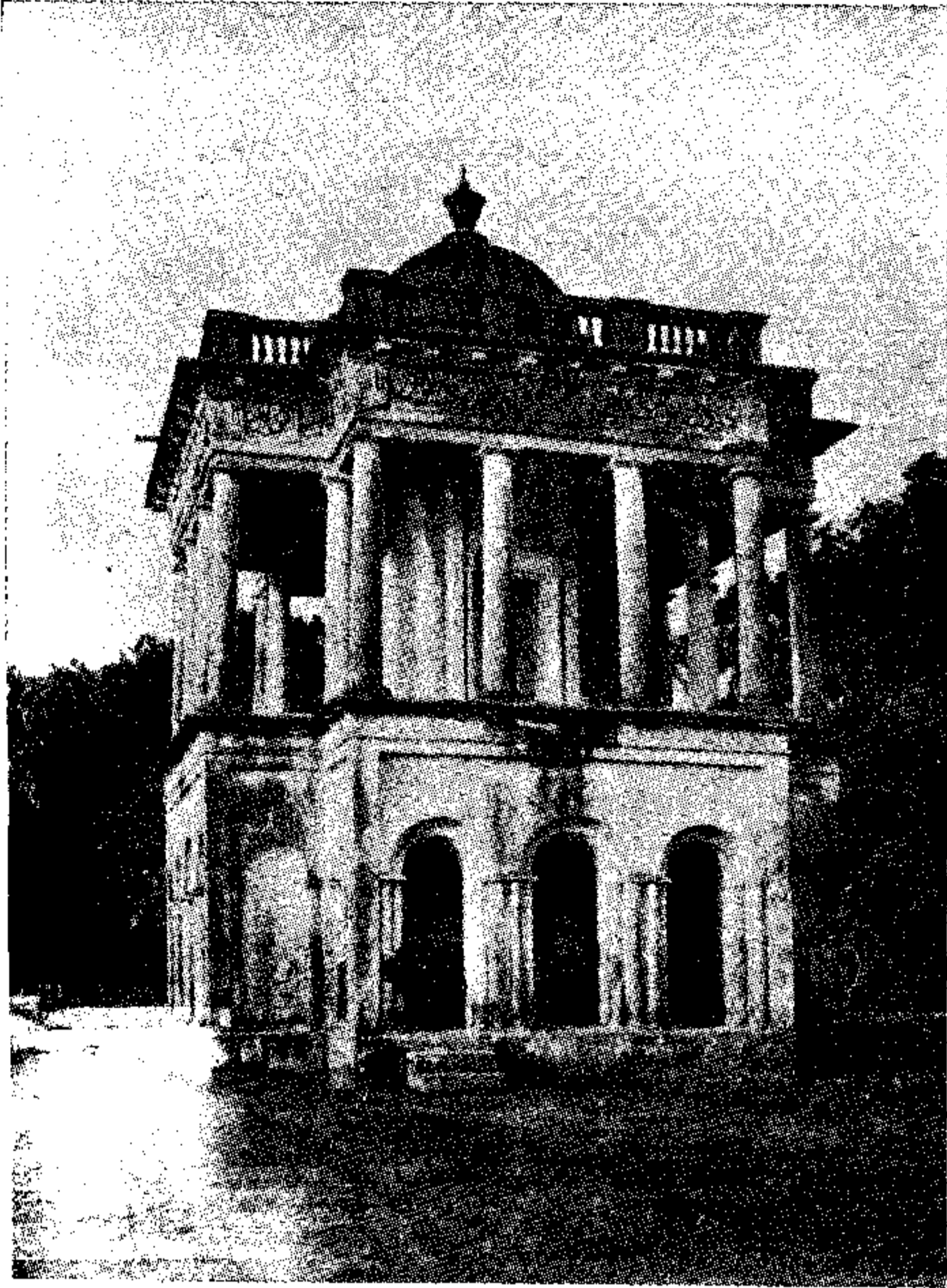


KALI TEMPLE  
DAKSHINESWAR

SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S ROOM IS TO THE EXTREME LEFT AND THE NAHABAT IS A LITTLE FURTHER DOWN



women—even the most corrupt—the presence of the Mother of the universe.



NAHABAT

‘The Rīṣi of the *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad* thus teaches in the discourse on Yājñavalkya and Maitreyi: “Because the Divine Self is in the husband, therefore does the wife love her husband; and because the Divine Self is in the wife, therefore does the husband love the wife”.’

During this time Ramakrishna and Saradamani used to sleep in the same bed. Ramakrishna had no consciousness of the body, and spent almost the whole night absorbed in Samādhi. From what Ramakrishna said of those days it is clear that if Saradamani also had not been completely free from all desires, he would not have so completely escaped the taint of body-consciousness. It is found of many great men in different fields of life that much of their noble achievements were possible through the assistance of their wives, who carefully cleared their path of worldly obstacles.

Not only do the wives of many great men spare them the daily distractions of domestic life, but they also instil courage and hope into their hearts in moments of fatigue, weakness, and despair. And it is doubtful if, without the noble and pure character of his wife, Ramakrishna would have reached the height of spiritual realization that he did, though it may be she appears even now rather like a shadowy figure behind the effulgent personality of her husband. . . .

She spent nearly five months at Dakshineswar after *Ṣhodaśhī Pūjā*, during which she would, as usual, serve Ramakrishna and his mother and his guests by preparing their meals and doing other household duties. She would pass the day-time in the *nahabat* and the night in the same bed with her husband. Ramakrishna could not stand all kinds of food or cooking. She had, therefore, often to prepare special dishes for him. In those days Ramakrishna ‘used to be in constant Samadhi throughout day and night’, and ‘signs of death would sometimes be manifest on his person’, and Saradamani could scarcely sleep at night for fear of his going into Samadhi. When Ramakrishna came to know of it, he arranged for her sleep with his mother in the *nahabat*. After such a life of sixteen months, she returned to Kamarpukur probably in the month of Kārtik of 1280. . . .

Ramakrishna passed away on the 31st Śhrāvaṇ, 1293. Saradamani was then thirty-three years old. I had heard that she did not put on the weeds of a widow on the death of her husband. In order to ascertain the truth of it, I wrote to a disciple of Ramakrishna and Saradamani. I received the following reply:

‘When after the passing of Sri Ramakrishna she was about to remove the bangles from her wrists, Sri Ramakrishna revealed himself to her in the healthy appearance of his early days, and holding her hand, said, “Am I dead that you are removing the signs of wifhood?” After that she never bared



her wrists. She always put on a cloth with a thin red border and bangles on her hand".<sup>3</sup>

If all had this faith in the immortality of the soul, the world would be relieved of much of its misery, sin, and suffering.

She lived for thirty-four years after her husband's passing. She herself passed away in her sixty-seventh year on the 4th Shravan,

<sup>3</sup> Bengali Hindu widows wear only a white piece of cloth without any coloured border. They do not wear any jewellery.

1327. The Bengali monthly *Udbodhan* of the next month celebrated her austerities, renunciation, steadfast faith, self-control, universal love and service, tireless activity, complete indifference to personal comforts, simplicity, humility, patience, kindness, forgiveness, sympathy, selflessness and other great qualities. The followers of her husband and herself used to call her Mother and even now refer to her as such. May the significance of this name be fulfilled in every way!

## MOTHER-LOVE IN MOTION

### HOMAGE TO THE HOLY MOTHER

BY ST. NIHAL SINGH

#### I

Suryadeva was being rapidly driven, in his seven-steeded celestial chariot, towards the line over which Ākāsha (sky) lovingly bends over Dharitri Mātā (Mother Earth) before bidding her a final farewell for that day. By the time I, at the fag-end of a tiring tour, could climb to the crest of the holy hill, open the tripod, set upon it my large camera, and screw the right lens with the appropriate filter into it, the light had all but failed. The islets, applying a vivid emerald touch to the Brahma-putra's majestic breast, moved me to make a supreme effort. Convinced in my mind that I had given a long enough exposure, I went away happy in the belief that I had been successful in taking back with me at least a passable impression. When the film was developed days later, some hundreds of miles away from that exquisite scene, I realized that I had been cherishing a delusion. The image was too faint to be of much use.

Being by nature an optimist, I pinned my hope to after-treatment of the negative. I

would reinforce the silver in the negative with another metal. This would strengthen it.

Which metal? I pondered that question. More silver nitrate? Chromium? Copper? Lead? Something could be said for each; also something against it.

Finally the choice was made. The gods smiled upon it. The image had been greatly strengthened by the time the negative came out of the last bath. When dried it would yield a print worth all the trouble that had been taken.

#### II

The image that I carry in my memory of the Holy Mother is something of this kind. I was only a child when I first set eyes upon that venerable face and figure. My parents, who carried me to her in the late eighteenthies or the early eighteen-nineties, kept, however, suggesting to me: 'Surely you remember the beatific expression on her features. She was mother-love in motion. Why, she actually patted you—gave you her blessing!'



Mother, in particular, set great store by that blessing. She had had the misfortune of losing her first-born—a man-child of great promise. She persuaded father to proceed upon a pilgrimage to the holy places all over the north. When they reached Calcutta they visited the Kāli temple. Someone told them of Dakshineswar. There they went and had the good fortune of having a *darśhan* of Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

‘I have never met any one so God-intoxicated as he was’, Father would say whenever something happened that reminded him of the sage. My parents had a glimpse of the Holy Mother, too. This was, they would tell me, by the merest chance. They deemed it a very great privilege, for they had heard much of the beautiful relationship that existed between the two noble beings—they led a perfectly immaculate life.

Time and again, as I was growing up, I was reminded that the Paramahansa had renounced the world. Yet he never went to the woods. He remained in the temple built alongside Gangā Māi, only a few miles from the first city in the country. He did not forbid his wife to come to him. She cooked and cared for him as any wife would for her husband. To her he was Guru (Teacher). To him she was the veritable representation of the Goddess.

‘Was ever greater control exercised over the senses (Indriyas)?’ Father would ask. ‘Were there, anywhere, in any age, such Jatis (Yatis) as they were?’

### III

So, the very first time after my birth (which my mother attributed largely to the benign influence of the Holy Mother, whose blessing she had sought), my parents took me to Dakshineswar. The Paramahansa had,

in the meantime, shuffled off his mortal coil. They enquired about the Holy Mother. They were told that she was not always to be found in Calcutta. ‘She is often away performing *tapasyā*’, they were informed. Mother, exceedingly practical, asked them: ‘But is she here now?’

‘Yes, she is’, they replied.

‘Then take us to her’, she insisted.

The Holy Mother was finally located. A doll’s house it was in which she was living (*patoliān dā ghar*)<sup>1</sup>: but how redolent was it of sanctity—shining with the light from her large, lustrous eyes—‘eyes black as *kol* (lotus seed)’, Mother would recall. She would always end by insisting: ‘Surely you must remember her. A short, plump body—one bare arm showing and her long, black tresses falling in front of her in her lap—her lips parted a little in the sweetest smile imaginable, as if in benediction’.

Father would, on occasion, add:

‘She never bore a child, yet any number of men—among them the illustrious Vivekananda—called her mother and what is more, loved her as mother’.

The Swamis of the Ramakrishna Mission who met me from time to time helped me to reinforce—and to vivify—the image of the Holy Mother that had been formed through my child-eyes. I should no doubt have been infinitely richer had I been vouchsafed the privilege of spending a minute—an hour—a day—or a week in her immediate neighbourhood and been the recipient of that mother-love of which she was the embodiment and the vehicle. As it is, the effect of the pat she once gave me has lasted through nearly seven decades.

<sup>1</sup> In Punjabi, meaning ‘the house of dolls’.



# MOTHER'S GRACE

BY SWAMI APURVANANDA

The year 1918 was indeed a memorable one in my life. It was in that year that I first came in contact with the Holy Mother and also with five of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, that is, Swamis Brahmananda, Shivananda, Saradananda, Turiyananda, and Subodhananda.

It was the end of October, a few days after the Durgā Pujā. My mind was full of spiritual delight as I arrived one morning at the Belur Math, Head Monastery of the Ramakrishna Order, near Calcutta. At first I was led into the main shrine, where the sacred relics of Sri Ramakrishna had been installed by the great Swami Vivekananda himself. After spending some time there in prayer and meditation, I came out and met Swami Shivananda Maharaj, later President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. His face was full of spiritual radiance and peace, and his divine glance made a deep impress on my mind. When I prostrated myself before him, he lovingly blessed me.

When I had stayed for three days at the Belur Math, Swami Shivananda Maharaj asked me to go and see the Holy Mother and some of the spiritual children of Sri Ramakrishna at the Udbodhan Office and Balaram Mandir in the Baghbazar quarter of Calcutta. The next morning I went to the Mother's place. There I met Swami Saradananda Maharaj, who was looking after the Mother and was staying at her place permanently. He was an outstanding personality, yet full of humility, and called himself 'the gate-keeper of the Mother's house'. When I saluted him and expressed my desire to meet the Mother, he said, 'Wait, you shall have your chance'. I waited a long time. Finally I was told that I could meet her in the evening, but when I returned in the evening, to my dismay I was informed that the Mother had gone out.

So from the Mother's place I went to Balaram Mandir and there met Swami Turiyananda Maharaj. He was full of kindness and cordiality and talked to me with great tenderness. Wishing to console me in my disappointment about not meeting the Mother, he said, among other things: 'This longing to see the Mother will purify your mind all the more, and you will receive greater blessing and love from her. She is the knower of every heart. It may be that just to increase your earnestness she has not yet revealed herself to you. When the proper time comes you will surely have her *darśhan*'. The following day also passed without my getting a chance to meet the Holy Mother. I was growing desperate and despondent, and thought myself very unfortunate. But that morning I did meet Swami Brahmananda Maharaj, revered by all as the spiritual son of the Master, then the President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. He possessed great spiritual calm and had an immensely impressive personality. His penetrating but sublime look thrilled me and made me feel that he could easily see through my mind and heart.

The following morning, as I sat for my usual meditation, I felt heavy at heart, still thinking myself exceedingly unfortunate for not having yet been able to meet the Holy Mother. Then gradually I felt some unspeakable peace and joy creeping into my desperate soul from somewhere. More time passed; and as I prayed to the Holy Mother earnestly, I was blessed by her with a divine vision of her own form. I can hardly describe in words this most personal and intensely soul-stirring spiritual experience of mine, but it is one of the richest treasures I still ardently cherish in the storehouse of my memory. At last the Mother herself had given me her *darśhan*, even before I could see her in physical form!



After this vision, I got up and went straight to the Mother's place. As I waited, along with other devotees, some *prasād* of fruits and sweets was distributed to us all. Then a Swami announced that we could go and have Mother's *darśhan*. The devotees began moving up, in single file, from the ground floor to the first-floor room where Mother was living. I had heard that Mother would not freely talk to male devotees during the time of *darśhan*, out of her natural womanly modesty. This made me feel depressed once again, for I was very eager to hear her talk. If only Mother would talk to me!—this was my one thought. With bated breath, I neared Mother's room. She was seated near the door. The devotees moved on, one by one, offered their salutations at her feet, and then moved off. Mother was seen to talk to none of the devotees who saluted her before me. She had also dropped her veil. My turn came—last of all. I offered my salutations, touching her feet, and looked up to her to have a kindly glance from her. To my great joy the Mother raised her veil and looked at me tenderly. She caressed me with her hand and asked, 'My child, have you taken *prasād*?' I replied in the affirmative. As I remained kneeling, transfixed like one in a trance, she added softly, 'So your heart's desire is fulfilled! Are you satisfied now, my child? Well, you may go now and come again later'. What more need I expect?—I said to myself. Then I bowed before her again. The Mother blessed me by placing her hand on my head.

\* \* \*

It was August 1919. The Ramakrishna Mission was conducting relief work in the dis-

trict of Bankura, and I was allotted work in the centre at Indpur. As this place was not far from Jayrambati, Mother's birth-place, and because the Mother herself was then staying there, I felt a great urge to go and have her *darśhan*. So I wrote to Swami Shivananda Maharaj at Belur Math, seeking permission. In his reply he wrote:

'I am glad to know that you are desirous of having the *darśhan* of the holy feet of Sri Sri Mā. When you go there you tell Mother, "Shivananda (Tārak) Swami has sent me to see you. It is he who sent me to serve the famine-stricken people of Bankura. From there I have come to see your holy feet and to receive your blessings. You please bless me" If you speak to her like this, she will



THE HOLY MOTHER  
AT HER COUNTRY-HOUSE AT JAYRAMBATI



surely bless you. She has kept the door of blessings ever open. She refuses none who approaches her. So I need not write a separate letter. If you only read this letter of mine to her, that will do'.

As soon as I received this letter, I started for Jayrambati, via Bankura town. It was possible to take a train for a short distance, but the rest of the journey had to be done on foot, by way of a rough track along the sides of paddy-fields and villages. It was late afternoon when I reached Mother's house. Within a few minutes of my giving Swami Shivananda Maharaj's letter to one of the attendants of the Mother, Mother herself appeared from inside her newly-built house of mud walls. Affectionately she caressed me as I bowed down before her, but I was not sure if she had really recognized me. Seeing me looking pale and exhausted after my journey, she said tenderly, 'Ah! How pale! What a sunken look! I am sure you had no food on the way.

Make haste, my child. Come after washing your hands and feet'. Saying this she began to busy herself getting ready some sweets and eatables in order to feed me. As I took the food, Mother kept on looking at me most affectionately.

I found to my heart's delight that Mother was more freely talking to me at Jayrambati than she did when I met her at Calcutta. I carried some medicines for her, from Bankura Sevashrama, as she was suffering from rheumatism in the legs. After I had taken the food so lovingly provided for me by the Mother, I was again called in to meet her. She was seated on the mud floor of the verandah, with legs stretched out to alleviate the rheumatic pain, and was dressing vegetables for the night's cooking. With great earnestness Mother made enquiries from me about the inmates of Bankura Math and about the condition of the famine-stricken people. I explained to her the



THE HOLY MOTHER AT FIFTY-EIGHT



details of our relief operations. When she heard that sometimes we distributed up to twenty maunds of rice per week, she felt pleased and said, 'My child, your life is blessed. There is no great Dharma than the service of the needy. The Lord will be very much pleased with you. Thākur (Sri Ramakrishna) will grant you Bhakti, Mukti, and all'.

Finding the occasion suitable, I humbly prayed to Mother to give me spiritual initiation. She remained silent and thoughtful for a while and then, looking straight into my face, said, 'All right. Tomorrow morning I shall initiate you'. I could not believe my ears. My joy knew no bounds. As evening approached, I took leave of Mother. Shortly after, the Brahmachari in attendance at the Mother's house began to sing devotional songs. I saw Mother sitting at a distance and listening to the Bhajan. When I took my night meal, Mother was all attention, saying, 'Take more. You had no proper meal during the day'.

Next morning I took an early bath and was mentally preparing myself for the great event of my life—initiation from Mother, who to us all was the Divine Mother Herself. One small thought troubled me. I had nothing, no fruits or flowers, to offer to the Mother from my side as a disciple. But I could do nothing about it. Soon I was asked to enter the room where Mother was performing Puja. I went in and she asked me to bow down before Sri Ramakrishna's photograph placed on the altar, and then to take my seat on the Āsana that had been arranged for me. When the preliminaries were over, Mother asked me, 'What Mantra shall I give you—Shakti, Shiva, or Vishnu?' 'I know nothing, Mother. You give whatever you please', said I. 'What is your family deity?' she asked. I told her. After that, Mother sat in silent meditation for a while and then initiated me. She repeated the Mantra ten times, and pointing to the altar (where I clearly perceived the presence of a luminous deity) said, 'Look, look, that is your Iṣṭa . . .'.

Next she taught me the correct way to do Japa, touching particular spots on the fingers, and gave me instruction on meditation. She asked me to meditate for a while. She then told me, 'From now onward Thakur will take care of you. He is yours and you are his. He is your Guru, your Ishta. I have offered your life at his feet'. 'But how am I to think of you, Mother?' I asked. She paused for a while and said, 'Well, think of me as one with him (meaning Sri Ramakrishna)'.

Seeing that I had nothing to offer to her as Guru-dakṣiṇā, she herself took a few flowers and a fruit from a plate in the shrine and asked me to offer them to her. I did so, and she accepted them gladly.

That afternoon I told Mother that I would like to visit Kamarpukur, the native village of Sri Ramakrishna, on the next day. But Mother said, 'No, my child. This is the rainy season. The road is not in good condition. Moreover, it is also the malarial season now, and it is not advisable to stay in these villages for long. We generally don't ask people from other places to come over here during this season. You have come. It is all right. And your heart's desire also is fulfilled. You stay here the three nights only, according to the traditional custom. You can go to Kamarpukur on some future occasion'. So I gave up the idea of going to Kamarpukur.

In the evening, as Mother was attending to some work in the verandah, I went and sat near her. Her mind seemed occupied with kindly thoughts for the suffering and afflicted people in the famine areas. I had to give her an account of the distress and the nature of relief being given. When she heard that the people had practically no clothing to wear, her eyes filled with tears and she uttered a spontaneous prayer to the Lord. 'Do you give clothes also?' Mother asked. 'Yes,' I replied, 'in most deserving cases we do'. When I told Mother that owing to shortage of funds we had not been able to give relief to the extent the situation demanded, she said, 'Yes; but still you are doing enough, my child. You



people are doing quite a bit. May Thakur bless you all!

Presently I said to Mother, 'Mother, you have hundreds of children, and I am only one of them. But to me you are my only mother. Bless me so that I may be a worthy child of yours'. 'Well, my child,' Mother said softly, 'surely Thakur will look after you. It is for your good that he has brought you here. Always think of Thakur as your own. Think me as your own mother and depend on us in all matters'.

Next morning I got an opportunity to go to a neighbouring place called Koalpāra, in the company of the Brahmachari who was attending to the needs of Mother and who was going there for marketing. I had very little money with me. So I purchased a small quantity of sugar candy worth only five annas and brought it to Jayrambati in the evening and offered it to Mother as my humble Gurudakshina. Oh, how gracious she was! Accepting with affection that humble offering of mine, she said to me, 'Lovely sugar candy! My child, I gladly accept this. I offer sugar candy syrup every day to Thakur and take the *prasād* myself. I shall offer this to Thakur'.

The third day of my stay at Mother's house was drawing to an end, and now it was time for me to leave. I heard the Mother say, 'What a pity the boy could not stay here longer! He has to leave today'. Turning to me, she said, 'Don't be sorry. This being the malarial season, I feel nervous lest anyone coming here from outside fall ill'.

At about four in the afternoon I went to take leave of the Mother, as I had to start before dusk. With tears in my eyes, I said to Mother, 'Mother, will you remember me?' Mother was also moved and she blessed and caressed me and said, 'Yes, my child, I shall remember you'. I repeated my prayer to her twice over again, and she assured me each time

that she would remember me.<sup>1</sup> Those were the last words I was privileged to hear from the Mother.

As I started off, Mother came and stood at the outer gate of the house and was tenderly and benignly watching me till I moved out of her sight. I too repeatedly looked back at her, feeling unutterable joy within.

\* \* \*

It was the year 1920. The Mother was seriously ill at her Calcutta residence (Udbodhan House). No one except doctors and attendants was allowed to see her. I was then at the Belur Math. Physicians had prescribed for Mother a medicinal herb called *śhveta-pūnar-navā* and a kind of spinach called *āmrul-śhāk*. Both these were available in the Belur Math garden. Fortunately for me, Swami Shivananda Maharaj called me and told me to collect and take these two things to the Mother's place daily. For nearly a month, each morning, I regularly took these things from the Math to Udbodhan. Thus I could see the Mother daily, though she was very ill and the doctors had prohibited any interviews with devotees or disciples. I could not talk to her, but whenever I silently bowed to her from a distance she would look at me tenderly and steadily. That was more than enough for me. Love flowed in torrents from those eyes. Her benevolent glance brought me great solace.

It was 20th July 1920. I had gone to bed as usual. At about half past one that night I had a wonderful vision of the Mother. It was most unusual. I saw her luminous form. She was looking at me tenderly. Addressing me she said sweetly, 'My child, I am going'. I could not divine the significance of the vision (which Mother had vouchsafed me) until I got the sad news of the Mother's passing away. She had left her mortal coil at Udbodhan House, at about the same time I had her vision.

<sup>1</sup> Much later I came to know from one of her attendants that soon after my departure Mother was heard to exclaim, in a somewhat thoughtful mood, 'So, I see, the boy has got it affirmed by me thrice' (in Bengali—'*tīn satya koriye nile*').



# TO THE HOLY MOTHER

BY TARA KUMAR GHOSH

The heavenly light that descended on the lap of Shyamāsundari,  
Shone in the dark like a never-ending lamp,  
On this Day of the days of December, the twenty-second.  
As a beaming joy to the heart of Sri Ramachandra.  
Joy had known no bounds in the village of Jayrambati,  
For that would embrace the space beyond all bounds.

Thus Saradamani, the embodiment of perfect Knowledge,  
The spirit and essence of Purity serene,  
Grew up in the beauty of soul to fulfil the wish of the Lord,  
By devoted dedication to the service of the Supreme Will.

Sri Ramakrishna, the Incarnation and the Prophet of Harmony,  
Whose beauty stood for the eternal harmonious completion,  
Sought for his divine consort, and found, in Sri Sarada Devi,  
The graceful, loving, divinely perfect, simple lady.

The Incarnation of the Age knew his own gem and took her endearingly,  
Taught her to consummate in the communion holy,  
To bathe perfect in the spiritual beauty, not seen  
In the course of previous expressed divinity.

Sri Ramakrishna saw in Sarada Devi the supreme divine fulfilment;  
So he dedicated the result of all his spiritual assay  
To her, who, with her simple grace, accepted it,  
To fulfil his desire, the only goal of her life.  
Her desire to become the mother of a child or two  
Expressed itself in the enchanting motherhood of countless children,  
All over the world, beyond race and clime.

Thus from chastity, purity, and supreme simplicity  
Emanated the flow of compassion, sympathy, and joy,  
To her children; the gracious Mother came,  
From whom benediction, goodwill, and strength simply flow.  
Thy Lord, Sri Ramakrishna, was the greatest of all-renouncing forces,  
So he lived in the openness of great renunciation;  
But thou, Mother, thou had great compassion for thy children,  
So didst live and move amidst the simple everyday life,  
Being thyself the centripetal force of renunciation.

Under thy simple robe and earthly form lay  
The original spirit, the Energy that dances in destruction.  
So beyond all recognition of the common folks,  
Thou didst shine,—move, live, and play;  
Thy lord had recognized thee, even as thou hadst become one with thy Lord;  
So do thou livest in his presence in full delight,  
To shelter the innumerable aspiring children dear,  
For all of whom thou art ever the gracious, blessed Mother.

On this occasion of thy blessed Hundredth birth celebration,  
Allow us, Mother, to worship thee,  
By enkindling the Lamp of our heart  
With thy compassion and benediction, which are our sole guide.

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## CHRONOLOGY OF IMPORTANT EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF THE HOLY MOTHER

1. Birth at Jayrambati—*22nd December 1853.*
2. Marriage and first visit to Kāmarpukur<sup>1</sup>—*May 1859.*
3. First visit to Dakshineswar—*March 1872.*
4. Serving Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar with intervals of visits to Kamarpukur and Jayrambati—*March 1872 to September 1885.*
5. Sri Ramakrishna worshipping her as the Śhoḍaśhī—*5th June 1872.*
6. First return from Dakshineswar to Kamarpukur—*October 1873.*
7. Death of Ramachandra Mukherjee, her father—*26th March 1874.*
8. Severe indisposition and awakening of Simhavāhini, deity of a shrine in the Mother's village—*September 1875.*
9. The incident connected with the 'dacoit father'—*Probably at the time of the third visit to Dakshineswar in 1877.*
10. Serving Sri Ramakrishna at Syampukur and Cossipore—*October 1885 to August 1886.*
11. Passing away of Sri Ramakrishna—*16th August 1886.*
12. First pilgrimage to Vrindaban—*30th August 1886.*
13. Visit to Kamarpukur after returning from Vrindaban—*August 1887.*
14. Return to Calcutta—*1888.*
15. Her spiritual ministry, her time being divided between Calcutta and Jayrambati—*1888—1920.*
16. Performance of Panchatapa<sup>2</sup>—*1893.*
17. Visit to Belur Math—*12th November 1898.*
18. Passing away of Swami Yogananda<sup>3</sup>—*28th January 1899.*
19. Passing away of Abhay Charan,<sup>4</sup> her youngest brother—*2nd August 1899.*
20. Birth of Rādhu or Rādhārāni<sup>5</sup> and beginning of domestic entanglements—*26th January 1900.*
21. Passing away of Shyamasundari Devi, her mother—*January 1906.*
22. Attending Durga Puja at the house of Girish Ghosh<sup>6</sup>—*1907.*
23. First visit to her Calcutta residence (the Udbodhan Office)—*23rd May 1909.*
24. Pilgrimage to Rameshwaram—*1911.*
25. Third visit to Banaras—*5th November 1912.*
26. Beginnings of her last illness—*December 1919.*
27. Passing away—*At 1-30 a.m. on 21st July 1920.*

<sup>1</sup> Sri Ramakrishna's native village.

<sup>2</sup> 'Austerity of the five fires'.

<sup>3</sup> A direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna who was closely associated with the Holy Mother.

<sup>4</sup> He was the most educated among the brothers of the Holy Mother, and the one whom she loved most.

<sup>5</sup> Niece of the Holy Mother and daughter of Abhay Charan. She was the Mother's ward in a special sense and an object of love and attachment for her.

<sup>6</sup> The great actor-dramatist of Bengal.

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# THE BIRTH CENTENARY OF THE HOLY MOTHER \*

BY SAILA KUMAR MUKHERJEE

The significance of the Holy Mother Birth Centenary extends far beyond the limits of Bengal—whercin the Holy Mother was born,—nay, beyond the limits of India, and has an appeal to the world outside. In the words of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, 'In the Holy Mother Indian womanhood fulfils, nay, transcends, its purely Indian character and assumes a world significance'. The message of the Holy Mother, in my humble view, is today for all humanity and not confined within the narrow compass of race or space.

The 27th of December 1953 will go down in history as a momentous day in India for two outstanding events which happened and which may shape the course not only of her future national life but may be a turning-point in the entire outlook on life of the men and women of civilized world who are tossed about by the conflict of ideologies and faiths

based entirely on a materialistic and sensual angle of vision.

First, the publication, on that date, of the Holy Mother Birth Centenary Memorial Volume—titled *Great Women of India*,—the first of its kind in Indian literature. Written by eminent scholars and thought-leaders from all parts of India, it makes for the first time, a panoramic review of the position of Indian women in the domestic, social, cultural, administrative, and spiritual spheres during the last five thousand years, by attempting an illuminating study of the lives and achievements of some outstanding figures and presenting in the background of that five-thousand-year-old canvas the picture of the Holy

\* Report of Sri Mukherjee's Presidential speech delivered at a crowded meeting at the University Institute Hall, Calcutta, on the 30th December 1953, in connection with the centenary celebrations.



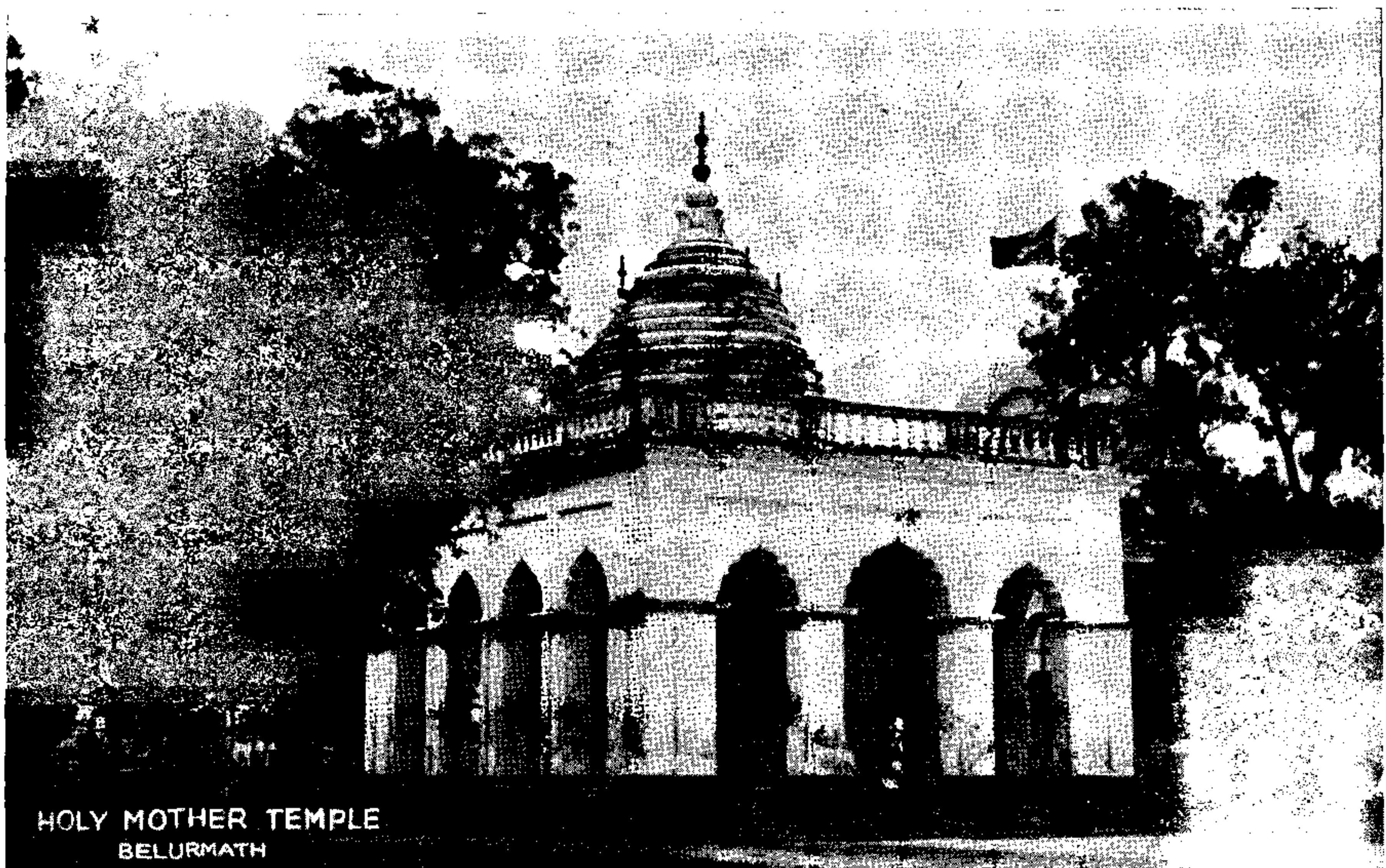
THE HOLY MOTHER CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS WERE INAUGURATED  
AT BELURMATH ON THE 27TH DECEMBER 1953



Mother and the prospect it opens out not only to the women of the future, but to the whole of humanity, irrespective of race or creed, age or clime. It is the first presentation of a systematic, connected, and continuous account of the achievements of Indian womanhood and the evolution of mother worship in India.

Secondly, the other outstanding event, which is also of great significance to the spiritual and cultural renaissance of the women of India, is the initiation, on the morning of that date, by the President of the Rama-

It is for future historians and writers to record the effect of these two epoch-making events not only on human conduct in this country but also on world events in the context of the mid-twentieth century. No event in one country can but have its repercussions in other countries. And today the unfolding of the life of a great Indian woman on the world panorama—a life which has not its parallel in any age or clime—cannot but have its silent and slow influence on men and women of the world, irrespective of geographical borders.



krishna Math and Mission, of seven women into Brahmacharya, as the first nuns—from among Indian women—of the Ramakrishna Order, dedicating their lives to the supreme sacrifice and to service. The ideals of womanhood depicted by the life and teachings of the Holy Mother have paved the way, for the first time in India, for the establishment of a women's Math (convent or nunnery), for higher social service based on ethical and spiritual values, and complementary to the Ramakrishna Order of monks so well known in India and abroad.

This joyous occasion predicts the ushering in of a new age, the release of a great and new spiritual force, the whole atmosphere of which is surcharged with vibrations of a new spiritual life that is coming. It appears as if the mysterious silence and seclusion of the Holy Mother, so long kept away from public gaze, has suddenly been broken, and the veil that covered the details of her life so long has been raised. A great hidden force has burst forth for the benefit of humanity. Hence I call this date of the Holy Mother Birth Centenary a momentous day in our national life.



What is that spiritual force emanating from the life of the Holy Mother, which, hundred years after her birth, seems to gain a tremendous momentum? How does it differ from the ideals of womanhood that Indian thought and literature have so long adored and emphasized? In the long galaxy of Indian womanhood there are scholars, poets, administrators, and brave fighters, as well as those distinguished by piety, charity, and other virtues of a very high order. To understand and appreciate that force, we cannot but think of Sarada Devi's divine consort—Sri Ramakrishna, the god-intoxicated priest of Dakshineswar, who, with his power of divine intuition, himself gave clue, before his marriage, to his would-be bride. During the full bloom of their youth, this supernatural couple established, by practical example, mutual respect, love, and adoration for each other, devoid of all sensual and carnal desire. And they advanced step by step, to the highest state of divine realization and bliss, without deviating in any way from the normal duties of a mundane life in an Indian family. Does the history and literature of any country, at any time, contain a parallel to the example set by this couple, who for months continuously shared the same bed and yet always remained in divine ecstasy without yielding even for a moment to the cravings of the flesh and ever subduing the senses with complete self-control?

The Holy Mother's life can broadly be divided into three stages. The first stage is from her marriage, at the age of 5 years, to the age of 18, when she came of herself to meet her husband at Dakshineswar. The second stage is the period of training, from the age of 18 years to the age of 34, when her husband passed away, during which she served her husband and mother-in-law and performed other household duties, in addition to practising Sadhana under the guidance of her husband, who was also her spiritual teacher. The third stage is the period of her spiritual ministration to the world, and her being venerated as the 'Holy Mother'. She

was revered as the successor of Sri Ramakrishna by the great monastic order. She gave spiritual initiation and instructions to hundreds of men and women.

Of all the unique features that are known to us of her life, from a simple village girl to the spiritual headship of a great monastic order, what comes off in bold relief is the unique phenomenon of a wife being worshipped as the Deity, thereby changing the current of man's attitude to woman as hitherto known to humanity. Worship of the husband had been a path to God-realization for Hindu women from time immemorial. But the worship of the wife was a rare phenomenon in history and was meant by Sri Ramakrishna as a path for men of future generations. When, in India and other countries, women were put under innumerable inhibitions, in the name of prevention of the sanctity of the social order, and were deprived of much of their freedom and many of their privileges, and when, in many parts of the world, a conflict is going on amongst men and women over equality of rights on the physical and material plane,—here is a glowing example meant to remove the doubts and conflicts by establishing a marvellous synthesis of wifeness, nunhood, and motherhood. This synthesis is achieved through a gradual accretion of spiritual strength and by manifesting the divinity present in everyone and everywhere.

The divine manifestation of the Holy Mother, in the latter part of her life was marked by a special feature which has great lessons for our countrymen. She was free from any the least caste prejudice. This was evident from several events, one of which is her serving food to a Muslim labourer and cleansing the plate and the spot herself. She lived and moved freely, on equal terms, with women devotees who came from the Western countries.

In the twentieth century, a great seer and maker of modern India, who gave the call to the women of India to join in the freedom struggle, was Gandhiji. He saw that women



in society should not be neglected but be utilized for all that is good and noble in a nation. In the nineteenth century, through the extraordinary life of the Holy Mother, Sri Ramakrishna, the great prophet of the harmony of religions, left behind his final word on and type of the ideal of Indian womanhood. In the middle of the twentieth century, therefore, the release of this spiritual force of ideal womanhood may produce men and women who will teach the art of peace in this warring world,—the art that will 'steer human civilization towards the goal of world peace,—not through sense-bound intellect but through the spiritual realization of the divinity within each individual'. This is the special message of the Birth Centenary of the Holy Mother.

If we analyse the deep meaning of the simple yet profound sayings of the Holy Mother, we find in them the quintessence of

wisdom and advice which is worth following by any man or woman in any country at any time. They reflect a marvellous synthesis of Yoga, work, knowledge, and devotion. In practical life, no individual in any country can have a better ideal to follow which can lead to peace and happiness of the individual as well as of nations. In these days of stress and strife, when people everywhere are making frantic efforts for the ushering in of a better world order, the noble ideas preached by this divine lady will have far-reaching results. It is for the leaders of nations to pause and ponder how best mankind can benefit by the Holy Mother's message. This ideal of womanhood based on spotless purity and universal love, which we find represented by the matchless life and example of the Holy Mother, will be revitalized in all its glory and will act as a beacon-light at critical moments of human history.

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## THE LIFE DIVINE

(A TRIBUTE TO SRI SARADA DEVI)

BY KALPALATA DEVI

'Vain is your search here and there; go to Jayrambati and there, in the house of Ramachandra Mukhopadhyaya, you will find her who is marked out for me'<sup>1</sup>—these prophetic words of Sri Ramakrishna drew Saradamani on to the stage of life to play an important part in an unparalleled drama of the unfoldment of the Divine Life on earth. Few, however, have understood the role played by her alongside of her husband in fulfilling his mission. But to those who have understood this divine play it is clear that if Sri Ramakrishna be taken as the Word, Sri Sarada-

mani is the Act; if he is the Ideal, she is the Fulfilment of it.

After her marriage, at the age of five, to Sri Ramakrishna, who was then twenty-three, she stayed almost all the time at her paternal home. For a period of seven months, however, when she was fourteen, she got the opportunity to stay with him at his village Kamarpukur where he had come for rest. Her first lessons of life were then received. She was as it were initiated into his Way of Life. He had the vision of the Divine and through the resulting cosmic consciousness he realized that Nitya and Lila were two aspects of the one and the same Reality. He

<sup>1</sup> *Sri Sarada Devi. (Also Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master).*



therefore made it clear that one who realizes the Divinity lives the twofold existence—enjoying the beatitude of the Absolute, *Nitya*, on the one hand, and performing the necessary duties in the world, the field of *Līlā*, on the other. If perfection in the realization of the finest was necessary, it was equally essential that duties should be performed with utmost care.

His instructions were about household works, like trimming the wick in the lamp, dressing vegetables, making betel-rolls, and cooking, and also about learning social adjustments, such as what sort of person each member of the household was, how to behave with each of them, and how to behave when she went out. Along with this tutoring, he guided her in devotional exercises, the reciting of the names and glories of God, meditation, and even the knowledge of Brahman.

For the girl-wife it was not hard to absorb his teachings. He was a kind and loving teacher and she a willing disciple. Days passed in happiness. Recalling those days she said to her disciples later on, 'I then felt as if a pitcher of bliss was kept in my heart'.<sup>2</sup>

This short stay together gave an opportunity to the Master (Sri Ramakrishna) also to understand his consort. It seems he was satisfied with the simple, pure, and eager disciple, for, four years later, when late one night she unexpectedly knocked at his doors at Dakshineswar, he welcomed her with the words, 'You have come at long last. Alas! my Mathur<sup>3</sup> is no more. Who will take care of you?' These words of welcome, simple though they appear, meant a lot to the young wife.

Sri Ramakrishna's divine inebriation was a known fact. Even before her stay at Kamarpukur it was being talked about that Sri Ramakrishna had gone crazy. Her experience told her otherwise. Though young, she understood his divine moods and saw no contradiction in his behaviour. But after Sri Ramakrishna's return to Dakshineswar he

merged in intenser Sadhana, totally oblivious of the world without. What was regarded before as only a malady or craze was now taken to be madness.

Wind-spiced gossips soon reached her village. Her parents were apprehensive, while single-handed she tried to fight her fears. Speaking about these days, later on, she said, 'In my early days at Jayrambati, I was always busy with some work or other, and would never visit my neighbours; for people would blurt out at the very sight of me, "Dear me, Shyāma's daughter has been married to a lunatic!" I avoided meeting anybody in order to escape such criticism'.<sup>4</sup> It was in such a state of things that she undertook the visit to Dakshineswar, for, even if rumours were true, was it not her duty then to stay by him? His cordial welcome and his normal behaviour blew away the clouds of uncertainty that were darkening her young life and gave her peace.

No one marks the silent flow of a stream that joins a torrential river. The mingling of Sarada Devi's life with that of Sri Ramakrishna was absolutely unnoticed. Enclosed within the small Nahabat, she worked from 3 a.m. to 10 p.m., unnoticed and unobserved, so much so that the manager of the temple once remarked, 'We have heard that she lives here, but we have never seen her'. Those who came to the Master knew that she only cooked for and served him. But unseen by the eyes of the world, it was here that, by the grace and guidance of her Guru, her personality fully developed. It was as silent as the blossoming of the bud into flower. Language cannot express the sublimity of this evolvment. The details of her life reveal her excellence not only as Sri Ramakrishna's companion and first disciple but also as one fit enough to receive his culminating adoration as the Divine Mother; as one worthy of being spoken of by him in such precise terms as 'My Shakti' and called upon to continue his spiritual mission on earth after his demise.

<sup>2</sup> Sri Sarada Devi.

<sup>3</sup> A patron and staunch devotee of Sri Ramakrishna.

<sup>4</sup> Sri Sarada Devi



Though Sri Ramakrishna remained in the Bliss of God-consciousness the whole time, he did not forget his duty towards his wedded wife. It may be remembered here that Sri Ramakrishna had the vision of the Divine Mother even before his marriage and that his mind was not attached to the world in the least. And yet, when he was asked whether he would marry, he willingly consented. Not only that; he helped them in finding a bride for him. It is difficult for us to comprehend the drama of their life. Sufficient is it for us to know that he had consciously taken upon himself the responsibility of a partner in life. Divine contemplation was not made an excuse by him to neglect his wife. He was prepared to allow her to exercise her right as a wife, and yet he paused—and frank as a child he asked her once, in her early days at Dakshineswar, ‘Do you want to drag me down into Māyā?’ ‘Why should I do that? I have come only to help you in the path of religious life’,<sup>5</sup> was her prompt reply.

And she lived her life true to her words, which brought forth Sri Ramakrishna’s following remark, later on:

‘Had she not been so pure and had she, losing herself, assailed me, who knows if my self-control would not have broken down and body-consciousness arisen? I importunately asked the Divine Mother, after my marriage, to keep her mind absolutely free from lust. Having lived with her at that time I knew that the Divine Mother really heard and granted that prayer’.<sup>6</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna perceived clearly that women were but so many aspects of the Divine Mother. And so, one day, while massaging his feet she asked him, ‘How do you look upon me?’ He replied,

‘The same Mother who is in the temple, the same who has given birth to this body and is now living in the Nahabat—it is the same Mother who is now massaging my feet. Verily, I always look upon you as a form of the blissful Divine Mother’.<sup>7</sup>

Sometime afterwards, when he was fully convinced that he did not for a moment think of the Holy Mother as apart from the Divine

Mother, he performed the Shodashi Puja as the culmination of his twelve years of Sadhana. Before emerging forth in the world as the child of the Divine Mother, as an instrument of Her will, he performed this last act of adoration.

One point may be mentioned here. Acts of such deep spiritual significance did not disturb the natural tenor of the lives of this unique couple. The Holy Mother, after the worship, engaged herself in the Master’s service as before, just as any simple, shy, and devoted Hindu wife. With the veil over her face, she came to serve his meals prepared by herself with scrupulous care and attention, waited upon him while he ate, rolled betel-leaves for him, and massaged his feet. The service of his old mother and cooking for the young boys who came to him formed part of her daily routine. Thus her life flowed on smoothly.

‘And like the ocean, day by day receiving  
Floods from all lands, which never overflows;  
Its boundary line not leaping, and not leaving,  
Fed by the rivers, but unswelled by these;—  
So is the perfect one’.<sup>8</sup>

Continuing in the same strain of their divine mission, stress may be put on a remark made by Sri Ramakrishna about her,—‘She is my Shakti’. Losing his own individuality in that of the Divine Mother, he rarely referred to himself as ‘I’ or ‘mine’. In later days when he talked to hundreds of people about himself and his Sadhanas, he always referred to himself as ‘this being’, ‘this self’, or ‘this one’, but in the instance given above, he said, in definite terms, ‘*śe āmār śhakti*’—‘She is my Shakti’.

Shakti is the principle of illusion, veiling Brahman, and also the Universal Energy in all its various forms. It is the Primal Power that brings forth the phenomenal world. Before creation it is one with the Absolute. ‘It is He alone who has become the universe, living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles. When He is actionless, I call Him

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>6</sup> *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>8</sup> Sir Edwin Arnold: *The Song Celestial.*



Brahman, when He creates, preserves, and destroys I call Him Shakti. Brahman and Shakti are not different from each other. Water is water, whether it is still or moving'.<sup>9</sup> Thus, even when from the ultimate point of view the Absolute is the only Reality, still, as he says, 'Unless you are established in Samadhi you cannot go beyond the jurisdiction of Shakti'.<sup>10</sup> The Tantra Darshana looks upon this Power or Shakti as Mother. Thus follows the acceptance of the Motherhood of God and the giving of the form of Mother to the Formless One.

The Divine Mother that Sri Ramakrishna worshipped was none other than this Shakti. He left behind him a living symbol of Her in the Holy Mother, and she knew it. Years after, when a disciple asked her the purpose of her outliving Sri Ramakrishna, she replied quietly, 'The Master left me behind to manifest the Motherhood of God to the World'.<sup>11</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna had made her aware of her mission on earth during his lifetime. His training of her was complete; but modest as she was, she did not think herself fit to take his place. During his last days at Cossipore, one day, with great feeling he said to her:

'Well, won't you do anything? Am I to do all?'

'I am a woman. What can I do?', was her modest reply.

'No no, you have much to do', the Master said.<sup>12</sup>

And after his passing away, when she too

desired to give up her body, he appeared before her and said: 'No, you must remain here. There are many things to be done'; and also, 'The people of Calcutta live like worms swarming in darkness. You will guide them'.<sup>13</sup> Her spiritual ministry started soon after. Following Sri Ramakrishna's demise, when she was at Vrindaban, she initiated Yogen (Swami Yogānanda). It is interesting to know her own reactions at this first discharge of duty in the Master's absence.

