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JULY 1966

# Prabuddha Bharata

OR

AWAKENED INDIA



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# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

JULY 1966

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# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

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ARE THE BACKBONE OF DEFENCE

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# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

Vol. LXXI

JULY 1966

No. 7



उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत

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



LETTERS OF SWAMI SHIVANANDA

( 102 )

Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama  
Bull Temple Road, Bangalore City  
12 August 1921

Dear Sriman —,

I have noted all from your letter. I feel much grieved to learn the premature death of your sister. She was endowed with so many virtues and it would therefore be no wonder that you all, more particularly your mother, would be distressed at heart in her passing away. Such are the laws of the world and they are inviolable. The Lord makes His will reign supreme. Discriminate this way, depend absolutely on the Lord and rest content. By doing so we make our faith on God deeper than ever, our mind becomes toned up and we learn to visualize more clearly that each of us will one day be separated from the other. The relations of this world are indeed such transitory and trivial. The Lord who is the Soul of souls, is alone real and changeless beyond the chain of birth and death. Bereavement, for a brief period is, of course, quite common but it cannot take a long hold on the heart of a devotee as he has within him the power of his faith on the Lord. It appears from what you have written that your sister was pure in her heart; so there is no doubt that her soul has attained to the divine realm. Be sure of it. Know for certain that she has reached the Lord. I am happy to learn about the Ashrama. I like that the little children who visit the Ashrama everyday should have some good training that will endure. It is very encouraging that you three or four study the Upanishads for two hours on Sundays before—. Some such study of the scriptures everyday is very essential. It will be good to have electric light in the Ashrama. Maharaj is very glad over it and we

too feel the same. But know all these to be secondary ones. Most fundamental of all is to build the life through spiritual practices, study and worship and we need to have a firm conviction in that respect. Go on with the regular spiritual practices as you are doing. There is no doubt that you are making a definite progress; by His grace, you will have more improvement gradually. The more you dive deep, the more, by His grace, your heart will become full with love and devotion. There is no other means but to pray to Him. His name is our only mainstay. Hold fast on Him with love and devotion and He will surely have mercy on you. I am quite certain of it; there is nothing to doubt.

We all are well here. The place is quite health giving and cool. There is not the least heat. Even during day time moderate winter garments are to be put on. May you, by the grace of the Master, have peace in every respect and become more steadfast in your faith and devotion.

Your well-wisher,  
Shivananda

( 103 )

Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama  
Bull Temple Road, Bangalore City  
11 September 1921

Dear Sriman —,

I received one letter from you a few days ago. I am very glad that you feel somewhat well there. In this human life there is no other greater mission than to serve all the beings. What other easy way is there to purify the soul? Through selfless service one realizes the manifestation of God easily at heart. It is but imperative that one will have to do the spiritual practices. My heartfelt blessings and love to you and the other devotees. Maharaj and others including ourselves are keeping fairly well.

Meanwhile, I had been to Mysore for a few days. There I visited the big temple of the Divine Mother Cāmuṇḍī who destroyed the Demon Mahiṣāsura. The temple is situated on a high mountain peak. It was Janmāṣṭamī day (birth day of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa and that of the Divine Mother Mahāmāyā) and, by the grace of the Master, I felt great joy to recite the *Caṇḍī* there. From there I went over to Melkot, a place thirty-two miles off where I could visit the image of Śrī Nārāyaṇa, the one worshipped by Śrī Rāmānujācārya. Oh! what a beautiful image it would be! Śrī Rāmānujācārya started preaching his Viśiṣṭādvaitavāda (qualified non-dualism) from this very place. Even now one would find the study circle still present there. This is one of the principal shrines of the Vaiṣṇavas. This place and the temple mentioned earlier are very beautiful and surcharged with elevating purity. I feel blessed that, by the Master's grace, I could have my visit to the places well.

Well-wisher,  
Shivananda



## OUR INNER LIFE

[ EDITORIAL ]

*Definitions of Man:* The inner world of man is not anything of the metaphysical speculations of the ancient sages nor is it a fantasy of some medieval mystics. It is a fact of burning realization to the sober thinkers of all the ages. Academically the world today no longer finds it worth-while to indulge in the favourite pastime of predicting the future of the religions and making prophecies about the ultimate goal of human existence. Yet human life continues to be a wonder of all the wonders. There has been no end of doubt and controversy in regard to this very old question. Various have been the definitions put forward by various thinkers in regard to the real nature of man. To some, 'Man is an animal that cooks his victuals', to the other 'Man is an animal that makes bargains'. To the eighteenth century English poet, 'Man is half-dust and half-deity, a pendulum betwixt smile and tears alike unfit to soar or sink', to Shakespeare he is 'infinite in faculties'; to Herbert Spencer, he is the 'Unknowable' and to H. G. Wells, 'The veiled Being'. Happy and, therefore, ideal man according to both Solon and Herodotus is one who possesses a good health. 'He is whole of limb', says Solon, 'a stranger to disease, free from misfortune happy in his children and comely to look upon. If in addition to all this, he ends his life well, he is of a truth the man of whom thou art in search, the man who might rightly be termed happy'. Again, according to thinkers like Sainte Beuve, happiness is an indefinable state of mind that varies from individual to individual: 'In life happiness and misery are separated by so small a division, or so slight an event that

this may well be compared to the trembling of a leaf'. Life to some is too short for its pleasures while to the other it is too long and dreadful to live. 'Life', says Shakespeare, 'is what you make it' but Somerset Maugham in his *A Writer's Note-Book* laments, 'They say that life is short: to those who look back it may seem short enough; but to those who look forward, it is horribly long, endless. The thought of living for ever is horrible'. On his ninetyeth birthday he would even say: 'I have walked hand in hand with death and its hands are warmer than mine'. This then is the state of affairs where opinions widely diverge from one another. Real man eludes our grasp and as such all our search for a happy ideal man becomes a wild goose chase.

Biologically the very foundation of human organism is quite material, chemical, the same as that of animals—it eats, sleeps and procreates. 'The physico-chemical mechanisms at the base of his structures are the same as those of the other animals. His brain carries all hopes of the new species but is made up of cells like those of primitive beings. These cells are nourished like others and their functions are ordained by the chemical products secreted by the endocrine glands which direct and maintain the harmonious equilibrium of the whole. The thyroid gland controls intelligence and its suppression or its atrophy transforms the moral being into an idiot but the gray cells of an idiot and those of a man of genius seem to be identical. The parathyroids partly control the nervous system. The pituitary gland controls bone growth. Its ablation brings death within a few

days, just as the removal of the suprarenal glands brings death within a few hours. Finally the interstitial glands exert an all powerful influence over the development of certain male characters such as the voice and the hair; when they are injured, the brain, the heart, the muscles, the skin are affected.' (Le Comte Du Noüy: *Human Destiny*, p. 81)

But then what is the dividing line between man and animal? Where does the manliness of man rest? Perhaps, we may find the answer in what Mr. Kenneth Tynan, the English dramatic critic of this century writes,—'No piece of prose, however deathless, is worth a human life'.

*Nature of Inner Life*: To speak about this human life is to speak the obvious and this would make us confront the inner man. One fundamental feature in which man differs from other animals is in the much greater range of inner potentiality. There is very little difference between two small jelly fishes; a little more, but still not so much between two monkeys; but the difference between two men would easily exceed the difference between a jelly fish and a monkey. This difference is evidently in man's sense of inner dimension. Out of the raw materials of his inner possibilities man builds his manliness and it is here that he makes a real difference in his identity with the other species. From the point of view of this vast universe of baffling comprehension he may appear as a microbe but from another he is the crown of creation. From one point of view he may appear to have tarnished his own image by his poor thinking and frequent mistakes but from another he evokes the picture of a climbing vine which outlasts and outshines his littleness, for he is engaged upon the task of imposing the spirit upon matter. This he can do by confronting the chaos of his outer life with his faculties of discrimi-

nation and purpose and generating a character. In a phrase he is a 'living mill' or a vital machine into which the world of crude reality is poured in all its rawness to emerge as a new reality of all realities, as a world of new values. By giving this sense of an inner world of man, God, it has been said, has abdicated a part of His omnipotence in favour of His own creature. So to be reborn in this new world of new values and to grow and develop in this new reality are but the only aims of human life. If he betrays himself, throws away the pearl of his inner destiny that is richer than all his outer heritage, it will be his own fault. The cynics and the pessimists who are too much engrossed with the outer shell of this life, may of course point out with glee that the image of the inner man is too idealistic and imaginary and it had better not be projected at all. But we decline to write about man as he is but write about man what he should be. We should be optimists. The world needs optimism more than anything else to make it enduring. 'Paper', says the optimist, 'is the material out of which are made the wings of the angel of knowledge.' But 'Paper', says the pessimist, 'may be a wing of the angel of knowledge, but it is of that particular angel of knowledge who brought death into the world'. Since this inner life is intensely subtle and the approach to it is a subjective one it can never be easily comprehended. The *Kātha Upaniṣad* says:

*Devairatrāpi vicikitsitam purā*

*na hi suvijñeyam anureṣa dharmah—*  
'Even the gods in heaven entertained doubts with regard to this in the days of yore.' (I. i. 21) It is, therefore, no wonder that man with his limited knowledge will have the same doubts in respect of the true nature of this other man within him.

*The Inner Mechanism*: While making



a beautiful exposition of the structure of this inner mechanism the Upaniṣads put forward the theory of the five sheaths. These are the sheaths of food or body, vital force, the mind, the intellect and Bliss. The inner man always remains enwrapped in these five sheaths. Practical discipline alone will enable one to visualize the gradual opening of this inner realm and to see that there is the progressive unfolding of the new values. Science and philosophy, scriptures and creeds—they all look at the periphery of this new world, the outside things, the varieties of the structure. But the centre from which all our knowledges emanate, from which all our faculties are controlled and guided can only be felt by inner introspection. One has to switch himself off from the world of outer occurrences and concentrate on the centre. 'The further from the centre, the faster goes the wheel, the less, the rest'. So only by drawing near the centre can we escape the delusions of senses. In the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* the pupil Bhṛgu approaches the teacher, his father Varuṇa and asks: 'Oh revered Sir, teach me Brahman'. (*Bhṛgurvai Vāruṇiḥ. Varuṇam pītaram upasasāra. Adhīhi bhagavo Brahmeti*) The celebrated teacher does not impart the supreme lesson all at a time. He asks the pupil to concentrate and teaches by stages and degrees. The aspirant too unravels the mystery of the inner life by stages. He first realizes: '*Annam Brahmeti vyajānāt*—Food (the gross cosmic person) is verily the Brahman.' Then he proceeds on with his discipline and gradually penetrates into the sheaths of vital breath, mind, intellect and Bliss and ultimately arrives at the centre. The teacher asks him to concentrate further and the pupil attains the gradual unfoldment. The teacher says: '*Tapasā Brahma vijijñāsasva*—Through concentration alone you crave to know the

inner Self.' The pupil adheres to the command with faith and reverence and discovers one after the other: vital force as Brahman, mind as Brahman, knowledge as Brahman and finally Bliss as verily the Brahman. (*Prāṇo Brahmeti vyajānāt. ... Mano Brahmeti vyajānāt. ... Vijñānam Brahmeti vyajānāt ... Anando Brahmeti vyajānāt*)

To elaborate the theory of five sheaths allegorically this body, the sheath of food is the outer case of the inner mansion over which we have the instruments of sense perceptions fitted in. These sense organs are like the so many servants moving always at the behest of the vital force. The vital force is a faithful but unintelligent subordinate who always moves throughout the length and breadth of this mansion, collects the different sense data from the sense organs and presents them all to its immediate superior, the mind for assortment and classification. The mind, although it superintends over the vital force and through it the sense organs, is not always a dependable guide. It is a bit finer in temperament than the others but it becomes easily upset by the events, worried over the situations and disturbed at the trying circumstances. So its function is to separate the necessary, the more important details from the unnecessary and less important ones and to relay those back to the intellect behind. This intellect is the chief executive of all. Seated in the interior apartment of the mansion with all its decorum it listens to the mind, examines the evidences presented to it, and after due verification gives the verdict. The intellect maintains meticulous records of its past experiences and compares any new fact with some such evidence recorded in the past before any verdict of knowledge could be pronounced. The mind in its turn again relays the verdict of the intellect to the vital force and



through vital force to the organs of action. In fact the verdicts of reasons are nothing but classified perceptions, stored up in the pigeon hole of the mind and preserved by the intellect. This intellect, though superior to all the other faculties in its sharpness and fineness, is not the supreme entity we know. It has to draw its authority from the person behind, sitting in regal grandeur and benign calm surrounded by a halo of bliss and joy. He is that inner man, the Soul of our souls, the master of the mansion and all else are his servants working at his will. This is how the mechanism moves and works. Discovery of this inner man beyond these five sheaths, beyond his servants and subordinates is what we know to be the quest of all religions and the aim of the inner life.

Therefore we have to learn by reflection, through the process of intense discipline and rigorous training. It is not merely being satisfied with the first appearance or perception of a thing but getting into the second thoughts, going behind it that can give us the truth. It is not a learned discourse that we can have it nor is it that what another man says. We have to taste with our own tongue, see with our own eyes and feel with our own heart.

The theory of five sheaths provides a scientific justification to the principle of the triple approach to the knowledge of the Self: *Śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana* i.e. hearing the dictum, reasoning on it and meditation. In *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (II.iv.5 and IV.v.6) the sage Yājñavalkya speaks of this very triple method: 'The Self, my dear Maitreyī, should be realized—should be heard of, reflected on and meditated upon. By the realization of the Self, my dear, through hearing, reflection and meditation, all this is known.' So starting with the matter (the body) we come to life (vital force); we

start with vital force and we come to the mind and from mind we get to the intellect. Intellect is also not the surest guarantor of truth. It is also disturbed and distracted and so we get to the tranquillity of the Self. 'Physics is bounded on both sides by metaphysics. So it is with reason—it starts from non-reason and ends with non-reason'. (Swami Vivekananda: *The Complete Works*, Vol. VIII, p. 20) We begin from the world of perception, push our enquiry far and arrive at the plane of realization. First we hear about the Self and gain a certain conviction in regard to the purport of the text but there are doubts and contradictions regarding the meaning. So we are required to reflect in our mind and in intellect. Again reflection must lead the knowledge gained thereof to a certitude about the reasonableness and so we meditate within. Hearing is confirmed through reflection and turned into a burning conviction through meditation. We perceive the reality through the pulse of our whole being. Swami Vivekananda emphasizes this very same training of the mind when he defines education and says—'Education is the nervous association of certain ideas.' All the enquiries must have to be converted into a coherent and integral conviction that will burn steadily within us all the while. Mere knowledge of text is no knowledge. It is too superficial to indicate anything of the real man. The wise ones say: '*Vākyaṛtha jñānamātrāt na amṛtam.*' One has to ask, enquire, push forward to reach the goal. Man is like that poor wood-cutter as described in the *Gospels of Sri Ramakrishna* who was told to go forward and forward. A wood-cutter once entered a forest to gather wood. A holy man said to him, 'Go forward'. The man obeyed the injunction and came across some sandal wood trees. After a few days he reflected. 'The holy man asked me to go forward.