To quote her words:

'One day the Master asked me in a vision to give initiation to Yogen. That frightened me a little. I also felt rather shy. I thought, 'What is this? What will people think of it? They will say, Mother has started making disciples so soon'. But on three consecutive nights I heard the Master telling me, 'I have not initiated Yogen. You do it'. He even told me what Mantra I was to give him'.<sup>14</sup>

So she initiated him and since then right up to her last days continued initiating her children of all castes and classes into the spiritual life. She had to play a combined role of Guru and Mother. As a Guru she initiated, guided, and corrected; as a Mother she served, protected, and loved. While Sri Rama-

krishna chose his disciples, she freely accepted all. Knowing the responsibilities of a Guru, even the spiritual children of Sri Ramakrishna—on whom had devolved his spiritual heritage—were oftentimes reluctant to initiate each and every one. But can a Mother choose between her children? 'We are sending to the Holy Mother the poison we could not



SWAMI YOGANANDA

<sup>9</sup> *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna.*

<sup>10</sup> *Sri Sarada Devi.*    <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*    <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*



ourselves take. She is giving refuge to everybody, accepting the sins of all, and digesting the same', Swami Premananda once wrote.<sup>15</sup>

She initiated people of all classes and beliefs. She upheld and supported all religious doctrines. As such she became the embodiment of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings. If, together with the Hindu Sanatana Dharma, Sri Ramakrishna practised the Islamic religion and the Christian principles during his Sadhanas, she accepted the children of all religions as her own. She was the Guru not only of lay disciples but also of many monastic members of the Ramakrishna Order. She extolled Sannyasa, but gave warning to those who became Sadhus:

'Sadhus should always be alert. The path of a Sadhu is slippery. While one is on slippery ground, one should walk tiptoe. Is it a joke to become a Sannyasin?'<sup>16</sup>

To the worried householder she said, in a consoling tone:

'The householders have no need of external renunciation. They will spontaneously get the internal renunciation. But some people need external renunciation. Why should you be afraid? Surrender yourself to the Master and always remember that he stands behind'.<sup>17</sup>

She did not consider her duty over after initiation. She had to lead her children across the ocean of Samsāra. In old age, and in illness, without taking the necessary rest, she continued doing Japa for the disciples. Once when she was asked to rest more, she replied with a mother's care:

'But since I have taken their responsibility should I not see to their welfare? Therefore I do Japa for their sake, and pray to the Master constantly, saying, "O Lord, awake their consciousness. Give them liberation. There is a great deal of suffering in the world. May they not be born again!"'<sup>18</sup>

She lived for 34 years after Sri Ramakrishna. During this period the Ramakrishna Math and Mission had become well established. She rarely stayed at the Math. But her arrival at the Math or any of its Centres

always brought joy and peace—all then, as it were, felt the presence of Sri Ramakrishna. She was certain that Sri Ramakrishna was looking after and guiding his children. Was not her prayer heard by him when, at Bodh Gaya, on seeing the well kept monasteries of the monks, she had said to him, 'O Lord! my children (i.e. the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna) have no place wherein to lay their heads. They have very little to eat. They trudge from door to door for a morsel of food. May they have a place like this!' And she said later on, 'Subsequently the Belur Math was established through the grace of the Master'.<sup>19</sup> She therefore never worried about its work. Right from the time Swami Vivekananda, then an unknown wandering monk, asked her blessings to go across to the New World to spread the message of Vedanta, her blessings and support were always with them who conducted the affairs of the Math. Not only that. When criticism was levelled against the Sadhus of the Ramakrishna Order for being preoccupied with the activities of a social nature rather than leading their lives in retirement, she emphatically replied: 'What will you do day and night if you are not engaged in work? Can one practise meditation and Japa for twenty-four hours? . . . Those who cannot adjust themselves will go away'.<sup>20</sup>

And again:

'One should always recollect God and pray to Him for right understanding. How many are there who can meditate and practise Japa all the time? . . . It is much better to work than to allow the mind to roam at large. For, when the mind gets a free scope to wander, it creates much confusion. My Naren (Swami Vivekananda) thought of these things and wisely founded institutions where people could do disinterested work'.<sup>21</sup>

These words give a right direction to one aspiring to be a Karma-Yogi. Equal emphasis was laid by her on austerities, knowledge, and devotion, and most of all on renunciation. Austerity of course included to

<sup>15</sup> Swami Premānunder Patrāvalī.

<sup>16</sup> Sri Sarada Devi. <sup>17</sup> Ibid. <sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.



a certain extent disinterested work. She laid stress on simplicity, purity, and regular spiritual exercises. Right knowledge helped to discriminate between things of eternal value and the unreal things of the world. Dry book-learning was of no avail. Devotion brought down the grace of God without which liberation was not possible:

'How can any one get liberation unless Mahāmāyā leaves the path open? O man, take refuge in God! Take refuge in Him! Then alone Mahamaya will be gracious and pave the way for liberation'.<sup>22</sup>

Renunciation, internal renunciation, is the spirit behind all the three paths. Her Master had declared:

'The essence of the *Gītā* is what you get by repeating the word ten times. The word becomes reversed. It is then 'tāgi', which refers to renunciation. The essence of the *Gita* is—'O man, renounce everything and practise spiritual discipline for the realization of God''.<sup>23</sup>

And she had caught the spirit of it.

She said the greatest lesson that the Master came to teach was that of renunciation. Thus with renunciation as the underlying force, a proper blending of Knowledge, Devotion, and Action is necessary for the realization of God.

'Who is able to renounce all for His sake? Even the injunctions of Destiny are cancelled if one takes refuge in God. Destiny strikes off with her own hand, what she has written about such a person. What does a man become by realizing God? Does he grow two horns? No. What happens is, he develops discrimination between the real and the unreal, gets spiritual consciousness, and goes beyond life and death. God is realized in spirit'.<sup>24</sup>

It is easy to know but difficult to achieve. For, even with all these His grace is essential. Without it nothing is possible. To a disciple who complained: 'Mother, I have practised austerities and Japa so much, but I have not achieved anything', her sharp reply was, 'God is not like fish or vegetables that you can buy Him for a price'.<sup>25</sup> Love Him and He will be yours.

'God is one's very "own". It is the eternal relationship. He is every one's "own". One

realizes Him in proportion to the intensity of one's feeling for Him'.<sup>26</sup>

Her teachings are, like her life, simple and sublime. One becomes struck with the feeling that she is one 'who speaks with authority'. She never delivered sermons, she never dogmatized, but she *lived* the life. Love, peace, charity, equality, and universal tolerance were not mere words with her, they were ideals realized. A curtain was drawn on her divine life in 1920. Such a life is aptly called the *līlā* or sport of the Divine. She played the part knowing full well that she was the playmate of the Divine Lord. 'Sri Ramakrishna is playing with his different children in diverse ways but I have to bear the brunt of it. I cannot simply set aside those whom I have accepted as my own', she once said explaining her responsibilities as a Guru. Yet the Master's presence was a reality to her and she offered everything at his feet. She knew that he was working through her. And therefore she never claimed anything as her own, never asserted her opinion. She was one with him in spirit, and those who came in contact with her knew that.

Speaking of her modesty her biographer writes:

'The veil with which she always hid her face in public seemed to be symbolic of this more profound veil of modesty with which she loved to hide her own greatness'.<sup>27</sup>

And who indeed can fathom her greatness when a spiritual giant like her beloved Naren, Swami Vivekananda, had an occasion to write:

'You have not yet understood the wonderful significance of Mother's life—none of you. But gradually you will know. . . . To me Mother's grace is a hundred thousand times more valuable than Father's. Mother's grace, Mother's blessings, are all paramount to me . . . Please pardon me, I am a little bigoted here, as regards Mother. If but Mother orders, her demons can work anything. Brother, before proceeding to America I wrote to Mother to bless me. Her blessings came, and at one bound I cleared the ocean. There, you see'.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*      <sup>23</sup> *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna.*

<sup>24</sup> *Sri Sarada Devi.*      <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Letters of Swami Vivekananda.*



# THE HOLY MOTHER

BY DR. (MRS.) S. MUTHULAKSHMI REDDI

The life of the Holy Mother has many lessons to teach us. In these days, when physical and mechanical contrivances are expected to yield maximum happiness with minimum trouble to men and women, it will do us immense good to have a glimpse of the married life of Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother. India can solve many of its baffling problems not by mathematical calculations but by its own methods. Family planning, planned parenthood, control of increase in population, and such other social problems are daily discussed in our midst. But yet we have not found the right solutions. In these days of famine and flood and the consequent distress among the people, lakhs of rupees are set apart for family planning. Our leaders may have not thought of the usefulness and efficacy of sublime married felicity between man and woman which had been practised by our wise men and women for ages and found to be successful. Knowledge of the secular type cannot easily find its way and penetrate into our villages, but religious and spiritual ideas will spread like fire, because the soil has been prepared for centuries—nay, for thousands of years. The Indian mind can understand the significance and meaning of Brahmacharya—which has become rather 'outmoded' to our nowadays youth.

In our schools and colleges, we find that knowledge is imparted on every subject except that relating to religion or spirituality. But all the same, the Indian masses have vivid remembrance of all the names of Avatars, saints, and mythological heroes and heroines. India has passed through many an invasion and many a misfortune, but the religious history of the land has not been effaced even from the so-called ignorant mind. Now, instead of expending our money and energy on these schemes of family limitation, cannot

we picture to the young minds the lives of great men and women, such as Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and the Holy Mother?

The Holy Mother was a simple village girl of five years, when Sri Ramakrishna took her to wife. When the mother of Sri Ramakrishna was in search of a bride for her son and could not easily find one, it was Sri Ramakrishna himself who suggested to his mother that a bride would be found for him in the village of Jayrambati. Even here there is something which the ordinary mind can hardly fathom. Saradamani was a mere child at the time of her marriage. At the age of seven, she was brought to her mother-in-law's house for some time in order to come into closer touch with Sri Ramakrishna. Again, at the age of fourteen, when she was fairly grown up, he became her teacher and taught her in detail all the household duties and thus made an indelible impression on her youthful mind of his divine love for her. Of the experiences of this period, she used to say afterwards: 'I felt as if a vessel full of divine bliss was permanently installed in my heart. I cannot adequately describe the heavenly joy which filled my heart'.

When rumours reached her that her husband was seen behaving like one out of his mind, in the course of Sadhanas and during Samadhi, naturally her heart went out to him and she could not rest comfortably in her parental home, which was many miles away from where he was. So, she walked on foot, with her father, about sixty miles or so, to meet her divine husband. When Sri Ramakrishna asked her whether she would want him to be her husband in the worldly sense of the word, just for the reason he had been wedded to her according to the customary rites and so was duty bound to play the role of a householder, she promptly replied that



she had come to him to serve him in his onward march to God and not to hinder his spiritual progress.

The Holy Mother was simple and guileless as a child and her life was one of service and sacrifice. Daily she would rise very early in the morning, bathe in the Ganges and after prayers and meditation, set about performing her routine work. She was always hard-worked and had to cook several dishes, not only for her husband but also for his many disciples and devotees who came for *darshan*. Without a word of murmur, she lived in a small room which had to be used as a kitchen, bedroom, living-room, and even reception room for the women disciples or devotees. So, she became his real housekeeper, serving him day and night, while Sri Ramakrishna played the role of a Guru and taught her all spiritual practices and finally initiated her into the sacred Mantras. The divinity in her manifested itself fully under his loving and careful spiritual nursing to the great joy of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna saw in her the Goddess of the temple worthy to be sanctified and worshipped. It was a glorious transformation into the highest spiritual life. Sarada Devi became one with her divine husband. Both their minds worked on the same plane. When they slept together in the same bed, the mind and even the body never descended from the superconscious divine state into the lower physical existence. Sri Ramakrishna, by his spiritual power and influence, was able to transform his wife, as he did his disciples. Was not Narendra (Swami Vivekananda) converted into a great Yogi by the mere touch of his hands? So there was nothing wonderful that Saradamani, an innocent, pure, and noble soul, was lifted into the higher regions of life, where the mind soared to its natural destiny—the Eternal and the Immortal.

It is good for us to remember the influence of parental conduct and early associations upon children. Both the Holy Mother and Sri Ramakrishna were brought up in an intensely religious atmosphere. Our village

people still practise, and did so better especially hundred years ago, the ancient and traditional methods of life. The parents of the Holy Mother were pious, simple, and honest folk, accustomed to the worship of the heroes of the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata* and given to pilgrimages to holy temples in their neighbourhood. Their recreation and joy consisted in attending religious Melas and Bhajans and in the celebration of religious festivals throughout the year. Such wholesome habits and practices could not but influence the young minds towards the Supreme.

What is the condition of our society today? Schools, colleges, and hostels have sprung up only in cities and towns and have attracted students from the villages to their portals. The present-day system of education does not provide opportunities for the young students to spend much time with their parents, who also, in the majority of cases, are losing faith in our scriptures.

Sri Ramakrishna, like a vigilant father, had a very observant eye on the conduct of his disciples. He would warn them, whenever their talks turned to worldly matters, not to indulge in sense-provoking topics.

Let us now try to have a glimpse into some important and illuminating incidents in the life of the Holy Mother.

Once when the Holy Mother, while massaging her husband's feet, asked him how he looked upon her, he replied that she was to him the same Mother who was the Deity in the temple. Though some may seek to criticize Sri Ramakrishna for his attitude towards his wife, viz. forcing her to be an ascetic and denying her wifehood and motherhood,—the Holy Mother herself has said to her disciples, later in life, that she always experienced a great bliss in Sri Ramakrishna's presence and company. She had innumerable disciples following her, worshipping her, and loving her as children love the mother. At one time when the mother of Sarada Devi had complained that her daughter had been denied motherhood by the asceticism of her son-in-



law, Sri Ramakrishna had prophesied and consoled her saying her daughter (i.e. Holy Mother) would have, in time, many good children, boys and girls, all round her, calling her 'mother, mother' throughout her life.

The Holy Mother used to say that she would often pray, looking at the reflection of the full moon in the Ganges, that her mind should become as pure and spotless as the moon. Her prayers were certainly heard; she was pure and spotless. Her love for humanity was that of a mother for her children, whether the children were good or bad. Once when Sri Ramakrishna refused to give his blessings to a woman who was not of good character, the Holy Mother called that woman to her, consoled her, and gave her affectionate advice. This woman was transformed and became her loyal devotee. The Holy Mother extended her love to all without any distinction.

She was of a compassionate and forgiving nature. The lives of Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother have great lessons to teach us. Sri Ramakrishna had so completely renounced attachment to worldly possessions and wealth that whenever his hands or body touched any coin of silver or gold, even unconsciously, he would feel pain and grow restless. When a rich merchant offered a sum of ten thousand rupees as provision for his needs, Sri Ramakrishna straightaway refused the offer. When the donor, in good faith, insisted on his acceptance of the amount, the Master referred the matter to the Holy Mother. She, in turn, declined the offer, explaining that her acceptance would be the same as acceptance of the amount by her husband.

When the Holy Mother went to Rameshwaram on pilgrimage, an officer of the place was directed by the Raja of Ramnad to show her his buildings and treasures there. While all the costly jewels and ornaments were being exhibited, she was informed that she could have any of the ornaments she liked for herself as a present from the Raja. She could never think of wanting any jewels.

But, lest the Raja feel hurt, she asked her young niece, who was with her, to choose one. All the time, the Holy Mother was praying that her niece should not covet any one of those jewels. The girl wonderfully responded to the Mother's wish and asked for a lead pencil, worth half anna. This incident reveals how detached the Holy Mother was even when precious ornaments were offered to her. Thus her nature readily responded to Sri Ramakrishna's teachings and she became even greater than the Guru himself.

In these days, many so-called modern educated men and women fall easy victims to the temptation of ill-acquired wealth and ornaments, revealing their faulty training and education. It should set everybody, interested in the welfare of the youth, thinking how much our present-day society has fallen from the high ideals of our forefathers.

Sri Ramakrishna was unique in his relationship with women. Some ascetics look upon woman as a temptress and scrupulously avoid her presence and company. But in Sri Ramakrishna's life we have an example to illustrate the truth of the moral—good will breed good, evil will breed evil. This is also a lesson to all married men, who often blame women, who are innocent and helpless, for faults of their own, and even discard them out of selfishness on their own part. Let them, for their great benefit, study the wedded life of Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother and learn for themselves. The Holy Mother embodied great magnanimity of mind, forbearance, and love, unequalled by the many so-called 'good people' amongst us. Once, in her village (Jayrambati), when she saw her niece serving food to a Mohammedan labourer by tossing the food to him from a distance, the Holy Mother felt unhappy at it and disapproved the so-called orthodox attitude on the part of her niece which lacked love for the poor man. To set an example, she herself removed the leaf and cleaned the place where he had taken food. This is evidence of a large heart and human sympathy for the lowly and the depressed, occurring half a cen-



tury ago when caste distinctions were rigidly prevalent in society.

In conclusion I venture to urge that in our schools and colleges earnest attempts should be made to teach the students and also train them in the methods by which they can control their passions, feelings, and emotions, and thus prepare themselves for leading a noble, pure, and healthy life. Much of the misery in our society may be traced to the indiscriminate and indiscreet marital alliances. Unfortunately our education is woefully lacking in the spirit of self-control and self-discipline. Therefore, in free India, education should be remodelled and reoriented so

as to include in its syllabus the high ideals of religious and spiritual life. The great drawback of the modern educational system is the complete dissociation of religion from education. Let us call it by any name—moral, spiritual, or religious teaching. But no education can be complete if it is dissociated from the daily life of the people and it takes the pupil away from the cherished thoughts and ideals of his ancestors. And no education can fulfil its chief purpose if it is not going to train patriotic, useful, and selfless citizens to serve humanity. A State that is interested in the moral and spiritual welfare of its people cannot divest itself of this responsibility.

## THE HOLY MOTHER

SRIMATI YAMUNABAI HIRLEKAR

A hundred years ago, in a little village called Jayrambati in the district of Bankura in Bengal was born a little child, Sarada as she was called, to a couple Ramachandra Mukherji and Shyamasundari Devi, who were known for their generosity of character and devotion to God. Little Sarada inherited the combined virtues of both her parents as was seen from her later life. At the early age of five, she was married to Gadadhar, as Sri Ramakrishna was then called. At that time he was 23. According to the old Hindu custom the marriage was only in name and Sarada lived with her parents till she was about eighteen. Only once during this period she went to live with her husband in Kamarpukur for about seven months. Sri Ramakrishna loved to teach her the simple household crafts and was very affectionate to her. She too loved to do little things for him and in this way a deep mutual affection grew between them, but it had nothing to do with carnal attachment. It was an unusual type of marriage in the worldly sense, but it was communion of two souls on the spiritual plane. Soon Sarada returned to her parents' place.

Later when Sarada heard about her husband having gone mad—for that was how his ecstasies for divine love were understood—she travelled on foot a distance of 60 miles to Calcutta to be by the side of her husband like a typical Hindu wife. She, however, soon discovered that the reports were baseless and settled down in Dakshineswar to serve Sri Ramakrishna in every possible way. He on his part was very tender in his attention to her needs and physical comforts. He even got a few ornaments made for her. The Master looked upon Sarada Devi as the incarnation of the highest form of womanhood i.e. the Mother, and on one occasion he actually seated her on the pedestal of his Deity, the Mother Divine, and worshipped her as the Goddess with all the ceremonial and ritual enjoined. Thereafter he went into deep Samadhi.

Sarada Devi's mother Shyamsundari was sad at heart at the seemingly strange relationship between her daughter and son-in-law. That Sarada would have no child of her own, made her mother grieve her lot. But when the Master came to know this, he assured his mother-in-law that although



Sarada would have no child of her own she would have many children who would look up to her as their veritable mother. Sri Ramakrishna's words proved true. All his disciples were like children to the Holy Mother. She loved them, and ministered to their spiritual needs. She earned the enviable title of the 'Holy Mother' and the maternal instinct which is embedded in every woman's heart was in the case of the Holy Mother amply fulfilled by the affection she showered on them which was reciprocated by them. Though she did not give physical birth to any child she did something superb which is not given to the lot of other women, i.e. she gave spiritual birth to many a faltering soul. The maternal love of a woman which is confined to her own children is only a narrow expression of a noble sentiment which is capable of being expanded to infinite proportions. It was given to the Holy Mother to attain the infinite proportions and reach the highest summit of motherhood which knows no narrow boundaries but sheds its kindly lustre alike on all those who come within her fold. The highest honour of spiritual Motherhood was bestowed upon her and Shyamasundari's sorrow was compensated for in ample measure. The Master's disciples loved and respected her as their own mother. Even Swami Vivekananda took her permission before he embarked upon his trip to America.

It is true the Holy Mother is not so widely known as Sri Ramakrishna or his illustrious disciple Swami Vivekananda, but does not her greatness lie in this very fact? Her's was a life of silent sacrifice and penance of the highest order. She merged her personality into that of the Master. She began as his disciple but soon she assimilated his ideas and made them her very life and character. At times she would excel even her illustrious husband in her qualities of forgiveness, affection, and renunciation. Men and women devotees who were sometimes afraid of the Master's righteous wrath often took shelter

under the Mother's affection in the same way as guilty children seek the protection of their mother before the father's presence. The Mother led a very rigorous life. She got up during the very early hours of the morning and was engaged in Japa and meditation for hours before sunrise. She hardly went out during daytime but was occupied with cooking for the Master and making special preparations sometimes for the Master's delicate stomach and sometimes for the special likings of his disciples. After the Master's passing away, she used to hold talks with devotees on the simple practices of spirituality in everyday life. With no children of her own, she had a big family to care for. Her brothers and near relatives were a great cause of anxiety for her. Particularly Rādhū, the daughter of her brother who died young, caused her great worry both financial and physical. But she discharged her self-imposed responsibilities with meticulous care and yet with a certain detachment. The Holy Mother outlived Sri Ramakrishna by thirty-four years but during all these years she felt his presence as if the separation had never taken place at all. In the early period, she had visions of Sri Ramakrishna assuring her that he had 'only passed from one room into another'.

Such was the divine couple—Sri Ramakrishna and Saradamani Devi, the Holy Mother. One could hardly believe that such a pair ever trod the surface of the earth. Yet it was true. They lived and died like any other mortal but left an indelible impress upon the hearts of many a soul whom they inspired to carry the torch of spiritual enlightenment from generation to generation.

The Birth Centenary of the Holy Mother is being celebrated from December 1953 to December 1954 and we shall be failing in our duty if we did not work and co-operate to our maximum ability in making the celebration a real expression of our devotion to the Holy Mother and her message.



# SRI SARADA DEVI

## A CENTENARY TRIBUTE

BY JUSTICE P. B. MUKHARJI

History does not fail to record the heroism of brave women who have partnered their husbands to victory in different avocations of life where glamour, fame, and wealth have been the rich rewards of a lifetime of struggle. But few are the illustrations of those still braver women who shade themselves so completely as Sarada Devi in order to be able to fuse ambition with self-renunciation, where fame, if it came, was not a prize but an attendant. She inspired her great husband Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa in man's pursuit after God by a beautiful companionship, sanctified by the highest sacrifice and made exquisite by an abiding love and devotion. Her ideal was a complete identification with her husband's aspiration to realize God on earth and for a total spiritual conquest of the nature of man. That ideal was big and spacious enough for their joint loyalty. It was attractive enough to redeem the paltriness of the common conjugal life. The world has known and admired the devout celibate and the pious nun who have sought God and realized Him. But here is a unique experiment where both the husband and the wife made God their joint venture. It was a combination rare and glorious and evocative of a great pattern of life which used to animate the lives of the great Rishis and sages of India in the past. Without Sarada Devi's willing sacrifice of the lower felicities of a common wife and without her active encouragement of one of the greatest spiritual endeavours made by man the world might not have seen the fulfilment of Sri Ramakrishna's grand human conquest of the divine. When she arrived at the Dakshineswar temple to meet her husband, the saint exclaimed, 'Have you come here to tempt me to the common futilities of life?' She replied,

true to the genius and ideals of womanhood, 'If that was my object I am no true wife; I have come here to assist you to realize man's highest aspiration and to that realization both man and wife are alike the heirs'. Sri Ramakrishna said later in life, about his wife, 'If she were not herself a spiritual aspirant, if she had attracted me only as a woman, I might have deviated from the path of discipline which is the condition of God-realization'. No greater tribute could ever have been paid to a wife by a greater husband. She truly was his 'ministering angel'.

Sarada Devi was born on 22nd December 1853, into the family of a poor Brahmin, Ramachandra Mukherji, in the village of Jayrambati in the district of Bankura in the State of West Bengal, India. In May 1859 she was married at the very early age of five according to the prevailing social customs of that time. Sri Ramakrishna was then 23 years old. It is said that he had indicated long before the marriage was arranged that she was to be his wife. For nearly eight years after marriage they hardly met. Then they met only to live for about seven months together and separated again. After another interval of five years, in the year 1872, Sri Ramakrishna himself baptized Sarada Devi in his path in the holy temple of Dakshineswar. The Mantra or the word of dedication that he uttered on that occasion represents the quintessence of the philosophy behind the ideal marriage and when translated will read something like this:—

'You, my partner, help me to conquer that central reality which binds you and me and the universe. Looking at you I see the Divine immanent in every human soul. You are the symbol that reminds and inspires me to re-enter the forgotten inheritance of man'.



That was the consecration and consummation of their marriage. The offspring was not a child, but a moving technique to perfect human life, and to redeem its promise and purpose.

The modern man pays lip service to the ideal of independence of man and woman in their married life. No more cant has been written and said on any human problem than on this one of independence in married life. That perversion of independence in married life has become synonymous today with the wife pursuing her own ideals and the husband his. Marriage today does not mean identity of lives and aspirations of ambitions not only intellectually shared and dialectically discussed in the drawing-room at stated hours but also lived together in the daily acts of life. The progressive outlook in modern marriage has miscarried itself under the delusion of independence and has come to mean for millions only a fortuitous and insecure combination of passion and convenience to run a joint mess where the children are regarded as a nuisance and are avoided if that means going without a car or a gadget or some other technological blessing.

Sarada Devi represented and lived that greater and truer ideal of equality and independence by an identity with her husband's principles and ambitions of life. She realized that true independence could only come from the conquest of human nature and that was only possible when man and his wife shared that ideal and that the basic economics of a true personality is an economics of donation, not of compensation or calculation. She and her great husband exemplified in their lives that the single state is not alone to be blessed. A true communion between the husband and the wife is the precursor of that communion with the divine. It can be the preview and prelude to that unitive experience with the ultimate reality. This is the more complete life and the more perfect life. It cannot come by sharing the temporalities of life but its spirituality. It is the life which does not insult Nature but asks her co-operation. Such

married life is not an inconsequential emotionalism but a rigorous discipline by which one exchanges the vortex of frustration for a boundless harmony potent enough to recreate new universes of fuller existence. She bent the powerful stream of her entire feminine nature to aid the fulfilment of human existence. She gave meaning to the great Tantras of India and portrayed them in her life. So completely did she live in her husband's life and ideals that when at her age of 33 she became a widow, in 1886, and was about to don the widow's dress of grief, she had a vivid vision of her husband who appeared to tell her that there was no death except in form and that there was no widowhood for the wife who had chosen God and life eternal as her ideal. For He is the deathless Lord to whom all life aspires and whose brooding omnipresence holds the creation in an eternity of perpetual existence, and the husband is only an institutional approximation to that eternal ideal.

When Sri Ramakrishna was alive, Sarada Devi's life was one of constant service and unflinching devotion to the cause, with complete unanimity on both the ends and the means. She used to live modestly and most unobtrusively in a quiet attic in the temple premises. Her life used to begin one hour before the dawn and throughout the day and evening it was one long continuous record of service quietly given with enthusiasm, faith, and hope. The daily programme was not a mechanical routine but was inspired with an all-consuming zeal to see the fruition of the complete spiritual and moral transformation of the nature of man. It was carried out with a patience that had learnt not to hasten but to wait for good work to come to maturity. No guest in the temple ever returned from the temple premises without being the recipient of her quiet and simple hospitality. No woman guest ever left the temple without being greeted by her with that divine smile that used to lit up her face. The modest needs of her husband were attended with scrupulous care as part of the divine adven-



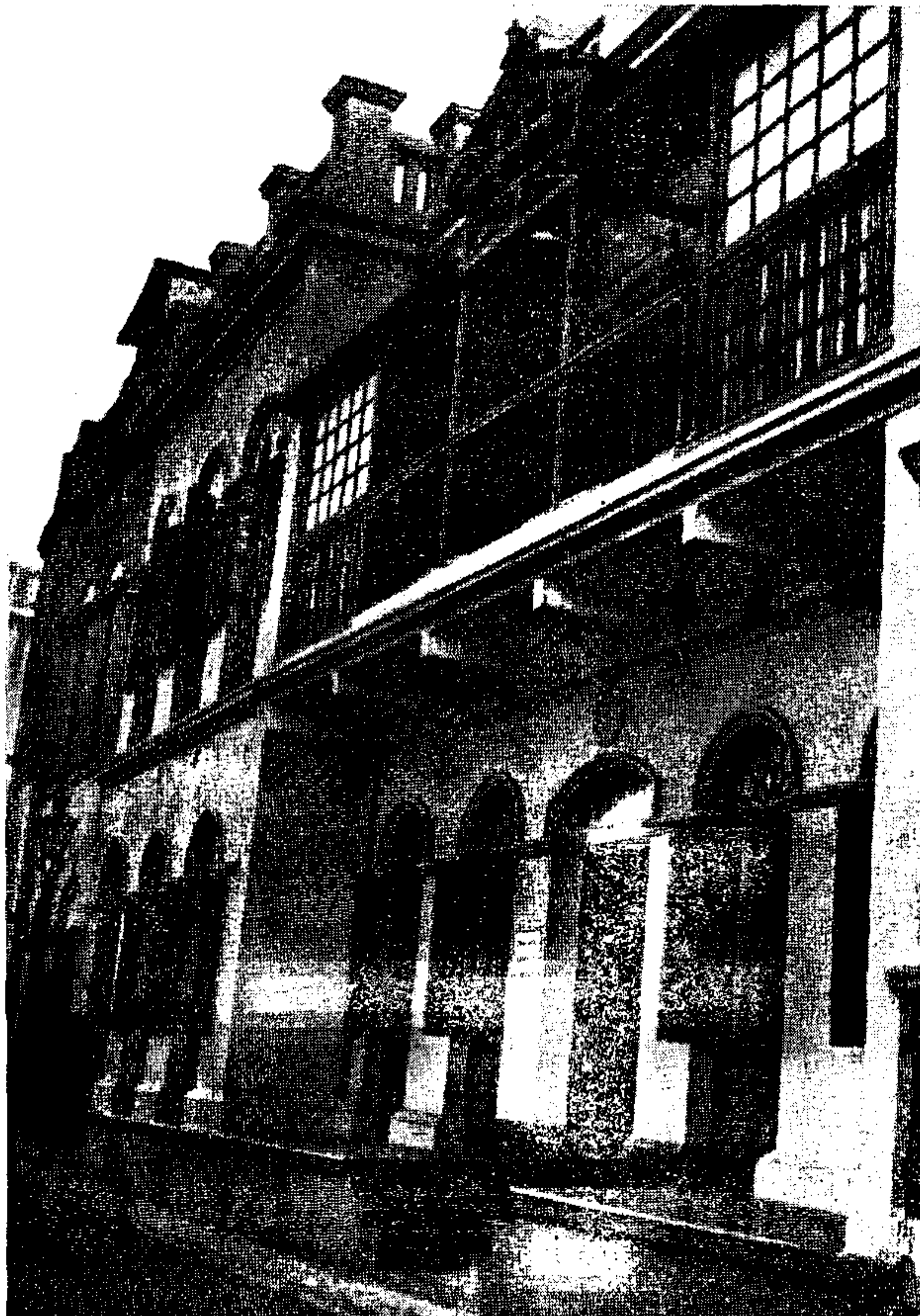
ture. The arrangement for worship in the temple received the perfect skill of her hands in a ceaseless search to divinize life and its methods.

Profound was the grief of Sarada Devi on the demise of Sri Ramakrishna. She transcended the great grief. She sublimated that grief and transfigured it into a new sense of responsibility. She refused to be overwhelmed by sorrow. She lived the rest of her life in continuing the work of Sri Ramakrishna that was left unfinished. It is not sufficiently realized how great in this respect was her contribution. In binding together the disciples of her husband in a common cause, and

thereby forging an instrument to serve the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna, and to inspire hundreds and thousands of men and women, she rendered a signal service to the Ramakrishna Movement and Mission of which India is so justifiably proud today.

The death of the great saint cast a deep gloom over the disciples. At that crucial hour it was the quiet strength of Sarada Devi which enabled her to collect herself with fortitude and courage. She called his great disciples together and stood by them. Her strength and stability acted as a magic example and a moving inspiration. Thenceforward she was to become the 'mother' of

all these wonderful disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, who had renounced their personal and selfish ambitions to serve the cause of their great Master and uphold the spiritual principles on earth. Having no child of her own, her husband's disciples became her children and she inspired them with loving care and understanding. From now onwards she became the person responsible for building that nucleus whose efflorescence we see today in the purposeful activities of the Ramakrishna Mission throughout the world. But for her inspiration of this hour of trial, but for her motherly affection when the death of the great Master threatened to spell desolation in the lives of his disciples, and but for her unflinching encouragement, much of the great work would have been lost. She supplied the faith when disciples wavered. She gave the assurance when doubts assailed. She provided helpful advice when



'MOTHER'S HOUSE'  
(Udbodhan Office at Baghbazar)



indecision prevailed. From now onwards she acquired a holiness of her own and out of that holiness grew that quiet strength which knows how to conquer difficulties and doubt's



YOGIN MĀ

in the crisis of life. She became the centre from which perpetually stemmed the radiant messages of soul-inspiring hope.

Sarada Devi outlived Sri Ramakrishna by 34 years. She passed away on the 21st July 1920. It was in this period of thirty-four years that she added new dimensions to her personality.

After the demise of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi went on a pilgrimage to Vrindaban in 1886. Later on again she had occasion to travel widely in India specially with a view to visiting the holy places. Among other places of pilgrimage she went to Gaya, Banaras, Puri, as also to Madurai and Rameshwaram in South India. A very touching incident is recorded of her visit to the great and ancient temple of Lord Jagannath at Puri. Sri Ramakrishna had a desire to visit the temple of Jagannath, but for some reason or other that journey was never undertaken. When Sarada Devi, as a widow, went on a pilgrimage to Puri, she quietly took a photograph of her husband. When inside the

temple of Puri she fondly produced that photograph of her husband, with tears in her eyes, so that the Lord Jagannath could have a look at her husband. Such deep human affection with such dedication was an arresting feature of her wonderful personality. These travels in India added richness to her nature and deepened her convictions in the spiritual ideals.

The first few years that followed the death of Sri Ramakrishna were years of great anxiety and privation for Sarada Devi. It was only after the Ramakrishna Mission was organized that a new chapter opened. During this period of crisis and uncertainty she stood firm as a rock, helped and aided by the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. The Udbodhan Office was constructed in 1909 by Swami Saradananda specially for the purpose of the residence of Sarada Devi who until then had no home. Before that she used to stay in rented houses while in Calcutta, except on the occasions when she lived in the houses of such devotees like Balaram Bose and Master Mahashaya. One of her favourite places where she loved to reside was the garden-house of Nilambar Mukherji.

No tribute to the memory of Sarada Devi can be complete without an account of her



GOLĀP MĀ



spiritual ministration which began somewhere near about 1888 and continued till the last day of her life. Here is another aspect of her personality which is little known. It is often said that the fate of a wife of a great man is not an unmixed blessing. Behind every greatness there is a tremendous sacrifice not only of the person who achieves such greatness but of many others who help in the fulfilment of that greatness. Every greatness carries a shadow with it and to be in the shadow of even greatness may be sometimes distressing. But not so in the case of Sarada Devi. She has to her account greatness on her own merits as a spiritual teacher. She achieved high spiritual insight by a life of intense devotion. She gave initiation to many of her disciples both men and women. The two well-known women disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, Golāp Mā and Yogin Mā, were her constant companions. Golap Ma followed Sarada Devi as a shadow and was with her in most

of her pilgrimages and was constantly attending to the internal management of Sarada Devi's household. Yogin Ma was perhaps the most impressive among Sarada Devi's women companions and of her Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Among women Yogin (Ma) is the Jñāni (intellectual ascetic)'. Many of the records left by both Yogin Ma and Golap Ma speak of the wonderful spiritual ministration of Sarada Devi. The conversations of Sarada Devi that are recorded reveal a remarkable spiritual maturity and a philo-



SWAMI SARADANANDA

sophy entirely her own. She herself believed in and practised a life of simplicity as a condition of spiritual progress. She never failed to emphasize that Divine Grace cannot be purchased even by the most rigorous disciplines of Yoga and asceticism. Her philosophy revealed that difficult technique of waiting upon the Lord in our daily round of duties. She was a great believer in the efficacy of Japa and the Mantram as inducing the state of receptivity when spiritual grace can descend. In the path of Yogic discipline she constantly



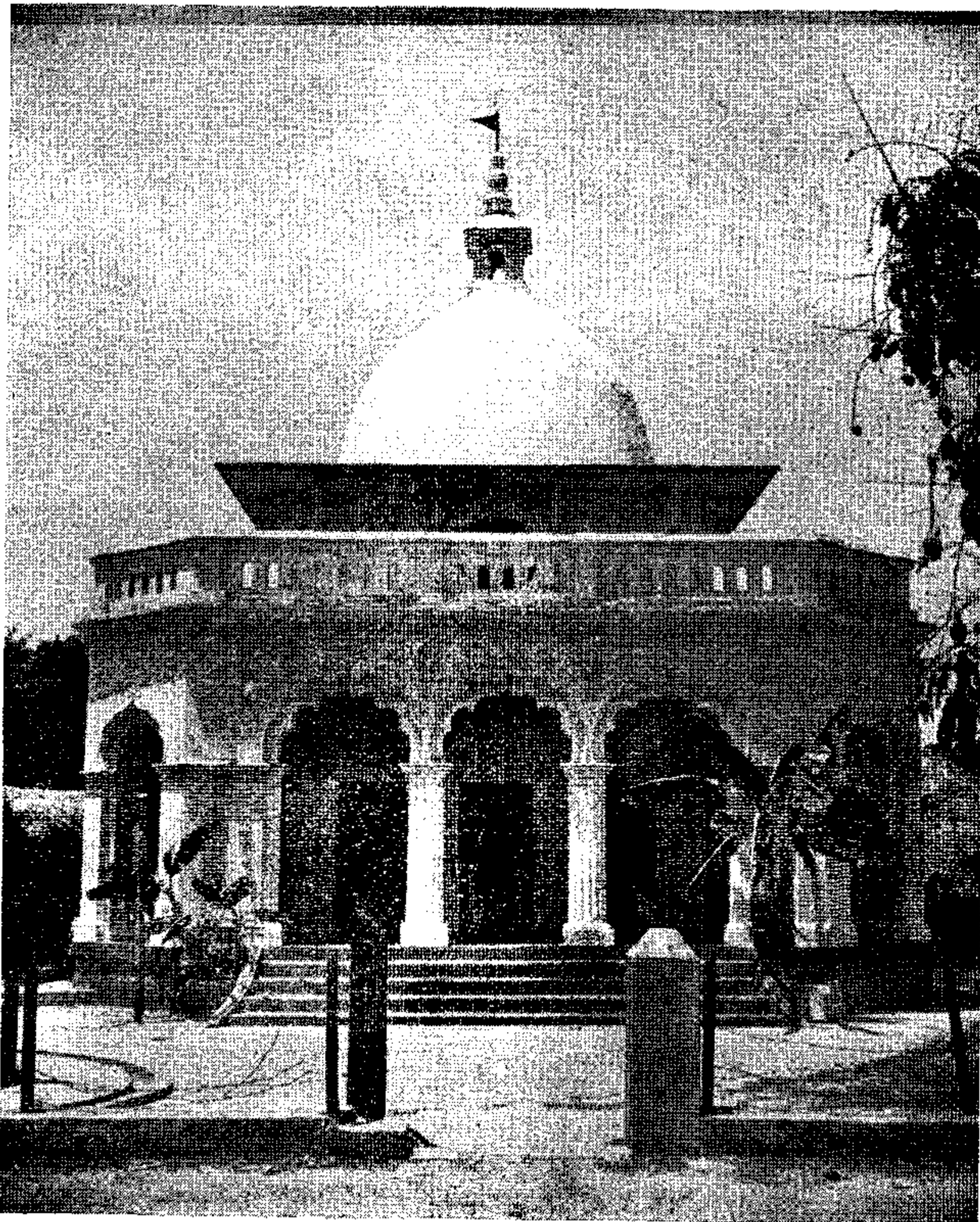
warned her disciples to avoid the insidious pride of individual effort which very often lurks in the heart of the aspirant and delays his spiritual progress.

In concluding this tribute a word is appropriate about her relations with the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. To everyone she felt that she had a responsibility. She became the centre and source of unbounded love and inspiration, to whom all his disciples could come

also impressed them with the great mission of their lives. She acted as the equal mother to all the disciples and thus helped to build up the brotherhood of monks in the Ramakrishna Order. That brotherhood of inspiring fellowship which still animates the members of the Mission is the result and imperishable record of Sri Sarada Devi, of her love and devotion of a lifetime. For Vivekananda she showed the same love and solicitude as the great

Master. In fact she used to say that the Master was working through the form of Vivekananda. Her words were: 'Naren (Vivekananda) is his chief instrument'. Sarat Maharaj (Saradananda) and Yogen Maharaj (Yogananda) were her constant companions. Yogen Maharaj's adoration for Sarada Devi knew no bounds. If anyone made a gift of a few annas to Yogen Maharaj he used to save them so that Sarada Devi could go on a pilgrimage. After the death of Yogen Maharaj, Sarat Maharaj used to look after Sarada Devi. About Sarat Maharaj she used to say that he had the strength of Shiva. It was he who wrote the Bengali work on *The Cult of Shakti Worship in India*. In building the Ramakrishna Mission, Saradananda played a major part. Saradananda's learning, his profound philosophical and psychological equipment, and his vast experience from

travels abroad made him a pillar of strength in the growth of the Ramakrishna Order. His great work *Śhrī Śhrī Rāmakriṣṇa Līlā-prasaṅga* is a matchless production. Both Sarat Maharaj and Yogen Maharaj owed much to the inspiration of Sarada Devi.



HOLY MOTHER'S TEMPLE AT JAYRAMBATI (1952)

with their doubts and their worries. To every one of such disciples she had something useful and practical to say. Her guidance was in constant demand and was always given with that wisdom which comes only to those who are spiritually kindled. She not only gave them the symbol of the unity of purpose but



Besides the imperishable fragrance of her life that she has left behind, Sarada Devi lives today in the minds of her many disciples who remain as testimony of her handiwork, and in the invisible bond of love and unity that pervade the Ramakrishna Order. Three temporal shrines today commemorate her life and teachings. There is the beautiful small temple at Belur Math on the banks of the Ganges on the spot where her body was

cremated. Then there is the shrine of the Udbodhan Office in Calcutta in which her portrait is worshipped. The third memorial is in her own village Jayrambati where Swami Saradananda erected a temple and a monastery in her memory. In this village shrine is installed a life-size painting of Sarada Devi. Many who are 'heavy-laden' still wend their way to the stillness and the holiness of this shrine and look at a Madonna.

## DEVI SARADAMANI

BY DR. MAHENDRANATH SIRCAR

Hundred years ago Sri Sarada Devi or Saradamani was born. She was united with Sri Ramakrishna in marriage. The marriage was significant and appears to be providential. He was in Dakshineswar, when his mother and others were thinking of finding a bride for him. He came back to his village home casually and himself suggested to the others to negotiate with the parents of Saradamani. Though Saradamani was not advanced in years, the marriage took place smoothly as if by divine dispensation. Every event in Sri Ramakrishna's life, as in the case of his marriage, seemed perfectly, though inscrutably, predestinated. Events just occurred, leaving Sri Ramakrishna completely unperturbed.

Sarada Devi was united with Sri Ramakrishna in deep Spirit. Nobody could easily fathom the depth of their relationship. It was a marriage not in the ordinary physical sense of the term, but a sublime spiritual union. There was no touch of flesh, although the Holy Mother—that is how Sarada Devi is affectionately called by her devotees—was allowed to remain in Sri Ramakrishna's room and did every bit of service to her husband.

In India marriage is not a 'contract' but a mutually elevating relationship between kindred souls. The bond between husband

and wife has always been looked upon as an ethical and spiritual interrelation and from both sides the influence is more spiritual than secular. We see this in Sarada Devi's life. In the natural course Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual influence served to manifest a new and marvellous being in Sarada Devi. In this marriage, Sri Ramakrishna's being was diffused. In fact, Sarada Devi's life is a diffusion of Sri Ramakrishna's spirit. In life generally and in spiritual life specially, the wife is the reflection of the husband and the husband's force is permeated through the wife. This is the basis of family life in India. Spiritual receptivity enables the wife to absorb and maintain the spiritual force of the husband. This ideal of Indian marital life was exemplified and re-emphasized by Sri Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi. In the elevating companionship of his illustrious consort, Sri Ramakrishna always felt quite at ease, because their life was completely free from any calculation or passion, and their love was an expression in Spirit. It was a spiritual marriage, so to say. The great effect of Spirit is to mould the follower spontaneously by its own power. In this way Sarada Devi's life was completely surrendered to her divine spouse and spiritual awakener.



There was no difficulty in conversion. In spiritual conversion the negative side receives and the positive side imparts. When both the sides are spiritual, everything goes on spontaneously without any obstruction.

This is also true in Christianity, especially as illustrated in the life of Cugenitus who could easily stand on red-hot iron. The power of the Spirit is thus exhibited in the Christian sense and in the Roman Catholic Church it can be seen even today. Before any person is declared a Saint he has to give evidence of his spiritual power in complete transformation. The word 'transformation' is present both in philosophy and religion. In philosophy it means the change in the intellectual angle of vision and in religion it signifies the complete change in being psychical and physical.

In spiritual life external examination is not so important as internal equanimity and peace and when these are established the being is truly changed and transformed. Harmony, rhythm, and the peace of being are the three marks of true spiritual life. It is full of rhythmic vibration and there is no disturbance from within or outside. There is an even flow of being and complete transformation of the system. The crude elements of our nature are rejected and the whole being becomes responsive to the finer vibration of Spirit. Intelligence, will, and feeling become strong and cosmical in being. This is true

especially of a soul like Sri Ramakrishna. Though he has not written anything, his expressions are dignified and philosophically very high and come to the point of Truth. Logic or metaphysics could not touch him. But whatever he gave out in silence was logically and metaphysically true. So he is revered as one amongst the great lovers of learning. His thoughts therefore projected from his inspired being like water from a spring. With this stream of inspiration Sarada Devi was always a help, because, humanly speaking, she could understand Ramakrishna better than anybody else. Ramakrishna's spiritual personality touched her most marvellously. She became the perfect reflection of Ramakrishna and was completely identified with him. Her thoughts, expressions, and movements were full of Ramakrishna.

In spiritual life, we find, when the heart becomes very pure, it becomes transparent to every bit of vibration and the ordinary world passes away. In this way Sarada Devi used to enjoy the spiritual company of her husband. Today the Ramakrishna Mission is so great because the power of both the architects is still working. Such was the life of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi that it has proved the continuity of the spiritual traditions of India and has established the message of all great spirituality.

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'One must practise spiritual disciplines such as worship and so forth. As one gets the fragrance of a flower by handling it, as one gets the smell of sandalwood by rubbing it against a stone, in the same way one gets spiritual awakening by constantly thinking of God. But you can realize Him right now, if you become desireless.'

'Why can't one meditate if one has a pure mind? Why should he not be able to see God? When a pure soul performs Japa, he feels as if the holy Name bubbles up spontaneously from within himself. He does not make an effort to repeat the Name. One should practise Japa and meditation at regular times, giving up idleness.'

Whenever the mind goes after anything other than God, consider that as transient and surrender the mind at the sacred feet of the Lord.'

—Sayings of the Holy Mother



# THE HOLY MOTHER

BY P. S. NAIDU

When we survey on the Indian scene, the long history of Indian woman and her influence on Indian life, we notice at once a striking phenomenon. In the midst of the successive deluges of foreign culture flooding our shores, and in the midst of the spectacular changes that have been taking place, woman alone has remained true and loyal to our sacred ideals. Outwardly we notice that the *saree*, the most graceful drapery for the body of the feminine, has undergone little change. In the matter of *coiffure* too there is a remarkable persistence of the old established fashions; and above all, even the most fastidious among our ladies continues to wear the *tilak*. The steadfastness and loyalty expressed in these outer symbols have their roots in something very deep in the nature of Indian woman. It is her innate purity and her utter devotion to the great and perennial ideal of Indian womanhood, namely, *motherhood*. *Holiness* and *motherhood*—these have kept the fountain of the life of Indian woman pure and sweet. And these two secrets of the loftiness of Indian woman are enshrined in the earthly life of the Holy Mother. It is necessary, therefore, to high-light these incidents during her earthly sojourn which bring out the 'holy mother' in her, for they serve as beacon-lights for the women of our country in every one of whom divinity and purity are innately present, but require to be developed through proper spiritual discipline.

From the very early years of her life there was a sense of devotion, a subconscious feeling of dedication to a high purpose, about the Holy Mother. Like Mother Mary of old, the Holy Mother was divinely set apart for the fulfilment of a noble mission, and that fulfilment came when she was united in holy wedlock to Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. But what a wedding it was! A true union of souls

on the high spiritual plane. I wonder why people even today fail to grasp the true nature of the relationship between Sri Krishna and Sri Rādhā,—even after they have seen with their own eyes the sweet, deep, fulfilling spiritual relationship between Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother! Love there was, deep, intense, and pure, but love in which the body had completely disappeared. The physical body simply did not exist in the region of that exalted love. Conjugal relationship there was, but here again the body had no part and no function, only the mind purified by discrimination and renunciation, and the soul in which the divine spark had burst into an all-consuming flame—these alone were functioning in that relationship. It is only in such love and such relationship that each partner uplifts the other and helps the other to realize the highest truth. The potentiality for such exalted relationship is present in every Indian woman, but it requires to be developed by *Sādhanā*. One such *Sadhana* within the reach of every Indian girl is the deep study of the life of and meditation on the Holy Mother.

After the holy wedding Sri Ramakrishna returned to Dakshineswar for his *Sadhana*. Strange rumours were afloat about the state of his mind, and some of them reached the ears of the Holy Mother in her distant village home. She made up her mind to go to him, and serve him in his time of trouble. She reached Dakshineswar and met her lord. A dry ascetic would have shunned the wife, whereas one with a lower degree of realization would have behaved like an ordinary householder. Sri Ramakrishna did neither. He accepted her with sweetness, cordiality, and purity. 'How do you look upon me?' the Holy Mother asked of her husband, when they were alone. Straight came the reply,



'The Mother who is the deity in the temple, the mother who gave birth to me, and the mother who is now before me (namely the Holy Mother) are one. I look upon you in that light—as the embodiment of motherhood'. Before Sri Ramakrishna reached the firm mental state, he went through an ordeal.

'One day, seeing the Holy Mother sleeping by his side, the Master discriminated within himself, "O mind, this is what the world calls the body of a woman. Men wistfully run after it. But one who goes after it remains enmeshed in body-consciousness, and cannot attain God. Now, O my mind, be not insincere—say not one thing outside and have another idea in the heart. Tell me, do you want this woman's body or do you want the Lord? If the first, here it is in front of you and you are free to have it". But scarcely had he contemplated in his mind touching the person of the Holy Mother when the mind shrank violently and he lost himself deeply in Samādhi for the whole night. Next morning the name of the Lord had to be uttered long in his ears before his mind could come to the sense plane'.

We are forcibly reminded of the temptations that came to Bhagavan Buddha and Christ, the Saviour. Like them, Sri Ramakrishna conquered the tempter. But the sequel is so charming and uplifting that I have no hesitation in saying that the entire *līlā* was enacted for our benefit and for the benefit of the present generation of humanity sunk low in materialism and sensualism.

Sri Ramakrishna has a full and complete understanding of and perfect sympathy with ordinary human nature. So, to ordinary householders he prescribes an easy path. Exhorting them to hold on to God with the right hand, while doing their worldly duties with the left, he says that after the birth of one or two children, the husband and wife should follow a lofty example in respect of their conjugal relationship. We are thus reminded of the great Upanishadic saying: 'It is not for the sake of the husband that the husband is loved, but it is for the sake of the Self that he is loved. It is not for the sake of the wife that the wife is loved, but it is for the sake of the Self that she is loved'.

Having seen how the holiness in the Holy Mother manifested itself, let us now turn to her motherhood. It will be seen at once that motherhood in her case meant universal spiritual motherhood. She is the mother of the entire universe.

During the days of his Sadhana, Sri Ramakrishna, as we know, was oblivious of the worldly environment and often acted in a way which went against the conventional rules of society. When the taunt was hurled at him that no one would marry his daughters if he broke the rules of caste, he flared up and retorted, 'Fie on you! You call yourselves Vedantins and yet you go and engage yourselves in begetting children. Is that how you realize your unity with Brahman?' And yet the Divine Mother showed Sri Ramakrishna in a vision that he will have children. Aghast, he prayed for illumination. And it came. He will be the spiritual father of his 'children'. What was revealed to the Master came true of the Holy Mother. Her innate motherhood was to fulfil itself at the spiritual level. She was to have many spiritual children. Her attitude to these children and her treatment of them were exemplary. Ordinary mothers, leading the life of householders, have a great lesson to learn from the Holy Mother's life. 'The consciousness of universal motherhood was so powerfully operative in her that there were cases of devotees who had lost their mothers in early days, finding even the very physical likeness of their mothers in her. It may be a subjective experience, but still it is significant in so far as the very subjectivity of it centred round her'.

Her truly spiritual motherhood evoked a response in her 'children' which was intense and satisfying, because her attitude was one of pure selfless love. 'If my child gets covered with mud and dust, is it not my duty to cleanse him and take him on my lap?' When a woman who had led a bad life went to her in a mood of sincere repentance and made an unreserved confession of her sins, the Holy Mother embraced her with great warmth of feeling, uttering these words of assurance,



'Don't despair for all that you have done. You will get over all your sinful tendencies'. She also gave initiation to that woman.

The so-called motherly love of woman in ordinary households is often self-centred and egotistic. It demands everything from the 'child'. The Holy Mother's attitude reverses all this. The mother should give, should give herself away to the children and expect nothing in return. How often, in her dealings with the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, did the Holy Mother show this attitude! And the giving should be such that the mother who gives and the child who receives will both come to realize the Universal Divine Mother in the earthly mother. Truly is it said in the biography of the Holy Mother that 'the Eternal Feminine can be equated with motherhood with all its implications, and motherhood, it must be remembered, is the special privilege of women, both in the physiological and the psychological sense' (*Sri Sarada Devi: the Holy Mother*). To quote again from the same book, 'Her (the Holy Mother's) life was meant to be an example of the pure feminine type. There are many examples of great women from whom one may seek guidance in the lesser accomplishments of womanhood that change with time and country . . . we find fulfilled in her the ideal of a Madonna . . . the Master left her on this earth to reveal the Motherhood of God'.

This motherhood found expression in some of the most remarkable ways in the life of the Holy Mother. Mothers in the Hindu household, when tending their own sick children, are often heard saying in tones of great tenderness, 'Darling, if it were some burden you were bearing on your shoulders, I would

gladly take it on my own. But what can I do to relieve you! I am helpless. The disease must take its own course'. Ordinary earthly mothers are of course helpless. Not so the Holy Mother. She did take on herself all the burdens of her spiritual children. When a disciple put it to her, 'You initiate the devotees because you desire to do so', she replied, 'No, I do so out of compassion . . . out of kindness I give them initiation. Besides, what do I gain by it? When I initiate devotees, I have to accept their sins. Then I think, "Well, this body will die anyway; let them realize the truth".'

To accept the sins and to take on the pain and suffering consequent on them! Which earthly mother will come forward to make such a sacrifice! The Holy Mother did come forward and the story of her intense suffering during the last days of her life on earth is well known.

It now remains for the women of our land to take full possession of the precious heritage handed down to them by the Holy Mother. But it is a holy heritage and not easily taken possession of without first attaining complete purity. But no one need lose heart. There is an easy way of attaining this purity. Let each girl aspiring to reach that lofty ideal read the Holy Mother's biography, ponder over the events of the holy life and gradually take to meditation on the peerless nature of her character. She is there before us, as a living presence, in the ideals and teachings she has left behind. And in time, if one is properly attuned, she will enter into one's mind and take full possession of one's nature. Can any one wish for a greater blessing than this!

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'Everything will happen in time. For how many cycles did the Munis and Rishis of old practise austerities to realize God but did not succeed, and do you believe you will attain to Him in a flash? If not in this life, you will attain to Him in the next. If not in the next, it will be after that. Is it so easy to realize God?'

—*Sayings of the Holy Mother*



# SRI SARADA DEVI: THE HOLY MOTHER

BY DR. NANDALAL CHATTERJI

History has seldom done justice to the memory of the wives of great apostles and teachers of humanity. The life of the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, wife of Sri Ramakrishna, is no exception in this respect. The saga of the Holy Mother's self-effacement and renunciation is yet not fully known to the world at large, and it is a pity that even those who have heard or read about Sri Ramakrishna often fail to recognize the vital role she played in the rise and fulfilment of his exalted sainthood. It is an irony of fate that while Sri Ramakrishna is a world-famed figure in history, his noble partner in life is still scarcely more than a name. The fact, however, is that Sri Ramakrishna would hardly have been Sri Ramakrishna, if Sri Sarada Devi had not been Sri Sarada Devi.

Born on the 22nd of December 1853, of a poor though highly respected Brahmin family in the little village of Jayrambati, nearly sixty miles to the west of Calcutta, Sri Sarada Devi began her life as a simple rustic girl with no formal education. But even in her early days she gave evidence of a religious turn of mind, and, thanks to the inspiring influence of her father, Sri Ramachandra Mukherji, who was well known for his charitable and God-fearing character, she could be imbued with a high sense of duty and self-sacrifice at an age when village girls run after squirrels or sport with toys. Even at play, she amused herself with clay models of goddesses Kāli and Lakshmi, and worshipped them with a solemnity that surprised the elders. She had to help her mother in the kitchen, and her father in the field, when her playmates would go to school. Though she went without a regular schooling, she received a type of training from her orthodox parents, which more than compensated for her lack of book-learning.

Her marriage with Sri Ramakrishna is indeed an idyll of epic magnitude. It was to wean Sri Ramakrishna from his strange passion for religious austerities that his parents decided to get him married. They began searching for a suitable bride here and there. Sri Ramakrishna, surprisingly enough, made no objection to this. One day, in an inspired mood, he told his parents 'Go to Jayrambati and there, in the house of Ramachandra Mukherji, you will find her who is marked out for me'. Inquiry was at once made, and the wedding was finally settled. The marriage ceremony took place in May 1859. And, what a marriage it was! The little Saradamani was a child of five, and the bridegroom an ascetic youth of twenty-three. Such child-marriages were, however, customary in that age.

After the wedding, the baby-bride lived for years in her parental home when Sri Ramakrishna was immersed in his devotional life at Dakshineswar, practising religious austerities and tasting the beatific joy and ecstasy of spiritual communion. For this seeker after God, home-life was out of the question. He had almost forgotten that he was a married man. Meanwhile, Sri Sarada Devi had grown up into a charming lady of eighteen. To her ears came disquieting rumours that her husband had gone insane. What was she to do? Was she to while away her time in Jayrambati, or hasten to the side of her husband? She eventually decided to come over to Dakshineswar. And she reached there towards the end of March 1872, fatigued and fever-stricken, after a strenuous journey on foot. How did the saint receive her? No, he was not annoyed. He welcomed her with an almost reverential tenderness. He greeted her with the words, 'Ah, you are here. All right'.



All right it could be, because the couple lived a life of immaculate purity which was as amazing as it was unintelligible to ordinary folk. Both the husband and wife saw the Divine in each other, and ennobled their conjugal life into devotional worship. Their self-abnegation through the conquest of the body-consciousness was indeed a superhuman feat. It is easy to ascribe their sublime chastity to the moral greatness of Sri Ramakrishna. But, it is necessary to remember that it was as much due to the Holy Mother's willing renunciation as to his saintliness.

'Had she not been so pure', Sri Ramakrishna himself confessed long afterwards, 'who knows whether I might not have lost my self-control from her inducements? After marriage, I prayed to the Divine Mother, "O Mother, remove even the least taint of carnality from the mind of my wife". When I lived with her, I understood that the Mother had really granted my prayer'. Indeed, is there any doubt about the fact that if she had chosen, she could easily have brought her Master down to the worldly plane of life? But, she was made of different stuff. When Sri Ramakrishna put her a straight question, 'Do you want to drag me down into Māyā?', her spirited answer was, 'Why should I do that? I have come only to help you in the path of religious life'. The reply was worthy of a saintly lady.

The two ascetics stuck to their vow of self-abnegation all through their lives, even though they lived together and for some time slept in the same bed. Swami Saradananda, the disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, has related thus:

'One day, seeing the Holy Mother sleeping by his side, the Master discriminated within himself: "O mind, this is what the world calls the body of a woman. Men wistfully run after it. But one who goes after it remains enmeshed in body-consciousness, and cannot attain God. Now, O my mind, be not insincere; say not one thing outside and have another idea in the heart. Tell me, do you want this woman's body, or do you want the Lord? If the first, here it is in front of you, and you are free to have it". Discriminating in this way, he

was about to touch the Holy Mother, when his mind recoiled so violently that he was absorbed in Samadhi for the whole night'.

The fulfilment of Sri Ramakrishna's vow was complete when, on the night of 5th June 1872, he, within closed doors, worshipped the Divine Mother, by placing Sri Sarada Devi on the pedestal of the Deity Herself. This rite of 'Ṣhoḍaśhī Pūjā' was unique in its spiritual exaltation and in its emotional appeal. It reflected the Holy Mother's willing and spontaneous copartnership in her husband's mission in life. Henceforth, the Master looked upon his wife as the Divine Mother who was the presiding Deity in the temple—the embodiment of motherhood. In the eyes of the wife, the Master was God-incarnate. With folded hands, she would pray to God, 'O Lord, there is a stain even in the moon, but let there not be the least trace of stain in my mind'.

Her daily routine at Dakshineswar was a round of service, contemplation, and worship spread out from 3 in the early morning to late hours in the night. By her unswerving devotion and selfless love and service to her lord, she made herself indispensable to him. Though she went back to her village from time to time, she remained mostly by the side of the Master as his ministering angel. But, alas, those happy days of spiritual companionship were not to last long. In 1885, Sri Ramakrishna was stricken with fatal illness. She nursed him day and night, forgetful of her own self. When medical treatment seemed to be of no avail, she took refuge in the temple of Shiva at Tārakeswar in quest of divine aid, and lay there for two days with no food or drink. During the night of the second day, she had the revelation, 'Who is husband and who is wife? Who is my relation in this world?' This realization prepared her for the inevitable bereavement which occurred on August 16, 1886. The Master's demise left a void in her life which nothing could fill. Yet she bore the pangs of separation in the implicit faith that Sri Ramakrishna had not gone



away and that he had only passed 'from one room to another'.

Her life, after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, was for some time one of continuous trials and tribulations which would have tried a lesser soul. From extreme poverty, she had to go without food for days. Often she had no money to purchase even salt. In the end, the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna brought her down to Calcutta, and enabled her to resume her mission of spiritual ministrations. She often went on pilgrimages, and in the intervals attracted a large number of disciples, both monastic and lay, by her spiritual discipline and elevating precept. In her teachings, she emphasized the importance of true renunciation (*sannyāsa*)—of living in the world, yet not being of it. She diverted many an erring sinner from the evil path, just as she helped a succession of devotees in their spiritual endeavours. In due course, she became the guardian-priestess of the Ramakrishna Order, inspiring its humanitarian activity no less than its spiritual preaching work. In fact, she was the fountain-head of the cult side of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement.

Devout and motherly, the Holy Mother's personality was Madonna-like. Tender and guileless, she was yet brave and resourceful. Looked upon as the embodiment of divinity by hundreds and thousands of devotees and admirers, she never showed the least trace of vanity or egoism. She rose above all greed and malice. Once a wealthy businessman offered her a gift of ten thousand rupees (after the refusal of Sri Ramakrishna to accept and at his instance), but she declined

it, lest it should lower the Master's lofty ideal of sacrifice. Indeed, her humility was as great as her dignity, and above all, her spirit of service was exemplary. In the various relief and humanitarian operations of the Ramakrishna Mission, she was always the moving spirit. She was deeply moved whenever news of suffering came to her ears. Her close companions have related how she would weep and pray to the Master for the suffering humanity. She was, like the Master, entirely free from narrowness of outlook and caste scruples. She served food to a Muslim labourer and afterwards herself removed the remnants and cleaned the place. She lived and took food with the European disciples, like Sister Nivedita, and if anyone said, 'You are going to lose caste', she would retort, 'Keep quiet. They are also my children'. She was not a conscious breaker of caste; yet her nobility of heart could make no distinction between man and man. Even so-called 'untouchables' were not untouchable to her, much less people of lower castes. Such catholicity on the part of a Brahmin lady was unthinkable in those days. Yet she could rise above orthodoxy in a spirit of love and service which she had imbibed from Sri Ramakrishna.

Her death, on July 21, 1920, marked the close of an unheard of career. Her life is indeed a lofty message in a far more real sense than the word implies. A living emblem of the Mother concept—an austere nun and devoted wife in one,—the Holy Mother stands apart by herself and is above labels in the history of mankind.

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'It is the nature of water to flow downwards, but the sun's rays lift it up towards the sky; likewise it is the very nature of mind to go to lower things, to objects of enjoyment, but the grace of God can make such minds go towards higher objects.'

'One must perforce work. It is only through work that the bondage of work will be cut asunder and one will get a spirit of non-attachment. One should not be without work even for a moment.'

—Sayings of the Holy Mother



# THE HOLY MOTHER

By T. S. AVINASHILINGAM

Sri Ramakrishna is the spiritual giver of the modern age, With the beginning of his life begins a new chapter of the spiritual life of the country and the world. And it is no small accident when we observe in his life that the form of Divinity that he worshipped was that of the Divine Mother; his first Guru was a woman—Bhairavi Brahmani, and his first and greatest disciple was also a woman in the person of Saradamani Devi. At a time when women were not properly respected but were regarded only as objects of a mundane life, at a time when people did not clearly appreciate and understand the implications of the worship of the Motherhood of God, there was need for a message in this direction. There were some others who taught that higher spiritual life was possible only by avoiding all that was feminine. Sri Ramakrishna pointed out that both these ideologies were wrong. The feminine can never be avoided as long as we live in this world. But the frailty is not in the form, but in our own minds. If we think of it as an object of enjoyment, then nothing can stop us from degenerating. But if we think of it as a representation of the Divine Mother, then nothing will prevent us from reaching the highest spiritual peaks. This is the great philosophy of life which he came to live and preach.

Sri Saradamani Devi was his illustrious consort. When she first came to him at Dakshineswar, she had come of age. She had heard varying rumours about her husband, that he was striving for spiritual life and that he had become mad. She came with an anguish, to live with him and serve him. Sri Ramakrishna did not reject her as an impediment to his spiritual life. He received her affectionately. He took her aside and explained his position. 'Will she,

because of her claim as his wedded wife, exercise that right to live a common life, or will she help him to strive forward in the godly way?' Sarada Devi understood the condition of her great consort, and she rose equal to the occasion. She declared that her intention was not to drag him down, but to follow herself the sacred path of godliness which he was following. Henceforth she became the Holy Mother, the first and foremost disciple of the Master, the Mother of all those other disciples and devotees who came to the Master afterwards.

The Mother's life does not abound with many incidents. There are generally very few incidents of interest in any spiritual life, and so much less in hers—as the major portion of her life was spent in comparative seclusion, looking after the daily needs of the Master and the devotees. She was rarely seen by others. She woke up in the early hours of the morning and worked till late at night. Many who admired the regularity and efficiency with which Sri Ramakrishna was attended upon when he was ill, were amazed that they could rarely see the actual person of the Mother who worked so un'stintingly to provide all those comforts. Her whole life became one of dedicated service to the Master and his disciples.

She lived for nearly thirty-four years after the passing away of the Master. The proper conducting of the Mission founded in the name of the Great Master, in those early years of its existence, was not a little due to the kindness, affection, and inspiration of the Holy Mother. She was not educated in any sense of the term. She was not even well read. She had little experience of any kind of modern organization. Though she was lacking in all these, she had one great quality. She had *love*, she had a wealth of affection,—



and in that affection she could understand all. She could sympathize with the sufferings of and understand the particular ailments troubling the various people that came to her and could give them the element of strength they needed. Thousands of men and women unburdened their sorrows at her feet, and returned with great consolation. People who

had no peace of mind, who had suffered loss of property, and whose husbands or wives or children were dead—all these and many others went to her and came back with a new faith and courage. She was thus the Holy Mother to them all, always ready to help them in their dire need.

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## SRI SARADA DEVI

### A STUDY IN HOLY LIFE

BY DR. S. C. CHATTERJEE

The year 1853 is a memorable year in the religious history of India. It witnessed the birth of Sri Saradamani Devi in a remote corner of the district of Bankura in West Bengal. Just at that time and even many years after it, nobody could imagine that this simple village girl, born in a poor but pure Brahmin family, would become a world figure in future and exercise such a tremendous spiritual influence on the lives of millions of men and women in the world. It is true that she was married at a very young age to Sri Ramakrishna who is now universally acknowledged as one of the greatest sons of men like Gautama the Buddha and Jesus the Christ. It is also true that her life was profoundly influenced and magnificently moulded by constant contact with the divine personality of Sri Ramakrishna. But, for that, no one should suppose that the lustre in Sarada Devi's life is a borrowed light and that her greatness is an epithet transferred from the great man whose spiritual consort she was. If Sarada Devi is great, it is because of the intrinsic glory and greatness of her life, her natural gifts and native perfections. She was the living example of the ideal of Indian womanhood in modern times. She is now commonly known as the Holy Mother because she

exhibited in her life many of the great qualities which we attribute to the Divine Mother of the world.

The year 1953 is another auspicious memorable year. It observed the Birth Centenary of Sarada Devi—the Holy Mother of the Ramakrishna Order as well as of the world's spiritual order. On this solemn occasion let us recall some salient traits of this holy life.

That life is holy which is morally perfect and spiritually profound. The life of Sarada Devi is holy in this twofold sense. We find in it all the moral excellences which shine like gems in a woman's life and make it great, glorious, and adorable. Her life was an unremitting observance of the five great vows—of complete harmlessness to all living creatures; truthfulness in word, thought, and deed; freedom from greed and avarice; non-attachment to worldly possessions; and absolute self-control and continence. Her married life was from beginning to end free from all taints of sexual relationship with her saintly husband. It was just the spiritual union between two pure and noble souls, neither of whom was found at any time to be swayed by the ordinary passions and propensities of man's animal nature. Sri Rama-



krishna loved, respected, and finally worshipped her as a manifestation of the Divine Mother whose crystallized conscious form is daily worshipped in the garden-temple of Dakshineswar. Sarada Devi too, on her part, reciprocated similar attitudes and sentiments and behaved all through her life as the spiritual companion and helpmate of Sri Ramakrishna in the uphill journey of his spiritual life. Purity and chastity are the outstanding characteristics of her noble life as much as they were of the lives of the great women of India like Sitā and Sāvitrī. Her one-pointed devotion to and reliance upon Sri Ramakrishna, her great concern for his weal and woe, and, above all, her loving and life-giving service to him at times of its supreme need are worthy of emulation by all women in the world.

It would be an evil day for the world if its womenfolk were to lose faith in the great virtues of purity and chastity. We can easily realize what tremendous power of transformation of other souls these noble moral qualities possess when we look at the life of Sri Sarada Devi. The pure, immaculate life that she lived would radiate purity and serenity all around and purify the impure, elevate the degraded, and regenerate even the degenerate, if per chance they have the good fortune to come in contact with it and receive its gracious influence. That is the reason why a ruffian, who once came to rob her in a forlorn countryside, was halted in his nefarious activity and subsequently escorted her to a place of safety and returned home to worship her for the rest of his life. This is only one of the many instances in which Sarada Devi transformed vicious souls into virtuous ones. In the course of her inspiring instructions to all those who approached her for light and guidance in their religious life, she would often stress the great need and value of purity of body and mind for the realization of God and attainment of enlightenment. On such occasions she was repeatedly observed to say: 'Everything depends on the mind. Nothing can be achieved without purity of mind. God

who is purity itself cannot be attained without austerities. Through a pure mind one attains knowledge and awakening'.

Sarada Devi's love and compassion knew no bounds. She had a great loving heart and all sentient beings constituted the object of her love. Like the great Bodhisattvas of ancient India, she was full of love and compassion for all men and women in the world irrespective of their caste, colour, creed, and nationality. Like an affectionate mother she would share our joys and sorrows as her own, comfort us when we were distressed, and console us when we were dejected and disconsolate. There were occasions when she would be prepared to go to great lengths in order that she might be in a position to relieve the sufferings of her dear children. Once on hearing the report of the persecution of one of her woman devotees at the hands of some policemen, she was heard to exclaim: 'If I were a man, I would try to release the unfortunate girl even by violent methods'.

Sarada Devi maintained a marvellous calmness and contentment of mind under all conditions of life. Her constant counsel to the disciples and devotees of Ramakrishna was that they should not lose heart and get frightened at the sight of the evils and sufferings which cast a gloom over human life in this world. Pain and suffering, she used to say, are inevitable in man's life. So long as man's soul is in the body, he cannot altogether avoid the troubles and sufferings which are inherent in the constitution of the body. That is the law of Nature. Even great saints, prophets, and incarnations had to suffer in their lives, although that was by way of a vicarious atonement for the sins of those suffering souls whom they wanted to save. In the face of the dangers and difficulties of life and in the midst of all miseries and sufferings, she would advise us to take the name of God and rely on Ramakrishna. With this, as she assured us, Ramakrishna would come to our aid, relieve our miseries, and give us peace of mind. That such a course does produce the desired result may



be borne out by certain unexpected experiences in the lives of at least some of her direct disciples.

The Holy Mother in Sarada Devi is seen at her best when we consider her in the role of the Guru or the spiritual guide and preceptor. It is here that we get some idea of the profundity of her spiritual life, although that idea would be necessarily inadequate in so far as it is formed by imperfect men like us. The great concern she had for the moral uplift of degraded humanity would often override all considerations of the fitness and eligibility of the supplicants before her and induce her to give them the much-coveted blessing of spiritual initiation. She had a penetrating insight into the minds of the disciples, and she would, of her own accord, select for them just those objects of worship which would satisfy their respective personal requirements as well as those of their family traditions. Her watchful eyes were always on

all her disciples, be they far or near, mindful or forgetful of her. The care and anxiety she always had for their future well-being were not only very deep, but at times devouring. At certain periods of her life she suffered intensely from insomnia and felt a burning sensation all over her body. She was placed under the best medical treatment that was available in Calcutta. But all this was of no avail, for the cause of her suffering was not so much physical as mental and spiritual. We have it on her own words that the real cause was her knowledge of the fact that some of the disciples had not only forgotten the Lord but taken to evil courses at the time, and that her suffering was an atonement for their sins. Thus we find in her the Guru who accepted full responsibility for the disciples and worked for their spiritual well-being even through a course of personal suffering. She lived a life which was really holy and divine, and would very well guide the spiritual evolution of mankind for all future time.

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## THE HOLY MOTHER—AN IDEAL FOR INDIAN WOMEN

BY S. N. L. SHRIVASTAVA

The mid-nineteenth century, the time of the advent of the Holy Trinity—Ramakrishna-Sarada-Vivekananda, was just the time in the cultural history of India when Indians were swept off their feet as never before, and were rushing headlong towards the imitation and adoption of the manners and ideals of Western civilization, dazzled by its materialistic glamour. At this psychological moment of her cultural history, her *śhāśhvata-dharma-goptā*, the Guardian of her Eternal Religion, projected her lofty ideals in all their pristine purity and native uniqueness in flesh and blood—the Ideal of the Indian Rishi was incarnated in Sri Ramakrishna, of Indian Womanhood in Sri Sarada Devi, and India's

Ideal Youth, the Nachiketas of her Upanishads, in Swami Vivekananda. Here, in this Trinity, was her *śhāśhvata-dharma* incarnate, the Word made Flesh!

Indian women, too often fascinated by modern education and thought, and tempted to lose themselves too much in the clamour for rights and reforms, may profitably turn for a while to the life of the Holy Mother to find therein a marvellous and unprecedented blend of the grandest Indian ideals of wifehood, motherhood, and sainthood.

Her life is the story of a simple and unsophisticated village woman, who had no education worth the name and yet rose to such sublime heights of nobility and enlight-



enment—the remotest semblances of which the best educational system in the modern world may fail to produce. What a grievous mistake we make in identifying education with literacy! Literacy is the least part of it. Ours is a land of illiterate luminaries—Akbar, Kabir, and Ramakrishna—to mention only a few of them. The appalling illiteracy of our masses is no doubt deplorable. But more so is the appalling arrogance of our educated classes!

For generations to come, Indian girls and women shall learn from the life-story of the Holy Mother lessons in humility and modesty, chastity and devotion to God, self-abnegation and ungrudging endurance of pain and suffering, maternal love and selfless service. Just as Sri Ramakrishna's life was a recapitulation of all the diverse courses of Sadhana practised on the Indian soil since the immemorial past, 'the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people' (Romain Rolland), so do we find in Sarada Devi's life reincarnate all those ideals for which the greatest of Indian women stood for in the ages past—Sita's unswerving devotion and service to her Lord through all the vicissitudes of fortune, Savitri's chastity and dauntlessness, Gārgi's grasp of spiritual truths, and Maitreyi's scorn of wealth and yearning for Immortality.

Could we have had Sri Ramakrishna as the Spiritual Colossus of the Age if Sarada had chosen—the choice was given to her—to drag him down to the state of worldliness? We can never express our gratitude to her adequately. If Sri Ramakrishna was super-human in not submitting to the seductions of Maya, Sarada Devi did not rank lower than him in that respect. She was married at the very innocent age of five, but when she just blossomed into womanhood, she set out with the dauntless courage of Savitri to find and

reclaim her husband alleged to be lost in irreclaimable madness. She met him and fully asserted her claim over him as his wife, not for carnal enjoyments, but as his *sahadharminī*, his partner in his spiritual fulfilment. Well has our poet Kālidāsa expressed the quintessential ideal of Indian wifedom in his *Kumāra-sambhava* (IV. 33) thus: 'The moonlight goes with the moon, the lightning loses itself in the cloud. That wives go the way of their husbands is shown even by inanimate objects'.

Wonderful, indeed, was the marriage of Sarada Devi with Sri Ramakrishna!—deepest love untouched by the faintest sprinkle of lust, most intimate companionship of opposite sexes with the innocence of childhood! It was the marriage of pure souls purely on the soul-plane.

Erring mortals have a great lesson to learn from this unique marriage. Earth will be transformed into heaven if the married couples of the world made it obligatory for them to fill even a small part of their lives with the purity and sublimity of the married life of Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi. By their unique marriage, these great souls have blazed a trail for the thoughtful married couples to follow, in howsoever humble a measure they may be able to do it. Monks and nuns there will be, perhaps till the very end of this world, in spite of our shouting hoarse against asceticism. But they will be few and far between. The teeming millions of the earth shall always be the householders, married men and women, who have to find the way to spiritual redemption in and through the toil and turmoil of their mundane existence. For such people, Sarada Devi and Ramakrishna have set the Ideal. The pursuit of this Ideal will be, for future humanity,—to borrow a phrase from William James,—'a heroic substitute for war'.







has now returned to the lap to which he belonged'.

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Mulberry was ouce widely cultivated and silk-worms reared in many villages of West Bengal. But foreign competition tolled the death-knell of this industry in the beginning of the present century, as a consequence of which many Mohammedan families at Shiro-manipur, a village in a distant corner of Bankura district, were reduced to penury. No honest means of livelihood being open to them, the helpless Mohammedans took to robbing and dacoity, which earned for them the appellation 'mulberry-robbers' (*tūntē-dākāt*). They were a terror to the neighbouring villages, including Jayrambati where the Holy Mother lived. Naturally, they were studiously shunned by the Hindus both for reasons of caste and their nefarious activities. And to add to the misery of these wretched families a famine raged in those parts. At

that time a new house was being built<sup>1</sup> at Jayrambati for the Holy Mother, and the monks who supervised the work engaged some of these famine-stricken people. The villagers did not take to this kindly and often complained that the monks were courting trouble both for themselves and the villagers. None the less, they had to change their opinion soon and declare, 'Ah! By the Mother's grace, the robbers, too, are becoming devotees!' How that happened can be easily realized from the following few anecdotes from the Holy Mother's life.

One day, one of these Mohammedan 'mulberry-robbers' brought some plantains to the Mother and said, 'Mother, here are some plantains for the Master (meaning Sri Rama-krishna); would you accept them?' The Holy Mother stretched out her hands for acceptance and said, 'Certainly, I will, my dear; hand

<sup>1</sup> The house was formally opened on 15th May 1916.



HOLY MOTHER'S NEW HOUSE AT JAYRAMBATI



them over. Why should I not, since they are brought for the Master?' A woman devotee of the Holy Mother, who hailed from a neighbouring village and happened to be there, was taken aback by this strange behaviour of the Mother and said warningly, 'These are thieves, we know. Why should his things be offered to the Master?' Mother, apparently unperturbed by this rude interference, deposited the fruits in the store and ordered some puffed rice and sweets for the man. When he had gone, she turned to the woman and sternly chided her saying, 'I know who is good and who is not'. Her mission was to uplift the spiritually fallen, and she used to say, 'To err is human. But how few know how to lead an erring man!'

Amzad was one of those 'mulberry-robbers' who had a hand in building the mud walls of Mother's house. Once Mother seated him on her verandah for meal and Nalini, a niece of the Mother, served him. But owing to caste prejudices she (Nalini) stood at a distance on the courtyard and tossed the food on to the man's leaf. This enraged the Mother, who said, 'Can one have any relish for food if it is served in such a manner? If you can't serve properly I shall do it'. When Amzad had finished his meal, Mother cleansed the place herself. At this Nalini loudly remonstrated saying, 'O aunt, you are going to lose caste thereby'. But the Mother reprimanded her with the remark, 'Amzad is as truly my son as my Sharat himself (i.e. Swami Saradananda) is'.

The next incident followed soon after. Mother was down with fever at Jayrambati and many visited her at her sick-bed. One morning, at about nine or ten o'clock, the Brahmacharin in attendance saw a Mohammedan of dark appearance, emaciated body, torn clothes, and sad looks tottering into the Mother's compound with the help of a stick. From his unhesitating movements it was apparent that the man, though unknown to the Brahmacharin, was quite a familiar visitor. But curiosity urged him to follow the man. Mother was inside, lying on a cot in her

room, and the verandah in front was covered by a thin screen of plaited bamboo slips, so that the cot was not easily visible. The man tiptoed to look over the screen. Suddenly the Mother's eyes turned in that direction and she accosted him in a low endearing voice, 'Is that you, dear Amzad? Come in'. With beaming eyes and a happy face Amzad stepped on to the verandah and standing on one side of the door thrust in his head and entered into an intimate conversation on matters of everyday life. Finding Mother and her son thus engaged, the Brahmacharin went about his own duties.

Not long after, the Brahmacharin was called in to offer food to the Master. Mother herself used to do this when she was well; but now she could not move about, and so the Brahmacharin had to perform this ceremony, which, however was a very simple thing. In the Mother's room, under the Master's seat, was kept some Ganges water which had to be poured into a small ceremonial vessel, technically called *pañcapātra*, and with this water the food in the kitchen had to be offered to the Master. The Brahmacharin came to take the *pañcapātra*, but was in a dilemma finding the Mohammedan standing in the only doorway. He could not be told to move away lest this should offend Mother. At the same time, to pass closely by a Mussalman, with holy water in hand, was against the caste prejudices and conventions that were ingrained from childhood in this Brahmacharin, who was a Brahmin by birth. He hesitated for a moment and then decided to carry out his duty without minding the man's presence, depending on the Mother to dissuade him if there was anything wrong in the step. He took the *pañcapātra* and stepped out. After the offering he returned with it and placed it where it was. Amzad was all the while at his post. Mother noticed everything but said nothing. As Amzad was leaving in the evening, the Brahmacharin noticed that the man's face was lit up with a happy smile and he was altogether a changed person. He had bathed and had rubbed oil all over his rough



skin; then he had had a full meal; and now he chewed betel and areca-nut and he walked home. In his hand there was a phial of indigenous medicine and in his bag were many titbits. Mother told the Brahmacharin, 'Amzad's brain has become heated as a result of taking stimulants. He has no sleep at night. I had with me for a long time a phial of Narayana oil, which I have given him. By using it his brain will be cooled; it is a very efficacious oil'. Amzad soon recovered from his illness and was always at the Mother's service. If anything had to be done, simply a word had to be sent to him and he would faithfully carry it out. For instance, when Mother lost all appetite as a result of long fever, her physician recommended pine-apples for her. They were by no means easily available in those parts and in that season. So Amzad's services were requisitioned, and he soon brought them, as if by magic, after ferreting all possible quarters.

But in spite of this divine affection of the Mother, Amzad could not free himself from his nefarious habit of thieving and robbing; and so the people of Jayrambati were afraid of him, though as a matter of fact that village remained free from those 'mulberry-robbers', evidently through Amzad's intercession. Often enough he was in jail, when his wife would run to the Mother for help; and she, too, would give whatever lay at hand. This love was heartily reciprocated by Amzad. Once after his release from jail he came home and found

a number of gourds hanging from his thatch. He plucked some of them and proceeded to Jayrambati. Mother, delighted to see him, said, 'I have been anxious at your long absence. Where had you been?' Amzad explained that he had been arrested on a charge of cattle-lifting and so he could not visit her. Unmindful of the explanation the Mother said with a sigh, 'Ah me! I was really worried as to why Amzad did not come'.

When Mother was in Calcutta during her last illness, the news reached her that Amzad had been arrested for robbery after absconding for some time. At this information she said, 'Ah me! Look here, my dear, I knew that he was an adept in robbery'. It is said that after the passing away of Mother, Amzad received a cut from a sword in an act of plundering. This wound developed into a sore and ultimately caused his death. Mother knew this man's character well enough, and she also knew it to be her duty to protect her household and her village from people of his trade. But the method she adopted consciously through the promptings of her motherly heart was not only unique, but also effective. It won the robber's heart and brought for her a result that even mightier people with fuller resources would have failed to achieve. She did not rely on arms or man-power, but on the power of love which melts the hardest heart and which brooks no interference from caste prejudice, or fear.

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'Don't puzzle the mind with too many inquiries. One finds it difficult to put one single thing into practice, but dares invite distraction by filling the mind with too many things.'

'Even the injunctions of Destiny are cancelled if one takes refuge in God. Destiny strikes off with her own hand what she has written about such a person. What does one become by realizing God? Does he get two horns? No. What happens is he develops discrimination between the real and the unreal, gets spiritual consciousness, and goes beyond life and death.'

—*Sayings of the Holy Mother*





THE HOLY MOTHER AT FIFTY-TWO



# THE HOLY MOTHER

(AS THE DISCIPLES OF SRI RAMA-  
KRISHNA SAW HER)

BY P. SESHADRI AIYAR

'A jeweller alone can know the worth of jewels'. In the same way, a sage alone can recognize and understand the heights of wisdom reached by another sage. Especially is this true of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, who chose to live like an ordinary woman away from the limelight. In the words of Swami Premananda, one of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, 'The Holy Mother does not show off her divine powers. . . . The great Empress has of her own accord clad herself as a beggar. She sweeps the floor, cleanses the utensils, and husks the paddy. She even removes the remnants of the food partaken by her own devotees and disciples'. Hence it is difficult to understand her towering greatness. Glimpses of her unique personality are revealed by the words and actions of the great disciples of Sri Ramakrishna who were themselves giants in spirituality. In this brief article, an attempt is made to study the life of the Holy Mother in the light afforded by this valuable testimony.

Swami Vivekananda, the foremost disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and the awakener of modern India, was divinely destined to spread the Message of the Master and found the Order of Ramakrishna. It is remarkable that before he started his life as a Parivrājaka, an itinerant monk wandering throughout India, he sought the blessings of the Holy Mother. Again, before he finally decided to go to the West on his grand spiritual mission, he prayed for her blessing in the momentous step he was taking. Swamiji himself writes thus: 'Mother's grace, Mother's blessings, are paramount to me. Before proceeding to America, I wrote to Mother to bless me. Her blessings came

and at one bound, I cleared the ocean'.<sup>1</sup> So, it can be truly said that the wide dissemination of the great message of Sri Ramakrishna was due to her grace. Swamiji also says, in a letter to a co-disciple, 'You have not yet understood the wonderful significance of Mother's life. Without Shakti, there is no regeneration for the world. . . . Mother has been born to revive that wonderful Shakti in India and making her the nucleus, once more will Gargis and Maitreyis be born into the world'.<sup>2</sup> The Durga Puja, which was celebrated in the Belur Math in October 1901, just a few months before the passing away of Swami Vivekananda, was conducted in the name of the Holy Mother according to the instructions of Swamiji himself, thus signifying that the patron and guide of the Math was the Mother.

Not less was the devotion to the Holy Mother of Swami Brahmananda, the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna, his 'Eternal Companion', the first President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. The following extracts from the memoirs of a devotee of South India, who had the privilege of receiving initiation from the Holy Mother, are sufficient to reveal her maternal affection to Swami Brahmananda and his deep veneration towards her. 'She (the Holy Mother) said to me: "Rākhāl (Swami Brahmananda) is there (in Banaras). Can you do one thing for me? You must convey my blessings to Rakhal. That will delight me'. After reaching Banaras I told Swami Brahmananda of what the Mother had said. He bowed down his head in deep reverence, signifying that he had devoutly

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Swami Vivekananda.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



accepted her blessings. Then he said to me: 'When you meet the Mother again, tell her that I feel blessed by receiving her blessings. You should also prostrate devoutly at her feet on my behalf'.'

The following incident is also revelatory. 'While returning from Sarnath the Holy Mother narrowly escaped a very serious accident. On the return trip Swami Brahmananda had exchanged his carriage with that of the Holy Mother. As they proceeded, the horses of the carriage in which the Swami was seated ran amock, thus upsetting the carriage and causing considerable injury to the Swami. Referring to this incident, the Mother said, 'I was to be involved in the accident, but Rakhal (Swami Brahmananda) took it forcibly on himself. Otherwise the consequences would have been disastrous'.'<sup>3</sup>

The testimony of Swami Premananda, whose surpassing love earned for him the name of the 'Mother of the Math', is eloquent. He writes in a letter: 'Who has understood the Holy Mother? Who can understand Her? Victory to Mother, the Power Incarnate! Do you not see how many are rushing to be blessed by her? We are sending to the Holy Mother the poison we could not ourselves take. She is giving refuge to everybody accepting the sins of all and digesting them. . . . The Holy Mother lives in Jayrambati, doing all the arduous works to teach the householders their duties. Infinite patience, unbounded mercy, and above all, not even the slightest trace of egoism. . . . Even though in a human form, she is the veritable Goddess who does Lila for the good of humanity. . . . Carefully note her actions and learn how to shape your life. . . . Without seeing an ideal life, how can we know the aim of human life? Serve the Mother for some time and be blessed. . . . With what patience, endurance, and forgiveness does she live, doing all the duties of the Mother of the house! Such an ideal has not been manifested in the past. . . . You will realize her divine love and infinite largeness of heart. By seeing the Mother, your egoism,

vanity, and pride will leave you for good. . . . Her infinite Grace is on all. Getting even an atom of it, we shall become filled'.

Swami Abhedananda, one of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, who composed Sanskrit hymns on the Master, read out his first composition to the Holy Mother who blessed him with the words, 'May Sarasvati, the Goddess of learning, abide in your tongue'. As a result, he was able to compose many other sweet hymns fragrant with deep devotion and rare charm. So, it may be said that the hymn literature connected with Sri Ramakrishna grew by the grace of the Mother. Swami Abhedananda has composed two very fine hymns on the Mother in which he speaks of her as the 'Supreme Mother of the Universe', 'Purity Incarnate', etc.

Swami Saradananda, the lifelong Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, took upon himself the responsibility of looking after the Holy Mother till the very end and discharged his duty with exemplary devotion and self-dedication. She herself has remarked: 'I shall have no difficulty so long as Sharat (Saradananda) lives. I do not see anyone else who can shoulder my burden'. The Swami's devotion to the Mother was unique. He dedicated his Bengali book *Bhārate Śhakti Pūjā* to the Mother with these words: 'By whose gracious look the author has been able to realize the revelation of Divine Motherhood in every female form—to the lotus feet of her, this work is dedicated in all humility and devotion'.

The Swami's masterpiece, the *Rāmakṛṣṇa-līlā-prasaṅga* in Bengali, (recently published in English in a magnificent volume under the title *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*), seems to have owed its inspiration to the Holy Mother. After the passing away of Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Saradananda could not continue the work. It is said that he used to remark that she who gave the inspiration had withdrawn it.

It may be noted that the *Rāmakṛṣṇa Kathāmṛita* in Bengali, published later in English as the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, was

<sup>3</sup> Sri Sarada Devi.



also the effect of the grace of the Mother. Mahendra Nath Gupta or 'Master Mahashay', as the venerable author of this was familiarly known, has dedicated the book to her. He has also published the gracious letter the Mother sent to him, encouraging him to publish the book as it was authentic and would be beneficial to humanity. Thus it is remarkable to see that the two most authoritative works on the Life and Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna are due to the Mother's grace.

Akshaya Kumar Sen, the author of the *Ramakrishna Punthi*, the fine metrical biography in Bengali of Sri Ramakrishna, says that he read portions of his book to the Mother who blessed him and advised him to complete it. Thus this great work is also a result of the Mother's unbounded grace on a simple and humble devotee of Sri Ramakrishna.

Nag Mahashay was one of the greatest householder disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. His life of immaculate purity, innate humility, and utmost self-surrender is a rare ideal. The Mother said of him: 'He had an exuberance of devotion. . . . Ah! What loving eyes he had! Bloodshot and always moist with tears! His body was emaciated by hard austerity. He would come to see me. He could hardly climb the steps. His emotion welled up at the very sight of me. He would tremble like a leaf. He would stagger while walking. I have never seen such devotion in anybody'.<sup>4</sup>

After seeing the Mother, Nag Mahashay said in ecstasy and emotion, while still not fully in the plane of ordinary consciousness, 'Mother is always even more merciful than Father'.

Swami Premananda, who witnessed the interview said: 'Oh! How the Mother bestowed her grace upon Nag Mahashay today! She partook a portion of the sweets brought by Nag Mahashay and then gave him the *prasād* with her own hands'.

Girish Chandra Ghosh, the great poet and dramatist, was one of the most devoted disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. 'On the first occasion he visited the Holy Mother in her

native village Jayrambati, he prostrated before her, 'looked at her once and immediately withdrew from there and sat in the outhouse in a very serious and introspective mood'. When Swami Niranjanananda asked him the reason, Girish wanted him to inquire of the Holy Mother whether she was not the person who had appeared to him in dream in his nineteenth year. In reply the Holy Mother sent him the information that she was that very person. Then Girish told his fellow disciples that when the doctors had given him up for lost during a severe illness in his nineteenth year, he had a vision one night that the whole sky was lit with a celestial effulgence. It gradually proceeded towards him and assumed the form of a Goddess. She put into his mouth something like the *prasād*, the consecrated food, of the Puri temple and vanished. After this vision, Girish gradually recovered from his illness. On seeing the Holy Mother, he was surprised to notice that she was the Goddess who had blessed him. Girish used to say that he had thus recovered his mother.<sup>5</sup>

Regarding the attitude, towards the Mother, of the women disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, the following words of Sister Nivedita will suffice to give an idea: 'So deeply is she (the Holy Mother) revered by all about her that there is not one of them who would, for instance, occupy a railway berth above her, when travelling with her. Her very presence is to them a consecration'.<sup>6</sup> It may be noted in passing that the Nivedita School for girls, which has developed into such a grand educational institution for women, was opened by the Holy Mother herself on the day of Kālī Puja in 1899. She prayed that the blessings of the great Mother might be upon the School and the girls it should train be ideal girls. Sister Nivedita says: 'I cannot imagine a grander omen than her blessing, spoken over the educated Hindu womanhood of the future'.<sup>7</sup>

The estimate of Gauri Mā, a woman disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, who was remark-

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*<sup>6</sup> *The Master as I saw Him.*<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*



able for her deep spirituality, great learning, and organizing capacity, may well conclude this short account. She says: 'Sri Sarada Devi was not only the Master's partner in his life-work, but the object wherein he worshipped the cosmic Mother. The worship of one's

own wife as the Divine Mother is indeed a phenomenon which no other age has witnessed. . . . People have not yet been able to know the Holy Mother. A full appreciation of the significance of her life is bound to have a liberalizing influence upon the whole world'.

## IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE HOLY MOTHER

You hold my reins: I cannot go apace  
 Than you'll let me, for I move with you.  
 I dwindle even as your spirit takes not wing;  
 I commune with Beauty as you seek the Truth;  
 You reign supreme o'er my vast terrain  
 And out of your lamp of vision emanates  
 The ethereal flame of my aspiration:  
     So ends my monologue  
     In I-Thou dialogue.

Then should you not view, in trance, the lofty goal  
 And dispel the gloom of delusion's snares,  
 To gaze at eternity's unscalable peaks?  
 So that I from behind may glimpse a star  
 And feel the majesty of the spreading glow;  
 Follow ont to the brink of infinity  
 Seeking the ineffable peace of lonely heights  
     And feel the sunshine  
     Of my Master's divinity:

Where's the joy of the lark, nestled in its nest?  
 Where lies hid the rapture of the lotus, at dusky eve?

The soul that yearns for mountain-tops treads thy foot-  
     steps up the narrow winding path,  
 Climbing upward, never crying halt.  
 It has no other choice but hold your staff against the  
     wiles of change and decay.

*Vāchārambhanam vikāro nāmadheyam;  
 mṛittiketyeva satyam.*



# WOMEN IN THE VEDAS

BY DR. A. C. BOSE

The Vedas, the earliest literary records of India and the world, exhibit very fine types of womanhood. Our country has, in subsequent ages, emphasized particular traits, but the basic ideal of womanhood has remained more or less the same as found in the Vedas.

In trying to understand this ideal we should consider not only human characters but also the portraiture of Goddesses. From both these sources graceful pictures emerge of the virgin, the bride, the wife, and the mother. The direct moral teaching is of less consequence than the sublimating effect of creative representations of women's loveliness, purity, and nobility.

There is one simple indication of the extreme refinement of the women represented in the Vedas. It is their smile. Anatole France, speaking of human development through the ages, says: 'Insensibly, by long and magnificent efforts, man having become less miserable became less wild . . . the human face took a supreme beauty and the smile was born on the lips of woman'. In the Vedas we find beautiful descriptions of the smiling woman. There is a reference to 'young women going to the social assembly, who are beautiful and smiling' (*smayamānāsaḥ*) (*Rig-Veda* IV.58.8). Ushā, the virgin Goddess, beautiful and holy, is described as 'smiling most sweetly' (*sam-smaya.rānā*) (*Ibid.* I.123.10).

The Vedas show a tender regard for the graceful form of woman and the added beauty of costume and ornament, in the serene setting of domestic life. Examples are provided by fine similes illustrating divine beauty, e.g. 'looking beautiful like women' (*Ibid.* I.85.1), 'like two damsels embellishing their bodies' (*Ibid.* II.39.2), 'like maidens adorning them-

selves while going to a marriage' (*Ibid.* IV.58.9), 'like a loving, beautifully dressed wife' (*Ibid.* I.124.7), and so on. The funeral verses make an interesting reference to the beauty and benignity of womanhood, which appear as a saving grace in the midst of earthly mortality: 'May the unwidowed women with noble husbands decorate themselves with unguent and balm, and may these, tearless, robust, and well adorned with jewels, ascend the platform first' (*Ibid.* X.18.7). There are verbal pictures in the Vedas of women (as of men) dancing (e.g. *Ibid.* I.92.4) and of the woman singing in her work (*Ibid.* I.92.3). We also find the traditional figure of the Indian woman carrying her water-pitcher (*kumbhinī*) (*Ibid.* I.191.14).

Ushā, symbolizing the purity and glory of the dawn, represents the typical virgin. She appears most graceful in her modesty in the word-portrait in which 'she, daughter of the Sky, like a virtuous virgin, bends, opposite to men, her forehead downwards' (*Ibid.* V.80.6). Through the nobility of Ushā, womanhood is ennobled: She is 'sublime by Law, true to eternal order' and is 'welcomed by sages singing their hymns' (*Ibid.* V.80.1). She is blissful and they pray to her for 'more and more blissful thoughts' (*Ibid.* I.123.13).

Ushā has been imagined as a maiden in love, going to her tryst (*Ibid.* I.123.9). She has been compared to the 'bride decorated by the mother' (*Ibid.* I.123.11). The Vedas have portrayed the bride with the tenderest touches. The hymn of Suryā marriage, which has been the model of Hindu marriage for thousands of years, gives the most graceful and dignified picture of the bride and young wife. Suryā, who is going to be married 'to the husband whom she mentally admires', stands in the innate beauty and glory of her womanhood:



'Lovely was Suryā's robe, decorated  
by the *gāthā* song,  
Thought was the pillow of her couch,  
Sight the unguent of her eyes,  
Her jewellery was the sky and earth,  
When Suryā went to her husband'.  
(*Ibid.* X. 85. 6-7).

After the marriage vow and sacrament the bride is welcomed to her household: 'Go to your home, mistress of it, so that you may rule and speak to the social assembly'. Mutualness of love between husband and wife is emphasized: 'Unite both our minds, unite our hearts, give us concord', goes the prayer. In the *Atharva-Veda* the husband grows more poetic: 'I am the song and thou art the hymn, I am the Sky and thou art the Earth' (XIV.2.7).

The wife is given an exalted position in the Vedas. The divinity is compared to 'the wife in the household, an ornament to all' (*Rig-Veda* I.66.5). Divine purity is compared to the chastity of a wife: 'Like a spotless wife, beloved of her husband' (*anavadyā patijushṭeva nārī*) (*Ibid.* I.73.3).

The Veda contemplates a monogamous marriage. 'Stay here, never be separated, enjoy, you two together, the full span of life, playing with children and grandchildren' (*Ibid.* X.85.42)—is the marriage blessing. 'May the married couple, with sons and daughters by their side, enjoy the full span of life' (*Ibid.* VIII.31.8). The immortal pair, Aśhvins, are compared to a married couple (*dampatīva*) (*Ibid.* II.39.2).

Most glorious are the portraits of the mother in the Vedas. Of Night and Day it is said: 'One mother rests, another feeds the infant' (*Ibid.* III.55.4). The Goddess Sarasvati is the Mother whose 'exhaustless breast' is 'the source of all well-being' and the worshipper prays for the privilege of being fed at it as a child (*Ibid.* I.164.14). The Divinity, imagined as feminine, is 'the Mighty Mother' (*Yajur-Veda* XXI.5), 'the motherliest of mothers' (*mātritamā*) (*Rig-Veda* II.41.16). The dual deities, Aśhvins, are compared to

'two breasts that nourish our life', exalting woman's motherhood.

The Vedas speak most tenderly of the relation between mother and child. 'May Aditi my praise-song accept, as a mother her dear heart-gladdening son', runs a prayer (*Ibid.* V.42.2). A *Rig-Vedic* sage, in a mystical vision, presumably based on a lovely natural phenomenon, sees the tender exchange of caresses between mother and child:

'With a simple heart I have seen Him  
from near,  
Him His Mother kisses and He too  
kisses the Mother'  
(*Ibid.* X. 114. 4).

The poetry of the imagery has hardly ever been equalled in the subsequent literature of the world. The Gods Maruts are spoken of as 'playful children of beautiful mothers' (*Ibid.* X.78.6). The wife, according to the Vedic conception, was not only to be 'the queen' (*samrājñī*) over the whole household, but she was also to mother everybody: 'Give her ten sons and make her husband the eleventh' (*Ibid.* X.85.45)—a strange prayer, but quite in keeping with Vedic idealism.

Ushā, the virgin Goddess, is also honoured with filial devotion: 'May we be as sons of Thee, the Mother', runs the prayer. The following picture of Ushā reminds us of Mother Durgā of Purānic times:

'She, yonder, bending down, rich in rays,  
clothed in red hues,  
Is seen advancing, as one wonderful,  
amid the ten surrounding arms'  
(*antar-dashasu bāhuṣhu*) (*Ibid.* VIII. 101. 13).

The arms signifying the ten directions became limbs through the mythopoeic Purānic conception.

The Veda, while paying the greatest homage to the mother, is not unaware of the existence of the woman of the companion type, as represented by Urvashi, who says she is 'like the wind, difficult to capture', and that 'there can be no friendship with women' (*Ibid.* X.95.15)—an idea diametrically opposed to the conception of the married couple with



its bird-like conjugality (e.g. *chakravākeva dāmpatī*) (*Atharva-Veda* XIV.2.64).