He did not tell me to stop here.' So he penetrated still farther in the forest and discovered a silver mine and next, mines of gold, diamond and other precious stones. With all these the poor man became immensely rich and happy. So to grow rich and happy one has to go deeper and deeper into the kingdom within than ever. It is our own folly or poor thinking that we make us remain weak and poor. It is not the decree of any fate that we suffer but it is our ignorance that we make ourselves appear to be so. Shakespeare's Julius Caesar is perhaps quite appropriate in making the statement :

Men at some time are masters of their  
fates ;

The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our  
stars,

But in ourselves, that we are underlings.

*Inner Growth is Subjective* : Mere theoretical exposition of our inner mechanism is not enough. There will always remain a gulf of difference between a theory and its practice, between a belief and its actualization. 'To believe in God is to desire His existence and what is more to act as though He existed.' If Christ asks us to be born again we are to act accordingly and make our human life worth its name. But how to be reborn ? What is the nature of this new life ? To this the man of realization says that the growth of inner life is a subjective one. It is not the attainment of anything spectacular. It is not the abundance of material things that would make that inner growth easily attainable. The happiest are not necessarily the wealthiest. The rich of the world are among those who find the vocations of this outer life as stale, flat and unprofitable. To them man is not merely a social being but is a solitary being too ; he is not merely the man of the world but above all he is a

man-in-himself. Inner life primarily concerns itself with this man-in-himself or the man as a spiritual being. The spirit again is not an object but a subject of what a man is or does. So the awareness of the inner being or the communion with the oversoul defies any logical analysis or any linguistic elaboration. 'To find the Father or the Maker of all is hard and having found him it is impossible to utter him.' (Socrates) When asked by Dionysius to make a statement of his philosophy of inner knowledge Plato said,—'There is no written work of my own on my philosophy, and there never will be. For this philosophy cannot possibly be put into words as other sciences can. The sole way of acquiring it is by strenuous intellectual communion and intimate personal intercourse, which kindle it in the soul instantaneously like a light caught from a leaping flame ; and once alight, it feeds its own flame thence forward.' So each has to move in his own way. There is no single royal road to realization. Though a man may become learned by another's learning, he never can be wise but by his own wisdom. The learning too, at times, becomes a burden in us and we spend our entire manhood in unlearning it again. By overloading our vessel too much we at times even sink it and thus give its owner an ill account of the voyage. The scriptures can point out the road, the teacher can arm you with the necessary facts but you have to travel all the way yourself. There is no self-realization by proxy. 'Work out your own salvation', says St. Paul. Symmachus in his controversy with St. Ambrose remarked, 'The heart of so great a mystery cannot even be reached by following one road only'. Each one has to make his own realization. Each one has to pay the price in his own labour and strivings. Each has to hear the deep within himself, experience the pride derived



from a profound sense of manliness—a costly pride richer in sacrifices than the pleasures, nobler in renunciation than the enjoyments. But nothing goes in vain. What is lost in power is gained in speed. To speak of this inner life is to signify the event of a tremendous epic, an evolution of our poor being into a rich becoming—a preparation for becoming Christ and Moses through self-expansion, self-expression and self-realization which cannot rest content till the soul has harnessed into its chariot all the forces of self evolution and drunk all the myriad experiences of this tumultuous outer life. An incident in the life of Buddha would be worth remembering in this context. In his wandering days Buddha one day arrived at Varanasi and went to a rich farmer and asked alms of him. To this the farmer said, 'I have ploughed and sowed to eat; you, on the other hand, propose to eat without ploughing and sowing.' Buddha in reply with a broad smile said that he was engaged in even more important 'tillage of the spirit'. 'Faith is the seed, penance the rain, understanding my yoke and plough, modesty, the pole of the plough, mind, the tie, thoughtfulness my ploughshare and goad. . . . Exertion is my beast of burden carrying me without turning back to the place, where, having gone, one does not grieve. . . . So this ploughing is ploughed, it bears the fruit of immortality.' (Hardy : *Manual of Buddhism*, p. 215)

This inner character is the keynote of the greatness of all those we deem as great. It is the unfailing charm of the saints and prophets. A man of character leads the life and he unknowingly inspires the millions. His every deed and every word expresses fresh testimonies to the noble and worthy virtues and purposes. What he is engraves itself on his face, on his form, on his words and gestures in letters of the light of spirit. We need no ghost to tell

that he is a man among men. He may be silent but one single penetrating look of his eyes is enough to make us realize where we stand. Consider the life of Sri Ramakrishna. He was not an astute academician like those of his contemporaries. Neither did he participate in any polemical discussion with the veterans of his time to establish his own greatness. Simple and unostentatious as he always was, he rather detested all these shows of scholarship and self-aggrandizement. One could notice no jugglery of words or phrases in his sayings and utterances. To deliver his message he would at times have his own language which was quite different from that of the so-called polished and cultured society. Yet nineteenth century sophistication was dwarfed down before his divine stature. All those dressed in the brief dresses of vanities shrank before his purity and veracity. Our inward foundation was laid bare by his direct and straight revelation. Living more healthfully than any of his contemporaries he spread health wherever he went. He was no genius of his time but to repeat the words of Romain Rolland he was 'above genius'. He could speak in the language of the soul. He was not like Vivekananda but to follow the words of Swami Vivekananda himself he could create such thousands of Vivekanandas at his pleasure. The sharp sword which carved India's way to glory in the historic Chicago Parliament of Religions was forged by Swami Vivekananda no doubt, but the steel had certainly been provided by Sri Ramakrishna himself. Herein lies his Sri Ramakrishnahood. This is how the thing happens.

There is nothing like pretension or concealment in the depth of such an inner growth. The height of its pinnacle is determined by the breadth of its base. Purity is its foundation, love is its crest. A building can rise high into the air only

as it has sunk its foundations deep into the earth; the part of such a man's life which the world sees is effective in proportion as it rests upon the solid work which is never seen. They may die in the harness but the legacy, they leave, proves deathless. The essential element in such lives is a consuming sincerity—an overwhelming faith in what they speak and behave. Emerson said, 'What you are thunders so loud I can't hear what you say' but Mirabeau watching the face of the young Robespierre exclaimed, "That man will go far; he believes every word he says". Tennyson once wrote, 'My strength is as the strength of ten, because my heart is pure.' One may find some extent of individuality in the statement but not certainly anything of arrogance of the writer and of such purity and sincerity it may be said with more truth than of Cleopatra that :

Age cannot wither nor custom stale  
Their infinite variety.

Portrait of such a man of such an inner stature always makes the real distinction in this world of poor pigmies like us and such a rare portrait we find in the life of Jesus, the man whom nobody perhaps knows as yet.

It was the scene of Jesus' trial and crucifixion. Calmly and cheerfully he went forward, cheering the spirits of his disciples. 'His accusers were determined. They thronged the courtyard before the palace, (of judgement) clamouring for his blood, yet even they felt a momentary awe when he appeared before them on the balcony.'

'Even Pilate felt it. The two men offered a strange contrast standing there—the Roman governor whose lips were so soon to speak the sentence of death, and the silent self-possessed ex-carpenter—accused and doomed yet bearing himself with so much majesty, as though he were somehow

beyond the reach of man-made law, and safe from the hurt of its penalties. In the face of the Roman were deep unpleasant lines, his cheeks fatty with self-indulgence; he had the colourless look of indoor living. The straight young man stood inches above him, bronzed and hard, and clean as the air of his loved mountain and lake. Pilate raised his hand; the shouting and the tumult died; a deathly stillness descended upon the crowd. He turned and faced the figure at his side, and from his coarse lips there burst a sentence which is a truer portrait than any painter has ever given us. The involuntary testimony of the flabby cynical Roman in the presence of perfect strength, perfect assurance, perfect calm :

"Behold", he cried, "the man!" (Bruce Barton: *The Man Nobody Knows*, pp. 55-56)

Indeed such men are rarely known by anybody in the world and still rare are the persons who understand them truly for they belong to kingdom within.

Yet such are the men whom the world needs. Those old voices of wisdom and hope need to be heard and pondered over again and again. The solution to our problems, the answers to all our doubts and the panacea for our boiling anxieties that stare us in the face can be found only in what they say and ask us to do. Their discoveries of the inner world of man are far greater than those of the Columbuses and Newtons. Military genius, political secrets, diplomatic wisdom may help to win a war but to win the formidable battles of life we require a supreme genius, some more sustaining wisdom and secrets of altogether different nature. Better individuals alone can make this world better and we need to realize that the individuals are invariably better when they make their inner life better.



## SRI RAMAKRISHNA: THE WIT—3

DR. S. P. SENGUPTA

Sri Ramakrishna once visited Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. He said wittily: 'I have at last reached the sea. So long we were plying our boat on the canals, marshy land or even a river.'

Vidyasagar crossed the path of the Master and said, 'Then you may have a little salty water of the sea.'

The Greater wit readily snapped, 'No, you do not have any salty water. You are the sea of *vidyā*, you are as sweet as milk'.

Vidyasagar was an embodiment of compassion. Explaining his tender heart, Sri Ramakrishna said, 'You are soft, as potatoes are softened when boiled'.

Sri Ramakrishna realized that Vidyasagar was a man with a large heart. But Vidyasagar did not know how large it was. 'You have so much within you', said Sri Ramakrishna, 'but you are not cognizant of it. You are like Neptune, but you do not know the treasures lying at the bottom of the sea'.

Sri Ramakrishna extended an invitation to Vidyasagar to visit Dakshineswar. A symbol of courtesy, Vidyasagar readily agreed. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'We can go any where. For we are so many canoes. We can, therefore, travel across the canals as well as the rivers. But you are like a ship, you may get stranded'.

Sri Ramakrishna, it may be recalled, called Mahima Charan, a ship. But there was the touch of irony. Here, however, Sri Ramakrishna meant what he said. Mahendra Gupta brought a friend with him to Dakshineswar. When told that the friend was doing practically nothing, Sri Ramakrishna felt a little disturbed. 'You are like the brother-in-laws, i.e. hus-

band's elder brother', said Sri Ramakrishna, 'Your only function is to mince a pumpkin. In a family there is sometimes a man who always keeps the company of women and like an idler goes on smoking all the while. Absolutely listless and inactive, he is at times asked only to carve the pumpkin. It was a convention that women must not do so. And hence he, being the only adult man in the family, is invited to carve the pumpkin whenever an occasion arises. He is, therefore, quite in the fitness of things called the pumpkin-carving brother-in-law. As a matter of fact, all his activities consist in that'. 'Faith is everything', said Ramakrishna. Mere mummery is not enough; sometimes it can be seen that an elderly woman while taking holy dip in the Gāngā is all the while babbling and priding herself on what she thinks to be her achievements. 'Durgā Pūjā', she said, 'is incomplete unless I am there'. Such boastful women never think of God, but always think of themselves.

Sri Ramakrishna was a little hard upon those who were extremely economical. They had enough, and yet they are close-fisted. A man called Jaygopal came to see the Master. A man of means, he came in a carriage, and the carriage was ramshackle, the horses were pining and languishing. And for the Master he brought two rotten pomegranates. When told that Vijay Krishna Goswami, Shivanath Sastri and several other stalwarts had seceded from Brāhmo Samāj, and Jaygopal was the man who was running the show, Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Govinda Adhikary refused to engage good actors in his opera party only because they were expensive.'

Sri Ramakrishna believed in a synthesis

of *jñāna*, i.e. knowledge and *bhakti*, i.e. devotion. Those caring only for *jñāna* cannot accept the whole. Their thinking is fragmentary. Sri Ramakrishna, on the other hand, accepted everything with no reservations. To illustrate this he told a highly enjoyable story.

Once a woman went to another woman, to whose son her daughter was married. She went there to find her spinning silken yarn. The second woman rejoiced and said, 'O sister, I welcome you. I suppose, I should bring your snacks now.' And so she left for a while. The first woman found a heap of silken threads lying there, and the temptation was irresistible. She looked sideways and picked up one skein of thread; and lest she might be detected she concealed it in her armpit. The second woman brought all sorts of sweets. The first woman was persuaded to fall to, and she thoroughly enjoyed them. The second woman cast a glance and missed one bundle of thread. But how to recover it? So she hit upon a plan. And hence she said, 'O sister, we are meeting after a long time. It is, indeed, a day of rejoicing. I like that we should dance merrily'. So they started dancing. The second woman then said, 'O sister, our dancing is not hearty enough. Let us dance with our hands stretched up'. This the first woman would not agree to. She stretched up only one hand and said, 'O sister, I am sorry, I do not know the art of dancing with both my hands stretched.' Most people are like this woman.

Reading a lot of scriptures will lead us nowhere. What matters is the mind—the mind bubbling with enthusiasm and suffused with devotion. All these scriptures, according to Sri Ramakrishna, are no better than '*Phālasophy*'. (Sic) We do not know if the Master had purposely distorted the pronunciation; but it has nevertheless deviated into sense. '*Phāla*' in Bengali

means to throw away. Does Sri Ramakrishna mean that all this stuff known as philosophy which promotes scepticism, should be jettisoned?

Whenever in the company of his disciples, Sri Ramakrishna's joy knew no bounds. It was all joy and laughter, where seriousness had taken a holiday. The Master must amuse his children. He was playing the role of a female musician in a musical soiree. He began to flaunt a handkerchief as a musician does. Sometimes he was spitting; and as if a rich or distinguished visitor had come, he mimicking the ways of the musician, greeted him, and missed no opportunity of displaying the ornaments. It was almost side-splitting laughter. Their laughter could be heard even from afar. A young boy named Paltu was rolling on the ground in joy. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'You are yet a boy, and therefore you can rejoice so heartily. But don't you tell your father about it. The little attraction he has for me will be gone. For, after all, he is like an English man and will not like all these outlandish and rustic ways.'

Sri Ramakrishna detested all sham and fake. While taking their holy dip in the Gaṅgā many people often say their prayers. They are supposed to be silent at that time. They would, however, do everything by gestures and postures. They are telling their beads, and even then they would like to higggle with fish-mongers. And when they start talking, the subjects are all sickeningly petty. 'I suppose, you have bagged a lot of ornaments on the occasion of your son's marriage.' 'Has he come back from his father-in-law's place?' 'He has been there to choose a bride. They will spend a lot. Harish is my spoilt child: he cannot live even for a moment without me.' 'I am sorry, I could not come so long. The marriage of the daughter of Mrs. X is fixed up, and I had so much to do', and so forth and so on.



The audience laughed; but Sri Ramakrishna was offering sugar-coated quinine pills. You laugh, you relish, but do understand the implications involved in the apparently jocular statements.

Sri Ramakrishna had as much love for men as for women. And yet those who do not know the Master say that he detested women. No, he did not. To him, all women were manifestations of Mother Divine, the embodiment of supreme joy. It should, however, be remembered that he always warned his disciples against the thoughtless, maddening passion of man for woman. An unemployed man in distress called on a Head-clerk of an office for umpteen times for some employment. He did not want a good job. He just wanted to eke out an existence. The Head-clerk each time said, 'Do come again, but there is, unfortunately, no vacancy at the moment'. The man was at the end of his tether. He told his friend the story of his misery. And the friend said, 'What an idiot you are! Why did you go to that fellow at all? You see Golāp, and you are sure to be employed'. Golāp was the Head-clerk's mistress. The man called on Golāp and said, 'Mother, I am a Brahmin in distress. I seek your mercy. You must help me. I have been unemployed for years, and my wife and children would die of starvation'. 'How can I help you?' asked Golāp. The man said, 'If you put in a kind word in my favour to the Head-clerk, I shall have no difficulty in being employed'. Golāp, now moved to pity said, 'Yes, I must recommend your case to the Head-clerk when he calls'. Next day, the man saw the Head-clerk at his office. And he introduced the man to the higher officer, 'Sir, this man is eminently competent. He has been appointed, and I hope, our office will be immensely benefited'.

There are men who sometimes visit

saints for religious reasons. They are, however, on their guard against any expenditure. Jadu's (Jadu Mullick, the devotee of the Master) mother once said, Sri Ramakrishna recalled, 'Other saints always insist on money, but you do not ask for any thing'.

Sri Ramakrishna was greatly amused. And at once he wittily described it. Once there was a theatrical performance. A man felt inclined to enjoy it. But he peeped in only to find that the members of the audience were lavishly throwing money on the stage for the actors. Bitterly disappointed, the man left. He went to another place where also there was a theatrical performance. He was immensely relieved to learn that no gift or payment from the audience was asked for. With a carefree mind, he now elbowed his way through and got inside the auditorium. He trimmed his moustache and watched the show.

God alone loves us selflessly. Everybody else has selfish motives. Even the mother and the wife are not exempted. To illustrate this truth, Sri Ramakrishna narrated two highly interesting and witty stories.

A preceptor told his disciple, 'All the world is an illusion. God alone is real. You come along with me, and you can realize god'. 'How can I leave my parents, wife and children, uncared for?', asked the disciple. 'They really do not love you', assured the preceptor, 'I shall ask you to put their love to the test'. The preceptor then gave a pill to his disciple and said, 'Once you take it, you will look like one dead. You can see and hear everything. And when I shall come to you, you will regain full consciousness.'

The disciple acted accordingly. All the members of the bereaved family began to cry. They were disconsolate. A Brahmin in the mean while appeared on the scene,

'What has happened?' He asked. When told that the man was dead, he read his palm and said assuringly, 'Good Heavens! Who says that he is no more? I am giving a medicine, and as he takes it, he will fully recover.' The members of the family were very happy. 'But, there is a condition', the Brahmin continued, 'Somebody must take the medicine before, and then he will die. Later the man who is now declared to be dead, should take the medicine, and he will recover. This man has a number of close relations. And I am quite sure, one will readily take this medicine to court death and bring him back to life'.

Then all of them stopped crying and began to review the situation. 'The family is so large', the mother said, 'If I happen to die, the entire family will be ruined'. 'He has died', the wife said, 'and nothing can be done about it. I have two or three minor children. If I die, they will be absolutely uncared for'.

The disciple saw and heard everything, gone was all the charm and glamour of life. He got up and said to the spiritual guide, 'O master, I am sick of them all. Let me go with you'.

Another man told his preceptor, 'Master, my wife is so loving, and I cannot renounce the world only for her'. The preceptor asked him to do something. Next morning everybody saw that the disciple, a *hatha-yogin*, was lying down, and for all practical purposes, *rigor mortis* had set in. The wife was crying, forlorn and disconsolate. The relations brought the bier. But there was some difficulty in bringing the dead body out. A neighbour brought a cutlass for removing the threshold. The wife heard the sound and rushed here. When told that the dead body of her husband could not be removed unless the threshold was cut off, the mourning wife said, 'I am a widow now, and I

have none to look after me and my minor children. If any damage is done to the door, I fear, I cannot repair it in the future. My husband is dead, and since nothing can be done about it, the only course left is to cut off his hands and feet; and then there shall be no difficulty in removing him'. The man stood up, thoroughly disillusioned. 'You bitch', the man addressed his wife, 'you want to cut off my hands and feet'. With this he left never to return.

Sri Ramakrishna clinched the issue. 'There are people who show off their mourning. Before their display of grief they first put off their ornaments and keep them in a box under lock and key. And after that they will cry frantically, 'I am done for. I have lost all charm of life'.

God will look after you only when your ego is merged. As long as you have pride and arrogance, God will remain indifferent. Once Goddess Lakṣmī was massaging the feet of Nārāyaṇa. Nārāyaṇa suddenly stood up. On being asked He said, 'I am going to the earth to offer protection to a devotee in distress'. He, however, came back at once. 'Why did you come back so soon?', asked Lakṣmī out of curiosity. 'The devotee, almost God-intoxicated was proceeding along', said Nārāyaṇa, 'and he trampled upon the clothes, the washermen had left to be dried and aired. In high dudgeon the washermen were about to assault him, and I thought, I should protect him'. 'If so', asked Lakṣmī, 'why did you come back?' Nārāyaṇa laughed and said, 'The devotee himself picked up a brick in self-defence. And hence I left'.

Once Sri Ramakrishna was being entertained at Keshav Sen's house. He had a sumptuous meal. No, he would not have any more. Suddenly *jilipi* (a particular kind of Indian sweets) appeared on the scene. Sri Ramakrishna now relented. '*Jilipi*', he said, 'is like the viceregal car,



All other cars and carriages must make room for the viceregal car. All the courses of food that had stuffed the tummy, must make room for 'jilipi'.

Rakhal (Swami Brahmananda) was the pupil of Sri Ramakrishna's eyes, and deservedly so. One day he was with his disciples, and he missed Rakhal very much. 'What has happened to Rakhal?' he anxiously enquired. When told that Rakhal was sleeping, he said, 'Once a man went to see a drama, performed by the opera party. He took a mat so that he might sit comfortably. He was told that it would start rather late. So, what could he do? He spread the mat and lay down only to be waked up after the performance was over. In disappointment, he came back home'.

Once Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples were invited by the Brāhmos. There was a palpable discrimination between the Brāhmos and Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples. Rakhal almost furious said to Sri Ramakrishna, 'Let us go away'. Sri Ramakrishna who could not find fault with anybody, replied, 'You are a pauper, who will pay our fare, if we go away now? Moreover, where shall we have food?' When all were entertained, the host perhaps thought of Sri Ramakrishna. The place where Sri Ramakrishna was asked to have his food was dirty and filthy. And yet the Master retained his usual vivacity and amused every body with his witticisms. That is not the end of the story. The host was pledged to pay his fare. When he had asked for it, the disciple was at first repulsed. Then the host condescended to pay rupees three, the actual fare being rupees three and annas two. The Master, as serene as ever, was cutting jokes with his disciples on this issue.

Scriptures are a poor substitute for God. Once some men were crossing the river in a boat. A scholar was making a

parade of his learning. 'I have read the Vedas, the Vedāntas and all the six schools of Philosophy', he said boastfully. With a good deal of fanfare he asked a man, 'Have you read Patañjal's Sāṅkhya philosophy?' 'No, Sir', was the reply. 'Have you not read philosophy at all?', the scholar asked; and the answer was again in the negative. Suddenly a storm was raging, and the boat began to sink. The ignorant man now asked, 'Sir, do you know how to swim?' The scholar said, 'No'. Then the man said, 'I have no acquaintance with Sāṅkhya philosophy, but I know how to swim'. And Ramakrishna concluded that scriptures would lead us nowhere, unless we could have the realization of God.

Sri Ramakrishna was often distressed to find people, completely tied to their wives' apron-strings. He once went to Viswanath Upadhaya whom he jocularly called the 'captain'. Ramakrishna asked for his fare. The Captain in his turn asked his wife; and she started shouting. Then the Captain said to Sri Ramakrishna that as he would later call at Ram Dutta's (a devotee of the Master) place, Ram should pay the fare. Sri Ramakrishna jestingly concluded that the *Gītā*, Vedas and Vedāntas were all subordinated to the woman.

Even a worldly minded man becomes spiritually minded, when he wears saffron robe, which is the symbol of non-attachment and renunciation. A man, Sri Ramakrishna said, used to earn his bread by playing different roles. Sometimes he appeared as a king, and sometimes as a monk. One day he was in the guise of a saint. Some wanted to give him a purse, and with complete nonchalance he declined. After some time he changed into his original clothes and said, 'You please give me now what you had offered before.' The man in the monk's robe could refuse

a purse of gold, but now even a four anna bit was right welcome.

Sri Ramakrishna had absolutely no bigotry or sectarianism. He had the profoundest regard for all schools of thought and religion. Never before in the history of the world have we come across a man with such catholicity. He only regretted that the different religious sects are all the while falling foul of each other. The Śāktas, Sri Ramakrishna said, often tried to belittle the Vaiṣṇavas. The Vaiṣṇavas boastfully declared that Kṛṣṇa was like a ferryman, taking the people from this world to the life beyond. The Śāktas re-primed, and asserted with greater gasconade, 'Mother Durgā is the Empress of the queens ; she cannot cross the river herself. So Kṛṣṇa like a humble ferryman takes her people across the ocean'.

Sri Ramakrishna, who was God Himself came to this earth to teach us *bhakti*, i.e. devotion. That is why he was never tired of doing obeisance to others. Examples are always better than precepts. Vishwambhar's (one devotee) six-year-old daughter saluted Sri Ramakrishna, but he did not notice it. So the girl saluted him again, and Sri Ramakrishna in his turn bowed to her. And then he sang a song to her, 'Let me do your braid of hair, otherwise your husband will get cross with you'.

Adhar Sen (the devotee of the Master) was all attention to his guests. Sri Ramakrishna asked two of the guests—Mahendra and Priyanath if they had had their meals. The two brothers said very politely that he should not be anxious on their account. This docility amused him. And so he told a story. A woman's father-in-law was named Hari, and her husband's elder brother was known as Kṛṣṇa. She was naturally in a quandary. How to utter the name of God ? So she went on praying :

*Fare Fr̥ṣṭa, Fare Fr̥ṣṭa,  
Fr̥ṣṭa Fr̥ṣṭa, Fare Fare ;  
Fare Rāma, Fare Rāma,  
Rāma Rāma, Fare Fare.*

She very adroitly and conveniently changed the letters H and K to F. It should be remembered that in the Bengali Society a woman was not normally permitted to utter the names of her superiors.

Pratap Hajra asked Gopal Junior to get the hubble-bubble prepared for Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna, however, had no difficulty in understanding that it was Hajra who was interested in smoking. Another devotee asked Hajra if he had learnt much at the feet of the Master. Sri Ramakrishna knew that Hajra thought very highly of himself and would not, under normal circumstances, acknowledge him to be his Master. And so wittily he said, 'No, no, Hajra has been spiritually advanced ever since his childhood'.

Our attitude, said Sri Ramakrishna, should be always to submit to those who have propagated the name of God. Caitanya Deva propagated this cult, and we should pay our homage to him. To illustrate this a story was inevitable. The farmers were being entertained. The host named an item of food and asked, 'Do you like to have it ?' 'Yes, by all means, if only the gentlemen have taken it. For that is the test of its excellence'.

Hajra was chanting a Sanskrit *śloka*—'*antarvahirṣadi Haristapsaya tataḥ kim.*' And he was evidently chanting it wrongly with his peculiar accents. Sri Ramakrishna asked his nephew, Ramlal, 'Well, what was Hajra chanting ?' He said, '*Antas bahis yadi Haris* etc.' Sri Ramakrishna continued, 'Hajra's chanting reminds me of a person who said '*mātāraṁ bhātāraṁ khātāraṁ*', i.e. my mother is eating rice.'

Sri Ramakrishna asked Narendranath to sing a song. Naren excused himself and



said that he must leave to attend to his duties at home. Sri Ramakrishna retorted, 'Why should you listen to us? This is the way of the world—a rich man's voice is always paramount, while one in tatters is of no consequence. You can go to the garden house of the Guhas. For they are rich. Whenever I enquire I happen to learn that you are there'.

Naren kept quiet for sometime, and then said, 'There is no musical instrument'.

Sri Ramakrishna replied, 'We are poor, we cannot afford to have musical instruments'.

Sri Ramakrishna was then at Balaram Bose's house. And so when he said that he had no musical instruments he, of course, meant that at Balaram's house there were no such arrangements. Balaram adored the Master, but he was nevertheless a little miserly. Balaram should, therefore, come in for criticism. The criticism, however, was coruscated with wit.

'Balaram has asked me', said Sri Ramakrishna, 'to come here in a boat. But if that is impossible, I must come in a carriage. Today he has feted us. He must have his money's worth; he will, therefore, make us dance in the afternoon. Once I had to go back to Dakshineswar. Balaram hired a carriage for me for twelve annas only. "Will the coachman go as far as Dakshineswar for twelve annas only?" I asked. "That's all right", he replied. The carriage trudged on and then suddenly gave way. The horse refused to run. The coachman gave him a good licking, and the horse ran only to stop after a while. Today the arrangement is that Ram will play upon the musical instrument, and he has no musical sense, and we shall all dance. Balaram's contention is that we should all independently dance, sing and rejoice'.

Sri Ramakrishna narrated the story with utmost fidelity, but the witty manner in

which he related his miserable experience made every body laugh.

Sri Ramakrishna asked his disciples to go home at night. Girish Chandra Ghosh was Balaram's neighbour, and hence he could stay a little longer. Girish would naturally like to smoke. But there's the rub. 'Balaram's servant', Sri Ramakrishna said, 'is no better. Like master, like man. You ask him to prepare the tobacco for him, and he won't'.