It is very interesting to note that there was also the woman of the student type in Vedic times. The *Atharva-Veda* says that 'the girl through Vedic studentship (*brahmacharya*) wins a youthful husband. (*Ibid.* XI.5.18). There are women sages among the composers of Vedic verses. This is most remarkable in view of the fact that women are known to have participated in the higher life of the intellect in only very modern times, barring some few exceptions. When we consider the hoary antiquity of the Vedic age and the intellectual and spiritual achievements of women in that age, we feel like discarding the theory of progress in relation to woman. Some of the women sages, like Ghoshā, practised celibacy up to an advanced age before entering the married state.

The wives of sages, too, present a very high type of womanhood. Sometimes, as in the case of Lopāmudrā, they are found to be practising celibacy along with their ascetic husbands for long years. Lopāmudrā did not become a mother till 'old age was about to impair the beauty of her body' (*Rig-Veda* I.179). Her husband, Agastya, speaks of facing the hundred conflicts of life, the two together, single-hearted. There has been a fine tradition in India of ascetic lives lived by married couples. Vālmiki shows Rama and Sita living such a life for the thirteen years and more of their forest life. In our times the Holy Mother, Saradamani Devi, set the noble example of a lifelong ascetic life as the wife of a great ascetic.

The woman of the heroic type, often thought of as the typical Aryan woman, is also found in the Vedas. There is the mention of a woman actually taking part in battle. We have cases of individual heroism too, in situations where women quit themselves valiantly. Indrāni is found trembling with rage at the amorous approaches of Vrishākapi. She boasts of being a mother of

heroes (*vīriṇī*). The fact that the offender is supposed to be protected by the deity does not matter to her. Her fury overawes him: 'Soon may the boar-hunting hound seize him and bite him in the ear . . . I will rend his head' (*Ibid.* X.86.4). Saramā, the messenger of the gods, seeks from the Panis the kine they have carried away. They threaten her with battle and tell her about their sharp-pointed weapons. 'Your words cannot wound, O Panis! even if your wicked bodies are arrow-proof' (*Ibid.* X. 108). The Panis change their attitude and say: 'We shall make thee our sister, don't go back. We shall give thee of the cattle, O blessed one!' She refuses to yield to sentiment: 'I don't know brotherhood or sisterhood'.

Saramā may have rejected the sentimental appeal, but the Panis' 'We shall make thee our sister' (*svasāram tvā kṛinavali*) is characteristic of the courteous attitude of men towards women and has become a part of Indian social etiquette. Similarly, the term '*subhage*'; '*O blessed one!*', usually applied to a goddess, is also applied courteously to woman, as in *Rig-Veda* (X.10.10). The root-word *bhaga*, later used in terms like *bhagavān*, a name for the Divine Person, means bliss, grace. In *Yajur-Veda*, the word, in a new combination—*bhagini*—is applied to a goddess, and means 'the blissful or gracious one' (*Yajur-Veda* II.20). In modern India, the word *bhagini*—and its derivatives like *bahin*, *ben*, *bon*, etc.—have replaced the word *svasā*, sister. This means that the Vedic term of courtesy has been substituted for the ordinary word for sister.

One cannot contemplate without surprise the strange fact that some three to four thousand years ago women should have been so brilliant and noble and should have lived in a society which held them in such tender respect. No less wonderful is the fact that, though the Vedas became unintelligible and were forgotten, their spirit should have lived in such a vital form for millenniums on end.



# GREAT WOMEN OF THE VEDIC TIMES

BY BASANA DEVI

The Ṛig-Vedic hymns present portraits of women illustrating the high position enjoyed by them in the Vedic Age as seers and sacrificers, as wives and mothers. There is no exaggerated colouring in the delineation of these characters. They are drawn to life with a few masterly strokes in a brief dialogue, a short prayer, or a single verse.

Viśhvavārā, a dignified woman of the Atri family, in her vigorous hymn of six verses, reveals herself as a lady of unique personality, making offerings to the gods, and her woman's heart praying for an atmosphere of love and concord in her home. She steps near the fire with oblations of butter and prays thus to the Fire-god:

'Show thyself strong for mighty bliss, O Agni,  
most excellent be thine effulgent splendours.  
Make easy to maintain our household lordship,  
and overcome the might of those who hate  
us'.<sup>1</sup>

Then we have the picture of Indrasenā Mudgalāni, a heroic woman, who, driving her own chariot, helped her husband in winning hundreds and thousands of well-pastured cattle in a memorable battle. According to the legend quoted by Sāyana, all Mudgala's cattle had been stolen except an old ox. This ox he harnessed to his wagon and went in pursuit of the robbers. He threw his club before him and it showed him the way to the thieves.

'For thee may Indra boldly speed the car that  
works on either side  
Favour us, Much-invoked in this most glorious  
fight against the raiders of our wealth.  
Loose in the wind the woman's robe was stream-  
ing what time she won a car-load worth a  
thousand'.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ralph T. H. Griffith: *The Hymns of the Ṛig-Veda*, Vol. I, (V. 28. 3).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. II, (X. 102. 1, 2).

In this hymn we have a beautiful picture of Indrasenā Mudgalāni.

The sorrows of Lopāmudrā are mournfully depicted. Lopāmudrā pines for the company of her husband who is leading a life of austerity and penance. The four short verses of the dialogue between the husband and the wife give a picture of their domestic life.<sup>3</sup>

Women had no mean share in illuminating the Vedic Age with the light of wisdom. It was the possession of culture that helped them to assert themselves with splendour and grace. They were bursting with creative vigour and could not be crippled by their routine duties. They discovered themselves and could express themselves too. Some of the hymns speak of their intellectual achievements. There are a number of women to whom the beautiful Vedic Mantras were revealed.

Vāk, the daughter of the Sage Ambhrīṇa, composed a set of hymns revealing her vast conception of and identification with Brahman. The most remarkable hymn ascribed to Vāk, which occurs in the Tenth Mandala of the *Ṛig-Veda* is known today as the 'Devi-Sūkta'. The mystical exaltation expressed in this hymn, which feels identity of self with the entire universe, is somewhat strange in the predominantly practical and polytheistic age of the *Ṛig-Veda*; but it is not altogether unexpected, having been expressed in various ways in other hymns, especially in the Hiraṇyagarbha and the Puruṣa Sūktas of a pantheistic character. To seek unity in the midst of diversity is a natural trend of human thought; but here it is not a systematic philosophical thinking, but an essentially emotional realization of what is transcendental that gives distinctive significance to this powerful hymn. The hymn begins thus:

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. I.



I travel with the Rudras and the Vasus, with the Ādityas and All-gods I wander.

Through me alone all eat the food that feeds them,—each man who sees, breathes, hears the word outspoken.<sup>4</sup>

Apālā was also a seer, who was married but was forsaken by her husband because of her skin disease. Then Apālā came to her father and engaged herself in deep meditation and penances. Apālā prayed to Indra for the removal of her skin disease and succeeded in her Tapas:

'Cleansing Apālā, Indra! thrice, thou gavest sunlike skin to her,

Drawn, Shatakratu! through the hole of car, of wagon, and of yoke'.<sup>5</sup>

She thereby helped to establish the right of women to approach the Creator directly.

Viśhpālā was a queen who reigned over a kingdom which was attacked by enemies, and she proceeded to the battle-field to fight with them to save her country. Once having lost a foot in battle, she received an iron leg from the Aśhvins and fought on most courageously.

'When in the time of night, in Khela's battle, a leg was severed like a wild bird's pinion, Straight Ye gave Viśhpālā a leg of iron that she might move what time the conflict opened'.<sup>6</sup>

Śhaśhvati, the daughter of Angira, is the seer of a hymn. Śhaśhvati's husband, Asanga, was changed into a woman by the curse of the gods and by her prayers was moved to repentance and in consequence restored to his manhood.

'What time her husband's perfect restoration to his lost strength and manhood was apparent, His consort Śhaśhvati, with joy addressed him, "Now art thou well, my lord, and shalt be happy".'<sup>7</sup>

Godhā is also a woman seer. She praises Indra and speaks of her devotion and obedience to the gods:

'Never, O Gods, do we offend, nor are we ever obstinate: we walk as holy texts command. Closely we clasp and cling to you, cling to your sides, beneath your arms'.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. II, (X. 125. 1, 4).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* (VIII. 80. 7).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. I, (I. 116. 15).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. II, (VIII. 1. 34).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* (X. 134. 7).

Ghoṣhā, the daughter of Kakṣhivān, was a seer. She was said to have been afflicted with leprosy and healed by the Aśhvins, who found a husband for her. In the Vedas the word '*purandhri*', meaning the wise maid, has been explained by Sāyana as referring to Ghoṣhā. The Vedic hymns of Ghoṣhā eulogize the Aśhvins.

'To Ghoṣhā, living in her father's dwelling, stricken in years, Ye gave a husband, Aśhvins'.<sup>9</sup>

In five Mantras Śhraddhā, the seer of the family of Kāmā, expresses the glory of sacrifice and gift. Being the seer of the Mantras she identifies herself with Faith personified.

'By Faith is Agni kindled, through Faith is oblation offered up. We celebrate with praises Faith upon the height of happiness'.<sup>10</sup>

Another seer is Romaśhā, the wife of Bhāvayavya. Her son Svanaya was famous for his generosity which he inherited from her. The seventh stanza of the hymn, ascribed to Romaśhā, reads thus:

'Let not the liberal sink to sin and sorrow, never decay the pious chiefs who worship! Let every man besides be their protection, and let affliction fall upon the niggard'.<sup>11</sup>

Brahmajāyā who is named Juhu, the sister of Agastya and the wife of Brihaspati, is the seer of a hymn. According to a legend quoted by Sāyana, Juhu had been deserted by her husband. The gods then consulted together as to the means of his expiating his sin, and restored her to him:

'So then the Gods restored her, so men gave the woman back again.

The kings who kept their promises restored the Brahmana's wedded wife'.<sup>12</sup>

Besides these we find mention of the names of female seers Sūryā, Yamī, Indrāṇī, Devayāṇī, Aditi, and Vasukra-patni.

Of these, except the last, the others though

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. I, (I. 117. 7). *Vide also Rig-Veda*, X. 39 and 40.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. II, (X. 151. 1).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. I, (I. 125. 7).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. II, (X. 110. 6).



mentioned as seers are themselves deified as the deities of the hymns.

Sūryā, the seer of the 85th hymn of the Tenth Mandala, is said to be the daughter of Surya, the sun-god. In this hymn her marriage ceremony has been described.

Yamī, the seer of the 10th hymn of the Tenth Mandala, is the sister of Yama. Yama and Yamī, son and daughter of Vivasvān, are the seers as well as the deities of the hymn. It is a dialogue between them in which Yamī boldly checks the advances of Yama saying:

'Alas! thou art indeed a weakling, Yama; we find in thee no trace of heart or spirit.

As round the tree the wood-vine clings, another will cling about thee girt as with a girdle'.

Indrāṇī, the consort of Indra, is a seer who invokes the Soma plant to jealously guard her husband's love:

'Auspicious, with expanded leaves, sent by the Gods, victorious plant,

Blow thou the rival wife away, and make my husband only mine'.<sup>13</sup>

Indramātris (the mothers of Indra) are mentioned as seers of the 49th and the 153rd hymns of the Tenth Mandala. Amongst them Devayānī and Aditi are well known. One stanza is ascribed to the wife of Rishi Vasukra, herself being a seer.<sup>14</sup>

In the Śhatapatha Brāhmaṇa, Sukanyā is mentioned. She was the daughter of Saryāta, and was married to Chyavana who is mentioned in the *Rig-Veda*. The story runs thus: Saryāta went to the forest with his daughter, accompanied by a band of soldiers. An old man was lying on their path and a child was throwing stones at him. When Saryāta came to know that the old man was no other than Chyavana, the great sage himself, he gave his daughter Sukanyā in marriage to him. Sukanyā accepted the old husband and led an ascetic life.

Once the Aśhvins came to test her chastity and tempted her, 'why do you serve your husband who is old and invalid? If you wish to enjoy life, come and live with us'. But Sukanyā answered: 'I will not forsake him

alive to whom my father has dedicated me'.<sup>15</sup> Sukanyā's strength of virtue indicates the wonderful character of women who flourished in those days.

In the Upanishads the names of Maitreyi and Gārgi stand out in bold relief due to their intellectual acumen and spiritual strength. Maitreyi was the daughter of Mitra. Mitra was a philosopher. Maitreyi was married to Yājñavalkya, who was invited to attend a religious conference at the court of King Janaka. When Yājñavalkya was about to renounce the world, he wanted to make a final settlement of his wealth between Maitreyi and Kātyāyani, his other wife. But Maitreyi was gifted with extraordinary brilliance and an inborn detachment; so she said to Yājñavalkya: 'If now, sir, this whole earth filled with wealth were mine, would I be immortal thereby?'

'No,' said Yājñavalkya, 'As the life of the rich, even so would your life be. Of immortality, however, there is no hope through wealth'.

Then said Maitreyi, 'What should I do with that through which I may not be immortal? What you know, sir, that only teach me'.

Yājñavalkya said: 'Dear as you are to me, dearer is what you say. Come, sit, and I will explain to you. But while I am expounding, do you seek to ponder there upon'. Then began the discussion of Yājñavalkya and Maitreyi concerning the Advaita nature of Atman.<sup>16</sup>

A religious conference took place at the court of King Janaka. Many realized souls and exponents of the scriptures from all quarters of the land gathered there for intellectual discussion. But all the sages and scholars were silenced by Yājñavalkya. Gārgi, the daughter of Vachaknu, well versed in the Vedas and educated at Gurugriha according to the prescribed rules of the scriptures, boldly rose on behalf of the humiliated assemblage. Gārgi said, 'Venerable

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* (X. 145. 2).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* (X. 28. 1).

<sup>15</sup> IV. 1. 5.

<sup>16</sup> *Bṛihadāranyaka Upaniṣhad*, II. 4.



Brāhmanas, I will ask Yājñavalkya two questions. If he will answer me these, not one of you will surpass him in discussions about Brahman'. Yājñavalkya said: 'Ask Gārgi'. She said: 'As a noble youth of the Kashis or of the Videhas might rise up, having taken two foe-piercing arrows in his hand, even so, O Yājñavalkya, have I risen up against you with two questions. Answer me these'. Thus began the discussion about the ultimate reality of the world—the Unqualified Imperishable. Gārgi was

defeated by Yājñavalkya, but only after a tough fight. Then Gārgi admitted the intellectual supremacy of Yājñavalkya and there upon held her peace.<sup>17</sup>

It can be seen from this brief review that during the Vedic period flourished women of such exemplary character that in obtaining distinction in valorous deeds, intellectual heights, moral splendour, or philosophical speculations they stood not a little behind men, and were honoured by the men as equals.

<sup>17</sup> III. 8.

## THE GLORY OF INDIAN WOMANHOOD IN THE RIG-VEDA

BY DR. V. M. APTE

If the cultural level of a nation is to be gauged by the culture of its women, then Ancient India (to be more accurate, 'Rig-Vedic India') will have to be placed at the top of the (contemporary) world by virtue of the greatness and glory of its women. The temptation of making platitudinous and undocumented statements must, however, be resisted and an attempt will be made in this short paper to draw up a picture of Indian womanhood *in outlines*, with their ideals, aspirations, achievements, and contributions in the social, educational, and spiritual spheres, sketched, strictly, on the unchallengeable basis of the relevant source-texts drawn from that earliest document (not only of Indo-European but also of world literature), namely, the *Rig-Veda*. The distinguished women of the post-Rig-Vedic epochs like Maitreyi, Gārgi, and Arundhati are now so frequently cited by public speakers and writers that any marshalling of the literary evidence of those epochs would be deemed superfluous and must be left out of this paper.

### I. THE SOCIAL SPHERE

Early or child marriage is *generally* a

great hindrance to the intellectual and physical development of women and leads more often than not to a dwarfing of their social stature. A study of the remarkable marriage-hymn of the *Rig-Veda* (X.85) and other relevant passages reveals that there were no child marriages in the days of the *Rig-Veda*. The marriage of Sūryā, the daughter of Sāvitrī, to Soma, as celebrated in that hymn provides the archetype of the marriage ceremony in India (ancient and modern). We are told there (X. 85.9) that Savitrī gave his daughter away in marriage only when she had set her heart on it and had approved of her would-be husband. The bride is called *vyaktā* (i.e. 'marriageable') in X. 85.21. A custom like that of a *svayamvara* ('the selection of a husband by the bride, of her own free choice') is indubitably hinted at, when *RV* X. 27.12 says: 'Blessed is the girl when she, well-dressed, seeks her (life-) companion, from among all the people'. Similarly, *RV* V. 37.3 describes the bride, through a poetic metaphor, thus: 'Here goes the bride seeking a husband who will make her—the eager one—the queen of his household'. There are references, elsewhere, (by no means condemna-



tory), to spinsters aging in the father's house. The elaboration, the stateliness, the dignity, and pomp of the marriage ceremonial (in *RV* X. 85) bears indirect, yet eloquent, testimony to the social position of women in those days. The suitor or his elders approached the father of the girl through friends acting as match-makers, friends *holding a high social position*, the divine prototypes being Soma, the suitor, and the Āshvins the match-makers, approaching Savitrī for the hand of his daughter, Sūryā, on behalf of Soma (*RV* X. 85.9). The newly-married bride, when she goes to her new home, has an escort consisting of a matron-cum-nurse and a playmate or friend whose duty it was to make the transition from the old home to the new one as smooth as possible (X. 85.6). The car in which the bride goes in a procession to her husband's house is a magnificent vehicle with strong wheels and axle, well fitted with cross-bars and shaft-poles and a fine bonnet or hood, and drawn by an excellent team of bullocks, with an outrider in front (X. 85.8, 10-12). A cushion or pillow is provided for the bride in the car in which she sits in comfort and not hunched up awkwardly like the coy maiden that the bride is in later days (X. 85.7). She carries a chest (of clothes and ornaments) with her. Her make-up is imposing and dignified and boasts of an anointing oil and fine raiment (6 and 7). Like a 'queen empress' (*samnājñī*) she rules over all the 'in-laws' in the new family she enters (46), but it is a rule of love and authority in the sense that she commands the respect of the father, mother, brothers and sisters of her husband. As regards the practice of suttee (*satī*), although this is not the place to discuss conflicting theories, it is a safe inference from the R̥g-Vedic evidence that it was neither compulsory nor common because childless widows are mentioned in X. 40.2; and from X. 18.8, where the wife of the dead man is asked to leave the funeral pyre about to be set into a blaze, it does *not* follow that a contemporary custom similar to that of suttee prevailed, but rather that

the widow fondly clinging to the dead body in sheer grief is successfully persuaded to come back to the world of the living and to resume the normal course of life. From references like I. 124.7 and IV. 3.2, monogamy appears to have prevailed. X. 14.5, which has a prayer for the discomfiture of co-wives, shows that polygamy also existed side by side, though in all probability it was confined to kings and rich men.

Women publicly attended feasts and dances, dressed in decent attire, and there are references to beautiful women flocking to a festive gathering. The Akṣha-Sūkta ('The Hymn of the Gambler') shows that the wife, though dutiful and devoted (X. 34.2), and though taking an enthusiastic part in the social life of her husband and cheerfully receiving his friends (X. 34.2b), could *set her foot down* when the husband took to gambling (X. 34.3). To sum up, *the social status of a woman in the R̥g-Vedic age was marked by self-denial and self-sacrifice in the service of her husband and family, by untrammelled self-expression in the life of the society and self-respect in her conjugal life.*

## II. THE EDUCATIONAL SPHERE

There are several women seers or R̥shis of hymns and stanzas in the *R̥g-Veda*, though they have not received the wide publicity of Maitreyī, Gārgī, and other ladies of the Brāhmaṇa and Upaniṣhad periods. They may, therefore, well claim our attention, here: (1) (Āṅgirasī) Śhaśhvati is the seer of *RV* VIII. 1.34. She and her husband Āsaṅga Plāyogi (the seer of VIII. 1.30-33) are king and queen and it is absurd to dismiss their claim to 'seership' on the flimsy ground that they are king and queen. (2) Apālā, the daughter of Atri, is credited with the hymn VIII. 91 and the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa tells us that she cured herself of her skin disease by winning the favour of Indra with this hymn. (3) Kākshīvatī Ghoshā, the daughter of a king, composed the hymns *RV* X. 39 and 40, and she is the proud mother of a son ('Suhastya') who is the author of the imme-



diately following hymn X. 41. (4) Another enviable mother of many gifted seers is the sister of Agastya, who inserted a stanza of her own inspiration (X. 60.6) in the joint composition of her sons (X. 57-60). (5) The daughter of Ambhrīna, called Vāk, is credited with the noble hymn X. 125, and the peculiar name may be accounted for on the supposition that *she, feeling inspired, nay, as it were, possessed*, by the Goddess of Speech (Vāk) may have received the same name. Godhā (X. 134.6-7), Śhachī Paulomī (X. 159) and Sārparājñī (X. 189) are names of other female seers and the list does not include feminine seers of the rank of Divinities or semi-divine beings, like Yamī, Saramā, Indrāṇī, Sūryā, Urvaśhī, and Aditi Dākshāyaṇī, *though it is reasonable to suppose that literary achievements could not have been ascribed to divine females if their counterparts in human society were non-existent*. If man is supposed to have been made in the image of God, it is equally true that gods and goddesses are cast in the mould of the fancy of their human devotees, and unless there were literary celebrities among women, no goddess would have been credited with a literary flair. It is needless to cite other evidence of the high intellectual equipment of woman in the *Rig-Veda*, as in passages like X. 85. 26 we are told that the newly-married wife will proceed to take a leading part in the religious and ritualistic counsels of the household (*vidatham*) with full authority and command (*vaśhinī*).

### III. THE SPIRITUAL SPHERE

Marriage is not a social contract but a spiritual union, a heart-to-heart unity, where

no separation is feared. Sensuality, sexiness, or a quest for carnal pleasures do not appear at all as marriage-motifs. Progeny (or propagation of the race) is the aim of marriage. The proud motherhood of heroic sons and grandsons is the ideal (cf. *RV* X. 85. 42, 44-47). There are beautiful hints of her ethical standards in X. 85. 44 and 46 which tell us that the newly-married wife will be kind to the bipeds and quadrupeds and that she will never cast an evil eye or an angry or a wicked look. Helping the husband in the service of the domestic fire is part of her duties. She participated in the Soma ritual—a right denied to her later. The newly-married wife is established in the world of good deeds and in the cradle of *ṛita*, which in the cosmic, religious, and moral spheres stands for ‘cosmic order’, ‘rite’, and ‘right’ respectively. There is no hint of polyandry in the *Rig-Veda* and there is strong insistence on conjugal fidelity. There is no reliable evidence at all of ‘a grand system of courtezans’, which some Western scholars, steeped in Greek traditions, think is hinted at by *Rig-Vedic* expressions like *jāra* and *jāriṇī*, because these words mean ‘a lover’ or ‘gallant’ and ‘a woman in love’ respectively and do not signify ‘a paramour’ and ‘a prostitute or immoral woman’.

This picture of Indian womanhood should hearten us against any depression or despondency induced by the deterioration of later days because we need never give up the right of aspiring after the ideal of the *earliest* (the *Rig-Vedic* age—an ideal that *facilitated and never hindered* the triumphant world-wide sweep of the Aryan cult, memories of which are preserved in *Rig-Vedic* passages like: *Kṛinvanto viśhvam-āryam!*

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‘Everybody says regretfully, “There is so much misery in the world. We have prayed so much to God, but still there is no end of misery”. But misery is only the gift of God. It is the symbol of His compassion. Is it not so?’

—Sayings of the Holy Mother



# WOMAN IN THE UPANISHADS

BY R. R. DIWAKAR

The status of woman and the relation between man and woman throughout the ages has always been a fascinating subject for students of human society. Perhaps since the very birth of man on this planet, though numerous variations have been found in the physical technique, the biological relations and functions of both the sexes have remained the same. It is true that in the course of civilization the relationship has been made increasingly a source of mutual delight divorced from the biological purpose. It is also notable that modern science, Freudian psychology, and rationalism are making inroads even on the biological purpose. But by and large, the position remains the same as some millennia ago, since there is a very strong element of supra-rational urgency about the whole affair.

But while there is little change in the biological fundamentals, there have been vast and sweeping changes in the social and other relations of man and woman. They have not been uniform in all countries, nor have they been so even in the same country. Modern ideas of democracy, with the deification of the individual, have brought in their wake the idea of the equality of sexes. The feminist movement is based on it and has the vision and the vigour of a new religion. Man has hardly the moral basis for resisting it since he has himself sponsored democracy and is upholding it with all his might. It might be said that man has recently lost to woman all along the line and the process is still on.

Most of the Western writers who deal with this subject begin with the Grecian period in history. Probably many of them know of the more ancient civilizations of Egypt, Babylon, China, and India. But they seem to believe that things which happened or happen east of Suez are not worth much from the world

point of view or from the point of view of global human civilization. But I think that they ignore the fact that half the number of humans live here in this part of the world and that civilization and culture are not much mindful of geography. They are in the habit of crossing continents and scaling mountains without much difficulty. They travel like seeds with winds and birds and seem to take the whole of humanity as their field, wherever it might be. Nor do they care for colour or race or conquests or political predominance of one people by the other. The place of woman in society is one of the fundamental aspects of any civilization, ancient or modern, because it concerns half the number (possibly the better half) of human beings constituting any social group and because the relationship between man and woman is so vital that it affects almost all other aspects of human activity.

It is from this point of view that the study of this subject is very important. Fortunately India has a very long and continuous social history, partly factual and historical, and partly as reflected in its vast and varied literature, its laws, and its customs. I am, however, taking up here a very small sector of society, the society of Upanishadic times, for seeing how woman stood in those days, especially in the intellectual and spiritual fields. The material available is significant though scanty. The Upanishads are, no doubt, the seed-bed of Indian philosophy. They are seminal in that they have the roots of many a school of philosophy that flowered later into a complete system. We go to them for the sources of spiritual inspiration of the great sages and saints that came later. They are neither history nor sociology nor books on psycho-analysis. But at the same time, it is necessary to note how in this great field of



spiritual endeavour and human thought the woman has acted at a time when they were being moulded.

Upanishads are grouped separately from the point of view of the development of Indian thought, but traditionally they are part and parcel of the Vedas. They are also Shrutis. Each one of the most important and ancient Upanishads is attached to and looked upon as a part of one of the Vedas. Therefore, naturally the status and importance of woman in the Upanishads does not differ much from what it is in the Vedas. Indian society was far more simple in those days. The stigma of inferiority, ineligibility to read and study the Vedas, and such other disabilities came to be attached later in the Puranic and subsequent periods owing to numerous adventitious circumstances.

I have no intention of going into details so far as the Vedas proper are concerned. Patriarchal society was the rule and joint family system prevailed in those days. Male issue was always preferred to the female. But ladies were looked upon with respect and pregnant women were very much looked after. The number of goddesses we come across in Vedic literature is not very imposing. Vāk and Ushā, however, are very popular and highly spoken of. But what is very noteworthy is the fact that there were a number of women composers of Ṛiks. *Devī-Sūkta* was composed by Vāgāmbhrī, the daughter of the sage Ambhrī. She speaks of her realization of identity with universal consciousness, evidently the highest mystic experience. *Rātri-Sūkta* is said to have been composed by *Rātri*. *Agni-Sūkta* was brought into the world by Sārparājñī who presided over many sacrifices. Similarly there are Viśvavārā's hymns to Agni and Apālā's (she was a Kanyā, a maiden) to Indra. Apālā, who is described as taking Soma from near the waters, takes it home to squeeze the juice for the sacrifice. She herself presses it for 'Indra' or 'Shakra', meaning *thereby that she herself took part in the Yajña*. Similarly there are the names of Lopāmudrā and Shashīyasī. Some hymns are

attributed also to Ghoshā-Kakshivati, Sūryā-Sāvitri, Indrāñī, Shraddhā-Kāmāyanī, Shachī-Paulomī, Urvashī, and so on. Whether all these were women in flesh and blood, or some of them personifications of qualities or goddesses, the fact remains that womanhood was held in high esteem to the extent of ascribing revelatory hymns to them.

Now coming to the Upanishadic period, it is evident, as already pointed out, that we can see some light thrown on the place woman held in a certain field, namely, the world of thought and spirituality, more than any other.

The first thing that one observes as he reads the Upanishads is that philosophy, spiritual life, and deep discussions on inner experiences are not divorced from society or from family life. All these are not restricted to Sannyasins who have renounced the world and live secluded and ascetic lives. They are to be found everywhere: in the crowded durbars of kings, in the simple educational institutions called Gurukulas, in the Ashramas in forests where wise men lived with their families and cows, in villages where poor cartmen like Raikva sheltered themselves under their carts. Nor was there any restriction of age, occupation, or social standing. The second thing to be marked is that there is very little that is esoteric and secret about truth and its incessant quest by dedicated souls. The third remarkable feature is that women are looked upon as equals and are not treated with any discrimination. The discrimination is only between those who are inclined to the spiritual life and those who are not. The Rishis evidently did not want to throw pearls before the swine. They knew also that the 'pearls' that they possessed were greater in value than kingdoms, crowns, and empires.

It is now usually admitted that the Upanayana (initiation) ceremony is Vedic and was common to boys and girls. That was the beginning of the study of the Vedas and of *spiritual life*. A number of Sanskrit words and designations, current both in the Vedic and post-Vedic period, clearly show that



women were admitted equally with men to the path of spiritual Sādhanā and Vedic studies. Brahmachārini, Brahmavādinī, Tāpasi, Siddhā, and similar words show this fact clearly. The *Bṛhad-devatā* calls the *R̥g-Vedic* women Rishis as Brahmavādinīs, while those who would go in for immediate married life came later to be called (by Smṛtis) Sadyovadhū. As late as the days of the *Mahābhārata*, an Ashrama near Kurukshetra is mentioned where a 'Brahmin maiden was crowned with ascetic success and, ultimately acquiring Yogic powers, she became a Tapas-Siddhā'. The celibate daughter of King Shāṇḍilya also is mentioned as having attained spiritual eminence in the same hermitage. I need not mention here the number of great 'Shramaṇīs' who became famous among Buddhist nuns and the *Therī-gāthā* which is full of their sayings.

On the occasion of the Samāvartana (convocation), when the Brahmachārins are about to leave their Ashramas for home, the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* starts its exhortation with, 'Speak the truth and follow the Law'. In the course of the talk, the Guru tells the boys to look upon the mother, the father, the preceptor, and the guest as god. But the first place of honour goes to the mother. There is reference in the *Bṛhadāranyaka* as to what one should do if he wants to be the father of a Paṇḍitā (a learned lady). We have at another place the story of the young wife of Ushasti Chākrāyana, a great Vedic scholar. Though young, she is a very dutiful housewife who knows how to manage in days of scarcity. Then we have the mention of charming Jabālā, a house-maid, who is truthful to the core. Without fear, she tells her son Satyakāma, who was eager to go to a Guru for learning, that when asked about his family name, he should boldly say that he was Satyakāma, the son of Jabālā. She begot him while young and while she wandered from house to house for work. The Guru honoured the truth and remarked that truth is the characteristic of a Brahmin. In *Kena Upaniṣad*, an intuitive flash which reveals the

truth is pictured as Umā, the golden goddess. She appears to Indra and acquaints him about the prowess of Brahmā, the Creator.

The two other most significant references in the Upanishads are to Gārgī-Vāchaknavī (the daughter of the sage Vachaknu) and Maitreyī, the spiritual-minded wife of Yājñavalkya, probably the greatest among the Upanishadic seers. Gārgī appears as being full of challenging spirit when she hurls a question at Yājñavalkya in Janaka's audience-hall. Along with other Pandits there, she too felt sore when Yājñavalkya quietly asked his disciple to walk away with the thousand cows which had gold-tipped horns. He did not even wait for any questions from those assembled and for answering them satisfactorily, when Janaka declared, 'He who is the most learned amongst you may drive these cows away'. But she was defeated. An appropriate reply was given by the Rishi. She allowed others to have a chance with the redoubtable Yājñavalkya. She soon saw that all others failed. The fighter in her was again roused. She now stood forth once again, 'like a warrior of Kāshi with a mighty bow and two sharp arrows', and asked him two questions. She declared that if he answered those two questions, then none of those assembled there could defeat him! This raises Gārgī, and womanhood with her, to heights of self-respect and self-confidence rarely reached in any assembly of a similar nature where wits, wisdom, and learning have massed together.

If Gārgī represents high confidence in learning and a challenging spirit, Maitreyī is a typical Brahmavādinī, a seeker after spiritual truth. She is unlike Kātyāyanī, the other worldly-minded wife of Yājñavalkya. After a long married life, when age is creeping upon the sage, he thinks of distributing his worldly goods between his wives and retiring to an Ashrama. But Maitreyī's reaction was a welcome surprise to him. She knew that wealth was not the giver of immortality (*amṛtatvasya tū nāsāsti vīttena*).



She bursts upon the mellow wondering husband, 'What good is all this to me since it does not take me nearer immortality?' This endeared his wife more than ever to the sage and he took her nearer to him. Then flowed from his lips the eternal message of the nature of the Ātman, the realization of which leads to immortality.

These two Upanishadic characters, Gārgi and Maitreyī, are as immortal as the Upanishads themselves. There are some other

passages in the Upanishads which idealize the biological functions of man and woman. There are also hints of planned parenthood and other matters. But the main purpose of this small article was to bring out the important place held by women in Upanishadic times, especially in the field already indicated. I dare say it was equal, honourable, and one that stood out as a distinguishing feature of the high degree of real culture attained in those days.

## TWO WOMEN THINKERS OF THE UPANISHADIC AGE

BY DR. P. S. SASTRI

Amongst the great contemporaries of the philosopher Yājñavalkya there stand prominently two women thinkers of considerable repute. One is Maitreyī, whose discourse with her husband has given us the celebrated injunction regarding the realization of Brahman; and this injunction constitutes the *mahāvākya* for the opening *sūtra* of Bādarāyaṇa. In a sense it was the spiritual inquiry initiated by Maitreyī that all of us imitate and adopt as we enter the threshold of the Vedānta. The other woman is Gārgi, who actively participated in the philosophical disputes, for, she was eager to know whether there is a ground (*adhiṣṭhāna*) for the universe of appearances. It was the search for a foundational consciousness that dominated her enquiries. And both the women were deeply interested in the problems of Reality, Self, and Immortality. The thinker that stimulated their spiritual appetites was Yajnavalkya in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*. As an absolute monist, he could adopt only a negative approach, while these Brahmvādinis were after a positive conception of Reality.

The fourth section of the second chapter in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* is popularly known as the Maitreyī Brāhmaṇa. Here we find Yajna-

valkya declaring his intention to give up his present *āśrama*. He wants to divide his material possessions between his two wives, Kātyāyani and Maitreyī. But Maitreyī observes: 'Even if the whole earth be offered to me, full of gold, how would the possession of it make me realize immortality?' The wealth that comes from this world has very little to do with the nature of the Self. Wealth is external, and immortality is an inward possession. The Self, which is our primary and only reality, can be treasured and realized after we reject all attachment for the unreal. This involves a preliminary knowledge of the real, a spirit of disinterested endeavour and an unquenchable yearning for true spiritual freedom. Convinced of the fact that she is spiritually prepared for an enquiry into the nature of the Self, the sage proceeds to explain the true doctrine; for, she insists on knowing that which he knows.

Yajnavalkya's answer proceeds through three stages. First, he tries to establish the reality of the Self. In this strain we find him saying,

'Not for the sake of the husband is the husband dear to the wife, but for the sake of the Self. Not for the sake of the wife is the wife dear to the



husband, but for the sake of the Self. The son is dear not for the sake of the son, but for the sake of the Self'.

Likewise wealth, Brahma, Kṣhatra, gods, and the elements are dear only for the sake of the Self. All that is dear to us is so because it is dear to the Self. The Self, as Maitreyi understood, is the vital principle; and the sage has made it central to all appearances. Everything that is in the world is there and has a meaning because it depends on the Self for its very being. Apart from the Self it does not exist. As depending on the Self for its very being, it is not real. If things are dear to the Self, it is because they are the expressions or manifestations of the Self. The things of the world are the other, the not-Self; and if so, they have no meaning and validity for the Self. If they are not the other, then the Self loves itself in loving them. Hence,

'Ātmā vā are draṣṭavyaḥ, śrotavyo, mantavyo, nididhyāsitavyaḥ, Maitreyi, ātmano vā are darśanena, śravaṇena, matyā, vijñānenedam sarvam viditam'.

This Self must be apprehended or realized; it must be heard, discussed, meditated upon; and by the apprehension, hearing, reflection, and knowledge of this Self, all this becomes known. This is the great passage that forms the basis of the first *sūtra* of Badarayana. It enunciates the reality of the Self and makes it the supreme value. This idea is already implicit in the remark of Maitreyi. The Self as the supreme reality is the ground of the empirical universe; and once we have the knowledge of the ground, we also know the consequences of this ground.

The second step in the dialogue is devoted to an explanation of the last words of the passage referred to. If everything becomes known when the Self is known, then everything must be the Self. There can be no other to the Self. And so we find the sage telling Maitreyi, '*Idam sarvam yad-ayam-ātmā*'. All this is verily the Self. This implies that the things of the world cannot be truly loved, for they are not real as they appear to be. Then what is the Self? And

how does it look like? The sage offers a beautiful picture:

'As the sound of a drum cannot be seized until the drum is itself seized, or the beater of the drum; as the sound of a conchshell cannot be seized until the shell itself is seized, or the person who blows it; as the sound of a lute cannot be apprehended until the lute itself is apprehended, or the player on the lute; likewise, nothing of any value can be apprehended until and unless the Self itself is apprehended'.

The Self is the foundation of all values and apprehensions. All the sciences proceed from the ultimate Self. It is from the Self alone that the empirical universe and its varied objects have been projected as the appearances of the Self. The philosopher proceeds to observe that the skin is the repository of all touches, the tongue of all tastes, the nose of all smells, the eye of all colours, the mind of all desires, the intellect of all learning, the hands of all actions, and the feet of all movements; that the waters rest in the sea, and that the Vedas in speech; and likewise the Self is the *summum bonum*, the immanent and transcendent principle of all that exists. This magnificent account is rounded off by a brilliant image explaining the emergence of the appearances and of the consequent false values of human beings.

'As a lump of salt thrown in water gets dissolved, and we cannot find it anywhere; so does this great Being, the Endless, the Unfathomable, the quintessence of Knowledge, emerge or appear in these elements and vanish after them'.

It appears when the body comes forth animated. But does this Consciousness, this Self, vanish after bodily death?

The answer to this question takes us to the third step. Maitreyi stands bewildered. Does Consciousness come to an end with the body? Maitreyi was not prepared for such an answer. She accepted the reality of the Self, not its dissolution. According to her, the Self is the individual self, and she longed for personal immortality. But when the Self is real, when reality is one and one alone, there is no room for personal immortality. And Yajnavalkya was not prepared to disappoint



her with the negation of personal immortality. He tells her that what he already informed her was enough for her for the time being. Yet he hastens to conclude by drawing the major implication of what he told her.

'When there is a duality between subject and object, one perceives while the other is perceived; one smells while the other is smelt; one hears while the other is heard; one says while the other is said; one thinks while the other is thought; one meditates while the other is meditated upon; one knows while the other is known. But when Brahman is the *All*, when there is no other, how can one see the other; how can one hear the other; how can one know the other; how can one think the other?'

If there is an *other*, then all these are possible. The absence of the other means that there is only one Self. And what Yajnavalkya is not prepared to inform is the way in which this one supreme Self appears to become the many individual selves. Maitreyi was essentially a spiritual pluralist, believing in the eternal reality of a society of selves; and Yajnavalkya opens her mind to the higher truth of Absolutism which recognizes the reality of the one supreme Self. It is with this end in view that he informs Maitreyi that all this that we have in the empirical universe is *the Self*.

Gārgi is the other famous thinker in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*. She takes up the cosmological argument, and she is eager to know the cause or at least the ground of the empirical reality. Yajnavalkya has no sympathy with this argument or with this method, since as an Absolutist he cannot recognize the validity of the causal series. Taking reality to be a process, Gargi wants to know the immanent principle of this dynamic process. But if Reality is one, there is no meaning in such a talk about the process. In the absence of a process, there is no problem of immanence. Gargi, however, reveals her sharp and subtle intellect in the disputation. She asks abruptly: 'What was it that sustained water and gave it support? What was it in which water was woven like warp and woof?' Yajnavalkya answers that it was air. But does the air stand by itself? The sage answers that its ground is the intermundane

region. This will not do, for we can stop only with the uncaused cause, and so she continues to question. Thus we find the sage telling her that the intermundane region has its ground in the world of the Gandharva, that the Gandharva-world is grounded on that of the sun, that the sun has his substratum in the world of the moon, that the moon has its locus in the world of the stars, that the stars have their ground in the region of the gods, that the world of the gods is grounded on that of Indra, that of Indra on Prajāpati, and that of Prajāpati on Brahmāloka. Brahman is the uncaused ground or foundation of everything else. Even the Creator is dependent on Brahman which alone is Reality. Since this Reality is beyond creation, it is not subject to the time-series. It is no process, but a state.

Gargi is not satisfied with the answer that Brahmāloka constitutes the ground of the Creator; for, if we can arrive at Brahman on the basis of the causal series, does not Brahman too need a cause? Brahman, being beyond time, cannot cause the time-series. If he does cause, he must be within time and therefore be an effect or event. Instead of solving this, Yajnavalkya mildly rebukes her. She should not ask too much, since the infinite *regressus* cannot be applied to the foundational Consciousness.

Gargi leaves him at this in the sixth section of the third chapter. In the eighth section we see her again asking two questions. The first one is: 'What is it in which that which is above the heaven and below the earth and in the intermundane regions is woven like warp and woof?' This question, in plainer language, is directed to elicit an answer regarding the ultimate ground of the empirical universe. It was towards this that she employed the causal argument in the sixth section. Yajnavalkya here tells her that it is *ākāśa* or space. The empirical universe is spatial. Since the argument from time did not solve her problem, now she wants to know the ground of this *ākāśa*. The reply is that the ground is Akṣhara or the Immut-able. Space is infinitely divisible and there-



fore not real; but its ground is the eternal. Carried by the question, he tells her:

'The Immutable or the Eternal is neither dense nor subtle, neither short nor long, neither glowing nor humid; it has neither shadow nor darkness, neither air nor space, neither attachment nor taste, smell, sight, audition, and thought; it is without light and breath, without mouth and measure; it is neither within nor without; it neither eats anything, nor is eaten by anything'.

This negative approach admits the positive existence of a Reality which does not undergo any change or modification. We can speak of it in a negative way only because we cannot describe it adequately. Yet, since it is the ground of the appearances, the sage tells her that the cosmological argument implies its existence. Everything is dependent on it. 'It is because of this ground we find the sun and the moon in their respective positions and movements'. Heaven and earth, moments of time, rivers and mountains, and all other features go to show that the world is a well-ordered cosmos; and such a cosmos is a cosmos because it has its being in this Eternal Self. And if one worships, or sacrifices, or practises penance without realizing the knowledge of this Eternal Self, he is wasting himself in the pursuit of an unreality; and he who knows this Eternal Self and has his being in it, he alone lives a worthy life, for such a one can truly be called a Brāhmaṇa.

'This Eternal Self is the ultimate seer, though no other sees him; he is the ultimate hearer, who

is not himself heard by any other; he is the ultimate knower, without himself being known; he is the ultimate intuator without himself being intuited. Beyond him we have neither a seer, nor a hearer, nor a thinker, nor an intuator. It is in this Eternal Self alone that space itself is ultimately grounded'.

This magnificent statement provides the answer to Gargi's earlier and later questions. She could not think of asking any other question. Her questions were resolved with reference to time and space. The time-series, involved in the causal argument, has been shown to have a meaning only with reference to the Eternal Brahman; and the spatial pattern involved in the cosmological argument has been set aside, since Brahman makes space possible for finite centres. The ultimate Self is beyond space and time. It is beyond the categories, being the very foundation of the categories. This statement elicited by Gargi constitutes the basic conception of the Advaitic Absolute which is beyond all determinations.

Maitreyi initiated once for all the basic philosophical enquiry. She was able to make Yajnavalkya enunciate the goal of all philosophic endeavour in the light of Absolutistic Monism. Gargi, on the other hand, succeeded in making Yajnavalkya explain the relation of the categories to the Absolute Reality. But for these two women thinkers, Yajnavalkya would not have stated his philosophic position so clearly and effectively.

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'From time immemorial innumerable people have worshipped images and thereby attained Liberation. Doesn't that count for anything? Sri Ramakrishna never cherished such narrow ideas of differentiation. Brahman exists everywhere. But you must remember that saints are born to show the way to mankind, and each of them speaks in a different strain. There are many ways to realize the truth; so the pronouncements of all of them are true. Take, for instance, a tree on which birds of different kinds—white, black, and red—are sitting and making diverse sounds. Though these appear as different to our ears, we say that they are all sounds of birds; we never distinguish only a particular sound as that of birds and deny the rest.'

—Sayings of the Holy Mother



# GLORY OF WOMANHOOD IN THE UPANISHADIC AGE

BY SRIMATI M. A. RUKMINI

With special reference to the life of Sri Saradamani Devi, the illustrious life-partner of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, I propose to place before the readers of the *Prabuddha Bharata* a view-point to which scant attention has been paid and the significance of which has been either not emphasized or missed. Let me refer, for the sake of illustration, to one or two prominent women of the Upanishadic age, whose bright and brilliant careers would throw a flood of light on the high and exalted destiny which happens to be the birthright of women, notwithstanding the disabilities and handicaps associated characteristically with womankind.

## I

Shakuntala Rao Shastri, in her book entitled *Women in 'the Sacred Laws'*, has pointed out that down the ages, whenever and wherever certain laws appear to the modern minds to be discriminatory in character, conception, and concrete application, against women, such an impression should be ascribed to the right and legitimate anxiety of the ancient Hindu classic law-givers to guard, maintain, and vindicate the glory of womanhood. Such laws were never formulated for the purpose of lowering the status of women.

It may not require any hard thinking to realize that from the earliest times of the dawn of human life and civilization on this planet, in fact even from the period of the cave-man's existence and of the nomadic tribes, the truth had been recognized that a *woman* must be deemed an indispensable *complement of man* in wayfaring through life's journey.

In Vedic times women were considered partners in sacrificial acts. The partnership stood in a unique category. It meant that unmarried men could not perform certain of

the rituals and sacrifices. It was believed that the performance of such rites and sacrifices conferred both mundane and spiritual benefits to be shared by the couple not only here but also hereafter, in another world, after the dissolution of the body.

In the Upanishadic age, the ideal of womanhood was practically the same as earlier, though an advancement had been made that was not thought of in the Vedic times. Women were considered eligible for studying Brahmavidyā, the Science of the Infinite, and men philosophers had to face searching questions and intense cross-examination from women philosophers.

In the subsequent epic and Purānic age, in the later ages of the Smritis and the Nibandhas, and in the Hindu and Muslim periods of Indian history, partnership of man and woman was recognized as a vital relation of existence that must control secular and spiritual life.

## II

The man-woman relationship can be viewed as a brother-sister or father-daughter or teacher-taught or such other relation. But the most intimate relationship is that of man and wife, which is intended for fulfilment of the cosmic creative end.

The man-wife union was rightly considered a sacrament. The offspring had to perform obsequies and other rites which were sacred and spiritual. So one cannot have even the slightest tinge or trace of impurity in such a relation.

The master motive of marriage was the gift of male issue for the performance of obsequies and other rites. The question of inheritance, of course, comes next.

Should one have only female issue; or



have no issue, man is permitted remarriage, nay, is called upon to remarry in the hope of male issue.

### III

In view of the religious and spiritual importance and significance of progeny, it had been justly laid down that a wife should be absolutely loyal and faithful to her husband. The motive of this rule or law must be obvious. It is preposterous to talk or even think of conditional loyalty or faithfulness. It is the spiritual destiny of the individual determined by progeny that is at stake. That is why marriage is taken to be a sacrament. Every rite, in fact all the rites through which an average Hindu, especially a Brahmin, had to pass were sacramental. Such purity can never be maintained if any modern view were to prevail and if men and women were to be freely allowed to marry or divorce as they chose, taking it as an index of individual liberty of thought and action.

Hence do we see how and why Sitā, Draupadi, Sāvitrī, Nalāyani, and others have been glorified as Pati-vratās or Pati-devatās.

In such a spiritualized and monogamous ideal of relation between man and woman, the congenital instinct and the desire for motherhood have been most judiciously and thoughtfully pressed into service by ancient Hindu law-givers.

Without needing any argument, it is apparent that the ancient glory of womanhood and significance of the marriage ideal can never tolerate the promiscuity and liberty of man-woman companionships so widely prevalent in European and American societies.

### IV

This must doubtless be the normal ideal. But, occasionally, in the onward march of progressive evolution, here and there, extraordinary instances of individuals do come up which enhance the brilliance of Indian womanhood and its glory. They are 'extra-

ordinary' in the sense that they are out of the ordinary routine way of existence.

The story of Yājñavalkya and Maitreyi is too well known to be detailed here. Though we are not sure if they had any children, we know that they did not believe in treading the humdrum path of existence. Kātyāyani, the other wife of Yajnavalkya, appears in the same context so as to furnish the necessary foil or background of contrast without which the positive truth would not shine in all its brilliance and pristine purity. On the eve of the final settlement of his property, Yajnavalkya offered to his wives his large wealth. At the same time, he had the power to impart spiritual knowledge of Brahman which would lead one to immortality.

The story goes that Katyayani chose wealth. But Maitreyi had been patterned in a different mould. She asked her husband: 'If indeed this whole earth full of wealth be mine, shall I be immortal through that or not?' 'No,' answered Yajnavalkya, 'your life will be just like that of people who have plenty of things (*upakaraṇavatām jīvitam*); there is no hope of immortality through wealth (*amṛtatvasya tu na āśā asti vittena*)'.

Maitreyi mused. It did not certainly take long for her to arrive at the only correct decision she did. She rejected all the wealth. She implored Yajnavalkya to teach her the Science of the Infinite, the Knowledge of Brahman, by securing which all else in the world that is worth knowing is known. Maitreyi learnt the truths of Vedānta, practised spiritual disciplines, and in due course obtained the undying Bliss of Immortality (*amṛtatva*).

### V

Like Maitreyi of old, in our own times the distinguished Saradamani Devi also chose the spiritual path that leads to the Bliss of Immortality.

Quite early and young in age, she had been married to the celebrated Paramahansa. The ordinary humdrum life of a householder



was not meant for her. It is very natural, and withal nothing strange, if the illustrious life-partner of the Paramahansa had entertained, in early life, in the uninitiated stages of her psychological and spiritual development, desires of leading a family life. But, in due course, she must have realized the greatness of the Paramahansa and sublimated all her mundane thoughts and directed them along spiritual channels consistently with her association with the great Saint of Dakshineswar.

The Paramahansa saw the Universal Mother, Kāli, everywhere, and at one stage of his spiritual Sādhanā he actually worshipped his wife as the veritable manifestation of the Universal Mother. Women, less gifted and with hearts less stout, might have witnessed something strange and unusual in such worship. But Saradamani Devi quickly realized the spiritual significance of the worship and secured complete and harmonious physical and mental adjustment to the new environment created under the circumstances.

## VI

There are *three* strikingly outstanding characteristics of the personality of Saradamani Devi which throw a flood of light on the ancient classic Upanishadic conception of the ideal of womanhood.

The *first* is absolute, unquestioning, and unconditional loyalty and faithfulness to her husband, which is the foremost glory of womanhood.

It meant stern and deliberate renunciation of all self-interest and the subordination of egotistic instincts to the higher life of the husband and the concomitant spiritual and philosophical interests and purposes. Self-discipline, austerities, hard life, service, readiness to undergo suffering for the sake of others, and many other virtues had to be cultivated and consistently followed by Saradamani Devi, as she found herself linked with a powerful mystic personality.

A loyalty like the one contemplated by the ancient Indian ideal would never tolerate

or accommodate any claim to equality with the husband, or any right on the part of the wife to challenge or disobey the decisions of the husband. It is because such equality or right is claimed in some modern communities that married felicity is most often wrecked.