Dwija (a boy devotee) often came to the Master, and his father was rather displeased. A pupil of captain D. L. Richardson of the Hindu College, he was naturally a little anglicized in his outlook. One day Dwija and his father both came to Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna sized up the situation and, as if to mollify the father said with his characteristic wit.

'I do understand why you often chastise your son. You want only to frighten him. You, however, don't mean it. You are like the snake, who was asked by the monk not to do any harm to any body. The snake became a symbol of non-violence. The cowherds thinking it to be innocuous, beat it mercilessly, and yet the snake did not retaliate. Months passed, and the monk again appeared on the scene. He called for the snake, and the snake appeared, lean and emaciated, almost crushed. "Why is it that you are in this sad pickle?" asked the monk. The snake could not even remember the harm, done to him. He was then passing through an exalted phase. At long last he recalled how he was beaten by the boys. The monk then said, "I asked you not to bite anybody, but you could jolly well hiss. I did not forbid you to hiss".'

Then Sri Ramakrishna said to Dwija's father, 'You are rebuking your son, not that you mean any harm, you are only hissing'.

You have a beam in your eyes; do not

therefore see the notes in other men's eyes. Do not carp at others. A widow, Sri Ramakrishna said, lived with her paramour, who was none other than her husband's elder brother. 'I am living with a close relation', said the widow boastfully, 'but there are women who live with persons, not related to them at all'. Little did she understand that she also had no extenuating circumstances.

God to a devotee is like an intoxication. He will enjoy supreme bliss when he thinks of God. 'The son said to his father,' Sri Ramakrishna related, 'you please taste wine, and then if you ask me to give it up, I shall gladly give it up.' The father tasted wine and replied, 'My child, I have no objection to your giving it up. But as far as I am concerned, I shall be the last person to give it up'.

One person was a rake. He spent all his money on wine and women. He was very much inclined to keep the company of the monks. Sri Ramakrishna with his keen intellect realized that the man had no genuine spiritual urge. 'Some', said Sri Ramakrishna, 'keep the company of the monks only for enjoying hemp. They prepare the hemp for the monks, and after the monks have taken it, they enjoy the leavings'.

Every body is not competent to hold religious discourses. Sri Ramakrishna recalled with amusement how a man having scholarly pretensions, once explained *nirākāra* i.e. God who is not incarnate. He missed it altogether and said '*nīnākāra*' means, a thing that has the *ākāra*, i.e. shape of *nīra*, i.e. water.

Sri Ramakrishna feared none, and therefore, spared none. Full of warm love for Keshav, he could rally him even, but the humorous touch was there. Once Keshav, Pratap and a few others came to Dakshineswar. It was late in the evening, and

Pratap proposed that they should stay there at night. Keshav, however, excused himself.

Sri Ramakrishna then told a story. A fisher-woman happened to be the guest of a friend, who was a gardener. The fisher-woman was asked to sleep in a room of flowers. The sweet smell of flowers was positively irritating; and she could not have a wink of sleep. When asked about her trouble, she said, 'These flowers are a nuisance. Could you please bring my fish-basket?' The fish-basket was brought there, and she smelt the basket and fell asleep.

On the occasion of Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary Ram Dutta entertained the Master and his disciples. Every body expected plenty of sweets. But there were '*chmā*', i.e. beaten rice and curd instead. Sri Ramakrishna himself was a little disappointed. 'In the winter', Sri Ramakrishna said, 'we shall have to take curd'.

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (the great novelist and litterateur of Bengal) and Adhar Sen were talking in English, and it was all Greek to the Master. 'What are you discussing?' asked Sri Ramakrishna. 'We are', replied Adhar, 'discussing the different manifestations of Kṛṣṇa'.

This sparked off a witty story. A barbar was shaving a gentleman, and in the process got a little hurt. At once he violently reacted, 'damn it'. The barbar did not know what 'damn' was. He, however, could smell that the term was pejorative. He rolled up his sleeves and demanded, 'What do you mean by "damn"?' A little depressed the gentleman said, 'Why don't you shave, my child. "Damn" is not an abusive term'. The barbar was not a person to let things lying down. His eyes rolled in fury. 'If "damn" means something good', said the barbar, 'then my father and all the forbcars are damned.'



If, on the contrary, "damn" is something bad in that case, your father, your forefathers and you are all damned'.

Bankim and Adhar laughed loudly.

Himself a great wit, Sri Ramakrishna enjoyed the witticisms of others. One of the disciples told a story of how a child wrote to God, and the address given was 'heaven'. Sri Ramakrishna thoroughly enjoyed the story.

Sri Ramakrishna was seriously ill, and Niranjan (Swami Niranjanananda) was there at the gate not to admit all and sundry. Kali, one of the devotees of the Master was requested by Binodini, an actress, to take her to Sri Ramakrishna. Binodini, a public woman, was once blessed by the Master. Niranjan, the gate-keeper was as stern as St. Peter, the gate-keeper of heaven. Kali foresaw the difficulty and came to the gate with an English friend. Niranjan looked suspiciously at the Englishman, and then reluctantly admitted them. The English man put off the hat and lay prostrate on the ground. The English man was Binodini. Sri Ramakrishna was not at all displeased. His face was gleaming in joy. 'Bravo, Kali', said Sri Ramakrishna, 'you deserve congratulation'. Niranjan and his friend flared up; but when the Master himself had enjoyed it, how could the disciples be angry?

Sri Ramakrishna could never be a medieval mystic, always talking philosophy with a wry face. He came to this earth with a message of hope and joy. He did not, therefore, like to make people cry at the thought of sin and hell. He made them laugh; he made them realize that they were the children of Bliss. He was not a bully, but the greatest friend of humanity in travail. Even in the throes of mortal agony, Sri Ramakrishna laughed, and his laughter swept away our fear, our hesitation and our imagined sense of guilt. 'I have come to cater,' said Sri Ramakrishna, 'not vegetables alone, but a little bit of fish and meat as well'. Once Sri Ramakrishna in a state of trance was smiling, for he could draw upon himself, the great repository of perennial joy. A monk said to another monk, 'this state is that of "*Paramahansa*", when one is in supreme bliss'. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'I feel like laughing'. We have tried to recount a few of such inimitable laughs. But who can translate the untranslatable delicacies of his wit and humour, the iridescent gleam, the light that never was on sea or land? Sri Ramakrishna came to the afflicted world, and he endeavoured to wipe away the tears from every human eye. No religious teacher could ever do it. Sri Ramakrishna, the prince of jesters could. For he is God Himself.

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## ADVAITA VEDĀNTA IS ESSENTIALLY A VALUE PHILOSOPHY

SRI M. K. VENKATARAMA IYER

The end and aim of philosophic reflection, according to all schools of Indian thought, is liberation from bondage and the attainment of release. They may hold different views as to what constitutes bondage and also as to the exact nature of

release. But all are agreed that the goal to be reached by philosophic thinking is not merely the construction of a complete and consistent system which will explain in an intelligible manner all the facts of experience but also the transformation of

that knowledge into a way of life. Philosophy, therefore, is not so much a Śāstra as a *Darśana*. Truth is not mere intellectual consistency or coherence with all aspects of experience but something to be felt and lived, something which must permeate every cell of our being, something which must produce in men a new outlook on the world. Philosophy, therefore, is not a mere academic affair to be confined to lecture-rooms and learned assemblies but an intensely practical discipline which must give the right direction to our every thought, word and deed. Apart from the rules of ordinary morality, every system of Indian Philosophy lays down a course of special discipline whose aim is to transform intellectual convictions into a felt experience. This is specially true of Advaita Vedānta since the non-difference that it teaches between the finite self (*jīva*) and the Infinite Self (Brahman) is more to be realized in a unique experience than to be intellectually grasped. The crown and consummation of all our attempts at philosophizing consists in the attainment of the experience of the non-dual Brahman (*Brahmānubhava*). The play of the intellect finds fulfilment in the intuition of the oneness of reality—*'Anubhavāvasāntvāt Brahmajñānasya'*. (*Sri Śaṅkara's Works, Memorial Edition, Vol. I, p. 11*)

This is in sharp contrast to the western approach to philosophy which is mainly intellectual. The philosophers of ancient Greece directed their enquiries to finding out the ultimate principle to which the entire visible world of nature could be reduced. Thales said it was water while Anaxagoras said it was fire. Water or fire or some other element was considered to be the world-stuff from which all individual things arose and into which they were reabsorbed. Later western thought has received its bent from classical Greek

Philosophy. The main concern of philosophy is to discover by processes of reasoning the ultimate ground of all existence. Reason is to be the sole guide in this process of investigation. Descartes, the founder of modern philosophy in Europe, adopted the method of doubt and, often dismissing many things as unreal, lighted upon the self as the ultimate rock of certitude. Though one could doubt everything one could not doubt the existence of the doubter. Doubt is a form of thinking and hence the thinker was an indubitable reality. Doubt also implies some object about which there is the doubt. Thinking implies a thinker and something thought about. These two, the thinker (*Res Cogitans*) and the object of thought (*Res Extensa*) are the two ultimate principles to which the entire universe could be reduced. Immanuel Kant gave further prominence to this method of intellectual analysis when he sought to lay bare the foundations of knowledge by the process of 'critical regress'. He however came to the conclusion that reality in its true nature, what he called the 'thing-in-itself', lay beyond the grasp of the intellect. Hegel, who came after Kant, corrected the mistake and said that the 'real was the rational'. There was nothing in reality which could not be completely rationalized. He built up a system of philosophy by processes of pure reasoning. Starting with the visible world he went up step by step by reasoning and analytic synthesis till he reached the ultimate principle which he called the Absolute. Bradley's complaint was that Hegel had not given sufficient prominence to modes of experiences other than rational such as feelings, emotions and volitions. He insisted that all genuine experiences must be included in our conception of the Absolute. 'It (the Absolute) should be experience entire containing all elements in harmony. Every



flame of passion should burn in the Absolute unquenched and unabridged, a note absorbed in the harmony of its higher bliss.' 'The delights and pains of the flesh, the agonies and raptures of the soul, these genuine experiences cannot be left out. All these divergent elements must be worked up unto a harmonious synthesis.' 'Reality is not the sum of things. It is the unity in which all things, coming together, are transmuted.' The problem for the philosopher was, therefore, to discover a principle which would effectively hold together all the conclusions of the sciences and all genuine human experiences. The principle must also contain the urge within itself for self-unfoldment. It must have the impulse within itself to go forth into the forms of finitude as also to withdraw everything into itself. It must not be like the lion's den into which all footsteps lead and from which, however, none emerges. A two-way traffic must be admissible. This is nothing but the back and forth motion of the intellect. Philosophy in the West is thus a purely intellectual game. It has its origin in the feeling of wonder and curiosity. Intellectual inquisitiveness is the impulse which sustains it. Plato has defined philosophy as 'the inquiry which follows reason to whatever conclusion she might lead.' Aristotle's definition is that it is, 'the thinking consideration of things'! In recent times William James said that the philosopher must be prepared, 'to think to the better end without seeking to take rest in half-way houses'.

Philosophy in this country has its origin, not in wonder or curiosity but in the practical need to liberate human beings from the misery and the unhappiness that lies all around them and thereby to make it possible for them to regain the state of bliss which really belongs to them. The pursuit of this supreme value provides a much

stronger incentive for the pursuit of philosophy than mere intellectual inquisitiveness or even the desire to be rid of doubts. So long as we rely on the intellect we can never hope to reach indubitable conclusions. The intellect is a double-edged weapon. It can cut both ways. It is as easy to find arguments to controvert a certain position as to support it. Dr. Johnson is reported to have said that it was as easy to find arguments for a *plenum* as for a *vacuum*. Sometimes the very arguments that are cited in support of a position are used by a clever controvertist to demolish it. Discussions based solely on the intellect can only provide a forum for the battle of wits and nothing more. Absolutely certain conclusions on which we can take our stand and in the light of which we can shape our lives are beyond the reach of the intellect. And further, mere intellectual curiosity can never be a self-sustaining attitude of mind. It will soon die of inanition if it is not backed up by a deeper faith in the purpose of life. Unless the inquiries that we carry on are related to the real problems of life, they will become arid and cease to be attractive. Even the scientist's study of the phenomena of nature which is generally supposed to be objective and free from extraneous considerations will prove aimless unless it is inspired by the faith that its conclusions have some bearing on human values. John Baillie said in his broadcast lectures on 'Science and Faith' that, 'mere inquisitiveness can never be a self-sustaining attitude of mind. If Nature has no meaning, leads nowhere and accomplishes nothing, we should lose all speculative interest in the manner of its proceeding. The line which the curiosity of a scientist takes is suggested by the perception of the significance and value of what he hopes to discover'. (*Listener*, August 8, 1952)



Values belong to a deeper dimension of our being. The mere intellect cannot do justice to them. A purely intellectual approach will mean the greatest violence to them. The general tendency of the intellectual method of study is to explain every phenomenon with reference to its lowest beginnings. The application of this method to the study of the values will result in explaining them away as so many illusions. The higher cannot be properly studied in terms of the lower. The method of resolving every phenomenon into its simplest elements is what Aldous Huxley calls 'nothing but' philosophy. 'Because of the prestige of science as a source of power and because of the general neglect of philosophy', writes Huxley, 'the popular *weltanschauung* of our times contains a large element of what may be called "nothing but" thinking. Human beings are *nothing but* bodies, animals even machines; the only really real elements of reality are matter and energy in their measurable aspects, values are *nothing but* illusions that have somehow got themselves mixed up with our experiences of the world; mental happenings are *nothing but* epiphenomena produced by and entirely dependent upon, physiology; spirituality is *nothing but* wish fulfilment'. (*Science, Liberty and Peace*, p. 29)

Happiness, arising from inward peace, is the greatest value for human beings. We may go further and say that all living beings instinctively try to secure pleasure and avoid pain. Human beings consciously strive for securing what will bring pleasure avoiding what will cause them pain—'*Iṣṭam me syāt aniṣṭam mābhūt.*' Unfortunately misery and pain surround us on all sides. Ignorance, poverty, disease, bereavement, disappointments and a thousand other ills are always with us. There are a few joys but they are not unmixed with pain. The joys that

we get are nothing when compared with the misery that falls to our lot. 'There is not a joy that the world can give like that it takes away.' (Byron 'Youth and Age') Schopenhauer's view is that pain preponderates in life. He writes: 'Compare the pleasure of the beast that devours with the torture of the one that is being devoured and you will be able to estimate with approximate correctness the proportion of pleasure and pain in the world in general. Hence man's life ends in the complaint that the best lot is never to be born at all. 'One of the four noble truths propounded by Lord Buddha is the universality of pain. (*Sarvaṃ duḥkham*) Enlarging on this theme he said: 'Birth is a pain, decay is a pain, disease is a pain and death is a pain. It is a pain to be associated with an unpleasant object and it is again a pain to be separated from a pleasant object. It is a pain to fail to get a thing that we want to possess.' The world in which our lot is cast is characterized by the Lord in one context as 'sorrowful and impermanent' and in another as 'fleeting and unhappy'. (*Bhagavad-Gītā*, VIII. 15 & IX. 33) It is no use shutting our eyes to the hard fact of misery. In Browning's 'Pippa Passes' we read: 'God is in His Heaven and all is right with the world.' But this kind of glib optimism will carry us nowhere. We may believe with Leibnitz that 'this is the best of all possible worlds', but even this belief will bring no satisfaction. The right kind of optimism is that which takes full note of the misery that surrounds human existence on all sides and will enable men to transcend it. 'I believe in optimism', writes Bernard Bosanquet, 'but I add that no optimism is worth its salt which does not go all the way with pessimism and arrive at a point beyond it.' Indian philosophy, therefore, need not be dubbed as pessimistic merely because it takes full cognizance of the hard



realities of life. At the worst, the pessimism that we find in Indian thought is initial and not final. It affirms in unequivocal terms that, 'we are the children of immortality and that happiness is our birth-right'.

We must know how to come by this birth-right, how to regain the bliss that is natural to us. Governments speak of raising the standard of living of the people. They launch ambitious programmes for eradicating poverty, disease and ignorance. At best what they achieve is in the nature of temporary palliatives. Medicines may cure diseases but there is no guarantee that they will not occur again. Population increases in geometrical ratio whereas food-production increases only in arithmetical ratio. There being more mouths to feed than food can be found for, poverty has almost come to stay. As for ignorance it cannot certainly be eradicated by the teaching of the three 'R's in the primary school.

What then is the remedy? It is in this context that the study of philosophy becomes purposeful. Indian thinkers, after very careful consideration, have come to the conclusion that pain and misery, in the last analysis, are due to foundational ignorance and therefore the best and surest remedy is to eradicate it. Ignorance, like fell disease, has many ramifications. There are many intermediate links between foundational ignorance and the misery that we experience. Lord Buddha connects the two by means of nine intermediate links, such as birth, good and bad action, clinging to existence, craving for worldly objects, sensation of pleasure and pain and so forth. By the cessation of the preceding one in the series, the succeeding one ceases to be. Thus ignorance becomes ultimately responsible for all human sorrows. He comes to this conclusion by the process of reasoning known as the 'Law of *Pratītya Samutpāda*', 'This

having been, that comes to be; from the appearance of this, that arises; this having not been, that does not come into existence; from the cessation of this, that ceases to be'. The idea is that as long as one is under the spell of ignorance, he experiences sorrow and when he overcomes it, he overcomes sorrow also. Gautama, in his *Nyāya-Sūtra*, connects nescience with misery through a chain consisting of only three links, sin, activity and birth. Nescience will disappear when right knowledge dawns and with its disappearance sin will disappear and then activity and birth will also disappear. If the root cause is destroyed, its effects will also be destroyed in succession. The cessation of misery is the same as 'apavarga'—'*Duḥkha-janmapravṛttidoṣa-mithyājñānānām uttarottarāpāye tadanantarāpāyādapavargah*'. (*Nyāya-Sūtra*, I. i. 2)

All are agreed that the root cause of human misery is ignorance but there is no such agreement as to the nature of this ignorance or the nature of the knowledge that will dispel it. For our present purpose it is not necessary to set forth this point in detail. Briefly it may be stated that these differences arise from the general metaphysical position of the system. Since Lord Buddha does not speak of the existence of a Self (Ātman) or God (Brahman) the ignorance of which he speaks cannot relate to the former and the subsequent knowledge that dispels it cannot relate to the latter. The soul is reduced to a series of fleeting states. There is not even a permanent mind of which these states may be said to be modes. In the absence of both the self and the mind it is difficult to see what the ignorance can be about and who is deluded by it. Probably right knowledge relates to the eightfold path which leads to the cessation of misery. This path, known as '*madhyama pratipāda*', com-



prises right belief, right aspiration, right living, right endeavour and so forth. The adoption of what is known as the 'middle course' will produce the insight which will break the fetters of ignorance. This will result in *nirvāna* which is a negative state because it means only cessation of pain. The Nyāya system believes in the existence of a permanent soul but knowledge is not one of its essential attributes. It is only adventitious. By right knowledge the soul has to be separated from the atoms which compose the material world. But to whom can this knowledge belong? The soul by nature is insentient. It cannot, therefore, be conscious of the state of 'apavarga' which only means the absence of misery. Of even this negative state the soul cannot be conscious. There will be little to distinguish such a soul from stocks and stones which are also blissfully unconscious of pain.

We have now prepared the ground for the understanding and appreciation of the Advaitic position in regard to the question of ignorance and the knowledge that will dispel it. According to Advaita, man's greatest ignorance is about his own real nature. Owing to primeval nescience he has slipped away from his real state and has wrongly come to identify himself with the gross physical body, the sense-organs, the mind and the intellect. This wrong identification is the root cause of all his misery. When the body is attacked by some disease he says 'I am unwell'; if the eye is blinded, he says 'I have become blind'; if the mind is stricken with sorrow, he says 'I am overpowered by sorrow'. A little reflection will show that the 'I', the real self, bears no relation to the disease or the blindness or the sorrow. It is a thing apart and remains untouched by the states of the body or the mind. It is truly transcendent. The wrong identification does not stop even with the body but ex-

tends to other people who are connected with us in some way. Consequently their joys and sorrows also become ours.

This wrong identification can be set aside only by acquiring right knowledge relating to the nature of the real self. Such knowledge can be acquired only from the proper study of the Upaniṣads. The sage Yājñavalkya speaks of the transcendental self as the *aupaniṣada Puruṣa*. (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, III. ix. 26) The study has to be carried on under the guidance of a competent teacher (*guru*). This part of the discipline is known in Advaita Vedānta as *śravaṇa*. The second part of the discipline consists in reflecting on what is learnt and removing all doubts and erroneous notions. This is known as *manana*. At this stage the student will be intellectually convinced of the truth taught by the Upaniṣadic text. The text in question is no other than the famous '*mahāvākya*', 'That thou art', taught by Uddālaka to his son Śvetaketu. (*Chāndogya*, VI. viii. 7)

This text affirms the identity of the individual soul or the *jīva* (Thou) with *Īśvara* (That). Superficially speaking, there are important differences between *jīva* and *Īśvara* and yet we are asked to believe in their essential identity. By a process of analytic reasoning we have to eliminate the adjuncts of both and penetrate to the inner core. Rid of their adjuncts, both *jīva* and *Īśvara* will be found to be consciousness all compact. Consciousness being one and entire, there is no room to distinguish between the consciousness of the *jīva* and the consciousness of *Īśvara*. The adjuncts, having been eliminated, there will be neither *jīva* nor *Īśvara* at this stage. In essence the two are identical. There is no question of the finite consciousness merging in the infinite consciousness. Rather it is a case of the finite self shedding its finitude and emerging as the infinite Self. (*ibid.*, VIII. xii. 3)



It simply comes to its own. It realizes its true nature. It is like an ailing man regaining his normal health after taking some medicines. When the sick man becomes whole he gains nothing new, nothing that he did not possess before. His normal health cannot therefore be said to be newly produced nor has the man gone to some other place to attain it. The cure does not imply any transformation or purification. Only the foreign element, which had gained a temporary foot-hold into his system, has been thrown out. The same is the case when man proceeds from ignorance to the knowledge of his real self. The realization cannot be said to be produced or attained nor does it involve any change or purification. In the language of Advaita Vedānta, *mokṣa*, the supreme value, is neither *utpādya* nor *āpya*, neither *vikārya* nor *saṃskārya*. What we realize is an eternally-present fact. The finite self is always perfect, being non-different from Brahman.

Studying the Upaniṣadic text and bringing thought to bear upon it will produce intellectual conviction. Western thinkers will say that the business of philosophy is over at this stage. According to them to philosophize is only to think till a satisfactory conclusion is reached. Indian thinkers, however do not share this view. They do not treat philosophy as merely an intellectual game. In their view it has a practical origin and is sustained by a high purpose. Its business is to lead man beyond sorrow and enable him to enjoy the bliss that is natural to him. It is directed to the attainment of this supreme value. Bereft of this, it will become cold, barren and academic. The findings of philosophy must have a close vital bearing on the real problems of human existence. The problem of evil is what impinges on us most. Philosophy, to be worth while, must show how we can get

over evil once and for all. It is not worth its salt if it remains high and dry, unrelated to life and confined to learned assemblies and lecture-hall. The philosophy that David Hume developed in his *Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* was so unrelated to life and so opposed to accepted beliefs that he felt that he had to leave it behind in his study when he wanted to mix with his fellowmen and enjoy the pleasures of social life. No thinker could write a more devastating condemnation of his own speculations. If one has to forget his philosophy when he wants to participate in real life, there must surely be something radically wrong with it. Philosophy is not meant only for the class-room or the lecture-hall. It is not something to be paraded in learned discussions. On the other hand, it is inseparable from life and its urgent problems. It must open our eyes, bring enlightenment, tear off the veil that covers the truth, fill us with a new purpose and, in general, make life more worth living. Śrī Saṅkara frequently remarks that mere book-learning is merely a burden that we are carrying in our heads. He has therefore no interest in mere theoretical discussions. In the Upaniṣads the accounts relating to the creation of the world, the number of elements and the order in which they came into being, are not uniform. These differences may be reconciled, but he does not attach much importance to this question. For, in his opinion, it is nowhere stated in the Upaniṣads that *mokṣa*, the highest value, depends on our acquiring correct and precise notions relating to this question. (Śrī Saṅkara's Works, Vol. I, p. 252 & Vol. III, pp. 575 and 630) John Baillie writes: 'It does not very much matter whether the earth goes round the sun or the sun goes round the earth. The only serious question is whether, either way, life on earth will become more worth-

while than before. It does not at all matter which of the two rival cosmologies is true unless we can find some meaning and worthwhileness in the life we have to live within the cosmos.' (B.B.C. Talk, *Listener*, September 25, 1952) Śrī Saṅkara will whole-heartedly endorse this statement.

His interest is not in learned, theoretical discussions. One may show off his learning by engaging in them and earn the plaudits of the multitude but he will not be advancing his true spiritual interests thereby. Rather they will promote self-deception. Besides, they will engender bitterness. In his poem known as 'Praud-ānubhūti' (13) he explicitly expresses his dislike of learned discussions. He says that only those who have not attained true enlightenment will engage in them. In his opinion it is mere waste of time and energy. Those who are truly enlightened will remain firm in their convictions like the rock.

Why then does he himself criticize the other systems of thought in his writing? He has explained his position in regard to this matter. He admits that criticism will create unnecessary bitterness and he would fain refrain from it if he could, but, in the interests of unwary people who may allow themselves to be misled by false doctrines, he feels he has no option but to undertake the duty of exposing the deficiencies of other schools of thought, however unpleasant it may be. In his opinion, philosophy is a way of life whose ultimate goal is the attainment of liberation. This is the highest value held in store for human beings. People who carelessly adopt any of the false creeds run the danger of missing the true aim of life. It is not proper for a great teacher to be a mere passive looker-on when people, wanting in discrimination, are being misled by the false prophets. He has to enter his word of protest however it may

go against his grain. Where the highest spiritual interests of the people are involved, it is almost criminal for a teacher to allow them to go in for the second or third best. It is to put people on the right path that he undertakes the criticism of other systems of thought. He invariably concludes his criticism by warning people that if they are interested in their final liberation they should have no truck with those systems. At the end of his examination of the Nyāya doctrine of atoms he writes: 'Since this doctrine of atoms is based on hollow grounds, since it runs counter to the Vedic texts, since it is not accepted by worthy persons, it is to be ignored by all persons aspiring for the highest good.'

This is his keynote and he strikes it quite at the beginning of his famous commentary on the *Vedānta-Sūtra*: 'Starting with the deliberation on Brahman, here is commenced an ascertainment of the meaning of the texts of the Upaniṣads with the help of reasoning not opposed to them *for the purpose of leading to emancipation through right knowledge.*'

Right knowledge must be transformed into a direct and immediate experience before it can result in emancipation. *Nididhyāsana* is the discipline that will bring about this transformation. It means constant and unintermittent meditation on the truth contained in the *mahāvākyā*, 'Tat Tvam Asi'. It is a psychological truth that the mind is transformed into the likeness of the object on which it dwells for a long time without a break. In the minor poem known as 'Brahmānucintanam' he says: 'Constant meditation will bring about a total change. Carry on with faith. Have no doubts on this point. The worm that is transformed into the likeness of the bee of which it is in constant fear is an instance in point.' (19) The supreme experience will supervene on such



continued meditation. The *jīva* will then shed its finitude, rise above misery and remain in the enjoyment of the bliss that is natural to it. Unless we rise to this exalted vision we can never hope to overcome the limitations of empirical existence. The Upaniṣads are clear on this point. (*Īsā*, 7, *Chāndogya*, VIII. 3, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, IV. iii. 22 & *Śrī Śaṅkara's Works*, Vol. IX, p. 18—'*Samsāra-bījabhūtau śokamohau taosca sarvakarma-samnyāsa-pūrvakādātma-jñānāt na anyato nivṛttiḥ*'.)

Śrī Śaṅkara, therefore, attaches more importance to this experience than to the system of philosophy he has erected. He has been compelled to put across his great experience in terms intelligible to others who are strangers to it. An experience, by its very nature, is incommunicable. It has to be brought down to the lower plane of the intellect to make it intelligible to others. In the attempt to make it acceptable, it becomes necessary to dress it up in the robes of philosophy. Thus we have to speak of Advaita metaphysics, Logic, Theory of knowledge, Theory of truth and error, Cosmology, Ethics and so forth. These are very intricate discussions involving objections and answers. In this jungle one is in danger of losing his way and missing the goal. (*Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, śloka 60) The scaffolding is so huge and interwoven that it tends to obscure the inner edifice. The intuition of the fundamental identity is not the outcome of laborious enquiry. It comes at the beginning without the mediation of logic and metaphysics. This is clear from the fact that so often great prophets and saints of different religions came by it without the formal study of the Upaniṣads and the system of the Vedānta. Plotinus and the Sufi mystics have also independently arrived at the same Advaitic experience.