In the case of the ideal wife, no such equality is claimed, nor even sought to be enforced. Women in the Vedic, Upanishadic, epic, and Puranic ages have all unquestioningly admitted the superiority of their life-partners, with the result that maximum domestic felicity and happiness prevailed. Even in cases where suffering became their inevitable lot, women resigned themselves to the force of circumstances and lived through cheerfully.

The *second* characteristic is pliability of personality and adjustmental faculty or capacity. Saradamani Devi quickly perceived that she had not been married to any ordinary person. Her destiny having been linked with that of a great personage, she must immediately have realized the imperative need for adjustment to the comparatively new environmental surroundings amidst which her life had to be lived.

Such adjustment is by no means easy. It requires: on the level of intellect (*jñāna*)—clear and penetrating perception of the nature of the environment and character of the response or adjustment required; on the level of emotion (*icchā*)—balanced feelings, subordination of sensuous desires and instincts, and control of all passions; and on the level of volition (*kriyā*)—energy, initiative, and strength of body and mind to act at the proper time and translate resolves and decisions into concrete and practical action in fulfilment of designed and contemplated programmes. In the absence of these, Saradamani Devi would never have secured the remarkably happy and harmonious adjustment she was able to secure in leading her life with the dynamic and mystic personality of Sri Ramakrishna.

The *third* characteristic is undoubtedly of utmost and outstanding importance. It is



quite natural and withal understandable that Saradamani Devi, having entered into matrimony, was perfectly entitled to have expected all the joys and benefits ordinarily associated with married life in the world. If, in certain situations, such an expectation had not at all been fulfilled or at best fulfilled partially or indifferently, psychologists have their pet theories to offer. But in the case of Saradamani Devi, the Paramahansa's basically and pre-eminently mystic and spiritual personality had amply enabled her to realize, in an intuitive lightning flash, as it were, that she should never bargain for nor expect any of the ordinary and familiar hedonisms of routine married life of an average householder. On the contrary, her realization has been rich, full, and complete. She straightaway submitted herself to the higher spiritual discipline and guidance of Sri Ramakrishna and sublimated her thoughts, feelings, and actions, as well as her intellect, emotion, and volition, in the direction of her husband's soaring spiritual realizations. It is obvious that such a sublimation would require enormous mental strength and spiritual stamina. Saradamani Devi had plenty of both.

### VII

Here I may refer to a problem that is significant and yet has seldom been raised.

Maitreyi was the wife of the sage Yajnavalkya. Sita was Rama's consort. The Gopis were associated with Sri Krishna. Likewise Saradamani was associated with Sri Ramakrishna. Did the divine consorts get the maximum spiritual benefit from their husbands? Did the Gopis, for instance, meditate, practise Yoga, and realize the Infinite? Did Sri Ramakrishna teach all the secrets of mysticism and Yoga and other concomitant spiritual and esoteric disciplines to Saradamani Devi?

Perhaps some would say that Sita was the incarnation of Lakshmi, the inseparable consort of Vishnu, the Supreme Lord. But in the case of the others, the problem would be strikingly relevant.

In the opinion of ancient Indian Vedantic thinkers, seers, and teachers of Yoga, the sublime and profound means of obtaining salvation could be imparted *only* to the deserving, the eligible, and the elect (*adhikāri*). On account of the purest Karma or past Samskāras, blessed souls like Saradamani Devi come into association with divine husbands like the Paramahansa. But, then, even a Paramahansa cannot straightaway convert his wife into an adept in Yoga—unless she were herself fit for it as a result of her own auspicious Karma. A queen, with all the devotion to her consort, cannot share the throne with him. A person who holds a high office, devoted though he is to his wife, cannot make her share his official seat.

### VIII

Every rule or law has its exceptions. Though marriage and married life must remain the unexceptionable ideal of womanhood throughout the civilized world, exceptions are sure to be and can be there.

Sociologically and biologically marriage must be the ideal for perpetuation of the species. But strong-minded and strong-willed men and women can very well remain unmarried and lead pure lives. Purity is very important and the ideal for which one remains unmarried is more valuable than the mere fact of remaining without marriage. On the other hand, marriage in proper time, motherhood, and family headship should be within the normal ambitions of all women.

### IX

The situation in which a saint or seer finds himself married in the usual way has its own counterpart in which the focus shifts to the woman. The woman mystic Mirābai found herself, early in life, drawn into the vortex of the whirlpool of matrimony. Mira's royal husband revelled in sensualism. But Mira rose spiritually higher and higher. Before long the parting of ways did come. In the case of married women saints and mystics, there have been frequent crises due



to misunderstandings with their worldly-minded husbands. The opposite is also true. But there is a difference. When confronted with such maladjusted situations, a woman is often more likely to secure easy and necessary adjustment and sublimation and find happiness in life. In a similar situation, a man is less likely to manage the needed adjustment and sublimation.

There are today, even in India, women in all walks of public life—doctors, teachers, nurses, politicians, and ambassadors, and there was a governor of a State too. From the story of Maitreyi we see that women are entitled to rise to exalted spiritual destinies. The story of Devahūti, mother of Kapila, is another convincing instance. Devahuti learnt the secrets of Yoga from her divine son and after going through those intricate practices obtained exalted spiritual rewards.

Katyayani, in spite of her perfectly understandable preference for wealth, must have been a lovable character for her loyalty and faithfulness to Yajnavalkya.

Gārgi was a typical debator and a powerful philosophical cross-examiner. She was easily holding her own in metaphysical discussions and debates conducted in royal courts and she crossed swords with a Brahma-jñāni like Yajnavalkya.

When all is said and done, there is no doubt that the Upanishadic ideal of womanhood stands eternally valid and timeless in its compelling character.

Saradamanani Devi stands out as a shining example of wifely duty and devotion, steadfast loyalty, strength of will and character, and spiritually sublimated personality.

## X

I venture to assert that if in certain cases the ancient Hindu Law and usages and even modern Hindu Law in theory and practice should seem to be discriminatory against women, the reason must be sought for and found in the fact that Nature has imposed on womankind a special role in respect of motherhood and child welfare. A woman is bound to be respected and treated with great consideration as wife, or as mother, or as sister (in Malabar Law, for example). She is perhaps in no urgent need of any special protection through the instrumentality of legislation. This must have been also the ancient Indian view. Here and there a daughter or a widow might be treated harshly and unjustly by coparceners or unscrupulous claimants. These cases certainly deserve special remedies. But such disabilities under which women may be suffering today are better removed by society itself, voluntarily, when its members are sufficiently educated and when they are enabled to see their errors as a result of cultured and educated vision. Legislation cannot achieve much.

In the life and personality of Saradamanani Devi, in her special position as the wife of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, all the noble, strikingly attractive, and spiritually and morally exalted characteristics associated with the ancient Indian 'Ideal of Womanhood' and concept of the 'Glory of Womanhood' are found embodied and exemplified. To the women of India she stands as the beacon-light of spiritual perfection.

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'The moon in the sky is covered by a cloud. The cloud has to be removed by the wind by degrees; then only can you see the moon. Does it pass all of a sudden? The same with spiritual perfection also. The effects of past work are exhausted slowly. When one realizes God, He grants knowledge and illumination from within—one knows it oneself.'

—Sayings of the Holy Mother



# WOMANHOOD OF INDIA

BY C. C. BISWAS

The status and position of woman in any country may be regarded as a fair test of the culture of the people. Hence the study of woman is essential in forming an opinion about the real civilization of a country. Unfortunately, such a study, so far at least as India is concerned, is beset with difficulties, for, we have to remember that Indian history extends over three to four thousand years, and it is a vast country. No single picture could possibly apply to all ages or all parts of the country. This is the reason why almost diametrically opposite views have been entertained regarding women of India. Some have held that the position accorded to women by the Indians was the highest and the best ever known in any age or country. On the other hand, people are not wanting who regard Indian women as occupying a very degraded position as compared with other countries. There is perhaps a great deal of truth in this seeming contradiction. For, each view is true more or less of different ages in India. It is not possible in this short essay to trace the different stages, nor to explain how they came about. All that can be done is to draw a general picture showing the two extremes.

The earliest picture of Indian society is offered in the hymns of the *R̥g-Veda*. Here, we find the general position of woman, though not a detailed account of the various phases of it. On the whole, it may be said that throughout the Vedic age women held a very high position both at home and in society. As a wife, she was the mistress of the household and a real partner of her husband. She performed along with her husband all the religious duties and, be it remembered, the religious duties were counted as the most important and vital in those days. She was the mistress of the household and also took part in the outdoor life, for there was no

*pardah* system. She was respected by all the members of the family, and mixed freely in society.

She was prepared for this life by receiving an education which was not distinguished in any way from that intended for men. As a matter of fact, both men and women enjoyed the same opportunities for intellectual and spiritual emancipation, and they had the same rights to knowledge, education, and pursuit of spiritual ideals. It is totally a wrong idea to think that the scriptures were then forbidden to women. Indeed it was enjoined that a girl should receive Upanayana before she studied the scriptures. Some of the greatest seers of that age were women, who composed Vedic hymns. It was during this Golden Age that Gārgi, Maitreyi, Vishvavārā, Ghoshā, and others flourished. They not only attained knowledge and taught philosophy but laid down social laws. The discourses of Gargi and Maitreyi with Rishi Yājñavalkya are famous, and they raised no astonishment among the fortunate listeners. This shows that learned women were neither oddities nor exceptions in those days. In such a society, girls grew up as free as the boys, and they had the freedom to choose their husbands. It will thus be seen, in spite of the meagre data, that a woman in India in the Vedic age not only did not occupy an inferior position in society but enjoyed the same status as her counterpart. She had the same rights and privileges and the same opportunities for self-fulfilment as man, so much so that she could rise to and occupy the position of a Teacher of society on the highest flights of philosophy and social conduct.

The above picture would justify the following statement of a great French writer:

'India of the Vedas entertained a respect for women, amounting to worship; a fact which we



seem little to suspect in Europe when we accuse the extreme East of having denied the dignity of woman, and of having only made of her an instrument of pleasure and of passive obedience.

Unfortunately, the accusation referred to in the last part of the above sentence soon came to be only too true, for gradually a change came over society, and the nature and degree of this change can be better understood if we look at the picture of woman in Indian society about 1,500 years later, say, in the age of the Smritis or Samhitās. The first important change that we notice was the lowering of the marriageable age of girls. More importance was attached to the purity of the body, and therefore, girls were married before the age of puberty. This involved many changes. The free choice of husbands was thus made first unpracticable, and then unthinkable. Emphasis on physical chastity increased. Child marriage limited the scope of education, and the limitation gradually became an injunction. Study and even recitation of the Vedas or Mantras were forbidden. With the scope of education gone, the woman's sphere of life was restricted. The household became her whole world. The menfolk, being the arm of society, became the superior part and the woman was relegated to the inferior position. This reflected itself in all spheres of duties and activities of society. But denial of freedom brings in its wake sure baneful effects. As Swami Vivekananda has said, 'If you do not allow a man to grow into a lion, he will degenerate into a fox'. It is easy to imagine that in such an abnormal society as it then existed, lapses would be common and each lapse on the part of a woman goaded the law-givers, who had very little of their ancestors' wisdom and vision, to forge more ruthless shackles. Thus came about early and obligatory marriage, denial of freedom and education and of divorce and re-marriage, culminating in the widow's *sati* rite.

If we follow the law-givers from Manu in the early stages of this period to Raghunandan, we find that this process of denial to woman

has been gradual albeit cruel. In the days of Manu, the woman had already come to be known as a distinctly inferior class. She was not considered to have the capacity to stand on her own legs. It was not safe to let her do so. So a chain of dependence was laid down from the cradle to the grave. 'A woman should be protected by her father in childhood, by her husband in youth, and by her son in old age'. She was not reliable at any time of her life. She was accused of habitual untruthfulness and unchastity. It is strange that a society which was taught by its scriptures to look upon all women as so many manifestations of the Divine Mother should have so forgotten itself as to lay such grave and sweeping charges against women. In spite of this, however, there were silver linings in the sky, though it was overcast with heavy clouds. We find notable passages in the *Manu Samhitā* which eulogize women, and there were laws which show that the deprivation of the rights of woman had not yet been complete. 'Father, husband, brother, and brother-in-law should respect the woman in the family'. 'Gods are pleased where women are respected'. 'Religious rites become futile where any disrespect is shown to women'. 'The family where a woman lives in distress perishes soon'. 'He commits no sin who commits a murder to protect a woman'. (If we took this last injunction to heart, our society could have been much cleaner today). There are innumerable passages in deification of the mother.

Though child marriages had been established, adult marriages were not only not uncommon but even sometimes encouraged. Svayamvara had not become unknown. The rights of woman in some respects were still recognized. All this shows that a conflict of ideas was in progress.

In spite, however, of the growing and already heavy restrictions, the irrespressible human spirit raised its head, and we find that even in these dark days there were women who found opportunities for education and self-expression and rose to high status in



society and commanded universal respect. The name that comes uppermost in one's mind is that of Ubhaya-Bhārati. Even Āchārya Shankara, the greatest philosopher of all times, had to accept her mediation and verdict in one of the most momentous discourses of his career.

The downward trend in the status of woman continued after the Mohammedan invasion. Their liberties were restricted more and more and seclusion was complete. It will be noted that the *pardah* system is more prevalent in North India where Mohammedan occupation had been stabilized and consolidated than in the South where Islam sovereignty was always precarious. The proselytizing methods of Islam never pursued the straight paths of conviction and option. Hindu society, therefore, shrunk more and more into its narrowing shell. Thus child marriage, which had already been in vogue, was now advocated as a means of acquiring merit. A father who kept his daughter unmarried till she reached puberty was threatened with dire consequences in this and after life. The attitude towards widows was rather harsh. *Sahamarana* was advocated as a means of acquiring merit and everlasting company of the husband in heaven. There was no forgiveness for lapses of even an abducted woman who could be murdered without committing a sin. One shudders to think of the depth of degradation to which society had sunk at this time, particularly when one remembers that it is the Shāstras of this country which have enjoined that the female species of even animals and birds should not be killed, as they are and should be looked upon as the Mother Herself.

The tide turned in the nineteenth century which marked all-round renaissance in India. The comparative peace and tranquillity of this period brought natural forces into play, and the age-long pent-up energy began to find vent in every possible direction. The human spirit never loses its elasticity and it is no wonder that with the gradual removal of social pressure the process of expansion began.

In spite of the stifling effects of political dependence, and perhaps in some respects, because of it, the spirit of freedom came into action. The impact with Western civilization, with all its glamour, gave an initial shock, and whether the light was too dazzling for clear vision or too dim to lead, the results were the same—it made darkness visible. The laws which had governed society in its minutest detail and which had been hugged as dear and sacrosanct began to be viewed with suspicion, and even distaste. But though the spirit had risen from its slumber and revolted, the mind was still ignorant of the heritage of India and the limbs paralysed from age-long disuse, and the ideal had still to be discovered. There was groping in the dark all around. The first visible leadership to the movement came from the great Raja Rammohan Roy, and it has gathered momentum ever since in spite of the heavy odds it has had to face.

From time immemorial, the woman in India has been respected as the manifestation of Divine Motherhood, and it is India alone which has worshipped God as Mother. 'Mother is worthy of respect, a thousand times more than the father'. 'A woman never becomes impure'. 'Woman is the grace and good luck of the family'. 'She is the foundation of home'. This has been the basis of Hindu society all along in its chequered career. Women have always been the custodians of culture, and it is fortunate that the Indian woman was not carried away by the glamour of Western civilization. The shackles which fettered her feet and smothered her spirit are quickly falling off. The question now before the Indian woman is not how she will regain her freedom, but how she will use it. She has to re-discover the ideal and have faith in the spirit which expressed itself without break through the long galaxy of great women who shone even in the dark Middle Ages. Her heart must yearn and strive for this. She has to understand her problems with Indian eyes and de-sophisticate herself from foreign ideas of freedom, which, without a spiritual ideal, must lead to licence and



disaster. In this connection, we can do no better than quote Sister Nivedita who was an embodiment of dedication, at the beginning of this century, in the cause of the woman of India: 'When the women see themselves in their true place, as related to the soil on which they live, as related to the past out of which they have sprung; when they become aware of the needs of their own people, on the actual colossal scale of those needs; when the mother-heart has once awakened in them to beat for land and people, instead of family, village, and homestead alone; and when the mind is set to explore facts in the service of that heart—then and then alone shall the future of Indian womanhood dawn upon its race in its actual greatness; then shall a worthy education be realized and then shall the true national ideal stand revealed'.

The problems of India are many and varied. Our Government has embarked upon

far-reaching plans for an all-round development of the country in all earnestness. Each one of us is expected to play his or her full part in this great endeavour. The Indian woman has thus wide opportunities before her. She is anxious to take her rightful place in society and the doors have been flung open. There is now no walk of life which is debarred from her and she is destined to play a vital part in the re-building of our society and bring back the lustre which once belonged to India and which made her the light of the world. If she uses her freedom to dedicate herself to this great task and forgets her little self, as she has always done in her glory of motherhood, then only she will fulfil herself. And if she realizes the significance of the Centenary of the Holy Mother, which is being celebrated, she will feel no want of guide to lead her to her cherished goal.

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## INDIAN WOMEN THROUGH THE AGES

BY DR. KALIDAS NAG

While offering our profound homage to Sri Sarada Devi on her Birth Centenary, we should remember that the sons and daughters of India have a great responsibility and duty towards the millions of Indian women in the villages, from among whom Sarada Devi herself came in order to shed the lustre of motherly love and spiritual blessings on all. In recent days we find Indian women expressing themselves in and through the diverse media of art and literature; but only a century ago our women expressed themselves more through selfless services than through literary or graphic arts. There is no doubt that since the glorious days of Sanskrit learning some women authors and their works have been duly remembered. But the principal medium of their self-expression was silent service to

their family and through the family to the nation as a whole. Sarada Devi's life proves beyond doubt that even when our women are not functioning as constitutional or economic beings, they lay the veritable foundations of our social and spiritual life which lie deep down in our ancestral memory.

In the dim light of the Vedic dawn we catch glimpses of Indian women who are perfectly free and worthy partners of their brothers, husbands, and other relatives. Equality in education and social opportunities was a noble characteristic of Vedic womanhood. Some Vedic kings found their queens as comrades-in-arms in the battle-field, driving the chariot in the thick of the fight and helping as nurses in difficult surgical operations. The intellectual eminence of woman



was proved by her capacity for debates and discussions in the royal courts and in Samitis and Sabhās (Vedic Councils). A homage to her spiritual achievements was paid by the compilers of the Vedas who carefully conserved many Vedic hymns composed by women sages, known as Brahma-vādinis, so well known in the later Vedic literature of the Āranyakas and the Upanishads.

That glorious tradition was continued to the age of the Great Epics of India. Sita and her sister heroines of the *Rāmāyana*, and Gāndhāri and Draupadi of the *Mahābhārata*, command our respect and homage by their phenomenal fidelity, and their devotion to Truth higher than personal interests and emotions. Such women characters have enriched the literature not only of India but of the entire world. Indian drama and Kāvya literature has offered to the world the deathless figures of Sāvitrī, Damayanti, and Shakuntala. If some of their observations and sayings could be compiled into an anthology, with a convenient reference to the context, such a book would be an inspiration as well as a revelation. What they said is no doubt very interesting, but why and how they said so would be no less significant. Our national gallery of Epic women leads us to the gallery of the Jaina-Buddhistic age (500 B.C. to 500 A.D.). Only one book, the *Therī-gāthā* or 'Songs of the Sisters', has been edited and published by Buddhist scholars; but there are many more references to the great contribution of women in the development of Jainism and Buddhism. The Jain Sādhvis and the Buddhist Theris are still continuing their spiritual career in different parts of India, Burma, Ceylon, China, Japan, and other parts of Asia.

Even in the dark days of Islamic invasion and foreign domination we find Indian women struggling heroically for centuries to protect their honour and spiritual heritage. A little research will convince us that there was a veritable hierarchy of heroic women (Virānganas) from Padmini of Chitor to Rani *Lakshmi Bai* of Jhansi.

It is difficult, however, to give a consecutive and comprehensive picture of Indian womanhood in the last few centuries of European domination. But one cannot but feel surprised to find that Indian women,—uneducated, neglected, and ill-equipped as they were reputed to be,—wonderfully responded to the needs of the society in all emergencies. When all material means failed her, the Indian woman tried all the same to save the situation by her total self-sacrifice. Rishi Bankim Chandra has given some brilliant portrayals of such noble women in his stories, specially in his *Anandamath*, from which India has received a song of national importance and significance—*Vande Mātaram*. Wherever we go we find Indian women symbolizing their earthly career into the apotheosis of motherhood. In most of the living languages and literatures of India we listen to the deep undertone of sublimating love.

In this historic context we should try to understand the immaculate life of Sarada Devi. Though childless, she has left behind her thousands of men and women who still address her as the Holy Mother, as prophesied by Sri Ramakrishna. With such great spiritual women there cannot be any earthly frustration; there is only divine fulfilment. And here lies the profound lesson of this silent daughter of Mother India whom we salute on her first Birth Centenary.

'The moon in the sky is covered by a cloud', so runs one of the sayings of the Holy Mother, 'The cloud has to be removed by the wind by degrees; then only can you see the moon. Does it pass all of a sudden? The same with spiritual perfection also. The effects of past work are exhausted slowly. When one realizes God, He grants knowledge and illumination from within—one knows it oneself'.

A few days before her passing away, the Holy Mother made a significant utterance while consoling a visiting lady devotee who had sobbed out, 'Mother, what will happen to us hereafter?' 'Why do you fear? You



have seen the Master', she said. Then after a pause, she solemnly added, 'But I tell you one thing—if you want peace of mind, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own

faults. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger, my child; this entire world is your own!' Perhaps this embodies her last message to the world also.

## POSITION OF WOMEN IN HINDU RITUALS

BY CHINTAHARAN CHAKRAVARTI

Women, especially married women with husbands living, known as *sadhavā*, occupy an important, honourable, and dignified position in the religious rites of the Hindus. The wife's presence in a Vedic sacrifice performed by her husband was essential so much so that Rama is stated to have installed a golden image of his wife who was in exile at the time of his horse-sacrifice. The husband is required to perform all religious rites in the company of his wife<sup>1</sup> who is therefore called *sahadharminī*. Even in her death a *sadhavā* is given special honour. A cow besmeared with sandal-paste (*candana-dhenu*), instead of or in addition to the usual bull (*vṛṣotsarga*) is consecrated for her well-being in the next world. Death of a married woman before that of her husband is considered by the womenfolk as a great fortune. And the dead body of such a woman is decorated like that of a bride before it is consigned to fire. Great honour is shown to a married couple when on the occasion of a *śrāddha* a complete bedding set is given away with proper ceremony to the couple for the spiritual benefit of the dead.

In folk-rites also, a highly respectable position is assigned to a *sadhavā* woman. There are a number of *Vratas* (e.g. *eyo-saṅkrānti*, *nitya-sindūra*, *aṅṣaya-sindūra*) observed by women, particularly of Bengal, which consist in the making of a *sadhavā* woman's toilet with vermilion, lac-dye, etc.

and giving her food or sweets. Feeding of *sadhavā* women is considered to be as meritorious as the feeding of Brahmins, especially on the occasion of the festive worship of female deities. These fortunate women have a special part to play in the various sacraments like *anna-prāśana* (first ceremonial feeding of a new-born child with rice), sacred-thread ceremony, and marriage. It is they who have the privilege of performing various folk-rites on these occasions as also of preparing different articles necessary for the performance of Shāstric rites. It is they who prepare the rice from paddy, make the festive cakes and sweets, cook the ceremonial food, and do many other things.

In the Purānas and Tantras women are regarded as forms of the Mother Goddess.<sup>2</sup> Woman represents the supreme Godhead not only as the wife of the preceptor or the preceptress herself<sup>3</sup> but also as a mere woman.

<sup>2</sup> *Vidyāḥ samastāḥ tava devi bhedaḥ, striyaḥ samastāḥ sakalā jagatsu (Devī-māhātmya, XI, 6).*

*Striyo devāḥ striyaḥ prāṇāḥ striyaścaiva  
vibhūṣaṇāḥ,  
Strī-dveṣo naiva kartavyo, viśeṣāt pūjanam  
mahat,  
Strī-mayam ca jagat sarvaṁ, tathā'tmānam  
ca bhāvayot.*

(*Tantrasāra* of Krishnananda, under *Kūlāchāra* section).

<sup>3</sup> According to the Tantras a woman may act as a preceptress and initiation received from her is considered to be highly efficacious. And worship of the preceptor and his wife as the deity itself is prescribed.

<sup>1</sup> *Sa-striko dharmam ācaret.*



Provision is made for the regular worship of an ordinary woman as the Mother Goddess irrespective of any caste distinction. In the Tantric rite called the *dūtīyāga* such worship is offered even in the midst of apparently hidden ritualistic orgies. The worship of the maiden is, however, quite sober. Maidens of all castes may be worshipped without making any distinction of caste. A maiden, it is stated, is the embodiment of all deities. The worship of the maiden drives away all evil and secures good for the worshipper. All gods are pleased with this worship. One who feeds a maiden gains the merit of feeding the three worlds. It is in this way that different Tantras speak highly of the worship of the maiden,<sup>4</sup> who like the more famous

deities has special Stotras, Kavachas, and Sahasranāmas eulogizing her and identifying her with other deities.

*Devī-buddhyā mahā-bhaktastasmāt-tām  
pari-pūjayet.*

*Sarva-vidyā svarūpā hi, kumārī nātra  
samśayah.*

*Kumārī bhōjitā yena, trailokyam tena  
bhōjitam.*

... ..

*Pūjayā labhate pūjām, pūjayā labhate śriyam,  
Pūjayā dhanam-āpnoti, pūjayā labhate mahim.*

... ..

*Pūjayā labhate lakṣmīm, sarasvatīm ca  
mahaujasam,*

*Mahāvidyāḥ prasīdanti, sarve devā na  
samśayah.*

... ..

*Mahā-bhayāni durbhikṣādyutpātāni kuleśvari,  
Duḥsvapnam-apamṛtyunca, ye cānye ca*

*sumudbhavāḥ,*

*Kumārī-pūjanādeva, na te ca prabhavanti hi.  
(Prāṇatoṣiṇī, under Kumārī Pūjā).*

<sup>4</sup> *Tasmāttām pūjayedbālām, sarva-jāti-  
samudbhavām,  
Jāti-bhedo na kartavyaḥ, kumārī-pūjane śrve.*

## WOMANHOOD AS A SPIRITUALIZING AND UNIFYING FORCE IN INDIAN TRADITION

BY DR. C. KUNHAN RAJA

Being called upon to contribute to the Special Number of the *Prabuddha Bharata* in commemoration of the Birth Centenary of Sri Sarada Devi, my thoughts began to wander far back into the regions of ancient Indian history, when India was decidedly the greatest country in the world, guiding humanity in its progress, shedding the light of wisdom on the entire surface of the earth. India may at present be in a state of slumber; but India is not a past number in the history of the world, and India will again play her part in the progress of man. And in this noble function, what is the part which women have played in ancient times and what is it that they can play in the present time and in future? We find in India two conflicting views, ranging

one against the other, with a large number of intermediate currents relating to the position of women in society. One view is that men and women are equal and the distinction has no other significance than purely biological. The other view is that there is a radical distinction between men and women in content and capacity and function, that a woman's function is to be a faithful wife and a loving mother within the home. There is consequently a cry for complete demolition of all old social institutions from one side and for the complete restoration and preservation of all old customs from the other side. We must know the traditions correctly and judge what part women have played in the evolution of such a long-standing tradition, and



this will enable us to know what path we have to follow in future also.

The first point that strikes me when I think of this subject is the word *dampatī* in Sanskrit. *Dam* is the Sanskrit form of the word which appears in Latin as *domos* and from which words like 'democracy' and 'domestic' have migrated into English, words that are too familiar to need any annotation. *Pati* means 'lord', and the whole word *dampatī* has the meaning of 'lord of the home'. This word is used in classical Sanskrit only in the dual number and signifies 'husband and wife'. The word occurs in the Veda in the singular number to mean 'lord of the home' designating some gods. In later Sanskrit, the word is taken as a compound of *jāyā* (wife) and *pati* (husband); but this interpretation of *jāyā* taking the form *dam* in a compound is not etymological. The dual number denotes that the domination and authority of the home is vested in the husband and wife conjointly. It clearly shows what an honoured and responsible position women had in the home in ancient India.

This high position assigned to women in ancient India is not confined to the secular side of national life; it is equally pronounced in the religious side also. It is the husband and wife together that can perform religious rites. An unmarried man has no place in the religious life of ancient India. The religious life is essentially in the form of the keeping of the sacred fire in the home and worshipping it daily, and in offering periodical special worships like the new and full moon worship and Soma-yāga. This domestic fire can be kindled only after the man has a son. It is not enough if he is married; he must be the father of a son too. And this must be when he is not grown grey. It is such a worship that leads a man to heaven. The wife takes a part in the religious rites along with the husband. She is called the *patnī* (the feminine form of *pati*, lord). The wife is also *gṛhiṇī* (feminine form of *gṛhin*, the owner of the home). All these words show that men and

women had equal status in social and religious life.

In the matter of education too, the position of women was not at all inferior to that of men. There were many women who were poetesses and whose poetry was accepted along with the poetry of men into the body of Vedic literature. An author of a Vedic text is styled a Rishi. Every poet is not a Rishi. It is only those few gifted poets who could see beyond the physical aspect of things, who could see the Divine in things in the true nature, that are called Rishis, and it is only their poetry that is included in the text of the Veda. Then, there were women who were also called Brahmavādinis, those who could discourse on the nature of Brahman. There are two aspects in Vedic intellectualism; one is that of intuitive realization of the divine truth and the other is that of realization through ratiocination. The former are called Rishis and the latter Brahmavadins. There were women in both categories of intellectualism in the Vedic period.

When we consider the question of gods in the Veda, we find that here also the feminine aspect is given a very important place. Macdonell says, in his *Vedic Mythology* (p. 124), 'Goddesses occupy a very subordinate position in the Vedic belief and worship. They play hardly any part as rulers of the world'. The standard applied in making this estimate is not quite the right one that should be adopted. The number of hymns is not a criterion to determine the importance of a Deity; nor is the relation of the Deity to the Soma offering a very reliable standard. It is true that the chief goddesses like Ushas (Dawn) and Aditi do not receive Soma offerings. There are two kinds of divinities in the *Ṛg-Veda* accepted by Yāska, viz. the *havirbhah* and the *sūhtabhah*. The former are propitiated by Soma offering and the latter by prayer. The latter are more in the *Ṛg-Veda* (Yaska's *Nirukta*, 6. 13). The collection that has come to us relate mainly to Soma-yāga, and as such, the number of Sūktas (hymns) to those Deities that are



propitiated by prayer may be lesser. But the number of such Deities is larger. There is Vishnu, who too is not related to the Soma worship; but we cannot say that he is of lesser importance. The number of hymns addressed to Vishnu too is very small. It is true that Macdonell applied the same criterion and put Vishnu in the fifth rank (*Vedic Mythology*, p. 37). Āsvins play a very important role in the Soma-yāga; yet they are not really Soma-drinkers. They are more related to prayer and to wisdom than to Soma and to ritual.

Aditi is a goddess who should not be ignored when we consider the question of the place of the feminine aspect in the religion of India. She is the mother of the gods, and the gods are called Ādityas, the sons of Aditi. Even the great god Varuna is her son. There is no hymn in which Aditi is separately addressed to. She is mostly addressed to along with the gods that are her sons. Still she is one of the most impressive Deities in the Veda, just like Varuna. Aditi gives protection to the worshippers against distress, along with the other gods like Varuna; she forgives sins. There are many gods that are propitiated for protection from sin; but it is essentially the role of Varuna and Aditi.

While Aditi is the majestic mother of the gods, Ushas is a daughter, full of charms and fascination, dressed in fine attire and appearing like a dancer in exhibiting her beauty and displaying her attractive form. Sarasvati is both a goddess and also a river. She is the personification of wisdom and of arts. There are various spiritual attributes that take the form of goddesses like Sunritā, Dhishanā, Shraddhā, Aramati, Purandhi, Asumati, Nirriti, Anumati, and Vāk. There are various other goddesses also in the Veda, like Prithivi, Rātri, Suryā, Ilā, Hotrā, Varutri, Sinivāli, Gangu and Rākā, Prishni (mother of the Maruts), Aranyāni, Varunāni and Agnāyi (wives of Varuna and Agni), and various Rivers like Vipāsh and Shutudri, and Gangā and Yamunā.

There are two things in a religion; the material aspect of worship for some fruit and the spiritual aspect of worship for elevation. It will be found that in the *Rg-Veda* the spiritual aspects take the form of the goddesses. Far from being unimportant and subordinate aspects of religion, the feminine aspect is assigned a very important place in the Vedic religion. Indra and Agni may cover more than half of the Vedic collection; but there are other gods, about whom the number of hymns in the Vedic collection is small, like Varuna and Vishnu, but who occupy a far higher position in the Vedic pantheon. And among them are included the various goddesses.

It may be that in the actual religious life women were assigned a subordinate position in latter-day Hinduism. Thus women were not employed as Archakas (priests) in temples, while they were partners in the Soma-yāga in an earlier age. We must understand that temple worship in India grew up along another line of religious development, different from the Vedic path, and in this line there have been some foreign influences. At a later stage, temple worship and the Yaga aspect of religion were brought together into a unitary religion, in which the foreign element continued so far as the participation of women in temple worship is concerned. Even in the matter of temple worship there are two sides. One is the worship in public temples and the other is the worship in family shrines within the home. In the latter, women continued their share along with the men and they conducted the worship in many a case.

In the conception of the Divine, the feminine aspect never suffered in this new form of worship, namely, temple worship, side by side with the Soma-yāga. While in the Veda goddesses do not come into the picture of Soma-yāga so very prominently, in temple worship the goddess assumed a position equal to, and in some cases superior to, the place of the gods. Temple worship is related to the worship of Shiva and Vishnu.



In both, the feminine element was assigned a very high position, and Devi became an independent object of worship. The Shākta school of religion developed in this new phase of Hinduism in which the Goddess is the most important object of worship. The doctrine of Three Gods (Trimurti) developed at this stage and the three gods are Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Each of them has his consort too, in Sarasvati, Lakshmi, and Pārvati. They all form important members of the Indian pantheon. The Vedic ideal of the goddesses being equal to the gods in the affairs of the world continued even in this later aspect of Indian religion. The image of Vishnu is always associated with the image of Lakshmi also in all the temples.

When we come to the worship of Shiva, we find a greater importance given to the goddess. The conception of Ardhanārishvara (the Lord with half of His body as woman) is something unique in Indian religion. Shiva and Parvati form a single divinity with the right side as male and the left side as female. The Goddess is worshipped in various other forms as Sārādā, Durgā, and Kālī. The idea of the 'Mother' is as prominent as the idea of the 'Father', attached to the Divine, in Hindu belief. The Hindu belief is quite different from the belief of women being a part of men, having been created from the rib of men. In Hindu belief, man and woman are equals and share in the responsibilities of the world. This is indicated by the conception of the male and female aspects of the Divine.

The belief that man and woman should perform all religious rites together continued in India. To give a casual example: Kālidāsa says in his *Raghuvamśa* that when Dilipa had to go to his teacher Vasishtha to consult him on the cause for his not having had a son though he was getting old, the king worshipped Vidhāta (the Creator) along with his queen. When they went to the hermitage of the family teacher, he could find out the cause and he advised them to propitiate, together, the daughter of the celestial

cow; 'Propitiate her, along with your consort' (*ārādhaya sapatnīkaḥ*) is what he says.

Even when, at a later stage, Hinduism showed signs of schism in the form of separate sects like the Vaishnavites and Shaivites, there was no schism in the case of the worship of the female aspect. Shri and Durga, Sarada and Sarasvati formed a sisterhood without any mutual rivalry or quarrel. If there had been no importance attached to the female aspect of the Divinity in Hindu religion, Hinduism would have been split up into a large number of rival sects without any contact with one another. Now it may be that schisms arose and there is rivalry among the sects. But they all remain parts of a single religion called Hinduism, and this unity is based on the fundamental unity in the idea of the Goddess in the religion. This idea kept the religion compact as a unit without allowing it to burst into pieces.

The doctrine of woman being the cause and the seat of sin has no place at all in any aspect of Hinduism. On the other hand the belief has ever been that there is no religious life for a man without a woman. Marriage is a necessity for full religious life. A man is not eligible for the performance of the 'Fire Worship' without having been married and without having had a son. The son must perform the funeral ceremonies if the parents are to go to heaven, and such annual ceremonies after the death of the parents must be continued by the future generations if they are to keep up their position in heaven. Even when Sannyasa became very common in Hindu practice, there were many monastic orders where admission of new entrants was restricted to those who had completed the Grihastha Ashrama or household life. The man may perform religious rites with a spiritual value; but the real force behind in such performance is the woman. Thus it is the woman that spiritualized the life of the Hindu people. It is the female aspect that kept up also the unity of the religion when, through ages, signs of schisms were found and separate sects were established.



Women have always played a very important role in the national life of India. It is not as an accident or exception that they played their prominent role in the life of the nation. It is in their own rights. This part which the women played in the life of the nation is not also confined to any particular field of a restricted nature. It is in all aspects of the national life. Apart from the women who were Seers (Rishis) and Speculators on the Highest Truth (Brahmavādinis), there were women warriors too in the Veda. There is frequent mention in the Veda of a woman warrior by name Vishpalā, who was the wife(?) of King Khela. She fought in battle and broke her leg, and the Asvins gave her an iron leg. This story is often mentioned in the Veda. Then there is Mudgalāni, who was the wife of Mudgala, and she drove the chariot of her husband in battle. In later history also, we find Bhāmā fighting, and we find Subhadrā driving the chariot for Arjuna. The goddesses were fighters against the demons and this example was followed by human beings also.

The character of Draupadi in the *Mahābhārata* is without parallel in any literature of the world. She dominates the entire situation. When in the assembly of learned people, she was ordered to be brought down

as a slave, having been pawned by Yudhishthira, she asked a question which no one, not even Bhishma and other wise men, could answer. We have the story of Sāvitrī who could outwit even the god of Death in discussion and regain life for her husband, Satyavān, Ahalyābāi, Tārābāi, and the Rani of Jhansi—in what is to be termed recent history, and some others of even more recent times are all representatives of a great tradition of unbroken continuity in India, going back to the Vedas. If India could extend franchise to women more than thirty years ago, after the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms, without any opposition, and if there are many women in India today holding positions in the forefront of national life and carrying on their activities even in international fields with great distinction, it is not a gift from modern civilization imported from the West; it is the survival of our great tradition of women being a spiritualizing and unifying force in the history of the country from the earliest times. Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, comes within the series of Avataras of that great 'World Mother' Power which has always been awake in the country. She is the manifestation in physical form of our great national Ideal of the spiritualizing and unifying force in womanhood.

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'Calling upon the Lord once with the mind concentrated is equivalent to a hundred thousand mechanical repetitions of His name. If, instead of that, one goes on repeating His name for the whole day, but with the mind elsewhere, of what good is it? There must be concentration, then alone one attains the grace of God.'

'Many take the name of God after receiving blows in life. But he who can offer his mind like a flower at the feet of the Lord right up from childhood is indeed blessed.'

'When a man sees defects in others his own mind first gets polluted. What does he gain by finding faults in others? He only hurts himself by that.'

'If you do not pray to God, what is that to Him? It is only *your* misfortune.'

'Many are known to do great works under the stress of some strong emotion. But a man's true nature is known from the manner in which he does his insignificant daily task.'

—Sayings of the Holy Mother



# THE SPIRITUAL IDEAL OF WOMANHOOD

BY C. T. K. CHARI

The position assigned to women is one of the surest tests of civilization. It is the barometer by which the rise and the fall of cultures may be judged. The 4,000-year old Babylonian code of Hammurabi reveals an enlightened attitude to women. Women appear to have enjoyed practically all the rights of men and engaged freely in commerce and the learned professions. Women in Ancient Egypt were, so far as we can determine, no less privileged. They were the equals and the companions of their fathers, brothers, and husbands. They were never secluded in harems. They had equal rights with men before the law, served in the priesthood and even mounted the throne. From the archaic inscriptions discovered on the site of Gortyn in Greece, it would seem that some advanced principles relating to marriage, property, and family were recognized quite early. Under 'Gortyn laws', the rights of married women were protected against unscrupulous husbands, and daughters could inherit property like sons. It has been said that the legal position of 'Gortyn' women was 'enviable' save when judged by ultramodern standards.

What is the status assigned to women by the most enlightened kind of Hindu religion? I fancy that the theme of the religion would be something like this: Any assertion of the intellectual, the legal, the political, and the economic rights of women, not rooted in the recognition of their spiritual rights, would eventually result in self-stultification. I suggest that in the life of Sarada Devi or the Holy Mother was enacted a great drama of love and faith that fulfilled the dreams of certain mystical philosophers. Kumud Bandhu Sen, putting down some reminiscences of the Holy Mother, has said that 'one could say that the Mother's place was neither a household nor a monastery in any exclusive

sense of the terms'. *Neither a household nor a monastery*; for the great ideals of spirit transcend both and embrace them in their sweep. The conversion of Father Sederholm of Russia was brought about by his witnessing a marriage ceremony in the Eastern Orthodox Church. He was struck by the fact that, in the service, the bridal crowns were compared to the crowns of martyrs. The profound idea took such complete possession of him that a revolution was wrought in his way of life. He renounced worldly learning and the university chair he was going to occupy and, to the consternation of his relatives, entered a monastery. In the monastery and yet beyond it, for he had realized the ideal of sanctifying love which is the consummation of the truest kind of marriage. Even at a lower level, do we not see that the sacrament of marriage implies far more than the ordinary psycho-physiological relationships between the sexes? The devotedly constant and honourable lover in Lovelace's lyric, *To Lucasta on going to the Wars*, says:

I could not love thee, dear, so much,  
Loved I not honour more.

Sri Ramakrishna must have perceived that Sarada Devi had to dedicate herself to a grander and nobler task than that of rearing a family in the ordinary sense. She had to become a great rallying point for spirit, 'a veritable sanctuary for aspiring souls of every description—men and women, rich and poor, Indian and Western'. The transubstantiation of the relation between the sexes has been described thus by the great poet-philosopher-mystic of Russia, Vladimir Soloviev, in his book *The Justification of the Good*: When there is a true spiritual meeting of man and woman, the awakened man "sees his material other—the woman—not as she appears to external observation, not as others see her,



but gains insight into her true essence or idea. He sees her as she was from the first destined to be, as God saw her from all eternity, and as she shall be in the end. . . . She is affirmed as . . . an entity capable of spiritualization or

Surely the words describe not inappropriately the chosen ends of Sri Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi. To those who know Sri Ramakrishna's real stature, there can be no doubt that he saw Sarada Devi 'not as others saw



THE HOLY MOTHER AT WORSHIP IN THE SHRINE AT UDBODHAN HOUSE

“deification”.’ The highest form of love in woman, according to the great Russian philosopher, ‘has a corresponding character. ‘The man whom she has chosen appears to her as her true saviour, destined to reveal to her and to realize for her the meaning of her life’.

her’, but in her ‘true essence’, ‘as she was from the first destined to be’, the Holy Mother of the devoted band of disciples that he was gathering round him, the men who were to accomplish, without ostentation, without noise, great things. Not accidentally were



they recruited by the Master; not accidentally did the Holy Mother in her later life preside over the curious household in which a Brahman managed the kitchen and the Sannyasin disciples gathered now and then to receive advice and instruction. I have not the least doubt that Sarada Devi saw quite early in the Master the one who was 'destined to reveal to her and realize for her the meaning of her life'. Small wonder that the little shrine in which she worshipped a photo of the Master throbbed and palpitated with an Invisible Presence. In the truest spiritual encounter of men and women, Soloviev declared, 'reproduction becomes both unnecessary and impossible . . . because the supreme purpose has been achieved, the final goal attained'. The new process 'does not reproduce life in time, but recreates it for eternity'.

Sri Ramakrishna's God was an Infinitely Loving Mother. That was why he could see the image of the Divine not only in Sarada Devi and his women followers, but in all women, even the fallen women on the slag-heaps of human society. No *tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner* but something loftier made the Master's tender concern for the least of them possible. What prompted the love? An ecstatic experience of the essential God-head: an experience on which poets have only speculated in their elevated moods. Mrs. Anna Hemsted Branch once dedicated a few lines 'To a New York Shop-girl':

Poet and prophet in God's eyes  
Make no more perfect sacrifice.

Who knows before what inner shrine  
She eats with them the bread and the wine?

Yes; who knows? With Sri Ramakrishna, however, it was no guess but an inner certitude. The criticism that by his attitude to fallen women he wiped out all moral distinctions needs no refutation; it is its own refutation. Does the Mother care less—for the least of her children?

Have we then answered the question often posed by psychologists today? Is a sublimation of sex possible? I shall say little here about the pseudo-profundities of those psycho-

logists who assimilate poetry to hysteria and religion to obsessional neurosis. Reik frankly admitted that although a psychoanalytic study of religion could be launched, it could not exhaust religion. Dalbiez, in his critique of psychoanalysis, has shown how inevitable, how fatal, are the limits of all empirical psychological explanations of the higher manifestations of Human Personality. It is no longer possible to write, with the naïveté of a Binet-Sanglé, *Folie de Jesus* in two volumes: the first dealing with the heredity, the constitution, and the physiology of Jesus and the second with his 'delusions' and 'hallucinations'.

Certainly, 'sublimation of sex' is not one of those simple, obvious theorems about human nature that text-books delight in expounding. The sex urge is not conquered by mere obedience, mere disuse, mere repression, mere reaction-formation. Paulhan has warned us of the danger of its remaining incompletely spiritualized. Samuel Lowy has represented its 'sublimation' as a supreme instance of a 'homeostasis'. The non-irruption or non-manifestation of the urge leads to an 'increased hunger' in other spheres, 'an increased productive potentiality'. Lowy has hinted that the particular conditions of the 'sublimation' of sex are of a highly individualized character and do not permit facile psychological generalizations. 'There must ensue a certain spontaneous thirst or readiness for a particular sphere of creative activity. And the particular substituting activity must be fitted to restore the balance of individual conditions . . .'. I suggest that it was this 'spontaneous thirst', this 'readiness for a particular sphere of creative activity', capable of achieving 'homeostasis', that Sri Ramakrishna could evoke in others, sometimes by a mere touch or a glance. Always he dealt with others as living persons. He saw men and women round him and not merely trees walking. He and Sarada Devi have demonstrated that the vocabulary of love loses nothing of its true import when it is universalized, when it ceases to be a local dialect,



a matter of a few strong preferences. Not the disillusionment of love (as Krafft-Ebing and others have suggested), but its fulfilment, is true mysticism. Of the two factors moulding the individual, predisposition (*Anlage*) and experience (*Erleben*), the latter assumes the dominant rôle.

Rebecca West, in her *The Thinking Reed*, wrote: 'The difference between men and women is the rock on which civilization will split before it can reach any goal that could justify its expenditure of effort'. But if I am right in my analysis, the barque of civilization need not split provided a more spiritual conception of manhood and womanhood takes the helm and displaces 'the solemn clowning about sex' as Rebecca West called it. D. H. Lawrence (at least in his novels) sometimes represented the anonymous mating of animals as far superior to the paltry semi-conscious stirrings and promptings of human beings. I submit that men and women can rise above not only mindless anonymity but also the

mere awareness of the biological urges. They need not be enmeshed for ever in the lustful enjoyment of their isolated individualities, their 'piddling, twopenny-halfpenny' personalities with their 'wretched little virtues and vices . . . silly cravings and silly pretensions', to use the language of Aldous Huxley's *Eyeless in Gaza*. Not the limpid 'Now, and only Now, and forever Now' of *The Plumed Serpent* knowing nothing of Yesterday or Tomorrow, but something more overpowering and overreaching can take hold of men and women and steer them to their high destinies. Goethe said that whoever would understand the Poet and inherit his riches must walk into the Land of the Poets:

Wer den Dichter will verstehen  
Muss in Dichters Lande gehen.

The test applies not less surely to the great religious experiences of mankind. The life of Sarada Devi is a reminder that the highest ideals of womanhood are not extinct. They await the faithful and the loyal.

## THE HINDU IDEAL OF WOMANHOOD

BY DR. P. K. ACHARYA

In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, the Creator is said to have divided himself into two portions which became the husband and the wife (in their individual existence and social relation). This romantic union is physically represented in the Ardha-Nārīśvara image of Shiva and Pārvati, whose one half of the body shows the male part and the other the female. Thus in Hindu mythology, the natural conjugality of the self-created Svayambhu and Shatarupā ('of hundred beautiful forms'), coming into existence as a couple, illustrates a general principle of life. This bipartition into male and female sexes is noticed in all created beings.

It is an idle speculation, and beyond the

scope of science and logic, to investigate as to why the union of sexes is inevitable in order to sustain God's creation and why God was not absolutely impartial and did not make man and woman exactly equal physically and mentally. Even the most aggressive women's movement does not deny woman's natural disadvantages in bearing children and in some other respects. In the modern context, it is not easy to understand the far-reaching benefit of the principle laid down by the Father of both man and woman and the first law-giver, Manu, viz. that at no stage of her life should woman be left unprotected,—being under the affectionate care of the father in childhood, loving care of the husband in youth, and



venerable protection of sons in old age. Manu has also extolled woman, saying that even the gods are pleased wherever and whenever women are respected. Can unrestricted liberty bring in greater advantage for anybody? When women can subject themselves to the laws of Nature, they can equally well and voluntarily subject themselves to some social laws and needs in the interests of the harmony and the common good of domestic life, social organization, and cultural eminence.

But the struggle between woman and man for rights and privileges—much like between limbs of the same body—, as understood in Hindu civilization, has been accelerated by historical reasons. In the development of human thought and deed, three distinctive stages are noticed. In the Primitive stage, the mind is grossly selfish, abnormally cruel, and absolutely callous. Outward action is guided by the principle of might being the only right. Livelihood is earned by crude methods, the stronger exploiting the weaker. At this stage, the weaker sex is held in subjection by stronger sex in order to gratify only the natural sensual desire for a mate. Like animals, the male partner does not care to take any responsibility for the upbringing of the offspring, though the female partner, owing to the natural propensity, continues to maintain the offspring, only so long as it is not able to stand on its own legs; thereafter the acquaintance even between the mother and the offspring is forgotten. Thus the mother becomes an unfortunate creature, being neglected by parents, by the husband, and also by the children. This cruelty and callousness towards woman have been persisting in various degrees from time to time and from place to place. This may be one of the main reasons for the feminist movement against suppression by man. But Hindu civilization has always conceived of man and woman as parts of one body or as the two wings of a bird, wherein non-co-operation of one part or one wing would seriously affect the entire body or the flight of the bird.

In the Medieval stage of human develop-

ment, spirituality reigns supreme in all spheres and regulates all actions, the only concern of life being the advancement of religion, which was not properly understood by various institutions. Here the Church or religious head is most powerful, and lays down rules and regulations of conduct to be followed by man and woman. Here we find the various forms of marriage or union between man and woman. At this stage, woman is almost an equal partner of man in all affairs of life. The couple is predestined to be partners. She co-operates willingly in running the fivefold household duties, viz. *Brahma-yajña* or worship of the Almighty God; *Deva-yajña*, which implies the recognition of some natural powers, of the sense of man's obligation to them, and of the need of propitiating them by devotion, prayers, and offerings; *Pitr-yajña*, which denotes ancestral worship by the performance of various forms of Śrāddha at marriage, childbirth, death, and also periodically and on special occasions, invoking the blessings of ancestors to whom we owe our birth and prosperity; *Manuṣya-yajña*, which symbolically implies service to mankind, e.g. giving assistance in time of need in accordance with one's capacity; *Bhūta-yajña*, or selfless love and service to inferior beings. These sacrifices and services purify the mind and remove the animal characteristics of gross selfishness, abnormal cruelty, and absolute callousness noticed in the Primitive stage.