Śrī Śaṅkara therefore does not look upon himself as a philosopher in the accepted

sense of the term. He is not a system-builder like the Naiyāyika or the Mīmāṃsaka. In fact his teachings cannot be brought under any of the accepted labels. It is a unique experience that he is seeking to put across. It rises clean above all distinctions. Though it is called an experience, it does not imply an experiencer and something experienced. It rises above the distinction of subject and object, knower and known. It cannot be brought under any of the usual modes of understanding things such as substance and attribute, cause and effect or a whole in relation to its parts. It is not the One in the midst of the many, the unity in the midst of diversity, the identity in the midst of difference. It is neither Monism nor Dualism. In fact it is no 'ism' at all. If a name can be found for it at all, it is best described as 'non-dualism'. The negative prefix, 'non' applies as much to 'ism' as to dual! It is not a system, much less a dualistic system. It is an experience.

Men must bend all their energies to attain this unique experience for it is the highest value. The Upaniṣad affirms that the attainment of the Ātman is a greater value than the begetting of children or the acquisition of wealth. The Lord says in the *Gītā* that there is no greater gain than the realization of the Ātman. (cf. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, I. iv. 8 & VI. 22) In *Śataślokī* (10) Śrī Śaṅkara writes: 'Objects are dear to us only so long as they give us pleasure. They cease to be desired the moment they become a source of pain. No object is dearer to us all the time or hateful all the time. What is hateful at one time becomes dear at another and conversely, what is dear at one time becomes hateful at another. By contrast, the Ātman is the only object that is always dear to us. It is a value in its own right.'

Hence Śrī Śaṅkara wants us to be in dreadful earnest about the realization of

the Ātman. By reason of our human birth, we have opportunities for self-realization which even the gods in Heaven might envy. It is a terrible pity that we thoughtlessly throw away these precious opportunities. Śrī Śaṅkara is severely grieved to find men clinging to their wives and children, their wealth and possessions as if these can bring them abiding happiness. In *Śataślokī* (5) he expresses his great sorrow at men hugging their chains to the bosom merely because they happen to be made

of gold. Nor will it do to lose oneself in the contemplation of art. Schopenhauer and the Naiyāyikas suggested that to overcome sorrow we might seek refuge in art. Aesthetic experience may be said to come very near to '*Brahmānubhava*' but it can never be a substitute for it. Only the direct and immediate experience of Brahman can help us to overcome sorrow and misery. This experience is, therefore, the highest value. Advaita is essentially concerned with the attainment of this value.

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## LIBERAL TRADITION IN MODERN INDIA

DR. P. N. MUKHERJEE

To the European nations India is traditionally backward, orthodox and conservative. Yet, it is a very important fact that probably in no other country in the last century and a half there have been so many important reformers of such calibre as India has produced in this period. Even in the more conservative among these leaders there is invariably to be found a deep human understanding and human sympathy rare among leaders elsewhere.

The progress in the growth of liberal tradition is all the more important because an agricultural country is usually fatalistic and 'conservative'. The judgement of the famous French historian Renan was, 'The more or less emphasis a people give to Fatality is the measure of its civilisation', and that a people that believe in Fate is less civilized. (Renan's dictum: '*L'extension plus ou moins grande qu'un peuple donne a la fatalité est la mesure de sa civilisation*') In spite of her agricultural civilization and belief in Fate India was liberal and progressive. Modern India accepted the challenge of British imperialism and although the freedom fighters were mostly believers in God and religion, they

were never content to resign the results in to the hands of a blind Fate. They demonstrated the great truth in the dictum of Novalis 'character is Fate'.

The liberal tradition in modern India was ushered in not by politicians, but by great spiritual leaders of men. The most important among them was Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the saint of Dakshineswar (Calcutta). Sri Ramakrishna, a simple villager, coming from a conservative family gave proof of that great liberalism which comes out of inward greatness and the realization of the Supreme, so much so that Romain Rolland had no hesitation to remark, 'Allowing for differences of country and of time Ramakrishna is the younger brother of our Christ'. (Romain Rolland: *Life of Ramakrishna*, p. 13) Sri Ramakrishna observed, 'You are seeking God? Very well, look for him in man! The Divinity manifests itself in man more than in any other object.' (ibid., p. 350) He was not a blind worshipper of the past, for he said, 'Greetings to those who believe in God with form! Greetings to the men of old who knew Brahman! Greetings to the modern knowers of Truth!' (*Gospels*



of Sri Ramakrishna) On one occasion he was so much moved by the tyranny and shamelessness of modern society that he fell at the feet of a few prostitutes and wept profusely and addressed them as 'mothers', thus giving dignity and reclaiming to society the oppressed and the down-trodden, for, like a true reformer, he would not abandon a single soul as completely lost and as unfit for ultimate salvation. Once some orthodox priests gave the verdict that an image the limb of which was broken and which was thus mutilated, was unfit for worship. He at once protested and asked, 'If one limb of any of our near and dear ones is broken should we not show him all love and regard still?' The people were stunned and realized their mistake, and the worship of the image with broken limbs repaired took place. On different occasions he realized the Supreme Bliss following different paths prescribed by different religions and declared that the goal is the same, only the paths differ. He denounced the caste system and declared that all are equally the children of the Mother Goddess, Kālī. Thus, Sri Ramakrishna, the prophet of modern India and of the modern age, was one of the most enlightened and liberal reformers. Standing between and uniting in himself the past and the future, the East and the West, this world and the next, Sri Ramakrishna will always continue to remain a unique figure in all history.

But the mission of Sri Ramakrishna was achieved by his disciple, Swami Vivekananda. Narendra Nath Dutta, later known as Swami Vivekananda, was an English educated intellectual who at first used to ridicule the idea of the existence of God. But when he came in the presence of Sri Ramakrishna, as day light dispels the intense darkness of the night, so all doubts of Vivekananda were dispelled in a moment and he became a believer and a

follower. An English educated intellectual, Vivekananda, was expected to be liberal and he was. It is clear from what he said and how he acted. He said, 'Alas! Nobody in our country thinks for the low, the poor and the miserable! Those that are the backbone of the nation, whose labour produces food, those whose one day's strike from work raises a cry of general distress in the city—where is the man in our country who sympathises with them, who shares in their joys and sorrows? Look, how for want of sympathy on the part of the Hindus, thousands of pariahs are becoming Christians in the Madras Presidency. Don't think it is merely the pinch of hunger that drives them to embrace Christianity. It is simply because they do not get your sympathy. You are continually telling them: "Don't touch me!" "Don't touch this or that!" ... How I wish to demolish the barriers of "Don't touchism".' (Romain Rolland: *The Life of Vivekananda and The Universal Gospel*, pp. 190-91) Finally he gave his famous liberal advice, 'Have you ever seen a country in the whole history of the world rise unless there was a uniform circulation of the national blood all over the body? Know this for certain that no great work can be done by that body one limb of which is paralysed'. (ibid.) In the same strain of sympathetic liberalism he thundered, 'There had been enough of the sterile God of solitary prayers! Let them worship the Living God the Coming God, the *Virāt* (i.e. Great) dwelling in all living souls!'. (ibid., pp. 136-37) Thus, both the so called illiterate Master and his highly educated disciple were intensely liberal in their outlook. Another bright star in the firmament of the Indian sky in modern times was Rabindra Nath Tagore. He also denounced the Caste system with intensity and vehemence. In his Bengali poem on this topic entitled 'Apamān'



(‘Insult’) Tagore’s great liberalism is distinctly visible.

Tagore symbolized the spirit of modern India, her high culture, philosophy and spirituality. Contrary to Rudyard Kipling’s thesis, Tagore in his poem, ‘Bhārata Tīrtha’ points out that here in India, the Aryans, the non-Aryans, the Dravidians, Scythians, Huns, Mughals, the Pathans all got mixed in one body. The door to the West has now been opened and all are welcome here to give and to receive. I shall put below in verse the idea of a stanza from his Bengali poem, ‘Mṛtyur Pare’ (‘After Death’) which is also remarkable for this broad and liberal sense :

Oh ! today just for a while  
Look out in the wide open  
The Infinite Heavens will  
Send unto Thee Great Inspiration.

It is this ‘Great Inspiration’ which was the secret of nineteenth and early twentieth century liberalism and also the secret of Tagore.

For want of space I shall not refer to other brilliant luminaries who also filled the Indian horizon in modern times with broad liberalism. I shall conclude by pointing out a unique incident where a very scholarly but extremely orthodox Brahmin Pundit of Sanskrit in token of the appreciation of the scholarship of a Christian German Professor put the sacred thread round his shoulders, thus following the spirit while completely ignoring the letter of the Law. Dr. Paul Deussen of the Kiel University toured India in 1892-93. On one occasion Hara Prasad, the famous Brahmin Sanskrit scholar took him to his school at Naihati near Calcutta and requested him to preside over a function specially organized in honour of Dr. Deussen. After the function was over, writes Dr. Deussen, ‘they offered me the usual ovation, and then the incredible

thing happened, that Hara Prasad in the presence of all the teachers and students hanged the Sacred Thread (*Yajñopavītam*) round my shoulders’. (Dr. Paul Deussen : *Erinnerungen an Indien*, Leipzig. 1904, p. 159, ‘Zum Schlusse brachte Man mir die üblichen Ovationen dar, und es geschah dabei das Unglaubliche, dass mir Hara Prasada vor allen Lehrern und Schülern die heilige Opferschnur [*Yajñopavītam*] über die Schulter hängte.’)

Truly, by profession and accomplishments Dr. Deussen was a Brahmin, a very worthy teacher for all time.

Thus, the best minds in this country always realized that without broadness of outlook and great liberalism British and other imperialisms could not have been thrown out. They realized what Professor Hubert Deschamps would in another context so eloquently indicate, ‘For new times (there should be) new language’. (Professeur Hubert Deschamp : *La Fin des Empires Coloniaux*, p. 5, remarks, ‘A temps nouveaux, langage neuf’.) This new language—the language of liberalism—was wide spread in modern India. It was as much the result of modern times and the impact of West as it was inherent in our past tradition. One should not forget that perhaps India was the only country where it was possible in ancient times for the great atheist Cārvākas to denounce God from the pulpit of His temples. This inherent liberal tradition in our history and culture strongly manifests itself in modern times. It can neither be concealed nor disproved by a few superficial evidences to the contrary. ‘The trees may conceal the forest. The forest can not conceal the trees’. (Professeur Jean Berard : *La Revue Historique* No. 444, Tome—CCXVIII, Oct.-Dec. 1957, remarks, ‘Les arbres peuvent cacher la foret. La foret ne doit pas cacher les arbres.’)



# VIJNĀNA: FIFTH LEVEL OF THE MIND

BRAHMACHARI VIDYA CHAITANYA

Mind, according to Western Psychology, appears to exist in three spheres or states—conscious, sub-conscious and unconscious. The *samskāras* or impressions of past actions constitute mind. When some impressions are brought into life while sense organs come in touch with the world, we call the mind conscious; because it becomes aware of the external object. The mind acquires knowledge of it. While doing this way, many impressions lie hidden in the periphery awaiting their turn to be aroused in the conscious plane. They remain just below the conscious level. It is called the subconscious. There are some impressions which exist with a very low potentiality. They cannot be brought back to life even if attended with the sense organs. This sphere is unconscious. The difference between these three levels is one of degree, not in kind. And the three phenomena come always by turn, not together. When one aspect of the mind is predominant, the other two are bound to keep their heads down.

## FOUR LEVELS OF MIND

These three spheres of the mind are interpreted by Hindu Psychologists in a more clear way keeping in view of the experiences of life. The conscious mind has been termed by them as *Jāgrat* or awakened. Impressions are truly awakened when they function through the senses. They cannot work independently but are governed by the senses. Whatever the senses call, the impressions are bound to come into action.

The play of the sub-conscious mind has been called *swapna* or dream. Here the impressions create their world of experience

out of their own stuff without the aid of the senses. They are independent in action but their very being is derived from the waking state.

*Susupti* or dreamless sleep is the instance of the unconscious level. Cases of swoon or reverie are also included into it. Here in the impressions cease to act for they get drowned in their cause. In the absence of any activity of the mind, it is aware neither of the physical nor mental.

To these popular three, Hindu seers add a fourth state. It is *turīya*. *Turīya* is a state of communion with God. In the *Susupti* state, mind is drowned but not destroyed. It has potential power to come back to dream and then to waking state. In the fourth state i.e., in *samādhi* all the impressions are burnt in the fire of knowledge. Here God, the ever present, omnipotent alone remains. Mind meets death along with its cause.

## VIJNANA : THE FIFTH LEVEL

All religions speak of liberation as the *summum bonum* of life but a few mystics are concerned with a stage higher than that. A blessed life beyond mortal world is what the ordinary aspirants are concerned with, but mystics enter deeper into the kingdom of bliss in this very life.

Sri Ramakrishna's manifold spiritual realization is a unique contribution in the field of religious experience. His extraordinary power of mind coupled with one-pointed devotion to spirituality reveals that immense spiritual gems are lying still undiscovered in the ocean of the Infinite. Even the Śāstras which speak of the supra-sensible world, have, according to him, made out a surface view of the inexhausti-

ble Truth. Souls who remain merged in godly thoughts carry a message of the unknown in a more distinct way.

Sri Ramakrishna speaks us of a state of realization called *Vijñāna*. This is a completely different level of mind and superior to the four states enunciated above. *Vijñāna* is the fifth level of mind—a state which is attained by the incarnations of God, born in the world to fulfil a mission.

#### JNANI: A KNOWER OF BRAHMAN

By *vijñānā* Sri Ramakrishna meant perfect knower of Brahman as opposed to *jñānā* or knower of Brahman. In a discussion with a disciple about the different forms of realizations as also the spirit-form of God, Sri Ramakrishna says: 'But there is a stage beyond even Brahmajñāna. After jñāna comes *Vijñāna*'. (*Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Translated by Swami Nikhilananda, 3rd edition, 1957, p. 229) A question arises here. What is the nature of *jñāna* that is spoken of here? Is it the absolute identity with Brahman? Sri Ramakrishna says, 'To know by one's inner experience that God exists is *jñāna*' just as 'the awareness and conviction that fire exists in wood is jñāna, knowledge.' (ibid.) Apparently this explanation leaves room for doubt and makes us think that by *jñāna* Sri Ramakrishna would not perhaps have meant a real knower of Brahman. But he elucidated its meaning in another context when the same disciple asked him about the meaning of the realization of God and God-vision. 'According to Vaiṣṇavas, the aspirants and seers of God may be divided into different groups. These are the pravartaka, the sādḥaka, the siddha, and the siddha of the siddhas. He who has just set foot on the path may be called a pravartaka. He may be called a sādḥaka who has for sometime been practising spiritual disciplines, such as worship, japa, meditation, and the chanting of God's

name and glories. He may be called a siddha who has known from his inner experience that God exists. An analogy is given in the Vedānta to explain this. The master of the house is asleep in a dark room. Some one is groping in the darkness to find him. He touches the couch and says, "No, it is not he". He touches the window and says, "No, it is not he". He touches the door and says, "No, it is not he". This is known in the Vedānta as the process of "*neti, neti*", "not this, not this". At last his hand touches the master's body and he exclaims, "Here he is!" In other words he is now conscious of the "existence" of the master. He has found him, but he does not yet know him intimately.' (ibid., p. 41) In another context Sri Ramakrishna explains, '... The third is that of the perfect soul. He has seen God, realized Him directly and immediately in his inner consciousness.' (ibid., p. 289)

From the above free quotation *in extenso* it leaves no room for doubt that a *jñānī* like a *siddha* is indeed a knower of Brahman—a liberated soul from the Vedāntic standpoint. From him the delusion of Māyā is vanished. Sri Ramakrishna explains the stage further to another once, 'The aim of the jñānī is to know the nature of his own self. This is knowledge; this is liberation. The true nature of the self is that it is the supreme Brahman. I and the supreme Brahman are one.' (ibid., p. 628)

#### VIJNANI: A PERFECT KNOWER OF BRAHMAN

But *vijñānā* goes further and excels in realizations. He not only realizes the existence of Brahman in himself but positively sees that Brahman has become manifested in things and beings. Sri Ramakrishna's beautiful exposition is put here in verbatim: '*Vijñānī* always sees God (Caitanya) ... He sees God even with



his eyes open. . . . The jñānī reasons about the world through the process of “*Neti, Neti*”, and at last reaches the Eternal and Indivisible Satchidānanda. He reasons in this manner: “Brahman is not the living beings; It is neither the universe nor the twenty-four cosmic principles. As a result of such reasoning he attains the Absolute. Then he realizes that it is the Absolute that has become all this—the universe, its living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles.” (ibid., p. 432) ‘First negation, then affirmation. A bell-fruit, for instance, includes flesh, seeds and shell. You get the flesh by discarding the shell and seeds. But if you want to know the weight of the fruit, you cannot find it if you discard the shell and seeds. Just so, one should attain Satchidānanda by negating the universe and its living beings. But after the attainment of Satchidānanda one finds that Satchidānanda Itself has become the universe and the living beings. It is of one substance that the flesh and the shell and seeds are made, just like butter and butter-milk.’ (ibid., p. 345) Sri Ramakrishna poses the question and gives explanation. ‘What is *Vijñāna*? It is knowing God in a special way. To cook rice on the fire, eat the rice and get nourishment from it is *Vijñāna*. . . . To talk to God, to enjoy Him as child, as friend, as Master, as beloved is *Vijñāna*. The realization that God alone has become the universe and all living beings, is *Vijñāna*.’ (ibid., p. 229)

Scriptural passages may be quoted here in support of the contention.

*Ātmani eva Ātmānam paśyati,  
Sarvam Ātmānam paśyati—*

He sees the Self in his own self (body); he sees all as the Self.’ (*Br. Upa. IV. iv. 23*) Says the *Bhāgavata* :

*Sarvabhūteṣu yaḥ paśyed bhagavad-  
bhāvamātmanah,*

*Bhūtāni bhagavatyaātmanyēṣ  
bhāgavatottamaḥ—*

‘He who sees Ātman in all beings and all beings in the Ātman is the devotee par excellence.’ (XI. II. 45)

#### NITYA AND LILA

*Jñānā* realizes Brahman in its undifferentiated form. In the state of *nirvikalpa samādhi*—a state of non-differentiation, he is said to be one with Spirit. Here the distinction between subject and object vanishes; world of name and form exists no more. What remains is awareness of the Self. This state of mind has been extolled by Sri Ramakrishna as *nitya* and is the culminating stage of all knowledge. The ego here merges in the Absolute and the body drops off like a tattered leaf after a few days.

The word *līlā* ordinarily means play and in Vedānta it means creation, the world, diverse states and forms. Creation presupposes a creator. He who is conscious of the world must be existing in the plane of duality. Apparently, the state of creation has been signified as determinate, finite, multifarious with names and forms as opposed to the indeterminate, infinite, unity of the Transcendent.

Reality is presented in these two principal stages, i.e., Brahman accompanied by the play of *Māyā*, and Brahman devoid of play. In its *nitya* aspect Brahman has been compared to a snake coiled up and *līlā* to the same snake in motion. A snake coiled up is as good a snake as that in motion. There is virtually no difference in reality but for the difference of states. A snake in motion does not lose its reality, similarly a snake coiled up is no addition to its status. The world is not to be taken as unreal because it is a play of *Māyā*. For it is Brahman who exists in and through



these playful states. This state is neither false, nor illusory.

#### VIJNANA: A BLEND OF NITYA AND LILA

But to the ordinary man the world is a multiplicity and multiplicity must be unreal, false. That is why the *sādhaka* applies the process of negation, 'neti neti', rejects the *līlā*, and attains the *nitya*—the transcendental state. After realization of Brahman there is some one who by divine grace, retains a semblance of 'I', a purified ego, and comes down to the state of play—to the creation together with the essence of transcendental state. Herein lies the germ of *Vijñāna*. He sees the world not as mere play, not as mere creation, but sees divinity in and through. This may be said to be a third category, a category which falls neither in *līlā*, nor in *nitya*, but a blend of the two. It contains the essence of the two states minus their defects. Ego is retained here no doubt but it is not the ordinary worldly ego, it is spiritualized ego. The 'I' of *vidyā* plays here.

Sri Ramakrishna says, 'There are some who come down, as it were, after attaining the knowledge of Brahman—after *samādhi*—and retain the "ego of knowledge" or "ego of devotion", just as there are people who, of their own sweet will, stay in the market-place after the market breaks up. This was the case with sages like Nārada.' 'This serves two purposes: first the teaching of men, and second, the enjoyment of divine bliss—participation in the divine sport in the world.' (ibid., pp. 111 & 932)

The characteristic of *līlā* is that it is always dubbed as illusory for it deals with name and form. But the *Upaniṣad* says: '*Neha nānāsti kiñcana*—there is no differentiation in Brahman.' *Nitya* is acclaimed as the final state. It has got no variety, no diversity. There is no 'I' to enjoy the

realizations of consciousness. The diversity, multiplicity of the *līlā* minus its illusory appellation combined with the spiritual core of the *nitya* makes the vision of *Vijñānā* possible. Neither he is said to be existing in the world, nor he appears to have merged in the transcendental state but he is said to remain in a state from which he perceives the world of differentiation, of name and form through the glass of Spirit. *Vijñānā* does not remain absorbed in the state of *samādhi* always but comes down to the plane of ordinary world for the good of humanity. Sri Ramakrishna explains the vision in this way, 'Divine Mother showed me that everything was full of consciousness. The image was Consciousness, the altar was Consciousness, the water-vessels were Consciousness, the door-sill was Consciousness, the marble floor was Consciousness—all was Consciousness.' (ibid., p. 290) 'The utensils of worship, the altar, the door frame—all pure Spirit. Men, animals and other living beings—all pure Spirit.' (ibid., p. 346)

#### VIJNANA! FURTHER EXPLAINED

The vision of *vijñānā* is a unique one and a spiritual realization par excellence. Sri Ramakrishna took pains to make it clear to Sasadhara, a scholar of repute. The scholar was a follower of the path of *jñāna* and he took the world to be nothing more than a play of *Māyā*. Having understood Sasadhara's bent of mind Sri Ramakrishna was obviously referring to the *Vijñāna* state to show that, 'He who is the indivisible Satchidānanda has assumed different forms for the sake of his *līlā*.' (ibid., p. 429) In his own language, 'Milk sets into curd and the curd is churned into butter. After extracting the butter one realizes that butter is not essentially different from the butter-milk and butter-milk not essentially different from butter. The bark of the tree goes with the pith and pith goes



with the bark.' Seeing that these lines could not make any effect, Sri Ramakrishna began again, 'If there is butter, there must be butter-milk also; for there cannot be any butter without butter-milk. Just so, if you accept the *nitya* you must also accept the *līlā*. It is the process of negation and affirmation. You realize the *nitya* by negating the *līlā*. Then you affirm the *līlā*, seeing in it the manifestation of the *nitya*. One attains this state after realizing Reality in both aspects—Personal and Impersonal. The Personal is the embodiment of Cit, Consciousness; and the Impersonal is the Indivisible Satchidānanda.' (ibid., p. 433)

#### NEW LIGHT ON VEDANTA

Sri Ramakrishna's exposition of the difference between a *jñānī* and a *vijñānī* often baffles us, makes us rethink about the long accepted notions of past. For instance, *ṛṣi* is a word which stands for a person who is a seer of truth—a knower of reality. Hindu Śāstras have unequivocally proclaimed their greatness, their superiority in the spiritual field. But according to Sri Ramakrishna these *ṛṣis* stand below the *vijñānīs* in spiritual excellence. The *ṛṣis* are much frightened to live in this world for they always bother about their own salvation, what to speak of the salvation of others? They are very much careful about their own destiny lest they should get entangled in bondage. 'A hollow piece of drift-wood somehow manages to float but it sinks if even a bird sits on it. But Nārada and sages of his kind are like a huge log that not only can float across the other but can carry many animals and other creatures as well.' (ibid., pp. 434-35) In a *śatran̄ca* game, a novice throws the dice with a trembling hand for he is not sure of the number that will come to his lot. One may lose the game in his typical fear. But an expert throws the dice to

have his required number and instantaneously gets it. 'And while playing he even twirls his moustache' in joy, for he knows for certain that victory is in his hand. *Vijñānī* is such a clever player in the game of life. He has no fear of being entangled in bondage for he knows, he has gone far beyond the worldly maize. He can also make others liberated.

*Jñānī* is always in fear about this world as it appears to him to be a 'framework of illusion'. He is not happy nor contented in his present state. World seems to him to be always deluding. It is *Māyā* which must be surpassed. But the same world appears to be a 'mansion of mirth' to the *vijñānī*. For he sees *Caitanya* alone and *Caitanya* everywhere, and is full of merry, mirth and bliss. Unlike a *jñānī* he is calm and tranquil while living in the world. He has passed through *līlā* state and transcended even *nitya*. As a result he sees them from a higher angle of vision.

#### CONCLUSION

One may enter into a critical examination of the state of *vijñāna*. He may question the possibility of the state and its validity. The most difficult question relates to the ego of the *vijñānī*. How does the ego which is totally destroyed with its cause in *samādhi* reappear?

The argument seems to be very weighty when the ego is considered in the light of non-existing now and later on existing. But the point rests upon a different footing,—to know that it is non-different from Brahman. Sri Ramakrishna says: 'You may cut down the aswattha tree but the next day sprouts shoot up. So also the "I" never disappears. After the state of *samādhi* it comes up, nobody knows from where. You dream of a tiger. Then you awake; but your heart keeps on palpitating! Hence the *vijñānī* maintains an attitude of love toward God.' (ibid., p. 31)

The ego that is retained in *viññānā* is a semblance—a mirage and cannot cause any obstruction to the knowledge of Brahman. Just as a piece of art seems to represent a true state of affairs, but in reality it possesses no living force, so also the ego of *viññānā* is contentless, a mere outline having no worth in itself. Sri

Ramakrishna says, 'The "ego of knowledge" and the "ego of devotion" can do no harm. It is like the reflection of a face in a mirror: the reflection cannot call names. Or it is like a burnt rope which appears to be a rope but disappears at the slightest puff. It is an ego only in name.' (ibid., pp. 932-33)

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## CREATIVE WRITING IN INDIA

PROFESSOR WILLIAM HOOKENS

In an age of publicity there is much that is sacrificed, including name and honour which are not so much in esteem! One is reminded of Dr. Johnson who hit back at his patron Chesterfield whom he had approached in his early years for patronage and who offered it when Dr. Johnson was already famous and needed his patronage no more. His letter to Lord Chesterfield is worth re-reading for the apathy with which the rich treat writers and men of talents, believing as they do that only money talks and all other things limp! And one remembers the words of Oliver Goldsmith in his poem '*Deserted Village*',—'Where Wealth accumulates and men decay!' It needs men and women of culture to appreciate good writing as much as speech—but, then, only the few would, like General Wolfe at the Battle of Quebec, wish that they were creative writers than generals! As for Lord Wavell, he was a good soldier as much as a good writer and we can see this in his anthology *Other Men's Flowers* (a collection of Poems by his favourites). Sir Winston Churchill was as much at home in the field of warfare as at home with books and men. T.S. Eliot saw Tradition maintained by individual talents and so did W.S. Maugham—

but then who reads literatures in India except as textbooks when they are in school, college or the University?

A country exemplifies its culture and tradition by patronizing its litterateurs as is done in Britain, the United States of America and on the Continent; but these are highly-industrialized nations and the labour saving devices at their command make them enjoy leisure which is singularly absent in the undeveloped countries.

India which is supposed to be the most cultured of all countries in the world has so few creative writers—and those she has are either ignored by the public or they die in poverty. To say that our creative writers are on the bread-and-water level is to say the obvious—and one has to visit them in their homes to see how their poor and unhygienic surroundings kill these writers before their time. One is again reminded of Oliver Goldsmith who gives a portrait of a poor writer who, on his death bed, is visited by a clergyman who tells him of the joys of seeing the world of Reality—and the despairing writer drives him away: 'I have had enough of this world to want the next!' And that's the cry of almost all living writers.



Professors from whom we would have expected productive-writing take to writing 'notes', 'made-easies' or 'guides' for the students in schools and colleges; and critical-writing is of so poor a quality as to make it plagiarized writing. But how can one think and feel and do things original when convention leads the way and the young as much as the old are averse to making mistakes? Lack of confidence and the desire to do more than one can actually do characterize the people as much as the writers of calibre—and no wonder there are copycats all along the line!

With Independence education has taken a turn for the worse—and there are graduates, with hardly the capacity to string an intelligible sentence! And yet, on the asset-side are geniuses who are outrun by mediocres in all positions of responsibility. Whereas there were M.A.s before, now we have Ph.D.s galore—and of such poor quality as to make them ridiculous before the specialist and the Public Service Commission.

In India we are wanting men of calibre—and at the same time we are wanting them to live primitively and cheaply! One has only to see our writers to know how hard it is for them to thrive! And if our writers take to being propagandists to some great politician it is because there is no other way out for them! No writer can be creative when he is hand and foot bound by his lord and master! But then this is the tale of all, including writers.