Here, at every step, the willing co-operation of man and woman is indispensable. In the absence of Sita, a golden image of her had to be devised in order to enable her husband, Ramachandra, to perform a big sacrifice. But a misguided outlook of life can make and has made the woman a helpless victim of an otherwise noble man-made civilization. Powerful priestcraft, in the name of religion, may have done some injustice to woman. The system of *satī*, offering of girls to the conquerors, sacrifice of infant girls for the benefit of male ones, and such other shocking practices concerning woman are noticed at this stage.



The Modern Secular stage, where religion is of no consequence, is evincing a curious outlook, viz. providing certain so-called facilities to woman in order to make her perfectly equal to man in all respects. But these Western type of rights and privileges, if exercised indiscriminately, can hardly contribute to real equality between the sexes. They do not serve to rectify man's errors of the past. The testimony of history is that we cannot fight reaction through further reaction. The mud of the past cannot be washed out by again throwing mud. They cannot make woman's status better. The common good may not be advanced thereby.

A civilized and organized society must have regulated and not unlimited liberty of thought and action, both for man and woman. Division of labour, which gave rise to castes and classes, is unavoidable for orderly development of family, society, and humanity at large. Woman and man must agree to the division of labour for their common welfare. This principle was understood and applied by ancient Hindu legislators, though today we do not follow it consistently.

Without acquiescing in the injustices that woman has had to undergo, it has to be admitted that woman has been the custodian of ethical principles and religious practices in all civilized societies. If modernization forgets this tradition, we may perforce return to abject primitiveness. The selflessness of woman is her glory. Poet Kālidasa has painted the woman as a complete personality in herself: she has to be like a mother while serving food, like a sister in sympathy, like a daughter in devotion, like a musician in soothing away fatigue, like an adviser in misery, like a nurse in sickness, and like a beloved in reciprocating love. History also provides instances of man's sacrifices for woman's sake. Wars have been fought, kingdoms lost, life given away, and extortion undergone in order to protect woman, to save her honour, and to make her life happy and peaceful. This is the spirit in which co-operation develops and this should be the

modern outlook. The sense of civilization and common prosperity clearly calls for an end of the needless struggle between man and woman.

The capacity for thought and action on the part of woman can never be questioned. History supplies ample instances to prove the fact that even in the field of work, where man is considered to have excelled woman, she has shown her capacity when circumstances called her to assume responsibility. Ghoshā, Viśhva-vārā, Apālā, Vāk, Sūryā, Romaśhā, Sulabhā, Śhaśhvati, Mamatā, Ushija, and others of the Vedic period competed exceedingly well with male composers and thought-provokers of Vedic hymns. Gārgi, Maitreyi, and many others contributed original thought in philosophy. Woman poets, novelists, and storytellers, ancient and modern, are too numerous to be quoted.

When the gods failed to cope with their too powerful Asura enemies, Goddess Chāṇḍi-Durgā-Kāli assumed the responsibility of putting the latter down. We have numerous historical instances of women warriors (*vīrāṅganā*) like Rupa-sundari, Rānibāi, Viramati, Virā, Tārābāi, Durgāvati, Rani of Jhansi, and many others. Successful woman rulers of kingdoms and empires, in European, Muslim, and Indian histories, are too numerous to be mentioned. Instances of women diplomats and politicians are still fresh in our memory. There are well-known women inventors in the sciences of medicine, surgery, mathematics, and astronomy. Music and the numerous fine arts are almost the monopoly of women. In fact, in a proper division of labour, the tendency is to reserve the finer duties for woman and the more rough ones for man. The reverse would be the exception and not the rule. Woman is credited with the softer feelings of the heart, although she is not devoid of a brain or intellectual capacity as good as man's.

God has indeed created man and woman to co-operate and to supplement each other's efforts according to capacity in order to fulfil His scheme of things and achieve perfection



which is the conception of Godhead Itself. This should be the ideal stage of development. Hindu civilization is based on this faith and our Shāstras have formulated rules of conduct on this basis. Thus, in Hindu mythology, Sāvitrī is an integral emanation of Brahmā and their union is natural. Svāhā represents the igneous power of Agni (fire god) and so they are a permanent pair. Vāruṇī is the liquid flowing force, springing up from the ocean-depths of the heart of Varuṇa, the presiding deity of the ocean, and so they are found in an eternal wedlock. Vāyavi is the female form assumed by the sweet and soothing power of breeze that resides in the wind god Vāyu. Manmatha, churned from the mind, is the divinity of love and is united with Rati, the feminine spirit of sweet and serene enjoyment. The Prajāpatis or the fathers and ancestors of being have all their feminine counterparts of life, finely fitted into their nature, character, and disposition. Thus Marichi is united with Kalā, Atri with Anasuyā,

Angiras with Shraddhā, Pulastya with Havirbhu, Pulaha with Gati, Kratu with Kriyā, Bhṛigu with Khyāti, Vasishtha with Arundhati, and Atharva with Shānti.

The lives of Sri Ramakrishna and his consort Sarada Devi illustrate a unique ideal for the monastic as well as the householder's ideal of religion. Their union was predestined; their married life was sexless. It was an ideal companionship. It was not the result of might being the only right. Nor was it due to force of religious practice. By nature both were actuated by the same feeling and ideal. She was willingly and joyously his conscious follower in all matters (*sadā cittavṛttyanusārinī*). Such perfect union can make married life happy for couples with other ideals also. As in the case of Sri Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi, the perfect union is everlasting. The highest Hindu ideal of marriage and of womanhood has been exemplified by their mystic, as also mundane, union.

## THE CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIAN WOMANHOOD

BY N. CHANDRASEKHARA AIYAR

Notwithstanding the rapidly changing times in which we live and the variations in modes and manners, habits and customs, dress and outlook, which are becoming increasingly noticeable, the Indian woman has not substantially deviated from the old ways of life. Modernization with all its attendant consequences, good as well as bad, has affected only a few of our women in large towns and cities; the rest continue mostly as they were from early times. Women eager to make an impression on the public and revolutionize society by agitation and public speeches and legislative effort have not yet become accepted ideals for womanhood in general to follow or imitate. Their number is growing but they

are yet few. There are many who still feel that the assertion of equal rights with men which is the goal of the modern woman is not best achieved by the abandonment of the wise rules of life prescribed for Hindu women in ancient India. This attitude does not mean that one should continue to cherish the beliefs that prevailed in primitive or ancient India about the rights and duties of women, thus putting back the hands of the clock. What is necessary is to see how far adjustments are called for in the present environments. For instance, is it essential that all our women, and not merely those who think of careers for themselves in fields like journalism, medicine, law, science, the teaching profession, etc.,



should have costly higher education? Would they be more useful units of society if the majority of them take care of domestic affairs, leaving a few to attend to the bigger task of the reformation of society? Are we going to have in our midst more and more disgruntled women graduates who cannot get employment suited to their education and new ideals and habits of life? The problem of spinsters and unmarried bachelors is becoming serious day by day and will require solution.

The life and example of Sri Sarada Devi, the wife of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, stimulate these questions. Let us say a few words about her, the Centenary of whose birth is sought to be commemorated by the publication of this volume and leave our readers to think out for themselves the pros and cons of the larger issues referred to above.

The ancient type of Indian womanhood has certain distinctive features or characteristics. She may be totally illiterate but she is shrewd, intelligent, and cultured. Her daily life is one of extraordinary simplicity and her main duties and interests centre round the house. The entire domestic economy is managed by her. She takes care of the husband and the children and the elders well and wisely. She is a model of self-sacrifice and thinks more of her duties than of her rights. To her, the husband, be he poor or wealthy, dull or intelligent, employed or idle, is almost divine and his word is law. She often advises but never commands or countermands. She chooses to remain in the background, but her silent influence over the household is tremendous. Service and sacrifice are her mottos. She is loved for her unobtrusiveness and self-abnegation and her exemplary patience in trials and sorrows. She does not lack in courage or determination, but she does not manifest them aggressively or proclaim their possession from the house-tops. She rules the house and has no ambition to rule the outside world. Careful attention to the needs of the household occupy most of her time and her spare moments are spent in

prayer, devotion, and religious observances. She is the 'good wife' described by Sir Thomas Overbury in these eloquent words:

'A good wife is a man's best movable, a scion incorporate with the stock, bringing sweet fruit; one that to her husband is more than a friend, less than a trouble: an equal with him in the yoke. Calamities and troubles she shares alike; nothing pleaseth her that doth not him. She is relative in all, and he without her, but half himself. She is his absent hands, eyes, ears, and mouth: his present and absent all. She frames her nature unto his howsoever: the hyacinth follows not the sun more willingly. Stubbornness and obstinacy are herbs that grow not in her garden. She leaves tattling to the gossips of the town, and is more seen than heard. Her household is her charge; her care to that makes her seldom non-resident. Her pride is but to be cleanly, and her thrift not to be prodigal. By her discretion she hath children, not wantons; a husband without her is a misery in man's apparel; none but she hath an aged husband, to whom she is both a staff and a chair. To conclude, she is both wise and religious, which makes her all this'.

Her love runs deep and her affections are undemonstrative, yet strong. The *pativrata*s of old, like Anasūyā and Arundhati, Sāvitrī and Sita, Damayanti and Draupadi, are India's ideals.

The modern over-sophisticated type of Indian woman serves as a true foil to this picture. Her life is one of haste and hurry, excitement and nerves, fashions and small or flippant talk. In her exotic routine life she has hardly any time to look after her children, who are often entrusted to the care of some servants. Husband and wife have hardly any time to spend in each other's company; they are so frightfully busy. He has his office work, his friends, and the club. She has her own engagements to fulfil; her meetings and committees cannot be neglected, and then there is social welfare work to do, leaving household duties to take care of themselves.

The great consort of Sri Ramakrishna belonged to the earlier type. She was a lady of extraordinary goodness and benevolence and she radiated spirituality. She was not thrown into the shade by the celebrity of her husband; on the other hand the Parama-



hamsa's name, fame, and popularity as a realized teacher of true religion brought out her own transcendental qualities of asceticism and love of humanity. She was married when she was very, very young—at an age when she did not know what marriage meant. All that she knew was that Sri Ramakrishna was her husband and must be adored by her. When in after years she was taken from her village to him at Calcutta, and she saw him in her maturity, Sri Ramakrishna observed that he saw the Holy Mother in her and this meant that the ordinary relationship between husband and wife was not to be their lot. The young Sarada realized at once what part she had to play in Sri Ramakrishna's future life and she never grumbled or protested at the situation in which she found herself. She remained a celibate till the end of her life, making an amazing sacrifice of all worldly pleasures. As she grew in age her influence over Sri Ramakrishna also grew in proportion and to him she was a Goddess. Many of the devotees who came to see the sage felt equal reverence for this extraordinary lady who spoke to them comforting words of spiritual wisdom. She was not learned by any means. Due to her association with Sri Ramakrishna, and also due to her own great personality and power, she was more wise than many of the professors of learning. She had uncommon common sense and was practical in whatever she said or did. Her advice was sought on

many an occasion and she gave it fully and freely and to purpose.

It is for us to ponder over the question whether the one type or the other will prove more beneficial to our progress. The thought occurs—may it not be a good blend of the two? The woman who knows to read and write fairly well, though devoid of the benefits of higher education, may yet take an intelligent interest in the events that occur beyond and outside her home. A highly educated lady might nevertheless pin her faith to the home as the chief centre of her influence and avoid falling a prey to alien habits and manners, tamely and unthinkingly copied from the lives of foreigners and wholly unsuited to the Indian genius and tradition which is substantially built on the ideals of simplicity of life, the sanctity of the home, devotion to duty, self-denial and self-sacrifice, and faith in God. Of course, the lines of future development will be dependent in large measure on unpredictable forces generated by the clash of differing ideologies. But one thing we can be sure of; it will take centuries to induce our women to change their outlook on life. This is not because they are ignorant or stupid; it is precisely for the reason that they are the exact opposite and possess a fund of essential wisdom which enables them to distinguish between tinsel and gold, chaff and grain, shadow and substance, and good and bad.

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'It is idle to expect that dangers and difficulties will not come. They are bound to come. But, for a devotee, they will pass away from under the feet like water.'

'My child, you have been extremely fortunate to get this human birth. Pray intensely to God. One must work hard. How can one achieve anything without effort? You must make some time for prayer even in the midst of the busiest hours of the day. I used to be very busy during my days at Dakshineswar; yet I made time for prayer and meditation.'

—Sayings of the Holy Mother



## WOMEN SAINTS AND MYSTICS

BY DR. A. V. RAO

The important role that women have played in many spheres of life is now universally acknowledged, though the 'superior' if not the 'fairer' sex had reluctantly admired it in the past. As monarchs or guides of the destiny of nations, we have had Elizabeth I of England, Christina of Norway, Joan of Arc, Nur Jehān, Ahalyābāi, and Lakshmibāi. As philosophers and mathematicians, scientists and social reformers, even as aviators, there have been women like Maitreyi, Gārgi, Lilāvati, Madame Curie, Elizabeth Fry, and Jean Batten. So the myth of male superiority has been exploded. Nor in the realm of religious devotion, meditation, and spiritual aspiration, have women fallen short.

Both in the West and in the East, women saints and mystics have made their own contribution in this sphere, less perhaps in volume but not in quality than that of men. It is intended in the present article to draw the attention of readers to this last group of eminent women and it is fitting that this tribute should be paid on the occasion of the Birth Centenary of Sri Saradhamani Devi, the spiritual consort of the great saint of Dakshineswar, the blessed Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

First, of the West. There are numerous women saints in the Roman Catholic Church, but in spite of the visions, trances, miracles, or holy stigmata attached to the history of their lives, only a few have been hailed as true saints in the sense widely accepted by the world as a whole and not by the Catholic Church only. Of these, the most prominent are the Blessed Angela of Foligno, St. Catherine of Siena, and St. Teresa of Cepeda (born at Avila). The Blessed Angela (1248-1309), contemporary of Dante, was converted from a sinful life and became a tertiary hermit of the Franciscan Order. Her

visions and revelations influenced later saints and contemplatives such as St. Francois de Sales, Gertrude More (1606-1633), and Madame Guyon (1648-1717). St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380), a Dominican tertiary, is, in some respects, a political figure, like St. Joan of Arc (1412-1431), who became the saviour of France at a critical period in her history. St. Catherine regarded it as her mission to bring peace to the Church and the State. Her four hundred letters, written in beautiful Tuscan, have a historical importance in addition to their spiritual charm and literary value. It is related that she practised asceticism from the age of seven and lived in her own home the life of the traditional Christian hermits of the desert. She secured success both in her political mission and her personal endeavour to attain the mystical apprehension of God. Her *Book of Divine Doctrine* has been hailed as a masterly expression of the Eternal in the symbolism of a day and of the 'achievement of the union of the soul with the supra-sensible while still imprisoned in the flesh'.

St. Teresa (1515-1582), the Spanish mystic and abbess, fell into mystic trances at the age of 40. There was a strong strain of asceticism in her and she founded convents and monasteries where the nuns were bound by vows to wearing sandals of rope, denying themselves meat, and sleeping on straw. It is said she used to scourge herself severely and wear painful haircloth next to the skin. Along with the mystic strain in her, seen in her trances and visions, she had a practical mind and sound common sense. Her two works—the *Way of Perfection* and the *Castle of the Soul* have been the spiritual guides of thousands, and describe the progress of the soul towards perfect union with God. She gave new life to a great religious order and



exhorted it to seek communion with the Divine. She inflicted on herself the most cruel self-torture. One doubts if it helped her to develop psychic power or mystic contemplation. Critics there have been, and will be, of St. Teresa's 'monstrous egotism', her morbid preoccupation with the 'Holy Marriage', her hysterical manifestations, and the erotic imagery of her writings, as also of the unnecessary flagellation and asceticism she practised. But this was a common practice among the medieval Christian saints of the West and St. Teresa cannot be blamed for conforming to tradition, perhaps in excess.

Among other famous women contemplatives of the West must be included Juliana of Norwich (1343-1413), Dame Gertrude More, Madame Guyon, Lucie-Christine, and St. Jeanne de Chantal.

The women saints of the East have generally avoided self-torture, flagellation, and excessively harsh asceticism. No doubt they occasionally fasted and led an abstemious life and practised austerity, but they did not inflict physical torture on themselves. If they suffered and endured, like Mirābāi, it was at the hands of others—their martyrdom was inflicted on them and not deliberately sought. Their chief means of communion with God was through Bhakti and Prema, devotion and love, and the service of the poor and the suffering. They depended more on intuition and faith than on self-torture on the one hand and severe intellectual discipline or philosophical study on the other. The famous Muslim Sufi saint Rābia of the eighth century, was a mystic, as was Ryo-Nen, the Zen Buddhist nun, who, in her youth, was a great beauty and a poetess like Mira. But neither practised flagellation or torture.

The women saints of India have always retained the feminine qualities of tenderness, love, and sympathy, and not adopted the essentially masculine traits of harsh asceticism, self-chastisement, or authoritative egoism—traits of Hatha Yogis, but rarely of the great masters.

The Purānas tell us of numerous heroines

and saintly women who found the way to God through Bhakti, love, and self-abnegation. The noble figures of Sita, Draupadi, Mandodari, Shabari, Kubjā, Sāvitrī, Anasuyā, Kuntī and others have provided inspiration to countless women through the ages. Historical records prove that many women of high rank and education enrolled themselves as the disciples of Buddha and took on vows of poverty and service of humanity. The tradition must have continued, but after the glory of the Guptas, at least in North India, there began a gradual decay and slowing down of the tempo of Hindu religious life and social organization till the Muslim invasion of India when political disintegration set in and conditions became worse. The core of Hindu religion was however still there, and remained firm thanks to Shankaracharya and Ramanujacharya. The gospel of love and devotion had always existed in South India, as the eminent scholar Sri Kshiti Mohan Sen, author of *Medieval Mysticism in India*, asserts, and we see it in the sayings of the famous Ālvārs, among whom is a woman saint—Āṇḍāl or Ranganāyaki. With the challenge of Islam in North India, there began a movement under the leadership of Rāmānanda, the fifth in apostolic succession to Ramanujacharya. He brought about the revival of Jñāna and Bhakti and preached the essential ways of God-realization through these two Mārgas (paths) to all people, irrespective of caste, and what is most significant, in the language of the masses. Indeed, Muslim saints, mostly Sufis, were drawn to the Bhakti-mārga of Indian saints and in their own way helped to consolidate this new revival of spiritual devotion and love of God. They could see no difference in the many ways of seeking God in the religions of Islam and Hinduism, and saints of both faiths drew their adherents from Hindus and Muslims alike. The devout of one religion honoured the devout of the other. The great Bhakta Kabir (1398-1448) and his famous follower Dādu (1544-1603) were both Muslims—one of the weaver and the other of the cotton-carder community. In the fifteenth,



sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries flourished the golden age of Bhakti and a feature of this upsurge of religious devotion is that both in North and South India, the great mystics and saints were mostly drawn from the lower orders of society—weavers, farmers, Chamārs, sweepers, menials, and so on. The women Bhaktas naturally enough sprang from the same classes and were often the daughters, wives, and kinswomen of the saints. One of the exceptions is Rani Mirabai, whose splendid devotion to Krishna and heroic faith in God, tested by many ordeals, are known all over the world and whose devotional songs are sung by tens of thousands today and stand next in importance only to the songs of Tulsidās, Surdās, and Kabir.

Kshema, a contemporary of Kabir, an Abhir's daughter, has many 'profound and beautiful sayings' to her credit. 'Conversation with Kshema was considered ennobling even by Kabir'. So also Gangābāi, Kabir's disciple, and Kamāli, his daughter, the two daughters of Dadu, the famous mystic, Nanibāi and Mātābāi, became devout Sādhikās, and by their songs and teachings influenced thousands. In Mahārāshtra, Sant Sakhubāi

and Janibai drew thousands of followers. Among the disciples of Charandas, the well-known Bhakta and saint of Delhi, were two women who made a name in North India in the eighteenth century—Sahajobai, whose songs are sung even today and whose book *Sahaj Prakāś* is well known; and Dayābāi, author of *Dayābodh*, and *Vinayamālikā*, a book of prayers. All these women were Sadhikas of a high order—they had little knowledge of metaphysics and philosophy of the orthodox type, or of the Upanishads and Vedas, but they had profound insight, innate faith, love of God, and spiritual vision.

The next century gave us the blessed Sri Saradamani Devi, whose intense spirituality, pristine purity, overflowing love, and life of self-abnegation provide lessons for all who seek the way to God. I shall not dwell longer on her radiant personality, as glowing tributes are paid to her elsewhere in this Number. That there are Bhaktas and Sadhikas among Indian women today, is proof, if proof be needed, that even in this age of scepticism and materialism, the thirst for spiritual illumination is as deep and intense in women as in men. Long may it continue to be so!

## ĀNDĀL—THE DIVINE BRIDE AND MYSTIC NUN

BY SWAMI PARAMATMANANDA

The name of the divine bard-mystic Āndāl is a familiar household word in South India, chiefly among the Sri Vaishnavites. As an incarnation of the Divine Mother, she came on earth to resuscitate the spirit of complete self-surrender which had its origin in her case in the overpowering ecstasy of pure devotion to God. She enjoys the highest status in the hierarchy of Sri Vaishnavite saints called Ālwārs—those that have plumbed the depths of the ocean of God-consciousness. She led captive the Proud Conqueror of her

heart, her divine Lover, by binding Him first with the garlands of flowers that gained a divine perfume by their contact with her divine person and tresses, and then with the garlands of her immortal lyrics glowing with divine fervour. Her entrance and exit and also the drama that she enacted on the stage of humanity, in the immediate presence of an Alwar of the first magnitude, her foster-father, and before multitudes gaping with wonder,—these are all wrapped in a shroud of profound mystery too deep for uninitiated



mortal gaze to probe. Prema was 'the food that she ate, the water that she drank, and the betel she chewed'—i.e. her means of sustenance, her nourishment, and her luxury. She being born and bred up in an atmosphere of flawless love and service to the Supreme Being,—day by day, nay, instant by instant, her burning devotion to God was gaining in volume and intensity till it found its culmination in bursting the delicate mortal frame that hid it and merging itself in the Supreme Godhead of which it was but a manifestation. Purity immaculate was the bed-rock on which the sky-kissing tower of her spiritual love and communion with God was reared, and it was essentially so divine and so spontaneously free from the dross of earth that not a single stain or shade of human weakness was perceptible in the whole of her God-intoxicated career. Her self-gift to her self-chosen Bridegroom was so perfect that there was absolutely no trace in it of self-seeking or jealousy. All this is evidenced by the singular absence of even a single reference in her works to any of her lapses, self-accusations, or contrition for past misdeeds in her pre-illumination period—a refreshing contrast to what we observe in the works of other Alwars, including even Nammālwār—the paragon of saints. She was an embodiment of Krishna-prema and her whole life was a poem of fulfilment of her bridal longing for Him. Yet, as the grace of God would have it, the history of the growth of her spiritual passion from start to finish was painted in immortal and ever-bright colours with all the consummate skill of a master artist, by her own hand, in one hundred and forty-three verses, that provide a sumptuous repast of rare mystic experiences to souls hungry for union with the Divine.

A brief outline of her life is sufficient for our purpose. Andal, the foster-daughter of Perīālwār, ever since the moment of her mysterious appearance on earth as a child, was steeped in an insatiable thirst for God. As her childhood glided into maidenhood, her instinct of feminine love

asserted itself in the form of bridal longing for Him. Her bridegroom-elect was none other than the Supreme Being to whom she betrothed herself in the secluded sanctuary of her own heart. So when the worldly wisdom of her fond relations sought to impose on her the bondage of marriage to a human being, she raised her indignant protest in the words: 'Were I to hear of an alliance with a mortal I cannot bear to live'. They were backed up by such an astonishing firmness of resolve that then and there they dropped the idea lest a catastrophe should ensue. In utter disregard of all worldly conventions and well-meant advice, Andal was silently nourishing the plant of her virgin love by her constant meditation on the Divine Ravisher of souls. Later, when marriage could no longer be postponed, her father, who had in the meanwhile diagnosed the unearthly malady of her heart and discovered its only cure—which was to fulfil her desire according to her enlightened understanding, began to acquaint her with the soul-bewitching beauty of the form and attributes of Sri Ranganātha, the Lord of Srirangam. Her response to the stimulus of this suggestion was so instantaneous, so spontaneous, and so ecstatic that thenceforth she came to look upon herself as His bride, pouring forth in torrents her infatuated love on Him and dedicating her all to Him in the eager anticipation of her being accepted as His consort. One night, her sincere, deep, and incessant prayer of this sort resulted in her being vouchsafed the vision of her marriage with the Lord, in her dream, with all due ceremonies of a formal marriage. Perīālwār, too, in his turn, was blessed with another vision in which he was summoned by Sri Ranganātha to conduct his daughter to His presence in the temple so that He might accept the bride for whom He was equally pining. In obedience to the divine call, the Alwar took her to the sanctum sanctorum at the temple of Srirangam and left her there so that her hungry eyes and soul might enjoy the feast of the Divine Personality before her. Just then



Andal, allured by the living, soul-entrancing beauty of the Lord, and like a piece of iron before a huge magnet, forthwith directed her steps towards the feet of the Lord; and there, to the bewilderment of all, she became one with Him and vanished out of mortal sight for ever. Such is the story depicted by the available tradition of the Sri Vaishnavites.

If this traditional account—the only account according to Sri Vaishnavites—is to be relied upon, then it is evident that the celebration of Andal's marriage with Ranganatha was only in the dream and never at all in the waking-world of experience. Yet in Srirangam and other important places in South India the annual festival of Andal's marriage with Ranganatha is celebrated with all pomp and ceremony on a particular day—a custom sanctioned by the authority of Acharyas renowned alike for their learning and devotion and for their strict fidelity to established tradition. Here one may see a discrepancy between scriptural record and temple usage, both accepted by tradition; and this therefore forms a fitting theme for investigation, especially because it must disclose a precious underlying truth. At the outset it is worth mentioning that distinguished opinion and historical testimony support each view. First, there is no evidence anywhere to warrant the suggestion that the Alwar returned from Srirangam with rejoicings in his heart consequent on his daughter's wedding with the Lord. On the other hand, Perialwar, the foster-father of Andal, subsequent to his departure from Srirangam, with an aching heart, gave vent to his grief in the following pathetic vein, as is apparent from a decad in the collection of the Alwar's works: 'Daughter I had but one, and she was brought up as though she was Lakshmi Herself; the Lord hath abducted my daughter'. 'Lo! the emptiness of my house! Nowhere can I see my darling'. 'Alas for me! Will the red-eyed Lord accept her hand and solemnize the marriage in public so that the folk in town and village might behold?' But

the traditional account also furnishes a piece of evidence in support of the marriage. It says that when the multitudes, watching with bated breath the spectacle of Andal's approach to the Lord in the temple, were struck with amazement, fear, and grief at her unexpected disappearance, the Lord Himself consoled them all by announcing, through the chief priest of the temple, thus: 'Alwar, thou hast become my father-in-law! Rejoice then, and go home in peace, back to your place, and continue your service, and worship us both together in a shrine'. This is tantamount to a declaration by Lord Ranganatha that He married Andal.

Let us approach the problem from another standpoint also. Andal, with a view to fulfilling her cherished desire of marrying God, offered a prayer to the Lord of Alagar Hill (at Madurai), coupled with a vow to which she gives utterance in the following words: 'To the Perfect One of Maliruncholai I have promised to offer a hundred big pots of butter and another hundred potfuls of sweet rice'. This, her vow, remained unfulfilled somehow during the lifetime of Perialwar and for some subsequent generations. It was only some three or four centuries after (in the eleventh century) that Sri Ramanuja, the Messiah of Sri Vaishnavism, on the occasion of his pilgrimage to Alagar Hill (alias Maliruncholai) while reciting, as a part of his daily worship, the hymns of Andal referring to her vow, suddenly realized how the Vaishnavites had so long failed to fulfil Andal's vow. Stung to the quick by bitter remorse, he forthwith arranged for the full quota of offering and rejoiced in his heart that the grace of Providence chose him as an instrument for the implementation of Andal's vow. Later, when Sri Ramanuja directed his footsteps towards the shrine at Srivilliputtur, with a view to worshipping the Divine Mother Andal, he was blessed with a sweet and sacred vision of Andal rushing towards him with overflowing gratitude, in the form of a young girl, with the words: 'My elder brother indeed thou art!'—for, it is a duty incumbent on



the elder brother of the family to fulfil the vows of his younger sisters. Now both these admittedly genuine episodes make it quite evident that in the opinion of both Ramanuja and Andal her cherished yearning to marry the Lord was undoubtedly consummated. However, this conclusion, though perfectly logical, is but an inference. The conspicuous lack of direct evidence for this all-important event and the fact that there was practically very little time for the celebration of the marriage stand in the way of our acceptance of the inference without some legitimate doubt. Hence the deepening of the mystery of Andal's marriage,—which it is the writer's purpose here to unravel.

Andal has given vent to the frustration of a normal desire of hers and the consequent poignant sorrow in the following words in a poem: 'My fish-like eyes know no wink because of the longing to enjoy the sight of the golden feet of the Lord dwelling in Sriviliputtur'. But it was to the selfsame Lord that her father Perialwar was daily offering his devoted service of supplying garlands. So it is strange indeed that Andal should have been denied the permission and the ordinary privilege of going to the shrine and feasting her eyes with the sight of the Lord's image, and that by the will of a father who was bringing her up with extreme tenderness, affection, and reverence. Would he not have taken his beloved child even once to the temple with him? Or else, does her 'longing to see the feet of the Lord' imply that she was not blessed with the vision of God in the image, although she was often paying visits to the shrine? A girl that lived and moved and had her being in Prema, ever since her childhood, could not have been expected to perceive only the stone in the holy image. Both the suggestions are thus highly incredible. Yet, the Acharya, gifted with erudition, intellectual acumen, and devotion, has made the following observations in his illuminating commentary on the hymn: Perialwar never took his God-intoxicated daughter to the shrine—nay, she was for-

bidden to enter the temple; for, he feared that, should she ever get a sight of the feet of her beloved Lord there, then, she, under the influence of the irresistible Prema, likely to be evoked thereby, would melt and pass out of mortal vision. So she was restrained and confined to her house. But the artificial dam that held in check the flood of her spiritual emotions served only to augment the depth and the pressure of her Prema.

If this interpretation of the Alwar's apparent harshness be correct, it may be asked why—in spite of his recognition of the growing volume and intensity of her Prema and its probable perilous reaction at her sight of the Lord in the temple—he still decided to take her to the immediate presence of Sri Ranganatha. The answer is obvious. It was done in a spirit of implicit obedience to the Lord's behest in his dream and with full faith in His solemn promise to wed his pet daughter. This assurance was granted to him just while he was reasonably doubting the possibility of the Lord's wedding a mortal in the mundane world. Again, the prospective joy of witnessing the marriage of the Lord with physical eyes was too great a temptation to be resisted and it made him blind to the risk that was involved. Indeed the validity of this conclusion is unquestionable. Yet, to contend that Andal, in the presence of Lord Ranganatha, would be completely consumed by her overwhelming passion for the sight of Him is rather untenable; for, then, it would bring to nought the long-cherished desire of Andal and the fond hope of Perialwar, as also the promise of the Lord. Hence it behoves us to ponder deeply the experience Andal must have undergone at the time she was approaching the Lord. Besides, any explanation offered in this connection should be consistent with the accepted traditional view that Andal was the incarnation of the Divine Mother.

A clue to the solution of the difficulty we are here faced with is found in Sri Ramakrishna. This prophet of the modern age has been spoken of by his illustrious disciple,



Swami Vivekananda, as a man who 'had in fifty-one years lived the five thousand years of national spiritual life'. His vast yet deep, all-comprehensive spiritual life has provided the key to the unravelling of the mysteries and the clearing of the intricacies in the lives of saints and seers, and the prophets and incarnations of God. Every incident in his life, however trivial it may seem, is really fraught with spiritual significance. A typical instance in point, which has a bearing on this mystery of Andal's marriage, is the following episode in his life. Once Sri Ramakrishna was taken by his patron, Mathur Babu, on a pilgrimage tour to all the important places in North India; and in the course of the tour, although he fell in readily with the proposal of his benefactor to visit most of the shrines, strangely enough he declined to go to Gaya. On being pressed for an explanation for this strange disinclination with regard to that particular shrine, Sri Ramakrishna remarked that if he once visited that sacred place, his mind would leave the physical plane altogether and his body would drop down of itself. He knew of his father's vision at Gaya, before his (Sri Ramakrishna's) birth, in which Gadādhara, the Vishnu of the Shrine there, proclaimed that He would be born as his son. He was convinced that his presence in the shrine would revive the old memory of his ultimate identity with the Godhead and his body would be forced to give way to the tremendous upheaval of the profound spiritual experience that would surely be evoked in him. But as the Divine Mother had decreed that his body should live for some time longer, he was disinclined to visit the place.

The nugget of precious spiritual truth underlying this explanation would suffice for a correct understanding of the final experience

of Andal and an appropriate interpretation of the authoritative pronouncements and opinions regarding her marriage with God. At the outset it should be borne in mind that established tradition considers Andal to be the incarnation of the Divine Mother, Bhūdevi. So, as soon as she beheld, in the shrine of Srirangam, the Lord Ranganatha reclining on the serpent-couch, with his eternal Consorts, Shridevi and Bhudevi, standing near His feet and absorbed in doing reverential service to Him, there must have been awakened in Andal's mind the powerful memory of her identity with Bhudevi; and instantly must have flashed the thought that in reality she had for ever been the spouse of God; and as a consequence her intense desire to wed the Lord should have slipped out of her consciousness. Further, the great reaction because of that memory and the following intense spiritual experience may have involuntarily put an end to her woman-consciousness and released her from her connection with the body. Hence the desire, which she had so long nourished, to wed the Lord was at once effaced and fulfilled by this final recollection of her identity; and the pronouncement of Lord Ranganatha that He had accepted Andal as His wedded companion has been justified. Similarly the apprehension of Perialwar for the safety of Andal's life, should she have a glimpse of the Lord in His recumbent posture in the shrine at Srivilliputtur, even as at Srirangam, has been proved to be well-founded; and the observation of Sri Ramanuja, in his lucid commentary on the utterance of Andal, in her hymn—'My longing to get a glimpse of the feet of the Lord'—has been vindicated. May the divine Prema of Andal flourish and inspire men and women everywhere in the world!

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'One must not speak even a truth, if unpleasant and unnecessary. By indulging in rude words one's nature becomes rude. One's sensitivity is lost if one has not control over one's speech.'

—*Sayings of the Holy Mother*



# WOMEN AND PROGRESS

BY SRIMATI SARASVATI CHENNAKESAVAN

Our Prime Minister, Pandit Nehru, declaring open a women's college at Hyderabad recently, said that the progress of a country depended on the women of the country. It is true that a man's character and conduct are moulded by his early upbringing and training, which in our country is entirely in the hands of women. If the state of affairs in our society is not all as it should be, then it is time we begin to take stock of ourselves.

Progress is a concept meaning change. When there is an upgrading movement of the whole people towards a higher and nobler ideal, whether the ideal be secular or spiritual, it is said that that society of people is progressive. Man alone has the capacity to stand outside himself and co-ordinate the memory of the past, the perceptions of the present, and the anticipations of the future, and evaluate a code of life which is a step beyond the present. These evaluations always take the form of his spiritual, cultural, and economic history. The progress of a nation, therefore, is very closely bound up with its history in these respects.

Our spiritual and economic history is said to be world-negating. The Indian ideal of life, in this world, is said to be only Nivṛtti or Sannyasa. This, although true to a certain extent, does not give the complete picture. Very often interested speculation emphasizes only this aspect. No doubt the achievement of freedom from all sorrows and joys, and other such dualities is the goal of all philosophic and spiritual training in our country. But the means is not negating the world. On the other hand, the path that is described in the *Gita* as 'Karma-Yoga' preserves the spirit of our culture, viz. renunciation in action. This attitude of renunciation is—not hankering after the fruits of action and being prepared to receive the ill with the well. This

attitude of renunciation is that which is characteristic of the lives of Indian women to a remarkable degree. This is evident from the fact that the history of the women's movement in India is completely free from any struggle for equality or political rights. Women in our country have not been considering political and economic equality as a very essential requisite. If Karma-Yoga is the ideal of our cultural life, then indeed our women are really and truly Karma-Yogins.

The life of a girl in our country is moulded always on the basis of self-sacrifice and service to others. Our very laws echo this. It is always the daughter of the house who has to take care of the comforts of others and she has invariably to take a second place in matters of comfort and convenience. It is a duty which gradually loses its imperative character by becoming identified with the inclinations of the individual. This trains the girl for her future duties in life, viz. those of a wife and of a mother. To most Indian girls, becoming a wife is not so much a matter of choice, as in the West, but a necessity, for she is always the dependent person. The Indian wife, with an ancient heritage to live up to, has before her the example of ideal women who have been virtuous wives. The Indian girl, from her infancy, is taught to live up to these ideals. The ideal wife, as portrayed in the *Itihāsa-Purāna*, is called upon to identify her individuality with and sublimate her personality in that of her husband according to the accepted code of wifely behaviour. Is this not the highest type of renunciation of the self?

Literature all over the world recognizes mother-love as the most sacred form of selflessness. Add to that the Indian idea that marriage is only a means of getting the desired offspring and not an end in itself—



then we have the concentrated essence of all selflessness. We believe that a home devoid of children is not sacred. Children are the means for the parents' attaining salvation. Hence woman is the instrument for the achievement of Mokṣha. All other things are incidental. Hence woman becomes the selfless worker in Indian family life. The similes that are given in our literature are symbolic. Woman is the creeper, always in search of a support. But for the support, the creeper cannot live. Hence, in the field of spiritual life, our women, whether they be literate or illiterate, are indeed very much in the forefront. It is this type of self-annihilation that has produced, even within living memory, glorious examples of womanhood.

It may be questioned, by modern thinkers, whether such an attitude of selflessness is possible. Woman as a human being is as much conditioned by instincts, motives, desires, and emotions as man. As such, to make out that at every stage of her life she should live only for others, forgetting herself, is to expect the impossible. This is a common objection levelled against all Indian spiritual thought. The answer is the same. Reality is one. The differences of 'You' and 'Me' are all illusory and are the result of ignorance. For the ordinary average man, realization of this truth is next to impossible. So, as the *Gita* says, sublimation of personal motives and working for the welfare of society and for the love of God is one of the ways of attaining this truth. The Indian woman, whether she be a maiden at home, a wife, or a mother, always works not for her own sake, but for the sake of others.

Now, leaving the spiritual field and coming down to our everyday life, we find that all is not as it should be. The very basis of social life of our women today has been responsible for many of the ills which they have to face in the world. For lack of appreciation and understanding, the mode of life laid down by our ancient law-givers has taken the form of blind insistence on outmoded forms. The vicissitudes of history, coupled

with the selfishness of human nature, have so moulded events that at present the women of India have been left a long way behind in the march to progress. There are, of course, a few fortunate Indian women who are today illustrious examples, bringing glory to their kind and to their land. They are the exceptions. There are millions of others,—illiterate, ignorant women, whose lives are a struggle for existence. Their ignorance is so great that they are not even aware of the benefits of modern scientific developments. Their cultural and spiritual development, though rich, needs enlightened expression.

Our economic set-up is such that many people do not have enough to eat. What little there is, it is given first to the lord and master of the house, then to the children, and then, if anything is left over, it is consumed by the woman. No doubt this is a laudable idea, in that it is the most extreme form of selflessness. But its results are sometimes deplorable. For, unhealthy and semi-starved women, raising children who are weaklings, both physically and mentally, speaks ill of a nation. We hear nowadays so much being said of the care of children, and the environment in which children should be brought up. But the essential prior factor is forgotten, or is not given so much attention. Our women should be healthy physically and mentally, must be cultured and educated, before a nation can produce young people who would be steeped in high ideals.

When there is no natural outlet for a flood, it breaks its bounds and destroys everything. So it has been in our community. As years passed and as decades rolled on, the position of our women became almost pitiable. For example, the practice of *sati*, which began as an offering of love and loyalty to the husband, ended in a cruel ritual, and when this was made legally punishable, other forms of suffering had to be faced by the widow in our society. She is considered 'inauspicious', and is often the drudge of the household. The laws of property and inheritance, which have made our women



entirely dependent on men, have made her position all the more difficult. As a result, even enlightened men have been seen to treat women more as conveniences and ornaments than as human beings. The Dharma of the woman, it is cited, is to be selfless. It has come to the stage when there is one law for man, both spiritual and secular, and another law for woman. All this suppression we now find breaking out into channels which are not desirable. The churning up of all value concepts, as a result of the two global wars and the inevitable intermingling of races and cultures, has given our women, at least of the younger generation, a peep into a new world order, where men and women are equal, both in the sight of God and man. As a result of this there is a swing to the opposite side. Unessential things have assumed larger importance as symbols of freedom, freedom from established taboos and customs. When this manifestation is sought to be checked by the social code, subtler forms of opposition are seen to develop. As a consequence we find juvenile delinquency in girls has become a very common thing today. Girls who find that they cannot achieve what they want by fair means, adopt wrong means to achieve their ends. Sometimes, it is the desire to show off that induces the girls to go wrong. Sometimes it is the genuine desire for the possession of something which they cannot afford, both economically and morally, that makes them resort to anti-social methods of attaining them. To balance the treatment that is meted out to them as the inferior sex, both privately and publicly, they try to behave in the same manner as boys do, and more often than not land themselves in trouble. Poverty, illiteracy, and lack of culture, all work together to vitiate the vision of these young girls who stray into undesirable paths.

The remedy lies not so much in apprehending these girls and putting them under protective detention as in educating them on the right lines and changing the social and home atmosphere to such an extent that these

girls have an opportunity to develop self-respect and self-reliance. It is lack of these qualities that is responsible for the misbehaviour of girls.

It is a matter of contention whether private enterprise can do much in the direction of remoulding our society. The efforts of the well-to-do philanthropic people, spending at most a few hours per day, sitting in committees and passing resolutions will not be of much avail in removing the deep-seated prejudices inherent in our social set-up. In very rare cases, as in the case of Gandhiji and Acharya Vinoba Bhave, when one's whole life is dedicated to the upliftment of the people, and when their personal lives themselves are examples, can some good be achieved by such private enterprise. The only other way is to reform our methods of education, instilling into the minds of our younger generation the idea that equality and freedom do not depend on mere outer garb or external modes of behaviour. Freedom really means the right to determine one's own way of life within the framework of certain general principles. It has been a most unfortunate thing that although our women have a very noble spiritual background, the power to appreciate it and intelligibly appropriate these principles into their life is lacking. These spiritual principles have lost their real import due to ignorance and neglect and have become mere external forms.

It cannot be gainsaid that economic independence has a lot to do in moulding the self-respect of woman and giving her a status in the social set-up. When the woman finds that she is completely dependent on others, even for the smallest necessities of life, either she loses all interest in things and conforms to the set pattern, whether she likes it or not, thus killing all initiative in herself, or she gives up all responsibility and behaves in an antisocial manner. To remedy this state of affairs, it is not enough if merely encomiums are heaped upon woman, while denying her the fundamental rights. A re-adjustment of economic rights is very essential. There are



numerous women, who, for no fault of their own, have been deserted by their husbands, and consequently scorned by their brothers and parents, and who are leading miserable lives. All this points very clearly to the fact that our women must have better economic rights. They must be in a position to stand on their own legs.

A brief review of all our standard literatures reveals the fact that for a long time women had been considered by their menfolk to be 'stumbling-blocks' in the way of the latter's spiritual progress. That women were a source of moral danger to earnest men has been the theme of most of our Purānic stories. As a result of this attitude we find that women are debarred from many things which are innocuous in themselves. The basis of this attitude may be traced to historic sources. In our Shrutis and Smritis there is no such marked feeling expressed. On the other hand, there have been eminent women well up both in secular and spiritual knowledge and ranking very high in the esteem of the learned. Probably, later on, due to the influence of foreign cultures, such as the Ionian and Muslim cultures, the Hindu man began to arrogate unto himself all noble qualities, making woman his subservient playmate, to be discarded or put away, once serious matters are in the offing. Years of such treatment has resulted, in the modern day, in women themselves forgetting their individuality and self-respect. They have begun to take for granted that they are what the men have made them out to be. That is why we find some things that are quite ordinary and common in other countries assuming an unusual significance in our country, such as co-education, women working in the public offices along with men, and widow remarriage.

If Indian women are not to lag behind, are not to become loads dragging their men down with them, then they must be fully

educated, not merely taught to read and write, as it very often happens, but they must be taught to appreciate the values that lie behind our culture, values rid of the vitiating circumstances of human selfishness. A certain amount of 'living the letter of the law' is inevitable in any co-ordinate living. But the tendency to concentrate only on the letter and forget the meaning behind must be eradicated if the lives of our women are to be full and useful. Science and psychology have proved that men and women are but complements of each other and no one is superior to the other. Philosophy and religion make it clear that there can exist no difference between man and man, not to speak of man and woman, in the sight of God. All unjust inequities, which have outlived their use and have become mere appendages, must be removed.

Women who are for ever denied their human rights, women who are always playing the subservient role, cannot have the capacity for leadership. If India is to be a leader in the affairs of the world, then her women must become leaders in their own spheres. Leadership is the result of clear and rational thinking, aided by the capacity to arrive at decisions quickly. This can come to our women only when they get out of the rut in which they have been living for the past few centuries. Signs of this rising up are not wanting. Slowly, but steadily, women have come to realize their place in life and their status in society. Education has revealed to them their past glory and has made them feel ashamed of their sliding back. Now, in every field, be it spiritual life, or politics, or social life, or academic life, we have shining examples of Indian womanhood, shining in all their pristine glory, beckoning to their sisters to follow their lead and to bring glory to their hoary tradition and to their motherland,



# THE ROLE OF THE MOTHER

BY SRIMATI LILA MAJUMDAR

The indiscipline, laxity, and indolence of the present generation of children have often been deplored by those interested in their welfare. The time has now arrived when one must descend to fundamentals and discover the causes of this attitude and if possible remedy them.

The whole situation appears to hinge on a misconception of the significance of the term 'freedom'. The responsibility for this lies more often with the family than elsewhere; and more often with the mother than with anyone else, because in a civilized world, she is the pivot round which family life revolves.

Liberty entails law. There can be no freedom without self-control, and no self-respect without regard for the respect of others. When our children seek to humiliate those set in authority over them for grievances however real, they refute those very principles of self-respect for which they are fighting. These are fundamental principles, which every mother must teach her children.

The days of mute obedience have fortunately passed and we must acknowledge the right of our children to question our directions and we must either be able to justify them or we must agree that we have no right to pass them. Let us bring up a generation of intelligent sons and daughters and not unquestioning automatons.

At the same time we must remember that he who cannot control his own passions, even under provocation, will never enjoy freedom but will always be a slave to the most brutal of masters, namely his own unbridled self. This the mother must teach her children, for it is bitter knowledge and will not be welcome from other hands.

Let us teach our children to give respect where respect is due, but nowhere else. Let us not require them to give undue veneration

to unprincipled persons because of personal relationships. It is mainly because we expect from our children a show of respect towards people whom we ourselves at other times have decried as unworthy of respect that they fail to respect even those to whom respect is due. Let us venerate only those who are worthy of veneration for the sake of the dignity of our own humanity, but let us, at all times, teach our children courtesy, kindness, and compassion to everyone. Let us be ruthless in our anger only when we stand up against wrong and let us never condone wrong but always struggle against it, not unwisely, but according to discretion, seeking always the occasion to rectify it. Those who suffer wrongdoing are as much to blame as the wrongdoers themselves. Let us teach our wayward children all this.

This was how our fathers prayed: 'Lead us from untruth to Truth, from darkness unto Light, from death unto Life Everlasting'. This is the greatest of all prayers because it does not seek respite from bodily pains or the endowment of earthly happiness, gifts to which the meanest of creatures are entitled and about which there is no need that we who have created want, should remind our Creator—but it asks for the highest gift of all, the strength and the power to fulfil our human birth.

The modern generation, as a result of bitter disillusionment, no longer believes in the efficacy of incantations. Let us, therefore, implant it in their lives to give forth leaf and blossom therein and to bear fruit. This is work meet for the gentle hands of the mother alone and will require much patience, forgiveness, and self-denial.

Truth signifies a great deal more than the mere adherence to facts as they have occurred, although that is also necessary, except to



avert pain and sorrow from others. Truth itself is absolute, unchangeable, and uncompromising. Honesty, integrity, trustworthiness—these are qualities no generation, however sophisticated, can do without. There can never be any excuse for treachery, cruelty, and selfishness. Should our children adhere to this wide view of truth, their little problems of behaviour will at once be simplified. Let us teach this to them.

Morality and immorality, on the other hand, are more relative terms, being always conditioned by our social sense. In this sphere, too, truth must be established and a standard of purity maintained in thought and action. Purity does not imply only the relationship between men and women, as so many of us have come to think. Purity implies selflessness, compassion, and forgiveness. It is a well-known fact that Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa taught men to beware of lust and greed of wealth; but he counted among his disciples a few whose private lives were not without imperfections. On the other hand, the very touch of money, as the symbol of greed and selfishness, he found physically unbearable.

This is the truth our children must learn to seek, not merely worldly success. They must abandon darkness and travel towards Light; they must eschew all ignorance and seek Knowledge.

Even as late as one generation ago, a certain degree of ignorance was considered essential in order to preserve the beauty of innocence. Let us leave no room for ignorance in the lives of our children. Let us reveal to them, by degrees, as their mental powers unfold, the true significance of all things. Knowledge can never harm anyone, because for ordinary mortals it is the only way to Truth.

Let our children learn the proper values of all earthly things, their usefulness as well as their danger; then there will be no likelihood of their cherishing unworthy ideals. Let our children learn to know themselves, their own strength and weakness, and all their

possibilities. If they underestimate their own powers, they will never achieve anything. On the other hand, if they magnify their own importance, they will be failures in the eyes of the world, for their endeavours will not be in earnest and will be directed towards the wrong goal. Neither must the mothers abuse the weaknesses or boast of the talents of their children, but always urge them towards knowledge.

In the Western world slothfulness has been called one of the seven deadly sins. Let us guard our children from slothfulness and habits of dependence even on the mother herself. This is the hardest task of all: so to bring up one's own children that they will not need the help of the mother; to stand aside and permit them to make mistakes and learn their bitter lessons; to allow them to bear the burden of their own responsibilities; to always stand aside and give help only when necessary; to grieve with them in their sorrows and be joyful in their happiness, but at the same time allowing them to lead their own lives, along the path leading from darkness unto Light. This is the greatest sorrow and glory of motherhood.

Our children do not really belong to us and are not given to us in order to satisfy our own ego. They have their own lives to live, their own destinies to fulfil. It is wrong to think that we are always the best judge of our children's lives, that because there is no love on earth comparable to a mother's love for her children, her wisdom is also the greatest. Thus our pride becomes entangled in our maternal affection which should be the most selfless of all earthly relationships.

We are always seeking to satisfy our own frustrations in the lives of our children. They are separate entities,—given to us to cherish for a few years,—who have to accomplish their destinies in their own way. What had we to do with them in the eternity which preceded their birth and in the eternity which will follow this little life? This is the spiritual truth our children must learn, that the fulfilment of their destinies lies ultimately with



themselves and with the Powers which sent them. There is a loneliness of the soul which accompanies it from the cradle to the grave and which nothing can assuage save the soul itself. Against this loneliness the mother must prepare the child.

There is no doubt that happiness for oneself is not the purpose of life, whatever else it may be. Happiness itself is a vague term and, as the majority of men conceive it, consists of freedom from pain, anxiety, want, and weariness; the last, the most deadly of all, being itself the product of the other freedoms, is probably impossible to banish. Happiness therefore remains unattainable even in this poor sense of the term. Why should our children learn to cherish it as the sole purpose of life?

This does not mean that we are in any way to deprive our children of all enjoyment and pleasure. On the contrary, the best way to show our gratitude to Providence for the good and beautiful things of life is to accept them, cherish them, and enjoy them, but not as the be-all and end-all of existence.

This is the pitfall in front of the modern generation of intelligent and sophisticated young men and women, that they have little faith in spiritual matters and no lasting satisfaction in earthly things, of which so much and no more may be taken and even slightly more than the minimum palls on the appetite. This is the tragedy of their lives. They have not learnt that life has any other purpose. Let us therefore set a purpose for the lives of our children. In this country of want, misery, and ignorance, whoever rescues a person from misery or ignorance finds a purpose for his existence.

The best part of a child's education is generally accomplished at home where, long

before he masters the alphabet, the child begins to learn, at first in a groping way and then more clearly, of the things which are of real value and of those which are not. As we leave the imprint of our hands on dough, so we leave the stamp of our own thoughts on the minds of our innocent children. Should we ourselves value things which are of no value, by our very attitude we teach our children to cherish the non-essentials. We should be careful about what we cherish and what we abandon, for the sake of our children.

It is also for the mother to teach her children always to perform, to the best of their ability, all those duties which belong to the station in life wherein Providence has placed them and all those tasks which they have voluntarily undertaken. To be a man of his convictions one need not be rigidly opinionated. The righteous man always keeps himself open to correction and his righteousness is more important than his personal predilections.

In India mothers have in their hands the whole future of the country and their role is no less important in moulding the destiny of the motherland than that of the scholars, teachers, and patriots. They hold the truth in their hands but have not always the power to impart it to wayward ears. Mothers must recognize in the teachers the best friends of their children. It is when there is discrepancy between the teaching at home and the teaching at school that the child learns to regard both with suspicion. Therefore the fundamental principle of imparting knowledge—whether of academical matters or of more vital subjects—should be a ceaseless endeavour to travel from untruth to Truth, from darkness to Light, and from death to Life Everlasting.

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'In this Kali Yuga one attains to God if one simply sticks to truth. The Master used to say, "He who speaks nothing but truth is lying in the lap of God".'

—Sayings of the Holy Mother



# MAHĀMĀYĀ

BY KSHITIS C. CHAUDHURI

Long long ago there lived a king named Suratha who ruled over a vast country. Always treading the path of virtue, he used to look upon the subjects as his own children. There was peace, plenty, and happiness in the land. But, ere long, a race of barbarians became his enemies and attacked his kingdom. The mighty king, with his legions, fought valiantly against them; but lo, the wonder of wonders, even though much inferior in numbers, the barbarians won the battle! Suratha lost to them all his outlying territories, and fleeing back to his capital remained the master of only a small kingdom. But misfortunes never come single. He was betrayed by his own ministers who misappropriated money from the royal treasury and even incited the army to rebel against the king. Apprehending further trouble and disgrace, the hapless monarch one day quietly slipped away from the palace. He went all alone on horseback,—on the plea of going a hunting.

Riding on and on, King Suratha entered a deep forest in the heart of which he discovered an Ashrama (i.e. hermitage) wherein lived the great sage Medhas with quite a large number of pupils. The Ashrama breathed an air of divine peace and love. In its precincts even the fiercest beasts of prey roamed about quietly like gentle creatures, forgetting their natural propensity to kill or do harm. The sage and his pupils accorded a hearty welcome to the royal visitor, and the self-exiled king stayed on in the Ashrama. But neither the exquisite natural beauty of the surroundings nor the serene atmosphere of the place could make him forget his sorrows and humiliations. He said to himself: 'I wonder if the wicked and avaricious ministers have been taking good care of the royal palace and the capital town which had been built at such great

expense by my forefathers. Is my pet elephant receiving enough food and caresses from his present master? Alas! Alas! Those attendants who had always received wages, presents, and favours from me must now have become the devoted servants of the usurpers of my throne. By strict economy and the avoidance of all luxuries, I had always kept the royal treasury full. But the wicked and extravagant ministers are surely squandering the accumulated wealth. Soon the treasury must become empty'.

While the exiled king was absorbed in such thoughts, his eyes fell upon a stranger whose face indicated a troubled mind. Moved by pity, the king accosted him and enquired who he was, what had brought him to the forest, and why he looked so melancholy. The stranger replied that he was a Vaishya (i.e. one belonging to the trading class), that just a few days ago, he was one of the richest men in his community, but now he was a penniless wanderer, having been turned out of his home by a wicked wife and avaricious sons. 'They and my other relatives', said the Vaishya, 'have deprived me of all my wealth and possessions. But still my mind is full of solicitude for them. I am anxious to know about their health and happiness. Alas! Who can tell me how my sons are doing, and how they are behaving—whether they are treading the path of virtue or have gone astray?'

'How is it, O Vaishya,' asked the king, 'that even now you retain so much love and affection for your family, for the very same wife and sons and relatives who have been so cruel and faithless towards you?'

'What you say is true indeed, O king,' replied the Vaishya, 'but even so, I cannot harden my heart against them. Strange though it may seem, it is true nevertheless that



the stream of my love still flows in full strength towards them. There can be no reason or justification for this; but the fact has to be admitted'.

The king and the Vaishya, deeply in thought over this matter, slowly repaired to their host. After respectful obeisance, the king said, 'O great sage, our minds are agitated with grave questions. May I crave answer to them from thee? Here am I, a person, who has been betrayed by his own people and deprived of his kingdom. But still I am fondly attached to the same people who have persecuted me. And here is a Vaishya who has been maltreated by his wife and children, betrayed by his friends, and forsaken by his relatives; but still he cannot withdraw his affection from them. Both of us clearly perceive the absurdity of it all; even so, we cannot hold ourselves back. This state of mind can be understood in the case of an ignorant, unthinking person; but neither of us is like that'.

'There are knowledge and knowledge, O king,' said the sage, Medhas, in reply. 'There is one kind of knowledge born of the contact of the senses with the outside world. Through such sense-perception one knows the various objects separately, and as differing from one another. This kind of knowledge is common to all creatures—high and low—though the mode and level of perception may differ. For example, the owl is blind in the day-time, while the crow is blind during the night. Again, there are worms, insects, and the cat which can see in darkness as well as in light. Man too has sense-perception, and by nature it is not different from the sense-perception of other animals. In the matter of fulfilling physical needs, of deriving physical pleasures, of bestowing love and affections, he does not differ essentially from other animals. O king, don't you see with what great care and devotion the mother-bird feeds her young ones even while she knows that such feeding will not appease her own hunger? On the contrary, have you not noticed, O king, how selfish persons rear up children in the hope

and expectation of getting some service in return in their old age?

'It is Mahāmāyā, the all-powerful and all-pervading Shakti of the Supreme One (Vishnu), that produces in the minds of all beings a delusion which draws their minds into the eddying current of "attachment to the world", and throws them into the abyss of ignorance. This Maya, i.e. illusion-producing and hypnotizing power of the Supreme Being, is known as Yoga-Nidrā. It is She who keeps the minds of all creatures steeped in ignorance and attachment to the world. Hence it is no wonder, O king and O Vaishya, that you cannot withdraw your affections from the same persons who have been faithless towards you. And, not to speak of ordinary mortals, Mahāmāyā subdues the minds of even persons with highly developed intellect. It is She who has created the phenomenal world. It is only when it pleases Her that She bestows on Her favoured ones the blessing of Mukti (i.e. release from the Cycle of Life and Death). She it is who creates the bondage; again, She it is who confers on man the inestimable boon of Brahma-Vidyā (i.e. the knowledge of the Absolute) which enables him to rip the bondage and to tear the veil of Ignorance'.

Struck with wonder, the king importuned the great sage to tell them all about the great Goddess. So the sage narrated three awe-inspiring stories which have come down from the earliest times regarding the appearance of Mahāmāyā in various forms divine for the deliverance of the gods (i.e. the innocent and the virtuous) from the oppression of mighty Asuras (i.e. demons), who, having somehow got mastery over the three worlds, inflicted untold miseries upon the conquered. It is a most powerful, ennobling, soul-stirring narrative that induces the human soul to take refuge in the Great Mother of the Universe, and thereafter march forward through life in full confidence of attaining the goal through Her grace. It is a story that not only prompts the devotee to conquer Evil and to persist in the Good, but also urges him on to go beyond the pales of Good and Evil and attain Mukti.



After listening to the narrative, the king and the Vaishya repaired to the bank of the rivulet that flowed past the Ashrama, and worshipped the Great Mother with all earnestness and devotion. Pleased with their fervent prayer, the Mother appeared before them in person and granted to the king the boon of long-enduring worldly prosperity and to the Vaishya the boon of Mukti as prayed for by each.

Now, if we analyse the story, it readily occurs to us that the question which King Suratha put to the sage is one which arises in every human soul from time to time in its journey through this world. Why is evil so rampant on this earth? How is it we remain passionately attached to this world even while fed up with its experience? There can be no explanation but Maya. How is it that we always perceive that there is a veil hiding the Reality from us? Again, the answer is—Maya. What can deliver us from its all-pervading influence? It is only the grace of the Great Goddess that can do so. How is one to obtain that grace? By good life, by incessant prayer, by deep meditation, and by complete surrender to Her will.

The life of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa is an eloquent testimony to the truth of the above proposition. Three events stand out. Firstly, when he began his Sadhana, he had no guide, no instructor. His sole reliance was on the mercy of the Divine Mother. Day and night he prayed to Her for the realization of the highest truth. At last the Divine Mother responded to his prayer and vouchsafed unto him the vision beatific. All his life he remained a child, utterly relying for everything upon Her, and merging his own will entirely in Hers.

Secondly, we find that when Tota Puri came to Dakshineswar and offered to initiate him into the realization of Advaita Vedanta, Sri Ramakrishna quietly but firmly replied that he must have the Divine Mother's permission before agreeing to accept the offer. Tota Puri could hardly conceal a smile; because in Advaita there is neither Mother

nor child, neither worshipper nor the worshipped. According to its tenets, the Divine Mother, i.e. the Shakti of Brahman, is as unreal as the relative universe.

Just after a few months had gone by, the same Tota Puri had a wonderful experience which perforce obliged him to admit to Sri Ramakrishna that the existence of the Mother was real. Now he recognized that Maya, the Shakti of Brahman, was as real as Brahman itself. Sri Ramakrishna was only too pleased and said, 'Ah! At first you refused to believe in my Mother, and argued with me in order to disprove Her! Now you perceive that She is real. She taught me long ago that Brahman and Shakti are inseparable—like fire and its burning property'.

The young Naren (later Swami Vivekananda), at one time an enthusiastic member of the Brahmo Samaj, was another intimate and dear one who ridiculed the idea of the Motherhood of God and the worship of Her through images and symbols. But soon there arrived an occasion when he actually saw Her face to face, and was thus compelled to give up his former obstinate disbelief. At this Sri Ramakrishna's happiness knew no bounds. He went for joy and muttered again and again, 'How good indeed; Naren has acknowledged the Mother; very good indeed'.

Thirdly, one of the most significant events in the life of Sri Ramakrishna is the worship by him of his holy consort, Sri Sarada Devi, as a manifestation in flesh and blood of the Divine Mother. It is this act (the *Shodāshī Puja*) which culminated and crowned his long Sadhana, his efforts at realization of the Godhead. It is said that, on an auspicious new moon night, Sri Ramakrishna made all arrangements for the worship of Goddess Kālī in his own room and he asked Sarada Devi to be present there at the time. As the hour struck, he took the seat of the worshipper and beckoned to her to sit on the *Āsana* (i.e. a low stool) kept reserved for the image of the Goddess. Like one under a spell, Sarada Devi did as she was desired to do. From the beginning both worshipper and the worshipped



seemed to be in a semi-conscious state. No sooner were the rites of worship finished than both of them passed completely into Samadhi and remained in that state for a long time. In the small hours of the morning Sri Ramakrishna partially recovered consciousness and laid at the feet of the Holy Mother (Sarada Devi) the fruits of his lifelong Sadhana, together with his rosary, and then saluted her. 'It was the consummation of his Sadhana, in which he dedicated his all to the Mother of the Universe, manifested through the living symbol of Sarada Devi'. And it was no momentary act of deification; it remained constant for the rest of his life.

We shall conclude this theme by recalling a most impressive incident narrated by Sister Nivedita. While staying at Dakshineswar, the Holy Mother once brought to Sri Ramakrishna a basket of fruits and vegetables 'with all the eagerness and pride of a happy child. He looked at it gravely and said, "But why so extravagant?" "At least it is not for my-

self", said the young wife, all her sunshine gone, in sudden disappointment, and she turned and went away, crying quietly. But this Ramakrishna could not bear to see. "Go, one of you", he said, turning to the boys beside him, "and bring her back. My very devotion to God will take wings, if I see her weep!" So dear was she to him'.

Did Sri Ramakrishna deify his consort simply because to him every woman was a symbol, a manifestation of the Divine Mother? Or did he see in her something more? Was she in fact nothing more than an unsophisticated, kind-hearted village woman on whom Sri Ramakrishna foisted a figment of his own imagination? In other words, does she shine by her own glory, or merely by reflected light? The question becomes meaningless, if we consider for a moment how scrupulous Sri Ramakrishna was in observing truth in word and deed, and how very particular he was in choosing the objects of his love and veneration.

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'Nothing can happen without the will of God. Not even a straw can move. When a man passes into a favourable time, he gets the desire to contemplate on God. But when the time is unfavourable, he gets all the facilities for doing evil actions. Everything happens in time according to the will of God. It is God alone who expresses His will through the actions of man'.

'The mind will become steady if one repeats the name of God fifteen or twenty thousand times a day. This is indeed true; I myself have experienced it. Let aspirants practise it first; then if they fail, let them complain. As the wind removes the cloud, so the name of God disperses the cloud of worldliness'.

'If you love a man, you will have to suffer for it. There is no suffering in loving God. One realizes Him in proportion to the intensity of one's feeling for Him'

'How little intelligence a man has! He requires one thing but asks for another! It is best for him therefore, to surrender all desires at the feet of God—God will do what is best for him'.

—*Sayings of the Holy Mother*



# THOUGHTS ON DEVI IN THE BLISS OF MENTAL ADORATION

BY C. SIVARAMAMURTI

The first object of love and affection for the new-born child is the mother, that noble object whose personal sacrifices are legion, whose love is deeper than the ocean, whose tender care is beyond comprehension, who, as it were, symbolizes unselfish attention and the highest heavenly grace in bodily form. It is indeed an object of utmost veneration. This immaculate object on earth, the mother, symbolizes the spirit of that great concept of the heavenly Mother known in various forms that compose a maze of varieties in the complicated study of iconography. But the child knows the mother in whatever mood she may be and in whatever form she may appear, for it is the privilege of the child to be as near the mother as possible, and in an ocean of heads the child knows its mother. The cow recognizes its calf, the parent the child, the bird its young one and the instinct that permeates in every one of these cases is that of divine intuition born of affection.

The naughty child may by its mischievous pranks stray away from the mother, but it is the mother who is concerned about the safety and the whereabouts of the child and frantically runs about to regain the lost one, and how happy she is when the lost child is found again! It is this, the innocent child, that knows nothing more or better than the mother as long as it is in her lap, which forgets her as it grows a little older and becomes interested as a boy in its playmates, as a youth in the damsel that attracts its eye, as an adult in its selfish pursuits of what it thinks are steps in the ladder of its progress in life, and as an old man in reminiscences of the exploits of its youth. But the mother,— what a sacred figure she is! She forgets herself and her wants and needs. *She* does not

think of whether her child has or has not thought of her, but *she* would necessarily think of and love her child even long after it has ceased to be child, for to a mother an adult is still a child.

If in our mad pursuit in life there is very little time left to us for thought of a Higher Power, it does not mean that that Higher Power in the form of the Divine Mother does not bestow affection on us. Our very existence is a proof of that divine maternal affection. Shaṅkarāchārya says that it is because one does not know the mode of performance, or because of the lack of affluence, or out of inertia, or due to inability to perform, that the devotee has neglected worship and strayed away from the feet of Devī. But this is surely to be pardoned by the Mother who is the uplifter of all, for in this world there may be an erring child but there can never be a resentful mother.—

विधेरज्ञानेन द्विविणधिरहेणालसतया  
विधेयाशक्यत्वात्तव चरणयोर्वा च्युतिरभूत् ।  
तदेतत्क्षन्तव्यं जननि सकलोद्धारिणि शिवे  
कुपुत्रो जायेत क्वचिदपि कुमाता न भवति ॥

*Devyaṣarādhakṣamāpanastotra, 2.*

After all, in this world there are four Purushārthas—Dharma, Artha, Kāma, and Moksha. It is in the pursuit of one or other of these, specially Artha and Kāma, that this world spends itself out; and it is in this pursuit that one forgets the very sublime aspect of things and the divine Creator who is in fact the *preraka*; for, whatever the aspect in which one is most interested in reaching the peak, it ultimately leads him, by that final stage, to that ultimate Cause of all causes, the Divine Mother, which makes Shaṅkara,



remark that She is the creator of all Dharma, the Maker of all the sacred texts like the Vedas that lay down the rules and courses that constitute the Dharmic way of life, that She alone is the root of all earthly affluence with Her lotus feet ever and anon touched in respect by the very Lord of Wealth, Kubera, that She is the source of all unpolluted love, the Divine Mother, who has caused triumph for even Cupid and can triumph over Cupid himself, and that She, the paramount spouse of the Lord of the universe, is the seed of salvation for all good folk.—

विधात्री धर्माणां त्वमसि सकलान्नायजननी  
त्वमर्थानां मूलं धनदनमनीयाङ्घ्रिकमले ।  
त्वमादिः कामानां जननि कृतकन्दर्पविजये  
सतां मुक्तेर्बीजं त्वमसि परमब्रह्ममहिषी ॥

*Ānandalaharī, 8.*

In this world it is only the green creeper, bright in its foliage and attractive by its blossoming flowers and other factors, that is sought, because all these qualities form the sweets of worldly pleasures. But the devotee is not mindful of such outward qualities like green verdure or bright bloom of flowers. Aparṇā (the term signifies Pārvatī and also literally means 'devoid of leaves') is indeed to be sought by one and all in this world, as by coming into contact with Her person even that ancient Sthāṇu (Sthāṇu means both Śiva and a wooden post) blossoms and bears the fruit of heavenly bliss.—

सपर्णामाकीर्णां कतिपयगुणैः सादरमिह  
श्रयन्त्यन्ये वल्लीं मम तु मतिरेवं विलसति ।  
अपर्णैका सेव्या जगति सकलैर्यत्परिवृतः  
पुराणोऽपि स्थाणुः फलति किल कैवल्यपदवीम् ॥

*Ānandalaharī, 7.*

If this idea of Aparṇā and Sthāṇu as the Mother and the Father of the universe gives us an idea of the possible fruit of Mukti by the sprouting of the old Sthāṇu in the form of a Śivaliṅga to give the devotee salvation, it is the grace of Aparṇā, the Mother, that

plays the greatest part in it. It is the mercy of the Mother that matters and this Mother is the very personification of tenderness towards the child. As Parāshara Bhatta puts it, we are all in one way or other mere children to be excused by the Mother, and She intercedes on our behalf just as any mother would intercede on behalf of a naughty child with her husband who is about to box the ears of the child for his activities. She would, indeed, point out to Her Consort, the Lord, how unkind it is of Him to expect everything ideal in this world. To err is a common factor which should not be magnified for meting out punishments. Thus She makes Him overlook our sins and makes us all Her own.—

पितेव त्वत्प्रेथान् जननि परिपूर्णांगसि जने  
हितस्रोतोवृत्त्या भवति च कदाचित्कलुषधीः ।  
किमेतन्निर्दोषः क इह जगतीति त्वमुचितै-  
रुपायैर्विस्मयस्व स्वजनयसि माता तदसि नः ॥

*Śrīguṇaratnakośa, 52.*

Contemplation of that sweet form of the Mother, so dear to us, becomes so pleasant, and, at a stage, so soothing, that Nilakaṇṭha Dikṣhita goes a step further and wonders how he, Her child, can bear separation from Her; indeed he cannot bear any impediment even for a moment which interferes with the pleasure of his hearing tales of Her glory, he must necessarily engage himself in adoring Her feet, he should have a real experience of Her for adoration of Her physical form and cannot bear separation. If salvation means this he is prepared to have it. But if on the other hand it means anything in which he can have no physical existence to enjoy the company of the Divine Mother, he vehemently opposes that great calamity termed 'salvation'.—

नाहं सहे तव कथाश्रवणान्तरायं  
नाहं सहे तव पदार्चनविच्युतिं वा ।  
मोक्षं दिशैतद्विरुद्धमिदं न चेत्स्या-  
न्नैवास्तु मातरपवर्गमहोपसर्गः ॥

*Ānandasāgarastava, 52.*





THE DIVINE MOTHER (Devī)

सिन्दूरारुणविग्रहां त्रिणयनां माणिक्यमौलिस्फुर-  
 त्तारानायकशेखरां स्मितमुखीमापीनवक्षोरुहाम् ।  
 पाणिभ्यामलिपूर्णरत्नचषकं रक्तोत्पलं विभ्रतीं  
 सौम्यां रत्नघटस्थरक्तचरणां ध्यायेत्परामम्बिकाम् ॥

But he takes a delight in recalling in his mind and enjoying in ruminating, so to say, on the transcendental beauty of that auspicious form of glory of the Mother from head to foot; and softly swayed as on a swing on a train of waves in the ocean of bliss and almost lost therein, he has lost all count of the days that have elapsed in such contemplation.—

आदूढमाचरणमम्ब तवानुवार-  
 मन्तः स्मरन्भुवनमङ्गलमङ्गमङ्गम् ।  
 आनन्दसागरतरङ्गपरम्पराभि-  
 रान्दोलितो न गणयामि गतान्यहानि ।

*Ānandasāgarastava, 53.*

That Divine Mother is beautiful from head to foot. She is auspicious and She assures auspiciousness to the entire universe. Her every limb sparkles with that glorious transcendental beauty which conveys a particular charm and significance to the devotee. *The Pādādi-keśānta Stutis*, describing Her from head to foot in all Her glory, take account of every ripple in that great ocean of mercy that forms the body of the Divine Mother. The sway of Her eyes, the curve of Her lips, the movement of Her glances, the tinkling of Her anklets, the jingling of Her bracelets, the nectarean drops from Her breasts, the rustling of Her silken garments, even the slightest movement of the curly hair on Her forehead, are something significant, and have a message for us who are supplicants at Her lotus feet for salvation.

And so one of the sweetest of the Sanskrit poets, Mūka, has composed his *Pañcaśatī*, with a century of verses for each one of these: the lotus feet of Devī, the soft smile, and the merciful glance. In singing the glory of the beautiful, poets have gone into flights of



imagination. In the *Kavisamaya* or the parlance of the poets, smile, like fame, is white and immaculate; and of all the white things of the highest value, nectar, the milky ocean, the stream of Gaṅgā, and the moon are the most noteworthy. But for the comprehension of each one of these, Mūka feels, there is difficulty: in the case of nectar, it is drunk by the gods before we can comprehend it; the milky ocean cannot be viewed in its proper perspective as a calm picture of the ocean is an impossible thing because it is all the time churned by the gods and demons alike for nectar or the elixir of immortality; the immaculate stream of Gaṅgā is imprisoned as it were in the huge bundle of matted locks of Maheśa; the moon is often enveloped in darkness. Thus all these baffle proper description. The smile of Devī which resembles all these, is precisely for the same reason and in a greater degree something that baffles even the highest flight of poetic descriptive power.—

पीयूषं खलु पीयते सुरजनैर्दुग्धाम्बुधिर्मथ्यते  
माहेशेश्च जटाकलापनिगडैर्मन्दाकिनी नह्यते ।  
शोतांशुः पुरिभूयते च तमसा तस्मादियं तादृशी  
कामाक्षि स्मितमञ्जरी तव वचोवैदग्ध्यमुल्लङ्घते ॥

*Pañcaśatī, Mandasmitaśataka, 45.*

It is not clear what actually it is. It dazzles and dazes comprehension, but it is immaculately sweet, and so he explains to the Mother Herself what he feels it is and wonders whether his conjecture is correct. Is it a fourth stream, just an appendage to the three streams of the heavenly triple-streamed river Gaṅgā, or is it a second form, so to say, of nectar which destroys all pain and misery, or is it some new kind of milk so near us for the attainment of sweet expression of poetry? O Goddess of the Lord of Kāñchī! Is Your smile any one of these?—

किं त्रैस्रोतसमम्बिके परिणतं स्रोतश्चतुर्थं नवं  
पीयुषस्य समस्ततापहरणं किं वा द्वितीयं वपुः ।  
किंस्त्रिन्कटकं गिरो मधुरिमाभ्यासाय नर्थं पयः  
श्रीकाञ्चीपुरनायकप्रियतमे मन्दस्मितं तावकम् ॥

*Pañcaśatī, Mandasmitaśataka, 83.*

But Oh! How wonderful! The smile of the Devī is really incomparable. The bright hue of the white lotus is apparent only when the moon appears in the horizon and sheds beams on it. The moonlight itself is not there all the time and it is only after twilight that it makes its appearance. The bright gleam of pearls of the rarest hue is also the result only of great care in polishing them. But lo! the smile of Devī has a glory that is all so natural.—



THE INCOMPARABLE SMILE OF THE DEVĪ  
(*Mandasmita*)

वैमल्यं कुमुदश्रियां हिमहवः कान्त्यैव संयुक्षते  
ज्योत्स्नारोचिरपि प्रदोषसमयं प्राप्यैव संपद्यते ।  
स्वच्छत्वं नवमौक्तिकस्य परमं संस्कारतो दृश्यते  
कामाख्याः स्मितदीधितेर्विशदिमा नैसर्गिका भासते ॥

*Pañcaśatī, Mandasmitaśataka, 73.*

White, the very perfection of purity, like the flowing stream of the heavenly Gaṅgā mingling with the waters of the Yamunā, the bright effulgence of the smile of Kāmākshī, directed towards the blue throat of Śiva, variegates its colour, when in Her attitude of embrace of Śiva, and this picturesque colour-combination is for the welfare of the universe.—

शम्भोर्यां परिरम्भसंभ्रमविधौ नैर्मल्यसोमानिधि-  
गैर्वाणीव तरङ्गिणी कृतमृदुस्यन्दां कलिन्दात्यजाम् ।  
कलमाषीकुस्ते कलङ्कसुषमां कण्ठस्थलीचुम्बिनीं  
कामाख्याः स्मितकन्दलो भवतु सा कल्याणसन्दोहिनी ॥

*Pañcaśatī, Mandasmitaśataka, 8.*



But more than all that, the appearance of the smile of the Devi is something that looks like a contradiction in terms, but is yet indeed magical in its effect. Though clearly white the smile of the Divine Mother throws into darkness the silver light of the moon, and though itself delightfully cool lights up the fire of love in Paśupati's heart, and though stationed on the lower lip (*adhara* means lower lip and down below) it bestows the highest bliss by carrying up to salvation those who bow at Her feet.—

श्वेतापि प्रकटं निशाकररुचां मालिन्यमातन्वती  
शीतापि स्मरपावकं पशुपतेः संधुक्षयन्ती सदा ।  
स्वाभाव्यादधराश्रितापि नमतामुच्चैर्दिशन्ती गति  
कामाक्षि स्फुटमन्तरा स्फुरतु नस्त्वन्मन्दहासप्रभा ॥

*Pañcaśatī, Mandasmitaśataka, 10.*

The glances of the Devi are even more wonderful. Her eyes, delightfully beautiful and attractive like the blue lotus, tinge the heart of the Conqueror of the Tripuras with love, and establish their triumph. Sportive and ever-mov-



THE SPORTIVE GLANCES OF THE DEVI (*Kaṭākṣha*)

ing, Her glances create the most steadfast faith in the hearts of devotees. Charmingly curved, the contours of Her eyes, are straight in meting out justice to supplicants; and so in this sportive fashion roll the glances of the Divine Mother in an eternal dance of bliss.—

नीलोऽपि रागमधिकं जनयन्पुरारे-  
लोलोऽपि भक्तिमधिकां द्रढयन्नराणाम् ।

वक्रोऽपि देवि नमतां समतां वितन्व-  
न्कामाक्षि नृत्यतु मयि त्वदपाङ्गपातः ॥

*Pañcaśatī, Kaṭākṣaśataka, 16.*

But it is not this alone, as Nilakanṭha Dīkshita observes, for the glances of Kāmākshī are not dark without reason. It is Her supreme self-sacrifice that accounts for that; it is Her great maternal instinct; it is a symbol of Her heart which is an ocean of mercy. The Goddess embodies in Herself Vāṇī and Kamalā, the goddesses of wealth and learning, but above all She is the Goddess *par excellence*—Kāmākshī. Her eyes are white like sandal-paste, as they are the mansion where dwells Vāṇī; they are pink like the lotus on account of their association with

Kamalā; but they are dark at the same time. The reason for this is that Her eyes have taken in all the impurity from the minds of the thousands that have sought Her protection in Her anxiety to cleanse them of that pollution.—

वाणीनिकेतनतया घनसारगौराः  
ऋह्यारकेसररुचः कमलानुषङ्गात् ।  
मातर्जयन्ति शरणागतलोकचेतो-  
मालिन्यमार्जनवशादसिताः कटाक्षाः ॥

*Ānandasāgarastava, 90.*

Her breasts adorned with a necklace of pearls settled on them, have a special



significance to us, the children of that divine Mother. Like a long-lost child found by its mother and welcomed with great glee, the necklace of pearls on the breasts of Devi welcomes us with the pearl globules suggesting the picture of drops of milk issuing at the mother's sighting the infant.—

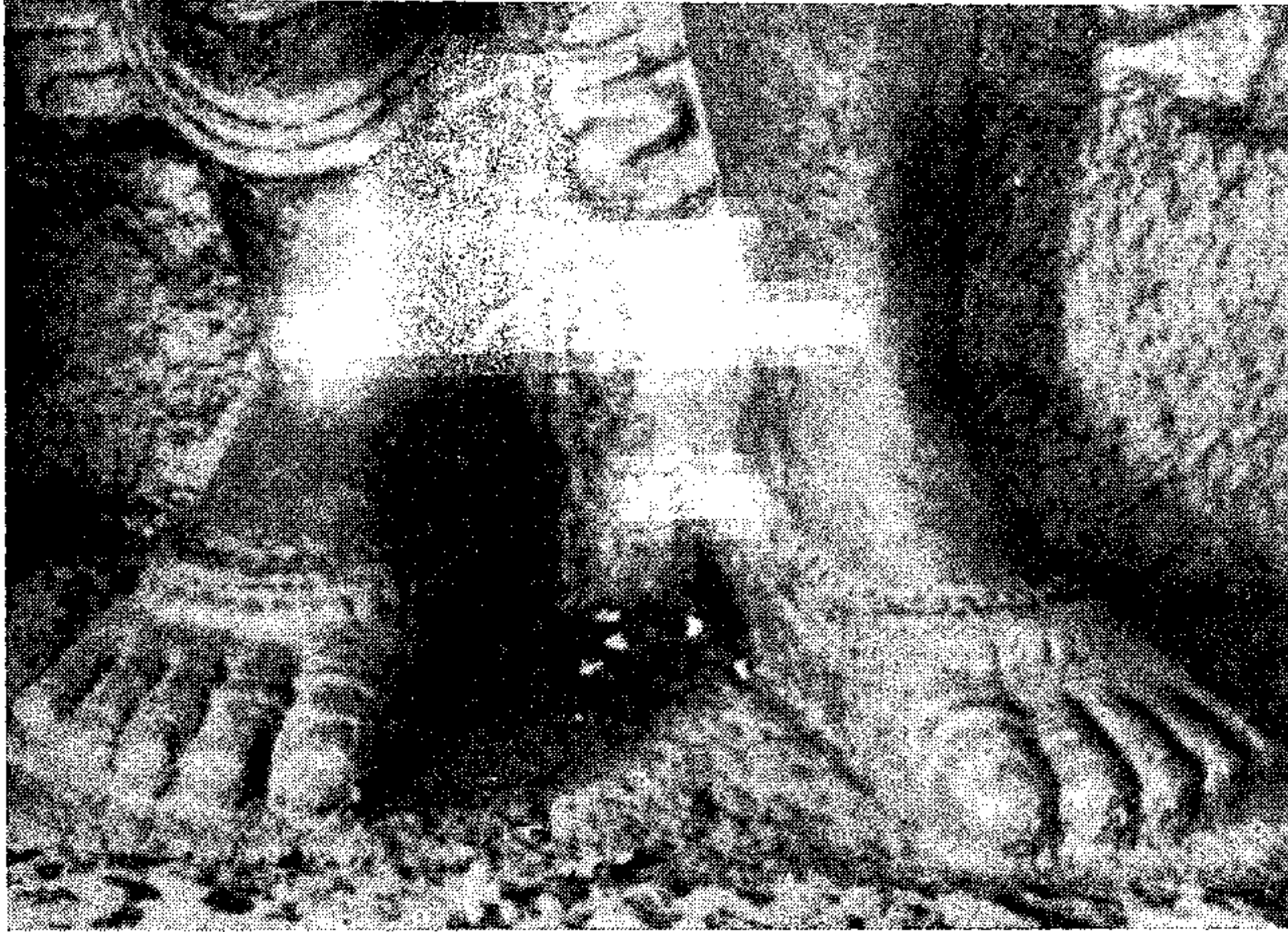
नष्टोपलब्धमधिगम्य शिशुं चिरान्मां

वात्सल्यविद्रुतहृदः परदेवतायाः ।

क्लिद्यत्योषरविनिःसृतदुग्धबिन्दु-

निष्यन्दपङ्क्तिरिव दीव्यति हारयष्टिः ॥

*Ānandasāgarastava, 72.*



THE LOTUS FEET OF THE DEVI (*Pādāravinda*)

These pearls are ever on the breasts of Devi, we do not know whether to beautify Her or honour themselves in the glory of Her glorious form which requires no ornaments to adorn it. But they are indeed there like *Muktas* (means pearls and also those who have attained salvation), their namesakes,—as some of the highest souls that have attained salvation still cling to that concept of the Divine Mother, for surely the nectar from her breasts is sweeter than ever, the nectar of salvation, and what to say about us who are

all the time roasted in the furnace of earthly existence and really require more than anything the nectarean and refreshing draught for which our mouth waters.—

मुक्ताश्च खल्वपि यदि त्रिपुरे भवत्याः

स्तन्याशया स्तनतटं न परित्यजन्ति ।

अस्माकमुद्गतभवज्वरतापिताना-

माद्रीभवन्तु वदनानि कुतो न हेतोः ॥

*Ānandasāgarastava, 71.*

Indeed, the charm of Her feet, matched only by their great efficacy in assuring salvation to those who seek refuge at them, baffles description, and it is idle to wax eloquent over it; but as *Mūka* puts it, it is just the desire to satisfy oneself by singing the praise of those glorious feet that this is attempted, but not for anything else. O Mother! The beloved one of the opponent of Cupid! Even though He tries His utmost how far can even the Lord succeed in comprehending Your glory? But still, O Sweet Lady strolling in *Kānchi*, it is some inexplicable mental desire of mine that makes me prattle so in singing the praise of Your lotus feet!—

महिम्नः पन्थानं मदनपरिपन्थिप्रणयिनि

प्रभुर्निर्णेतुं ते भवति यतमानोऽपि कतमः ।

तथापि श्रीकाञ्चीविहतिरसिके कोऽपि मनसो

विपाकस्त्वत्पादस्तुतिविधिषु जलपाकयति माम् ॥

*Pañcaśatī, Pādāravindaśataka, 1*

And a whole century of verses, each one a gem of poetic composition, has been offered by *Mūka* at the feet of *Kāmākshī*.

*Nilakantha Dikshita* goes a step further and begs pardon of *Devī* to excuse him for



this very fault of singing similar verses on the glory of Her feet, though he fully realizes that these words would probably act as thorns on those tender feet, as he modestly puts it, which, however, to speak the truth, are softer than the softest flowers. Those feet of the Devī, which are touched lightly with the tip of the crescent moon on the locks of Śiva as He bows to Her to beg pardon after a friendly domestic quarrel, the feet that feel as if crushed by even the softest flowers used in worship, O Mother,—says Nilakaṇṭha Dīkshita,—will they not be hurt by my crude outpourings?—

यन्नाममन्पशुपतिः प्रणयापराधे  
मन्दं किल स्पृशति चन्द्रकलाञ्जलेन ।  
पुष्पाद्यैःपि मृदितं पदयोर्युगं त-  
न्मातस्तुदन्ति न कथं पश्या गिरो मे ॥

*Ānandasāgarastava, 60.*

But it should be remembered that Nilakaṇṭha Dīkshita, the Prime Minister of King Tirumala Nāyaka, was the sweetest of the later-day Sanskrit poets and his offering of his composition at the feet of Minākshī is probably as sweet as that of Mūka who offered a similar handful of flowers of adoration at the feet of Kāmākshī.

With tears in his eyes he thinks of the Mother rushing to his aid, as the messengers of Death surround him towards the end of his life, even as a mother would rush herself to save a child fallen into the hands of ruffians, and asks, with great anguish, addressing the Mother, whether at least then, towards the evening of his life, he would hear the tinkling sound of the anklets of Her feet, as She personally approaches him.—

संनार्हिभिर्यमभटैः परिवार्यमाणे  
मय्यर्भके कर्णया स्वयमापंतन्त्याः ।  
आकर्णयेयमपि नाम विरामकाले  
मातस्तवाङ्घ्रि मणिनूपुरशिञ्जितानि ॥

*Ānandasāgarastava, 66.*

These feet of the Devī are sacred, sacred beyond comprehension, sacred to an extent

that they have triumphed even over Śiva. And if, in the Deopara inscription of Vijaya-sena, Śiva is described as the 'Lord of half-woman' to whom the Sena kings, famous for their donations, gave several beautifully adorned damsels in the temple built for the Lord,—this half-lady, the Devī, forming one-half of *Ardhanārīśvara*, is probably mightier



*Ardhanārīśvara*

than the other half. And Nilakaṇṭha Dīkshita humorously remarks that by all means Śiva can have all the glory for that simple victory



over Cupid (*Madanāntaka*) with His third eye on the forehead from the Śiva-half of the *Ardhanārīśvara* form. But it is the special glory of the Mother's foot, the left foot from the left half, the lady-half of *Ardhanārīśvara* that triumphed over Kāla (Death), who was kicked by Him in His *Kālāntaka* form, and surely for this triumph Śiva cannot lay any claim, as it is wholly a triumph of Devi who constitutes the left half.—

साधारणे स्मरजये निटिलाक्षिसाध्ये  
भागी शिवो भजतु नाम यशः समग्रम् ।  
वामाङ्घ्रिमात्रकलिते जननि त्वदीये  
का वा प्रसक्तिरिह कालजये पुरारेः ॥

*Anandasāgarāstava*, 56.

Indeed the glory of Devi is beyond the range of words when Śiva himself is great because of his association with Devi:

शिवः शक्त्या युक्तो यद्भि भवति शक्तः प्रभवितुम् ।

It is not for anyone to remark on that glorious superiority of the concept of Mother. It is the *bhāva* that matters and how sweet is the maternal *bhāva* of the Mother! With the very flowers with which the devotee worships with the idea that he should offer worship and attain salvation, with those same flowers, Manmatha approached with the idea kicked by Him in His *Kālāntaka* form, and reduced to ashes, as it is only the inner motive which is considered by the Lord and not the outer form.—

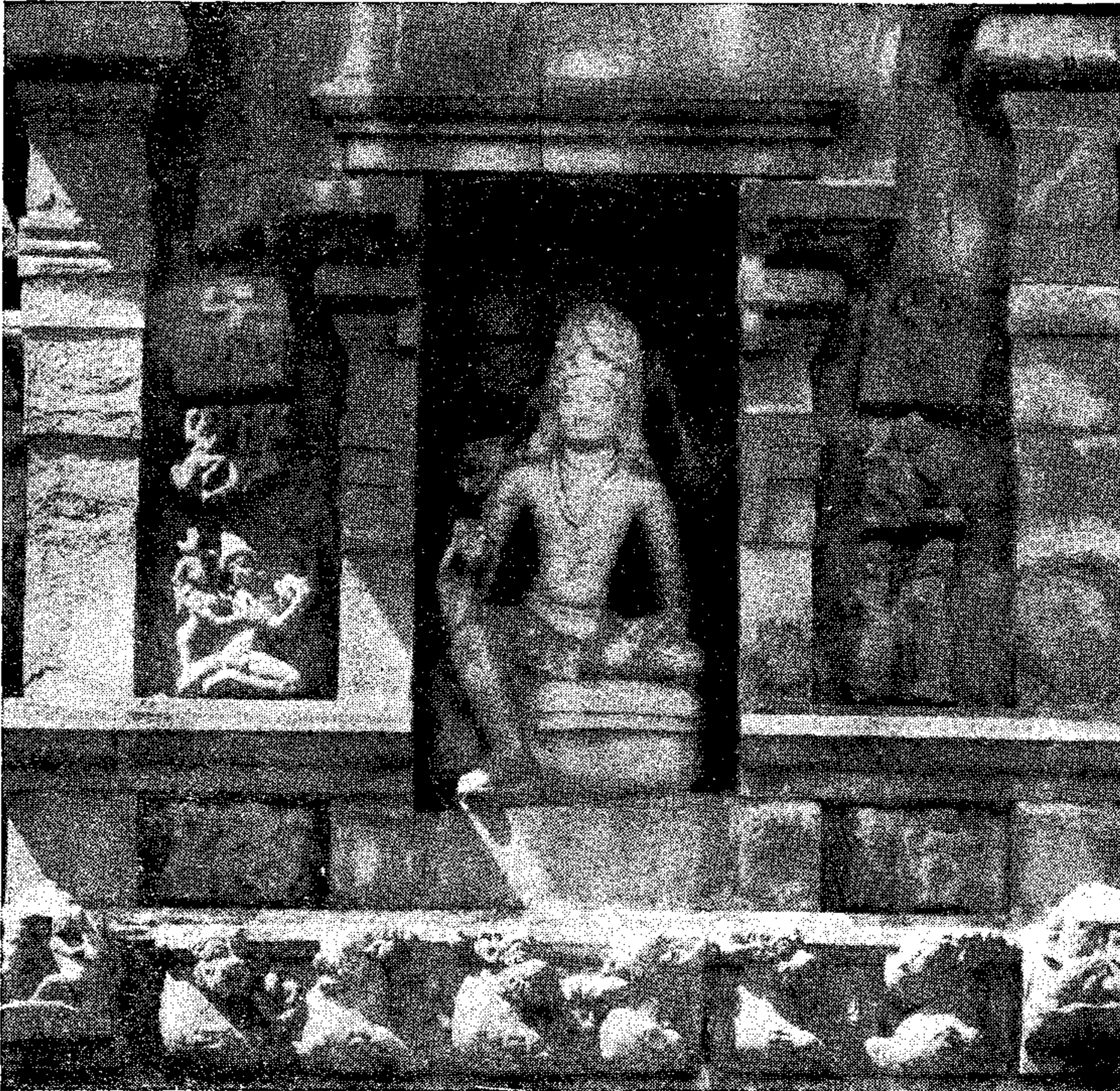
अर्चामीति धिया यदेव कुसुमं क्षिप्त्वा जनो मुच्यते  
विध्यामीति धिया तदेव विकिरन्भस्मीकृतो मन्मथः।  
इत्याभ्यन्तरवृत्तिमात्ररसिको बाह्यानपेक्षश्च यः  
स स्वामी मम दैवतं तदितरो नान्नापि नान्नायते ॥

*Śivotkarṣamañjarī*, 2.

It is this, the softest of all things and the sweetest, the flower, that the Mother can whip up for chastizing even the most wicked amongst us, Her children, and Nilakanṭha Dikshita wonders what kind of anger it can be of the Mother that can have only a flower in the place of an arrow to punish even the greatest sinner, even when the Mother assumes Her most terrible angry form.—

आस्थाय दारुणतरं कमपि  
स्वभावमत्यन्तदुष्कृत-  
कृतामपि शिक्षणाय ।  
गृहासि सायकपदे कुसुमान्य-  
मूनि मातः स्तेषु महती  
किल रक्षतेयम् ॥

*Anandasāgarāstava*, 74.



THE DESTROYER OF CUPID OR MADANA. (*Madanāntaka*)



Even Her weapons, as She carries them in Her hand, have a lesson to teach us. The *pāśa* and *aṅkuśa* in Her hands, as beautifully explained in the *Lalitāsahasranāma*, one symbolizing *rāga* and the other *krodha*, are intended to free us from *rāga* and *dveṣa*, and the sweet sugarcane-bow and the flowery arrows are to wean away our hearts from the abysmal depths of empty pleasures.—

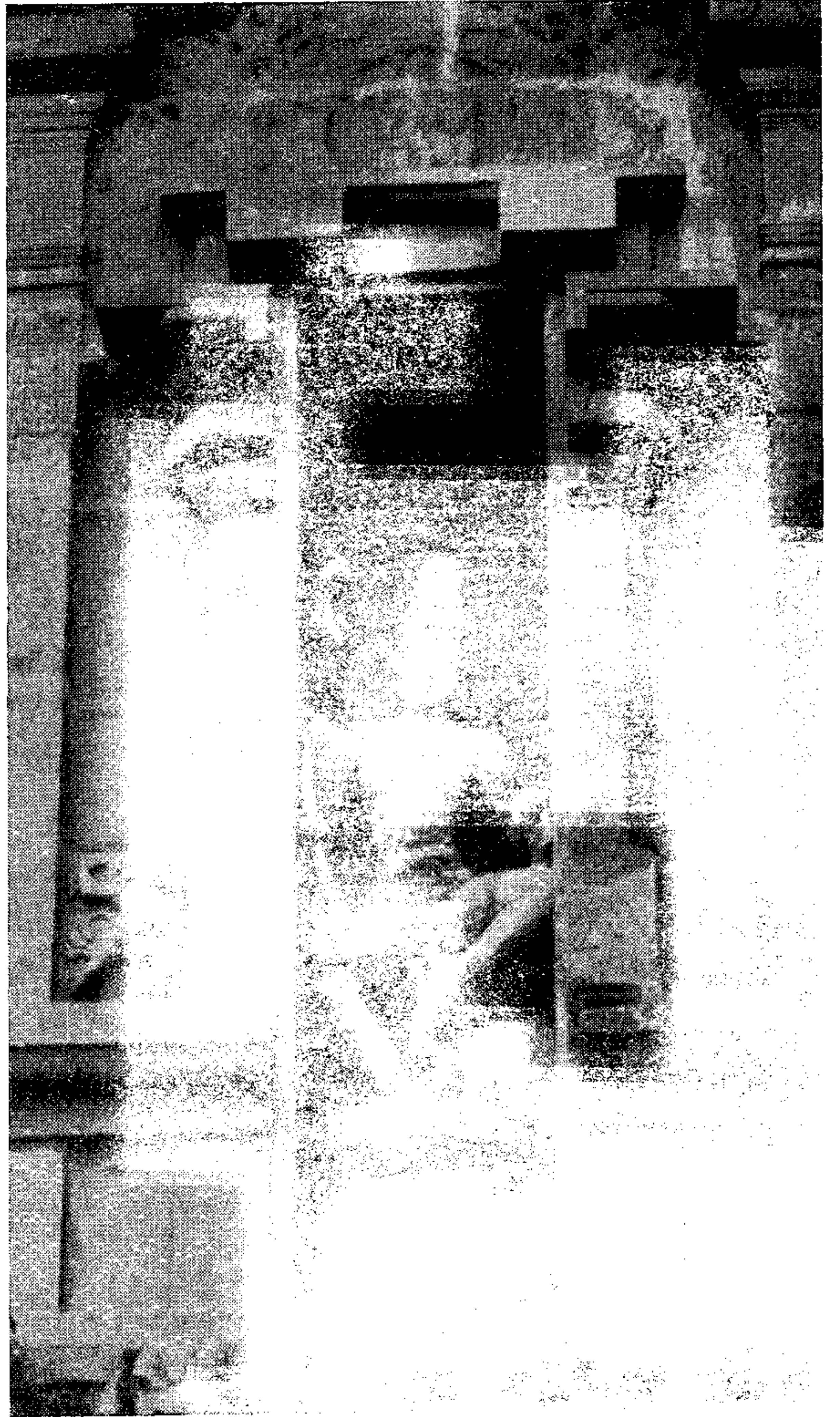
पाशाङ्कुशौ तव करे परिचिन्त्य राग-  
द्वेषौ जयन्ति परमार्थविदस्तु धन्याः ।  
एकत्र चापमितरत्र शरं च मत्वा  
व्यावर्त्यन्ति हृदयं विषयान्धकृपात् ॥

*Anandasāgarastava, 76.*

Such prayers to and adorations as are bestowed on the Mother are nothing better than childish babble; but the Mother would really welcome it like the sweet song produced on the lute. And let us therefore conclude with this apology to the Goddess, as Śaṅkara himself says in his *Ānandalaharī*: 'O Mother Bhavānī, surely You are beyond the capacity of anyone to praise You because it is impossible for Brahmā to do so with even his four heads, or for the Lord of Tripuras either with his five faces; nor can the Commander-in-Chief of the gods with his six heads, nor even Śeshanāga himself with his thousand faces; and so in the case of such an impossibility, where is there any scope for any other?'—

भवानि स्तोतुं त्वां प्रभवति चतुर्थिर्न वदनैः  
प्रजानामीशानस्त्रिपुरमथनः पञ्चभिरपि ।  
न षड्भिः सेनानीं शशतमुद्वैरप्यहिपति-  
स्तदान्येषां केषां कथय कथमस्मिन्नवसरः ॥

*Ānandalaharī, 1.*



THE VANQUISHER OF DEATH (*Kālāntaka*)

This charm in poetic expression, so full of feeling is matched only by the fervour of the sculptor's devotion (as evidenced by the accompanying illustrations of sculpture) as he has created every one of these ideas in visual shape all over the land as a *sādhana* in *saguṇopāsana*.



# SOME ASPECTS OF ŚAKTI WORSHIP IN ANCIENT INDIA

BY DR. JITENDRA NATH BANERJEA

The beginnings of the worship of the female principle go back in India, as in many other countries of the ancient world, to a very remote past. Remains of the cult of the Mother Goddess have been recognized by many scholars among the various interesting objects unearthed in the pre-Vedic sites of the Indus Valley. One of the commonest such objects is a pottery figurine of a female, practically nude, with a very short skirt tied round the loins by a girdle. It has been said that 'these pottery images of the goddess whose name is unknown were kept almost in every house in the ancient Indus cities, probably in a recess or on a bracket on the wall' (Mackay: *Early Indus Civilization*, 2nd Edition, p. 54). The early Indus Valley settlers seem also to have worshipped her in her aniconic form; many ring stones, some of a very suggestive nature, discovered at Mohenjo-daro and Harappa can be described with a great deal of justification as cult objects symbolizing the Mother aspect of the Goddess. An earlier suggestion of some scholars that these objects were of an architectural character, being no other than mere components or sections of a peculiar type of a column, cannot be seriously considered. They should be studied along with not only the much decorated types of ring stones of the Maurya period found in many North-Indian sites like Taxila, Kosam, Rajhat, and Patna, but also the phallic objects symbolizing the Father God of the Indus Valley people conveniently described by Marshall as Proto-Siva. The ornamental ring stones of the historic period no doubt represent some variety, but their general character shows that 'they were cult objects comparable with the prehistoric ring stones of the Indus Valley on the one hand and the *cakras* and the *yantras* of the later Śāktas on

the other' (Banerjea: *Development of Hindu Iconography*, p. 188). One such, of a representative nature, unearthed by Marshall at Hathial near Taxila, has been described by him in this manner: 'It is of polished sandstone, 3¼" in diameter, adorned on the upper surface with concentric bands of cross and cable patterns and with four nude female figures alternating with honeysuckle designs engraved in relief round the central hole' (*A.S.I.A.R.*, 1927-28, p. 66). These female figures either represent different aspects of the Goddess, or are mere repetitions of the same theme. The Lady of the ring stone exactly resembles the gold leaf female figure dug out of the Stūpa at Lauriya Nandangarh by Block and correctly identified by Coomaraswamy and others as the Mother Goddess. The juxtaposition of the much earlier undecorated ring stones with the phallic objects of the Indus region leaves little doubt about their original character. With the aforesaid iconic and aniconic objects associated with the cult of the female principle may be considered a few devices on some seal amulets of the early Indus sites. One such device only on the right side of the obverse face of an oblong terracotta seal, unearthed at Harappa, may be noticed here. It shows a nude female figure upside-down with legs wide apart, and 'with a plant issuing from her womb'; her arms are shown in the same position in which those of the Proto-Siva on the Mohenjo-daro seal amulet are depicted. Marshall rightly compared this striking representation of the goddess, with a plant issuing from her womb, with the device on an early Gupta terracotta sealing showing a goddess with her legs in much the same position, but with a lotus issuing from her neck instead of from her womb. The idea of vegetation issuing out of



some part of the body of the goddess reminds us of the Devī-māhātmya concept of her Śākambharī aspect in which she is said to have nourished her drought-afflicted people with vegetation produced from her body (*Tato'hamakhilam lokam ātmadehasamudbhavaiḥ; bhariṣyāmi surāḥ śākairāvṛṣṭeḥ prānadhārakaiḥ. Śākambharīti vikhyātim tadā yāsyāmyaham bhuvī*), (*Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa, Devi-māhātmya*, 91. 48-9). The pre-Vedic archaeological data discussed above throw much light on the early stages of the cult long before it was fully developed into the Śakti worship of the epic and the Purāṇic age.