Judged by the number of schools, colleges and universities we have in this country we are highly literate and even highly educated people; judged by the number of talkers we have, one would imagine that we are the most reasonable of people but the question is: Are we? We quibble over sections and maim the innocents in the name of law when we should do all we can for them! Love, understanding,

sympathy which one would have expected from a peaceful, God-fearing country like India, are becoming gradually absent in the people. And the reason is that there is no heart in the people—and all want to live mechanized lives as the Westerners do not for a moment realizing that Westerners are not a philosophy gabbling people but a down-to-earth people with understanding of humans and human conditions.

Education, like creative writing is not a thing of show or exhibition—but elevating, soul-lifting,—an influence that can be felt not defined. But only the intelligent few can understand this. The rest, the rabble, as George Gissing would call them, see no distinction between mere show or values—and prefer the former every time! In India today every one feels he has a licence to think and feel as he likes. To an Indian the burning of a policeman or setting ablaze of a huge building is not a thing for consideration or dismay because of his wrong outlook. For him the means, any means justifies the end—but need we burn innocents so that we can put the scare in the Government or the people? Unless the people know the sense of values and see in human nature something sacred there will always be trouble and examples of indiscipline. And where indiscipline, both among the adult population as well as the young and impressionable minds has been the keynote, nothing good is to be expected either in life or in the day-to-day behaviour-pattern of people. And indiscipline, in its turn, paves the way to other sins—disloyalty, laziness, unpunctuality, treachery!

A really cultured people will not go out of their way to showing themselves superior or wonderful—but those who are conscious of their loss of culture go to the other extreme and show themselves as conceited and the result is that they make laughing-stock of themselves and the country they

represent. One sees this conceit in immature people, be they in Britain, the States or on the Continent: they ever talk big of themselves and their people—talk loudly of culture when, in actual fact, they are such poor specimens! 'Have you seen the Tower of Liberty?', the immature American would ask of an Indian as an immature Britisher would ask: 'Have you seen Westminster Abbey?' And similarly the immature Indian would talk loudly of the Taj Mahal, the Kutub and the Stupas when he knows next to nothing of any of them but what the photographer has pointed out to him and which he is at pains to show the foreigner by the beat of the trumpet! But foreigners are not wanting to see or hear third-rate guides who are out for making money when the going is good but want the men and women who represent the culture that is India's own.

Creative writing can only come into existence when writers as much as the people find a thrill in life and in living—and see in their country security, good government and healthy competition. Poverty, disease, illiteracy will have to be eliminated. The people have to depend on themselves, dream less, think more and do more! The past cannot come back—but the present is with us and that is all we have. Ill will, hatred, sham—all these will have to go. Positive-living or optimism will have to be the tune that India and the people must sing to. Then only will Creative Writing be a fact, and one will like to create because one likes to live—as Shakespeare did, as Goethe did, as our Kālidāsa did. For all this, vision is wanted—for where there is no vision, there the people perish! Our life, educationally, socially, economically, politically will have to be fuller.

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## NOTES AND COMMENTS

### IN THIS NUMBER

In the article, 'Sri Ramakrishna: The Wit—3' Sri S. P. Sengupta, M.A., Ph.D., (London), Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Head of the Department of English, University of North Bengal, (West Bengal) sums up his beautiful discussion on the subject. The other two sections of the article appeared respectively in the last April and May issues of *Prabuddha Bharata*.

'Philosophy is not an affair to be confined to intellectual ratiocination. Its consummation consists in the attainment of the oneness of Reality.' In the article on, 'Advaita Vedānta is essentially a Value Philosophy', Prof. M. K. Venkatarama Iyer, M.A., formerly Head of the Department of

Philosophy, Annamalai University, excellently elaborates the aims and purposes of all philosophical quests in the background of the realization of Śrī Śaṅkara.

There is an inevitable note of liberality and broadness in the modern history of Indian traditions and culture. Sri P. N. Mukherjee M.A., Ph.D., Head of the Department of History, D.A.V. College, Dehra Dun, beautifully upholds that 'Liberal Tradition in Modern India' in his article on the subject.

Brahmachari Vidya Chaitanya of the Ramakrishna Order explains in his article the characteristics of 'Vijñāna: Fifth Level of the Mind' in the light of the *Gospels of Sri Ramakrishna*.



Prof. William Hookens, a member of the M.P. Educational Service, is the Head of the Department of English at Sri Nilkanteswar Government Post-

graduate College, Khandwa. In his short article Prof. Hookens studies the prospects of 'Creative Writing in India' today.

## REVIEWS AND NOTICES

**MAHATMA GANDHI (VOLUME I): THE EARLY PHASE.** BY PYARELAL. Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad 14. 1965. Pages 854. Price Rs. 25.

The book under review is the first volume of a projected series. It covers the story of Gandhiji's life up to his first visit from South Africa to India. It is in four parts.

The first part deals with the situation that obtained in our country before the advent of Mahatmaji. Here the atrocities perpetrated on the helpless people of India by the British have been vividly described. The political and cultural reaction to this oppression have been clearly set forth. The author considers Ramakrishna and Vivekananda as the spiritual predecessors of Gandhiji. Hence, he has dealt with the life and work of these two personalities fairly in detail.

The other three parts deal with Mahatmaji's ancestry, birth, early life and education, the stay in England, and the trip to South Africa. This biographical portion does not contain much of new material. But the effect is more telling because of the fine background the author has given as also the beautiful style of writing. This makes the book quite readable in spite of its bulky size.

Part Three contains valuable information for the Indian reader on the colonization of South Africa by the Dutch and the British.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan has written a nice preface in which he says: 'Gandhiji was essentially a man of religion. For him politics was religion in action. His religion was broad, non-sectarian, and non-dogmatic. He believed in the ultimate Supreme Being and he says that for thirty years he struggled to see God face to face.' This beautifully sums up the significance of Mahatmaji's life, personality, and work, and the value of the present book under review.

On page 81, the author states that the parents of Sri Ramakrishna were Śāktas. They were not: Śrī Rāmacandra was the tutelary deity of the family.

On page 104, he says of Swami Vivekananda:

'His renunciation of politics was an escape from the necessity of action which might demand jettisoning of ethical values.' It would be truer to say that the reason for his not dabbling in politics was that he was first and foremost a *sannyāsīn* whose main task in life was the moral and spiritual regeneration of the entire humanity, without which neither political freedom nor economic prosperity was of any avail.

The paper and printing are nice, but the get-up is poor.

SWAMI HARSHANANDA

**THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT ACCORDING TO VEDANTA.** BY SWAMI PRABHAVANANDA. George Allen & Unwin Ltd., Ruskin House, Museum Street, London. 1964. Pages 110. Price 16 shillings.

In every religious community, there are people who believe that they alone are the repositories of divine truth. The scriptures, theories, and beliefs of other religions appear to them either puerile or false. Fortunately, in the present age, there is a movement to delve deep into the secrets of all religions, to understand them, and to isolate the chaff from the grain.

The Sermon on the Mount can be called the highest pinnacle of biblical thinking. Swami Prabhavananda, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order and a true Vedāntin, has tried to understand and explain the Sermon with a depth of spiritual understanding and a liberality of outlook that will make the book at once illuminating and inspiring. The Swami proceeds in his interpretation from the belief that the 'Truth is one, the wise call It by different names', as the ancient Vedic seers proclaimed.

The Swami does not try to propagate Vedānta through the Bible, nor does he try to blindly eulogize or criticize the Bible. He only gives a new vision, a healthy outlook, and a true view of religion and spirituality.

The book is useful for Christians, because it will enable them to break the narrow shell of sectarianism

which smothers their spiritual development; and it is useful for the non-Christians, too, because it will help them not only to appreciate Christianity, but also to understand their own religion better.

The value of the book is enhanced by the many anecdotes from the life of Sri Ramakrishna as well as other saints with which the Swami has illustrated his explanations, and the book makes very interesting reading.

DEVIDUTT PUNETHA

INDIA AND THE WORLD. BY BUDDHA PRAKASH. Vishveshvaranand Vedic Research Institute, P.O. Sadhu Ashram, Hoshiarpur. 1964. Pages 292. Price Rs. 20.

In this fully documented study of the relations that ancient India had with her neighbours and with many other outlying countries for over a thousand years, Dr. Buddha Prakash brings to the fore many facts that are lying unnoticed in several Sanskrit and Pali works. He draws upon authentic records found in various parts of Asia and Europe, and marshals enough evidence to show that 'The unique feature of India's contacts and relationship with other countries and peoples of the world is that cultural expansion was never confused with colonial domination, and commercial dynamism was never identified with economic exploitation'. His conclusion that in view of this historical background of her peoples, India is specially fitted to practise and advocate a policy of non-alignment in the present world of power blocks is unexceptionable.

Chapters on the geography of South-East Asia and Central Asia are specially interesting. The identification of Rāksasadvīpa with Ceylon and a greater Rāksasīdvīpa in the eastern archipelago is worked out in considerable detail. I agree with the author that 'the land of women' to which Matsyendranātha is said to have gone and lived could not be this Sinhaladeśa as stated in some *Nātha* works, but some place in the North (p. 113).

This work is a solid contribution to studies on the subject.

M. P. PANDIT

## BENGALI

SMRTI SANCAVAN. BY SWAMI TEJASANANDA. Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, Belurmath, Howrah, West Bengal. 1966. Pages 149. Price Rs. 3.50.

Reminiscences, personal recollections, memoirs and Diaries have a distinct place of their own among the literary *genres*. They have the stamp of individuality. The conscious or unconscious self-portrait of the author has its irresistible appeal. Literary

critics have drawn a distinction between an autobiography and memoirs. In an autobiography the emphasis is normally laid on the author himself, while in memoirs the author relegates himself to the background and attaches considerable importance to the other personalities and the cross-currents of history. An autobiography tends to be subjective and introspective; in memoirs the author becomes more objective. In either case, however, there must be the pursuit of truth—the naked and bare truth, which must on no account be sentimentalized. The autobiographies of John Wesley, Cardinal Newman, St. Augustine or Mahatma Gandhi may be cited to illustrate our point.

*Smṛti Sañcayan* by Swami Tejasananda is partly biographical and partly autobiographical. The four biographical sketches of Swami Brahmananda, Swami Premananda, Swami Shivananda and Swami Akhandananda are followed by the reminiscences of the author. The vignettes are extremely well-drawn. The four spiritual leaders had the rare opportunity of coming in close contact with the Master, and under the able leadership of Swami Vivekananda brought about a spiritual and cultural renaissance in India. They preached and practised the noble ideals of Lord Ramakrishna. The author, while in a spiritual crisis, came in touch with these four savants, and all his doubts were resolved. Their ineffable love, assurance, and faith took him out of the woods. While frantically crying for a little light amidst the encircling gloom, the four religious leaders came to his rescue, and in this life he had his rebirth, and reached the stage of everlasting Yea. It is a bold reaffirmation that spiritualism is still a dynamic force.

Swami Tejasananda has earned the gratitude of thousands of readers for this eminently readable book. Biography is often a dull reading when the author invests the hero with glamour and romance. The O! altitudo sentimentalities of Carlyle often mar the effect. Swami Tejasananda has nowhere been sentimental. As a matter of fact, he has dispassionately recorded his impressions. The book, therefore, has gained in artistic shape and coherence as well as in frankness. The bane of autobiography is ego. The author in the work under review has completely shed his ego. This self-effacement is a rare virtue in this age of self-aggrandizement. And the author is to be complimented on his self-effacement. He has completely surrendered himself to his guides, and they have not failed him.

Nowhere has the author spoken with pontifical solemnity. He has recorded his obligations to the four towering personalities in a language, which is at the command of one who has realized the truth.



The language has the simplicity, grace and poetry of the Bible. There is no striving after effect; there is no jugglery of words; nor is there any phrase-mongering. And yet all the felicities of expression have come as spontaneously as the flowers

bloom in spring. The modern age is the age of materialism. The author has delivered a message of the undying spirit, and yet we are sure, that it will not be a voice in the wilderness.

DR. S. P. SEN GUPTA

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## NEWS AND REPORTS

### THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF ST. LOUIS

REPORT FOR 1964-65

#### *Sunday Services :*

Swami Satprakashananda, the Head of the Centre, conducted regular services in the Society's chapel on Sunday mornings except during eight weeks of the hot season. He dealt with different religious and philosophical topics. The services were open to the public. Students of comparative religions of different colleges, churches, and synagogues were among the audience.

#### *Meditation and Discourse :*

Every Tuesday evening the Swami conducted a meditation and gave a discourse on the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. Students and members of different religious and educational centres also attended the meetings. Throughout the year the chapel was open for silent meditation on all weekdays from 11 to 12 noon. Every day some devotees came. During the summer recess, while the regular services were suspended, the Vedānta students met regularly every Sunday morning and Tuesday evening at the usual time for prayer, meditation, and for hearing the Swami's tape-recorded lectures.

#### *Anniversaries :*

The birthdays of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Buddha, Śaṅkarācārya, Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda, and Swami Brahmananda were observed with devotional worship in the shrine. On the following Sunday a special service was conducted in the chapel to celebrate the occasion. On Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary a Hindu dinner was served. On every other occasion the audience partook of light *prasād*. On Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary documentary sound films on his life and message prepared by the Government of India were also shown. Besides, other festivals such as

Good Friday, the worship of the Divine Mother Durgā, and Christmas Eve were observed with a special service in the chapel.

#### *Other Meetings at the Society :*

Two additional meetings were held in the Society's chapel: One for the Adult Education Group of St. Peter's Episcopal Church and the other for the High School students belonging to the Richmond Heights Presbyterian Church. On both occasions the Swami answered a number of questions after the talk.

#### *Lecture Engagements :*

The Swami was invited to speak on Hindu religion and philosophy at different educational and religious institutions in and outside St. Louis, viz., Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota, the Missouri Methodist Church, Columbia, Missouri, Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis, and the Temple Shaare Emeth, St. Louis. On every occasion there was a discussion after the talk. The Swami answered questions. At Concordia he spoke a number of times.

#### *Other Activities :*

The Society's library was well utilized by its members and friends. About forty guests and visitors from different places came at different times. They usually talked with the Swami and attended the services. The Swami gave interviews to the seekers of spiritual instruction and to those who came for the solution of their personal problems.

#### *The Founding of the Vedanta Society of Kansas City, Missouri :*

The Vedanta Society of Kansas City, Missouri, was founded under the auspices of the Vedanta Society of St. Louis, to which one of its devoted members, Mrs. Anne W. Fawcett of Kansas City, Missouri, had bequeathed a house for the purpose.

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