It has been usually accepted by scholars that Vedic ritualism was characterized by the prominence given to male deities, and goddesses, comparatively few in number, play very little part in it. Macdonell says that 'Goddesses occupy a very subordinate position in Vedic belief and worship, and play hardly any part as rulers of the world' (*Vedic Mythology*, p. 124). But the female deities, though few, are of a very interesting character. Some of them bring out in a striking manner the inner workings of the Vedic seers' minds. If a careful analysis is made of the nature of such goddesses as Aditi, Ushas, Sarasvatī, Pṛithivī, Rātrī, Purāṇdhṛī, Ilā, Dhīshanā, etc., and last but not the least Vāch, one cannot fail to recognize the importance ascribed to them by the ancient Rishis of India. Aditi the Divine Mother, Ushas the great Goddess of Dawn on whose description and characterization the Vedic seers employed their highest poetic fervour and genius, Sarasvatī—primarily deifying a river on the banks of which distinctive traits of Vedic culture were formulated, Pṛithivī the great mother earth, Rātrī the goddess personifying a starlit night, Purāṇdhṛī, Ilā, and Dhīshanā, etc.—personifications of such abstract attributes as abundance and nourishment,—all these were the different manifestations of the great divine principle conceived by the old sages in its female aspect. But it is in the sublime conception of Vāch, the great goddess of speech, that is to be found one of the greatest and at

the same time simplest expositions of the idea of the divine Energy or Śakti inherent in everything—animals, men, and gods and in the universe. The Devī-sūkta (*RV. X. 125*), in the eight verses of which occurs this sublime characterization, came to occupy a very prominent position in the Śākta ritual of subsequent times. A place of honour was also given in it to the Rātrī-sūkta (*RV. X. 127*). All these facts show that the developed Śakti worship of later days was not a little indebted to the goddess concepts of early Vedic age, the very idea underlying the word Śakti being based on the central theme of the Devī-sūkta. It is, however, a well-known fact that there is no mention in the *Rig-Veda* of such names as Ambikā, Umā, Durgā, Kālī, etc., which became singly or collectively the name of the central figure of the Śākta cult. Such names begin to appear in the later Vedic texts. Thus, Ambikā appears as Rudra's sister in the *Vājasaneyī Samhitā* (III. 57) and in the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* (I. 6. 10. 4-5), and as Rudra's consort in the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* (X. 18). There is an invocation to the goddess styled Durgā Vairochanī in the tenth book of the same *Āraṇyaka*; she is also described here as Kātyāyamī and Kanyākumārī in the *Durgā-gāyatrī* (X. 1, 7). The *Kena Upaniṣad* refers to Umā Haimavatī as the personified Brahma-Vidyā (III. 25). The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* mentions Kālī and Karālī, but they are described here as two of the seven tongues of Agni; the names are Kālī, Karālī, Manojavā, Sulohitā, Sudhūmravarṇā, Sphulinginī, and Viśvaruchī (I. 2, 4). Their number is to be noted, for it corresponds to the number of the Divine Mothers—the Sapta Mātrikā. The name of Śrī as a concrete goddess concept occurs for the first time in the *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa*, such words as *siri*, *rayi*, etc. indicating wealth, prosperity, fortune, etc. occurring in earlier literature. The *Sat. Br.* account of the origin of this goddess reminds us of the story current in Greek mythology about the birth of Pallas Athene. Such names of the Devī as Bhadrakālī, Bhavānī, Durgī, etc.



are found in late Vedic works like *Sāṅkhyāyana* and *Hiranyakeśin Gṛihya-sūtras*, and in the *Taittiriya Āraṇyaka*. The aforesaid data clearly prove that some features of the cult which were in a nascent stage in earlier times were gradually taking shape and form of a type well familiar in the epic and Purāṇic age.

The two famous Durgā-stotras in the *Mahābhārata* (IV. 6 and VI. 23) and the Āryāstava in its supplement (*khila*) *Harivaṃśa* (III. 3) illustrate in a characteristic manner the various constituent elements underlying the principal cult picture of the developed Śākta cult. The composite goddess was no doubt made up of such various elements as her Mother, Daughter, and Sister aspects, her Vedic Aryan element, inasmuch as she or her particular forms were the objects of worship of the members of such Aryan sage clans as the Kuśikas and the Kātyas (cf. her appellations Āryā, Kauśiki and Kātyāyanī), and last but not the least the various non-Aryan strands in her character. It is specially mentioned in the Āryāstava that she was well worshipped by the Śavaras, Barbaras, and the Pulindas (*Śavarairbarbaraiścaiva Pulindaiśca supūjitā*) and she is often described in other contexts as Aparṇā (not even covered with a leaf garment, i.e. nude), Nagna-Śavarī (the nude Śavara woman), and Parṇa-Śavarī (the leaf-clad Śavara woman). It is true that the Durgā-stotra in the *Virāṭaparva* is not found in all the recensions of the *Mahābhārata* and thus is regarded as an interpolation, but it does not minimize the importance and authenticity of its contents. The original *Rāmāyaṇa*, on the other hand, is less indicative of the prevalence of Śakti worship in India. The incidence of the worship of the Devī by Rāma when he was in some difficulty about Rāvaṇa's destruction is to be found in the Bengali *Rāmāyaṇa* by Kṛittivāsa. In its Sanskrit original (*Yuddhakāṇḍa*, 106), it is the wise counsel of the sage Agastya to propitiate the Sun-god by ceremonial recitation of the *Ādityahṛidaya-stava*, that helps Rāma to put the demon king of Laṅkā to death. But the absence of any clear mention of the worship of the Devī does

not prove anything about the existence of the cult.

Some of the early authoritative Purāṇas, however, fully compensate for the paucity of reference to the Śākta cult in the lesser epic. The most representative and important of the Purāṇic characterizations of the cult picture is to be found in the *Devī-māhātmya* section of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*. The various Devī-stutis (Brahmā-stuti, Śakrādi-stuti, Nārāyaṇī-stuti, etc.) in it reveal in a striking manner some of the multifarious strands that have contributed to the building up of the concept of the composite cult goddess. The last few verses in the Nārāyaṇī-stuti chapter, which are put into the mouth of the goddess herself, refer to several of her incarnatory forms assumed for the welfare of the three worlds (*trailokyasya hitārthāya*) and for the destruction of the wicked (the Dānavas in this context). The last couplet, *Ittham yadā yadā bādhā dānavotthā bhaviṣyati, Tadā tadāvatiryāham karīṣyāmyarisamkṣayam*—incidentally reminds us of the famous exposition of the theory of divine incarnation (*Avatāravāda*) in the fourth canto of the *Gītā*. The sublime ideas about the divine power and energy, again, that are so beautifully expressed in the two great hymns of the *Ṛig-Veda*, the *Devī-sūkta* and the *Rātrī-sūkta*, are fully expounded in the elocutory verses of the Purāṇa. A careful comparison of these Stutis with the epic Durgā-stotras alluded to above also brings to light one important and interesting fact. The Purāṇakāra seems to have almost completely eschewed any explicit reference to the non-Aryan elements in the composite goddess so frequently and unblushingly mentioned in the Stotras.

It will now be necessary to expound with the help of literary and archaeological data some of the different aspects of the cult goddess already alluded to above. The Mother Goddess of the pre-Vedic times and Aditi the Mother Divine in the *Ṛig-Veda* have already been mentioned. The epic Durgā-stotras also harp on her mother aspect, and she is described as *Skandamātā*, *Vedamātā*, Mother



of Siddhasena, Mother of the Mantra-collections, etc., though her Daughter and Sister aspects are more prominently emphasized there. Her Jagamātā or Jagadambā aspect is more outstanding in the Durgā-stutis of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāna*. The Mātrikā concept specially canalized into that of the Seven Divine Mothers, viz. Brahmānī, Maheśvarī, Kaumārī, Vaiṣṇavī, Vārāhī, Indrānī, and Chamuṇḍī, (who are also conceived as the individual Śaktis of the gods after whom they are named, the last one being the Śakti of Bhairava, an aspect of Śiva), is also fairly old, being met with in texts and inscriptions of the Gupta period. There is a reference in the *Bṛihatsamhitā* to the images of the Mātrigaṇas who are to be made with the features and cognizances of the gods after whom they are named (LVII. 56:—*Mātrigaṇaḥ kartavyaḥ svanāmadevānurūpakṛitacihṇaḥ*), and in the chapter after the next of the same text (Pratimāpratiṣṭhāpanam) we are told that it is only those well-versed in the Tāntric Pūjā rites who are fit for the ceremonial installation of these images (*Mātriṇāmaṇḍalākramavidā*); *maṇḍalākrama* has been simply explained by the commentator Utpala as *pūjākrama*, but the very word *maṇḍala* seems to suggest its association with the Tāntric *cakra*. This raises an interesting point about the antiquity of Tāntrikism, most if not all of the extant texts which expound it being adjudged as late compositions. The *Bṛihatsamhitā*, which is usually dated in the sixth century A.D., thus appears to associate the worship of the Mother aspect of the goddess with Tāntric rituals. We find a still earlier reference to this association in a stone inscription of the first quarter of the fifth century A.D. found in the village of Gangdhar (Jhalwar, Madhya Bharat). In lines 22-3 of the inscription, mention is made of the erection of 'the very terrible abode of the (Divine) Mothers, filled full of Dākinīs,—who utter loud and tremendous shouts in joy, and who stir up the very oceans with the mighty wind rising from the Tāntric rites of their religion' (*Mātriṇāṅca pramudita-ghanātyartha-nirhr-*

*ādinānām tantrodbhūtaprabala-pavanodvartit-āmbhonidhīnām . . . gatamidam dākinī-samprakīrṇām veśmatyugraṁ nripatisacivokārayatpuṇyahetoḥ*). The royal minister, who caused this shrine to be made for merit or piety, was well aware of the nature of the rites connected with the creed centering round the Divine Mothers, as the mention of the Dākinīs and the terrific Tāntric rites prove.

The Daughter aspect of the Goddess is also hinted at in some of the hymns of the *Rig-Veda*. Aditi is sometimes described as the daughter of the Vasus, and in a later cosmogonic hymn (X.72, 4-5) she is said to be the daughter as well as the mother of Daksha. Mention has already been made of her description as Kanyā-kumārī in the Durgā-gāyatrī of the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* (X.1.7). But this is very frequently alluded to in the epic Durgā-stotras. Durgā is born to Yaśodā, the wife of the cow-herd Nanda, and is a virgin goddess practising Brahmacharya and thus sustaining the three worlds (*Kumārī Brahmachārīnī, kaumāraṁ vratamāsthāya tridivam pālitaṁ tvayā*), and she is the Brahmacharya of the virgins. This trait of the Devī finds a curious echo in one of the passages of the *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, a work composed by an unknown Greek in the first century A.D. There is a reference here to the southernmost point of India, named as Comara, which was traditionally associated, according to the author, with a virgin goddess who bathed in the seas lapping its coast. This is an undoubted allusion to the sacred Kumārikā-tīrtha, where the Devī is still worshipped in her virgin aspect. Such was the importance attached to this form of the cult picture that in some medieval texts (cf. Rājaśekhara's *Kāvya-mīmāṃsā*, Ch. 17) the sub-continent of India is given the name of Kumārī-dvīpa. It is true there is no mention of this important Tīrtha in the *Si-yu-ki* of Hiuen Tsang, but it should be noted that the Chinese pilgrim did not visit this southernmost part of India.

The Sister aspect of the goddess is to be found as early as in the *Rig-Veda*. She is



once strangely enough described as the sister of the Ādityas (*Rig-Veda*, VII. 10.15), and a passage in the *Atharva-Veda* (VI.4.1) refers to her brothers as well as sons. Mention has already been made about the description of the goddess Ambikā as the sister of Rudra in the *Vājasaneyī Samhitā*, and the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*. But this trait of the Devī again finds prominent place in the Durgā-stotras. She is frequently described there as the sister, not of Rudra, but of Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva (*Vāsudevasya bhagini, Gopendrasya-ānujā, bhagini Baladevasya*, etc.). Some of her names in this aspect are Ekānamśā, Bhadrā, Subhadrā, etc. One of the earliest references to the first of these names is to be found in the *Bṛhatsamhitā* where two-, four-, and eight-armed images of the goddess are described, and it is specially enjoined that such images of Ekānamśā should be placed between those of Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva (*Ekānamśā kāryā devī Baladeva-Kṛṣṇayor-madhye*; LVII, 37). That the worship of this aspect of the goddess was very prevalent in eastern India is proved by some extant images of the early and late medieval period. An inscribed bronze composition of c. tenth century A.D. found at Imadpur (Bihar) and now in the collection of the British Museum, London, shows the goddess Ekānamśā between the figures of Baladeva and Kṛṣṇa. There is no doubt that this was a cult object held in veneration by her devotees in Bihar. That she was also worshipped in some parts of Orissa in medieval times is proved by the discovery of such sculpture compositions. Many people may not know that the central object of worship in the temple of Ananta Vāsudeva on the bank of the holy tank Bindusarovara at Bhuvaneśvar is none other than this composite sculpture group in which the principal or the central figure is that of Ekānamśā. A careful scrutiny of the images collected in the subsidiary shrines inside the temple enclosure of Liṅgarāja at Bhuvaneśvar will also reveal the existence of such relief compositions of medieval times. The symbolic icons of Jagannāth, Balarām, and Subhadrā in

the main sanctum, again, of the Puri temple is clearly reminiscent of the Ekānamśā worship; the two main subsidiary shrines of Vimalā and Annapūrṇā, occupying important positions in the Jagannāth temple enclosure at Puri, also emphasize in a way this association of Śakti worship with Viṣṇu worship. It is needless to reiterate that Subhadrā, in the image group of Balarām, Subhadrā and Jagannāth, stands for the sister aspect of the goddess.

One, if not the most important, aspect of the Devī is that of the concept about her as the great consort of Śiva. Ambikā is conceived in some later Vedic texts, as we have shown, as the spouse of Rudra, the Vedic counterpart of Śiva. This mythology is further reorientated in the well-known story of Daksha's sacrifice in the epic literature. I shall only lay stress here on the 'pīṭha' idea which grew out of it. The dismembered limbs of Satī, Daksha's daughter and beloved consort of Śiva, fell, according to epic and Purāṇic tradition, in different parts of India, and different Bhairavas—really Śiva in his many terrific forms—kept guard over them. The cult adaptation of this story was the transformation of these places into Śākta Pīṭhas variously enumerated in different texts. They usually consisted of shrines containing aniconic—sometimes iconic—emblems of the goddess supposed to be associated with one or other of her different limbs, with the temples of her consort close by. Bhairava or Śiva thus kept a watchful eye, as it were, over his beloved spouse. The idea underlying this mythology no doubt goes back to a remote period, but it is fully worked out in detail in comparatively late texts. The Tīrthayātrā section of the *Mahābhārata* (Vanaparva) refers to three Śākta Pīṭhas associated with the Yoni and Stana of the goddess. Kuṇḍas or sacred tanks are also their inevitable adjuncts, and mention is made there of two Yonikuṇḍas (one situated at Bhīmāsthāna beyond Pañchanada, and the other on a hill called Udyatparvata probably in the Gaya region), and one Stanakuṇḍa on



a peak known as Gaurīśikhara, possibly in the Gauhati region (D. C. Sircar, *Śāktapīthas*, *JRASB*, Letters, XIV, 8-9). The evidence of the epic passages is partially corroborated by the statement of the keenly observant Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang. He records that there was a great mountain peak in the heart of ancient Gandhāra (modern Peshawar district), which possessed 'a likeness (or image) of Maheśvara's spouse Bhīmādevī of dark blue stone. According to local accounts, this was a natural image of the goddess; it was a great resort of devotees from all parts of India. At the foot of the mountain was a temple to Maheśvara-deva in which the ash-smearing Tīrthikas performed much worship' (Watters, *On Yuan Chwang*, Vol. I, 221-22; Bhīmādevī Parvata and the site of Maheśvara-deva's temple below have been identified by Foucher with the hill known as Mt. Karamar, and the modern village of Shewa at its foot). The existence of a very sacred shrine of all-India fame with 'the natural image' of the goddess (probably an aniconic stone emblem) and the temple of Śiva near-by distinctly allude to the developed concept of the Śākta Pīthas. The *Mahāmāyūrī*, a Sanskrit Buddhist text composed in the early centuries of the Christian era, seems also to refer to the shrine of Bhīmā, when it lays down that 'Śivabhadra was the titular deity of Bhīṣaṇā' (for detailed discussion about Bhīmā-Bhīṣaṇā, cf. the present writer's article in *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XIV, 1938, pp. 751-53). Bhīṣaṇā (the feminine form of Bhīṣaṇa) is a synonym of Bhīmā,

and we have copious instances in Sanskrit literature of designating one and the same locality by its various synonyms (cf. the various names of Hastināpura, Nāgasāhvaya, Gajasāhvaya). The cumulative evidence of the aforesaid data proves the early prevalence of Śiva-Śakti worship in this peculiar form in various parts of India, specially in the extreme north and north-west. The early association of Tāntrikism with the Mother aspect of the Devī has already been commented upon. Certain observations of the Chinese pilgrim also show how it became the special trait of this form of worship of the goddess in that remote part of India. Hiuen Tsang says, 'The people of Uḍḍiyāna (Swat valley, north of Gandhāra) were fond of learning but not as a study, and they made the acquisition of magical formulae (really Tāntic ritualism) their occupation' (Watters, *op. cit.*, I, p. 225). The *Hevajra Tantra* (c. eighth century A.D.) 'enumerates the following four holy regions as Pīthas:—(1) Jālandhara, (2) Oḍiyāna (Uḍḍiyāna—Udyāna), (3) Pūrṇagiri, and (4) Kāmarūpa (Sircar, *op. cit.*, p. 12).

It is not the intention of the present writer to give a complete picture of Śakti worship including its fully developed phases of later times. Some of its early aspects, specially from the historical and evolutionary point of view, have only been touched upon in the article. The topic is a vast one, and it cannot be satisfactorily dealt with in the span of a short article.

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'In course of time one does not feel even the existence of God. After attaining wisdom one sees that gods and deities are all Maya. Everything comes into existence in time and also disappears in time. . . . God and such things really disappear at the dawn of Knowledge. The aspirant then realizes that the Mother alone pervades the entire Universe. All then becomes one. This is the simple truth.'



## OUR CONTRIBUTORS

In the metric composition *She*, SRIMAT ANIRVAN, one of our old and esteemed contributors, has exquisitely woven a few vividly impressive Vedic imageries around the cosmic significance of the lives of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi. It is significant that the date of the Holy Mother's birth (22nd December 1853) has coincided with the astronomical day of winter solstice. In Vedic esoteric tradition, the winter solstice or the commencement of the sun's 'northern journey' (Uttarāyana) symbolizes the beginning of the ascent of the victorious Light to greater and greater heights till it reaches the *paramam padam* (supreme state) of Vishnu. This has been described also as 'the Eye extended in heaven'. This Eye is compared to the magnetic force of Sri Ramakrishna which draws Her (the Holy Mother) through the passages of the Three Lights of the fire, the sun, and the moon till her self-nature is revealed to Her as 'Aditi the Virgin Mother of Gods and Man'. And then Her life becomes a sacrifice, a Descent symbolized by the tear of compassion and love. . . .

SWAMI ABHEDANANDA was one of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. . . .

SWAMI SARADANANDA, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and author of the great Bengali work *Shri Shri Rāmakṛṣṇa Līlā-prasaṅga* ('Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master'), was the first Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. He took up the responsibility of looking after the Holy Mother and meeting her expenses, and whole-heartedly discharged the responsibility till the last to the immense delight and satisfaction of the Mother. . . .

SWAMI VIRAJANANDA was President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission (till his passing away in May 1951). . . .

SISTER NIVEDITA (Margaret E. Noble), the brilliantly gifted English disciple of Swami Vivekananda and the author of some of the best known works on Indian life and thought, had the privilege of living in the same house and coming into intimate touch with the Holy Mother.

*Sister Nivedita's* now famous *Letter to the Holy Mother*, which is reproduced in facsimile in this issue, reveals the remarkable depth of devotion and filial love the Sister had for the Mother. . . .

SWAMI VISHUDDHANANDA is the present Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. . . .

ST. NIHAL SINGH, the world-famous Journalist and the doyen of Indian journalism, has recalled, from the depths of the remote past,—for the benefit of our readers—the vivid image made on his child-

mind by his meeting and receiving the blessings of the Holy Mother well over six decades ago. . . .

SWAMI APURVANANDA, President of the Vivekananda Ashrama, Shyamala Tal (in the Himalayas), U.P., has written and compiled useful books in Bengali. He has travelled extensively in the interior of the Himalayas and parts of Tibet. . . .

SRI TARA KUMAR GHOSH, is good at composing short poems with devotional and religious themes, especially in Bengali. . . .

SRI SAILA KUMAR MUKHERJEE, Speaker, West Bengal Legislative Assembly, presided over a public meeting, at Calcutta (on the 30th December 1953), held in connection with the inaugural celebrations of *The Birth Centenary of the Holy Mother*. The article by Sri Mukherjee is largely based on his illuminating Address delivered on the occasion. . . .

KALPALATA DEVI, M.A., Ph.D., is on the staff of the Ramakrishna Mission Nivedita Girls' School and has dedicated her life to the noble cause of women's education in India. . . .

The first woman in South India to take a medical degree, DR. (MRS.) S. MUTHULAKSHMI REDDI, M.B. & C.M., has been one of the most prominent social workers in India. Even in her present advanced age she ably runs, devoting her personal attention, a Home for destitute women and an Orphanage for children. She is a Member of the Madras Legislative Council. Many years ago she was elected President of the All India Women's Conference and she also held with distinction the office of Deputy President of the Madras Legislative Council. . . .

SRIMATI YAMUNABAI HIRLEKAR, M.A., J.P., is a well known educationist of Bombay who has travelled in foreign countries. She is the Joint Secretary, Holy Mother Centenary Celebration Committee, Bombay. . . .

HON'BLE SRI JUSTICE P. B. MUKHARJI of the Calcutta High Court, is the Vice-President of the General Committee as well as the Executive Committee of the Holy Mother Birth Centenary Celebrations. . . .

DR. MAHENDRANATH SIRCAR, M.A., Ph.D., formerly Professor of the Presidency College, Calcutta, is a profound scholar and has written many books on Hindu religion and philosophy. . . .

PROF. P. S. NAIDU, M.A., of the Department of Psychology and Education, University of Allahabad, is one of our old and valued contributors. . . .

DR. NANDALAL CHATTERJI, M.A., Ph.D., D.Litt., Head of the Department of History, Lucknow University, is the author of several publications on



Modern Indian History and has written many thought-provoking articles on historical, cultural, and political subjects. . . .

SRI T. S. AVINASHILINGAM, M.P., a former Minister for Education in the Government of Madras, is a leading figure in the literary, cultural, and political fields in South India. He is the President of the Tamil Academy, Madras, and the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore Dt. . . .

DR. S. C. CHATTERJEE, M.A., Ph.D., of the Department of Philosophy of the Calcutta University, is a leading philosopher of renown and has many important works to his credit. . . .

SRI S. N. L. SHRIVASTAVA, M.A., one of our old and valued contributors, is Professor of Philosophy in a College in Madhya Pradesh. . . .

SWAMI GAMBHIRANANDA, a former Editor of the *Prabuddha Bharata* (1942-44) and now President of the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, is the author of several works in Bengali, including a complete, authentic, and comprehensive biography of the Holy Mother. . . .

SRI P. SESHADRI AIYAR, B.A., M.L., Curator, Sri Chitra Central Hindu Religious Library, Trivandrum (Travancore), is a Sanskrit scholar and a linguist of repute, well versed in many Indian and foreign languages. . . .

DR. A. C. BOSE, M.A., Ph.D., Principal of a College in Madhya Pradesh, is an eminent scholar and author. . . .

BASANA DEVI, M.A., is on the staff of the Ramakrishna Mission Nivedita Girls' School and has devoted herself to the cause of women's education. . . .

DR. V. M. APTE, M.A., Ph.D. (Cantab.), is Professor and Head of the Department of Sanskrit in the University of Saugor. . . .

SRI R. R. DIWAKAR, Governor of Bihar, and formerly Minister of the Government of India, is a distinguished scholar, known for his erudition alike in English and Sanskrit, and is the author of several works in Kannada and Hindi also. . . .

DR. P. S. SASTRI, M.A., M.Litt., Ph.D., of the Department of English, University of Saugor, is a noted scholar and writer. . . .

SRIMATI M. A. RUKMINI, B.A., B.L., a woman-advocate practising in the Madras High Court, is a keen writer of great understanding and a contributor to many Indian periodicals. In her present article she portrays an original point of view with a realistic approach to the problems of Indian womanhood. . . .

SRI C. C. BISWAS, M.A., B.L., M.P., is Minister for Law and Minority Affairs, Government of India. . . .

DR. KALIDAS NAG, M.A., D.Litt., M.P., formerly Professor of the Calcutta University, is a scholar and author of great repute. He has travelled widely in different parts of the world and is an able exponent of Indian history and culture. . . .

SRI CHINTAHARAN CHAKRAVARTI, M.A., Kavyatirtha, is Professor of Sanskrit in a College in West Bengal, and is reputed for his profound scholarship, especially in the Tantras and the ancient Classics. . . .

DR. C. KUNHAN RAJA, M.A., Ph.D., formerly of the Madras University, is at present Professor of Sanskrit at the University of Teheran, Iran. . . .

SRI C. T. K. CHARI, M.A., of the Department of Philosophy and Psychology of a well-known College in Madras, is a forceful writer of wide interests and massive erudition. He has specialized in the study and lucid exposition of psychical research and depth psychology, and has contributed learned articles to various leading journals in India and abroad. . . .

DR. P. K. ACHARYA, M.A., Ph.D., D.Litt., formerly of the Indian Educational Service, was Head of the Department of Oriental Studies, Allahabad University. He has been a regular contributor to the *Prabuddha Bharata* and his valued writings are always characterized by profound scholarship, clarity of thought, and a deep insight into the Hindu scriptures. . . .

SRI N. CHANDRASEKHARA AIYAR, a former Judge of the Supreme Court of India, is a learned writer and Sanskrit scholar, and is the Joint General Editor of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's Book University. . . .

DR. A. V. RAO, M.A., Ph.D. (Lond.), Bar-at-Law, is Reader of the Department of English, University of Lucknow. . . .

SWAMI PARAMATMANANDA is the Editor of the *Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam*, the popular Tamil monthly journal published from Madras (by Sri Ramakrishna Math). . . .

SRIMATI SARASVATI CHENNAKESAVAN, M.A., our new and welcome contributor, is Assistant Professor of Philosophy in a College in Madras. . . .

SRIMATI LILA MAJUMDAR, M.A., our new and welcome contributor, is a distinguished Bengali writer of great literary accomplishment, and possesses valuable first-hand knowledge and experience of the special problems of women and children gained through a good deal of ardent social work. . . .

SRI KSHITIS C. CHAUDHURI, a high and distinguished official of the Indian Audit and Accounts Service, is a learned and thoughtful writer and author. . . .

SRI C. SIVARAMAMURTI, M.A.,—whose illuminating contribution, suitably illustrated, will be read



with interest,—is the Superintendent of the Archaeological Section of the Indian Museum, Calcutta. . . .

DR. JITENDRA NATH BANERJEA, M.A., Ph.D., F.A.S., is Head of the Dept. of Ancient Indian

History and Culture, Calcutta University. The article—'Some Aspects of Shakti Worship in Ancient India'—is based on an illustrated talk delivered by him at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, some months ago.

## REVIEWS AND NOTICES

GREAT WOMEN OF INDIA. EDITORS: SWAMI MADHAVANANDA AND RAMESH CHANDRA MAJUMDAR. *Published by Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Almora (Himalayas).* Available from Advaita Ashrama, 4, Wellington Lane, Calcutta 13. *Pages xix + 551. Price Rs. 20.*

The Committee that was formed to celebrate in a due manner the Birth Centenary of the Holy Mother, Shri Sārādā Devī, the spiritual consort of Shri Rāmakrishna, was extremely well advised to include within the programme of celebrations the publication of a Volume entitled *Great Women of India* which would 'deal with the ideals of Indian womanhood, its position in Indian life and society through the ages, as well as the biographical sketches and contributions of great Indian women who made their marks in different spheres of activities and different periods of Indian history. In pursuance of that laudable objective the Committee invited the co-operation of some of the outstanding intellectuals, men and women, of India to make the scheme a success. The result has been the production of the present magnificent volume of over 500 pages with an admirable index.

The Committee has faithfully executed its trust and presented, for the first time, a connected and comprehensive survey of the position of women in this great land of ours down the ages. The volume is divided into two parts. While the First gives a general survey of the position of women from the Vedic times down to the modern period, the Second makes an illustrative study of the lives of the Great Women of India in the different periods. Occasional overlapping has been inevitable but it is almost negligible, considering the fact that different contributors took part in discussing the women's problem of the same period. In fact, it is only in Chapters I, II and IV that such overlapping occurs. If a mild criticism is called for, it is that Chapter III should have found a place under Section A of Part II where it rightfully belongs, or it should have started the Volume as a whole, dealing as it does with divine personalities. At the same time a word of praise is due to those authors who agreed to

merge their individuality in dealing with a common topic so that it is not possible to detect what portion of a particular Chapter was contributed by whom. This remark applies to Chapters XV, XVII and XXII.

The Volume starts with an informative and appreciatory Introduction by Dr. S. Rādhakrishnan who quotes with approval the beautiful remark of Sister Niveditā about Shri Sārādā Devī, 'To me it has always appeared that she is Shri Rāmakrishna's final word as to the ideal of Indian womanhood'. He also gives his own ideal of womanhood in the context of Indian culture. Dr. R. C. Majumdar traces with bold hand the development of the highest type of monogamy from an original but occasional promiscuity in the early Vedic period. He could have cited in addition the story of Jabālā, the unmarried mother of Satyakāma Jābāla, and also the question put to a woman at the Varuṇapraghāsa sacrifice to disclose the list of her lovers in order that by confession she might be rendered sinless. With strict impartiality he shows the good and evil sides of early Hindu society and traces how in course of time women lost many of their early privileges and became subjected to many disabilities. The hankering after a male issue naturally grew stronger with every degradation in the status of women. He might have referred to the ceremony of *pūmsavana* which still finds a place in Hindu almanacs (*pañjikā*). Dr. Majumdar is followed by Dr. A. S. Altekar on whose work, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilisation*, all subsequent workers have largely drawn. He unrolls the sad tale of the gradual deterioration in the social position of women, starting with the loss of the right of investiture with the sacred thread and ending with child marriage, want of education and loss of many legal rights to property. Dr. Roma Chaudhuri, whose article on Women's Education in Ancient India logically comes next, partially lifts the gloom of the articles by her male collaborators by showing how in spite of adverse social circumstances the ideal of womanhood was never allowed to go out of literature and life at any time and



how women of all the religious communities were shown proper respect and given training according to contemporary social tradition. This graceful appreciation of the attitude of reformers from a woman contributor of eminence is very welcome indeed. Mrs. Lila Majumdar, who writes on the Position of Women in Modern India, writes with vigour about the agelong sufferings of women due to the neglect of their education and the development of illiberal social laws through the centuries, but she too ends with a joyous note about the redemption of women in sight in a secular State which is opening up new visions and opportunities before the women of modern India. Judging by the cogency of reasoning and beauty of literary presentation, hers is one of the best articles in the whole Volume and the reader is sure to enjoy greatly her diagnosis and cure of our present social maladies concerning women. Chapter III, which is a kind of parenthesis between two articles on each side in the First Part, is devoted to Dr. S. B. Dasgupta's article on the Evolution of Mother Worship in India. It traces the evolution of the Mother cult in India from the earliest times and is a well informed article from the pen of one who has been long specializing in this branch of study. Aditi, Prithivī, Saraswatī, Shri, Devī, Ambikā, Umā, Durgā, and such prominent female divinities are treated with a wealth of knowledge that is impressive. This is followed by a scholarly treatment of the Shakti cult in different types of literature—philosophical, Vaishnavite, Shaivite, Shākta, Purāṇic, Tāntric, and Aurobindian. He concludes that the Divine Mother has something to do with the majesty and glory of the human mother in India and the cult of the Motherland in all patriotic movements of recent times.

The first section of Part II includes four articles on Great Women in Vedic Literature, in the *Mahābhārata*, in the Purāṇas, and in Sanskrit Classics, contributed by four acknowledged authorities in their respective fields of Sanskrit literature—Dr. S. K. De, Tripurari Chakravarti, Dr. R. C. Hazra, and Sivaprasad Bhattacharyya, the two other contributors being Swami Nihshreyasananda and Miss Suniti Bala Gupta, who contribute respectively Great Women in the *Rāmāyana* and Women Characters in the Stories of the *Mahābhārata*. Dr. De gives a translation of the hymns ascribed to the female seers of the Vedic times, including the famous Devī-sūkta (which Dr. S. B. Dasgupta has also translated), and points out how the eternal woman comes out in some of their prayers and supplications. He rounds off with the two outstanding philosophical figures—Maitreyī and Gārgī of the Upanishadic age. Swami Nihshreyasananda ropes in within his article almost all the noted women of

the *Rāmāyana*—Kausalyā, Kaikeyī, Sumitrā, Sītā, Tārā, Mandodarī, Saramā, Trijatā, Ahalyā, Swayamprabhā, Shabarī, and Anasūyā, naturally leaving out Tāḍakā and specially Mantharā, and Shūrpanakhā whose counsel of selfishness and infatuation were respectively responsible for all the woes of Sītā and Rāma.

The characters of Gāndhārī, Kuntī and Draupadī find an authoritative handling in the article on Main Women Characters in the *Mahābhārata* by Tripurari Chakravarti who quotes the immortal words of Gāndhārī, "Where there is righteousness, there is victory" and brings out the type that each character represents in her adversity. Miss S. B. Gupta maintains the prestige of the *Mahābhārata* by contributing the third longest article in the Volume, the biggest being the concluding article on the Holy Mother. She details many of the well known stories to be found scattered in the pages of the great Epic, such as those of Sukanyā (which is traceable to sub-Vedic literature), Jaratkāru, Pativrata, Shakuntalā, Lopāmudrā, Sulabhā, Vidurā, Damayantī, and Sāvitrī, and succeeds in presenting before us the whole gamut of womanly virtues that have created a tradition of dignity, purity, and spirituality among women in India. I am not sure, however, whether the three-day (*trirātra*) fast by women observing the Sāvitrīvrata is anywhere observed nowadays—in Bengal the fast is observed only on the Chaturdashī day. Dr. R. C. Hazra purveys to us the stories of Madālasā and Devahūti as ideal mothers, Satī, Umā, Shaibyā, Sunīti, and Bhāminī as exemplary wives, and Sharmishthā as a noble unmarried daughter. Sivaprasad Bhattacharyya delineates the handling of many of the epic and Purāṇic characters in Sanskrit literature, e.g. Sītā, Shaibyā, Damayantī, Draupadī, Pārvatī, Shakuntalā, Rādhā, Arundhatī, as also of other characters like Mahāshwetā, Rājyaśhrī, Vāsavadattā, and Chudālā (of *Yogavāsishthā*) to bring out the peculiarities and nobilities of the feminine nature and does not even shrink from giving a prominent position to the courtesan Vasantasenā in his treatment. He draws some general conclusions about the peculiarities found applicable to great women of India. Dr. Nalinaksha Dutt places at the disposal of the readers his wide knowledge of Buddhist literature in understanding some of the outstanding women characters in Buddhism—Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, Kṣhemā, Paṭāchārā, Bhaddā (or Subhaddā) Kuṇḍalakeshā, Ambapālī the courtesan, and Isidāsī, who furthered the cause of the Buddhist Church in a variety of ways as also lay devotees like Sāmāvātī, Khujjuttarā, and Vishākhā, who were patterns of loyalty to the religious fraternity. Dr. U. P. Shah unfolds before us the ideals of character, learning, and detachment



held up by Jaina nuns and lay devotees—the mothers of the Tirthankaras, Malli (the female nineteenth Tirthankara according to Shwetāmbara tradition), Rājimatī, Kannaki, (Paṭṭinī Devī of Ceylon), Yākinī Mahattarā, Pāhiṇī, Shridevī, and many queens and wives of high State dignitaries, who are still remembered with gratitude and devotion for their furthering the cause of Jainism.

Dr. D. C. Sircar describes the achievements of Prabhāvatī Gupta (the Vākāṭaka queen), a succession of Bhauma-kara queens of Orissa, Queen Diddā of Kashmir, of uncertain morals but great administrative ability, and some other heroic women of that country, and the valiant Kleophas and Rānī Bāi who withstood the attack of foreign invaders. He cites also a large number of poetesses mentioned by Rajashekhara in his *Kāvya-mīmāṃsā* and also found in Hala's *Sattasāi*, *Shārngadhara-paddhati*, *Kavīndravachana-samuchchaya*, and *Sadukti-karṇā-mṛita*. Līlavatī, Khanā, and Ubhayabhāratī figure as women scholars of tradition in this article. K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, K. R. Venkataraman, Dr. N. Venkataramanayya, N. Lakshminarayan Rao, and K. N. Gopala Pillai take joint responsibility for the two articles on Great Women in South India of the Classical and of the Medieval Period. Early characters are Jaina and Hindu mystics like Guṇamatī, Paṭṭina Kuratti, Avvai, Tilakavati, Maṅgaiyarkarashi, Punitavati (Kāraikkāl Ammaiṃyār), Kodai (Āṇḍāl), and Akka-mahādevī; pious devotees like Raṅgapatākā, Sembiyan-mahādevī, Kundavai, Kuṅkuma-mahādevī, Loka-mahādevī, Dāna-chintāmaṇi Attimabbe, Rebbaladevī, and Shāntalā who liberally patronised their respective faiths; reputed poetesses like Ādi Mandi and Velli Vidi, Pūda (Bhūta) Pāṇḍya's queen, Aṅgavai and Sheṅgavai, Avvai, Veṅṅikuyatti, Nappashalai and Kāntī, many of whom came from lowly castes; and queens, warriors, and administrators like Shīla-mahādevī, Akkadevī, Nāyakurālu, Rudrāmbā, Gaṇapāmbā, and Uṅṅiyarcha. The Medieval figures depicted are poetesses like Gaṅgādevī, Molla, Oduva Tirumalāmbā, Honnamma, Cheluvāmbā, Heḷavanakaṭṭe Giryamma, Tarigoṇḍa Vengamāmbā, princely consorts like Madhuravāṇī, Rāmadhadrāmbā, and Raṅgajamma, and the courtesan Muddupaḷani, showing the extent of culture among women during that time. Queenly eminence is manifested in the lives of Chennammāji, Umayamma and Maṅgamma. Dr. Kalikinkar Datta's Great Hindu Women in North India naturally turns to the Rajput heroines of bardic fame—Saṃyogitā (also known as Saṃyuktā), Kūrma Devī, Padminī, Tārā Bāi, Rānī Durgāvati, and Dhātrī Pānnā, and to religious devotees like Lalla (Lal Ded), the incomparable Mīrā Bāi, and some other medieval mystics belonging to the religious cults that arose under the

inspiration of Rāmānanda and his disciples. To these are added women distinguished in art and literature or patronesses thereof like Lachhimā Devī I, Lachhimā Devī II, Chandrakalā Devī, and Rūpamatī of Baz Bahadur romance fame.

Then follow Chapters on regional celebrities of Mahārāshṭra, Gujarāt and Saurāshṭra, and East India. Dr. Mrs. K. Deshpande has no difficulty in picking up at random women saints and poetesses in the land of the Lord Viṭṭhal or Viṭhobā of Paṇḍharpur. Mahadambā (Mahadāisā or Rūpāi), Muktabāi, Janābāi, Kānhopātrā, Bahiṇābāi, Venābāi and Akkābāi have left behind a fame that would not die out. Jijābāi, mother of Shivājī, Tārābāi, and Ahalyābāi of hallowed memory adorn the glorious pages of Mahārāshṭra history as able women in politics and administration. Dr. B. J. Sandesara gives us an account of Mayaṇallā (or Mīnaladevī) as a famous queen mother who was famous for her piety and charity, Nāikidevī who checkmated the Muslim invader, and Auupamā, the mother of six *darshanas*, which she impartially patronised, famous for her share in the building of the Delwārā temple on Mt. Ābu. Among the saint-poetesses are described Kriṣṇābāi, Gavaribāi, Puribāi, Divālibāi, Rādhābāi and Janibāi. Dr. Sukumar Sen enlightens us on Vishwāsadevī, Chauching, Chandraprabhā, and Rānī Bhavānī as able administrators in East India. The Vaiṣṇava devotees are represented by Sachidevī, Viṣṇupriyā, Jāhnavā, Sītā, Ichchhādevī, and Hemalatā while literary women claim respect in the persons of Chandrāvati, Ānandamayī and Gaṅgāmayī, Gaṅgāmaṇi, and Haṭī Vidyālaṅkāra who even ran a Sanskrit school (*chatuṣhpāṭhī*) in west Burdwan. The section ends with a portrayal of great Muslim women of India from the pen of Dr. M. W. Mirza who gives a vivid pen picture of queens and princesses like Razīya Sultān, Gulbadan Begum, Nūr Jahān Begum, Jahān Ārā Begum and Zibunnisā, religious women like Bībī Fātima Sām and Bībī Zalīkhā, and heroic women like Chānd Bībī and Sāhibjī.

The modern period is ushered in by a group contribution of Dr. Radhakamal Mukherjee, Swami Satswarupananda, K. N. Gopala Pillai and N. Lakshminarayan Rao. Among queens Gaurī Pārvatī Bāi of Travancore and Rānī Lakṣmī Bāi of Jhānsī find a just place in narration, while writers and social reformers are represented by Toru Dutt, the fragile genius of Calcutta, Paṇḍitā Ramābāi whose amazing versatility and labour in the cause of Christ is well known, Swarṇakumārī Devī, Kāminī Roy, and Sarojinī Nāidu who shed lustre on so many fields of activity. The list of modern worthies might have been a little longer,



but perhaps the just departed do not get a halo of sanctity and greatness as the long departed do.

The last two chapters have come from the pen of two monks of the Rāmakriṣṇa Order as they alone possess the detailed knowledge and the devotional attitude that are indispensable for putting a coping stone to the valuable structure of women's greatness that others have built up in the Volume. Swami Tejasananda gives us an account of the great women devotees of Shri Rāmakriṣṇa. Rānī Rāsmaṇī, Yogeshwarī Bhairavī Brāhmaṇī, Aghor-  
maṇī Devī (Gopāler Mā), Yogīndra Mohinī Bishwās (Yogin Mā), Golāp Sundarī Devī, Mṛḍānī Chattopādhyāy (Gaurī Mā), and Lakṣhmīmaṇī Devī (Lakṣhmī Didi) are some of the famous women figures whose devotion, ministrations to creature comforts, and personal purity have contributed largely to the smooth running of the religious brotherhood in its earlier years.

The Holy Mother (Shri Sārādā Devī) could not have been delineated with surer touch and more picturesque treatment than by Swami Nirvedananda who gives us an almost day to day account of the Holy Mother's inspiring life. Her love and her sacrifice, her family attachment and spiritual detachment, her wanderings among the sacred spots of India and gradual acceptance of the responsibilities of the mother of the spiritual organization built up by the apostles of Rāmakriṣṇa, her native shyness and her amazing adaptability to new social situations, her performance of the drudgeries of a village household and her spiritual ministrations to a growing flock of disciples, her solicitude for the welfare of one and all, and withal her withdrawal from the realm of sense in ecstasy form the texture of an amazing personality as presented to us by Swami Nirvedananda. The simple village woman and the exalted spiritual consort of a great mystic play hide and seek in her bewildering personality. Now her spirit hovers over the Rāmakriṣṇa-Vivekānanda organization like a guardian angel, inspiring faith in religious values and in the sanctity of a wedded life lived in strict conformity with the spiritual status of the partners involved, each helping the other in the attainment of higher reaches of sacred exaltation.

The above is a brief sketch of the contents of one of the most remarkable productions of the closing days of 1953. The whole work has been excellently planned, judiciously distributed, profusely illustrated, and wonderfully executed, and will long remain a standing book of reference on the women of India. I have no doubt that the work would be enthusiastically welcomed in enlightened circles as an eye-opener to the achievements of women. In the midst of their poverty and ignorance, loss of ancient privileges and life in seclusion, hard

household duties and restricted opportunities the women of India hold a wonderful record of achievement in diverse occupations. They held fast to the sheet anchor of their national spiritual outlook and all the blows and buffets of fortune failed to drive them from their religious moorings. The very sensible view expressed by the women contributors raise the hope that, in spite of the influx of new ideas and the general apathy to religion that is raising its head among men in this secular State, women of Modern India will worthily maintain the ancient spiritual tradition, shorn of its ugly trappings, lay the foundation of a never ending stream of great women in an ever widening field of occupation, and would not only march hand in hand with their male compcers, but exhort and encourage them in the difficult ascent of the heights of nobility, purity, and holiness.

HARIDAS BHATTACHARYYA

THUS SPAKE THE HOLY MOTHER.  
*Published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras-4. Pages 112. Price 6 As.*

This booklet, a welcome companion to the earlier publications—*Thus Spake Sri Ramakrishna* and *Thus Spake Vivekananda*, brings together some of the choicest sayings and utterances of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, the divine consort of Sri Ramakrishna. It is most appropriate that the booklet, with a tri-colour picture of the Holy Mother on the front cover, has been published on the occasion of the Birth Centenary of the Holy Mother. An Invocation, taken from a Hymn to the Holy Mother by Swami Abhedananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, a short sketch of the life of the Mother, as also the text of a nice letter written to her by Sister Nivedita, have been added at the beginning of the book. The sayings, compiled herein, are divided into eight sections, under suitable headings, and have been selected from the informal conversations of the Holy Mother with disciples and devotees. These valuable teachings have a unique charm of their own and contain spiritual counsels of the highest order, uttered with love, warmth, and catholicity.

#### BENGALI

SHRIMĀ SĀRADĀ DEVĪ. BY SWAMI GAMBHIRANANDA. *Published by Udbodhan Karyalaya, 1, Udbodhan Lane, Baghbazar, Calcutta-3. Pages 702. Price Rs. 6.*

A biography, being a personal account, can never be as truly impersonal as a chronological record of the events of a man's life, complete from birth to death, would have been. A criticism of



such a biography is all the more difficult because it can never be as impersonal as a proper judgement should be. In the following lines we can only attempt to give an estimate of the significance of this volume, published by an avowed follower on the occasion of the hundredth birth anniversary of the Holy Mother.

In his foreword, the author frankly confesses his personal interest in that in the recital of the events of this remarkable life, he has really embarked on a spiritual quest. At the same time, he is cognisant of the truth that the true story of the Mother's life is in itself a spiritual lesson, and requires no sermonising or doctrines from the author's pen to clarify its particular message.

As a result, the book is authentic, historical, restrained, sincere, and bold. The language adopted is simple but dignified, the theme intelligible to the plainest understanding. Without any of the sentimentalism or mystical theorising, which are the pitfalls of the devotee, the biography is unfolded with a strong conviction and tenderness and in its pages the personality of the mother reveals itself in all its strength and gentleness.

In the first thirty-two chapters of this volume the author gives a systematic account of the significance of the appearance of the Mother, her birth, her environment, marriage, spiritual initiation, her daily life, her associates, her private difficulties, her secret meditations, her responsibilities, her Master and his relatives and disciples, life at Dakshineswar and in the village, her human joys and sorrows, her disciples, her travels, her domestic life, her trials and tribulations, her sublimity, her illnesses and disappointments, her renunciations and glory.

For the convenience of the reader a bibliography and a copious index are attached at the end, together with a comprehensive chronological list, a few personal notes, references, etc.

To be of value to posterity, a biography should be a store-house of accurate information on which scholars may rely. However, the success of a biography does not depend only on its value to the scholar but to a greater extent on its appeal to the ordinary reader. This volume comprises both qualities and should be read and appreciated by all.

LILA MAJUMDAR

**SRI RAMAKRISHNA-O-SRI MĀ.** BY SWAMI APURVANANDA. *Published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Bankura, West Bengal. Pages 264. Price Rs. 3.*

The book under review,—containing condensed, yet comprehensive and well-written, biographies of Sri Ramakrishna, the prophet of the age, and Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, the spiritual consort of Sri Ramakrishna—is a welcome addition to the group of valuable publications, big and small, that

are being brought out in commemoration of the Birth Centenary of the Holy Mother. In simple, chaste, and lucid Bengali, the learned author,—who has many interesting and instructive writings to his credit and with whose fascinating and absorbing style the Bengali-reading public is well acquainted,—has presented the main events, together with their spiritual significance, of the illustrious lives of this holy and extraordinary couple, whom we see first as husband and wife, next as Master and disciple, and finally as Shiva and Shakti, one and non-different. While Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings are widely known throughout the world, the comparatively less eventful, but equally rich and profound, life of the Holy Mother are just beginning to be known and understood. She was in fact his first disciple and took upon herself, as his spiritual successor, the arduous task of fulfilling his great mission. To the devotees and disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, the personality of the Holy Mother is no less sacred and vitally significant. Hence it is a commendable plan on the part of the author and the publishers to combine the two lives in one volume and present them as complementary to each other. For obvious reasons, the life of Sri Ramakrishna, which is placed first in the book, occupies nearly twice as many pages as the life of the Holy Mother. In the life of Sri Ramakrishna there occur numerous references to the Holy Mother and the unique and spotless relationship between the two is exquisitely represented by the author. The book is most appropriately suited to the purpose of children as well as adults, and serves as a short and handy one-volume biography of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi.

**JANAK-JANANI.** BY NRIPENDRA KRISHNA CHATTOPADHYAYA. *Published by Satyendralal Roy, 8-C, Beadon Street, Calcutta 6. Pages 173. Price Rs. 2-8.*

The book under review contains the short life-sketches of Sri Ramakrishna and Saradamani Devi—the Father (Janak) and Mother (Janani) of innumerable seekers after Truth. The holy lives of these two spiritual personalities are presented in simple Bengali, easily intelligible to boys and girls of school-going age. There are, however, various biographies of Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother, in Bengali, including such important books as *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lila-prasanga*, *Paramapurush Sri Ramakrishna*, and *Paramā-prakriti Saradamani*. Some of these books are noted for depth of thought and high philosophical merit. *Janak-Janani*, with its lucidity of style and simplicity of language, will appeal to the young as well as the old.

TARAKUMAR GHOSE



