

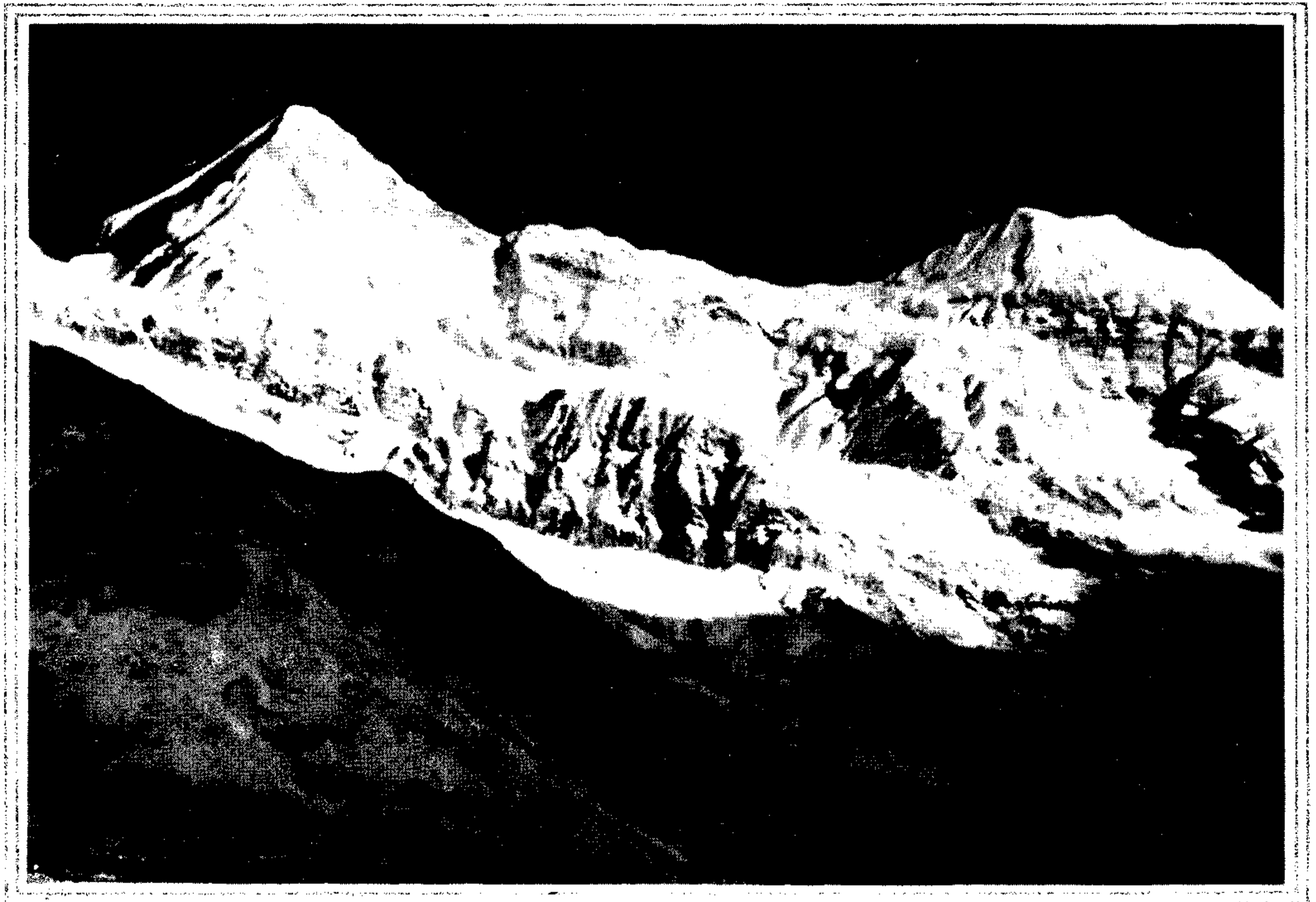
# Prabuddha Bharata

OR

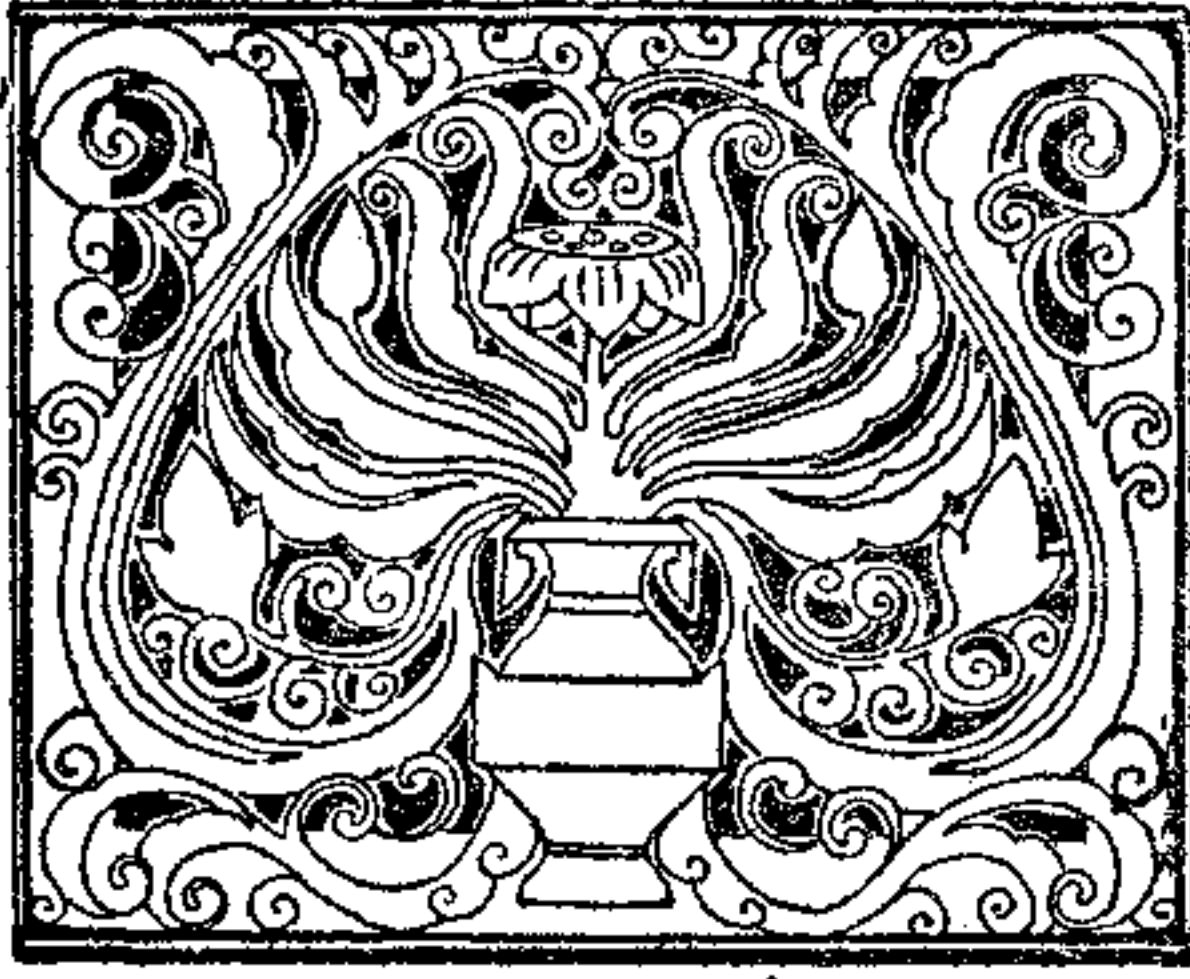
## AWAKENED INDIA

VOL. LXXIX

SEPTEMBER 1974



ADVAITA ASHRAMA, MAYAVATI  
HIMALAYAS



# Prabuddha Bharata

Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

A MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE  
RAMAKRISHNA ORDER

SEPTEMBER 1974

## Editorial Office

P.O. Mayavati, Via Lohaghat  
Dt. Pithoragarh 262-524, U.P.

## Publication Office

5 Dehi Entally Road  
Calcutta 700-014  
Phone: 44-2898



## Annual Subscription

India, Nepal & Bangladesh	Rs. 10.00
Sri Lanka	Rs. 12.00
U. S. A.	\$ 5.00
Other Countries	£ 1.20

## Life Subscription

Rs. 180    \$ 120    £ 24

## Single Copy

Rs. 1    40 cents    12 P.

## CONTENTS

Sri Ramakrishna Reminisces .. ..	321
Onward For Ever! .. ..	323
Caste System Vs Casteism—Part I —Editorial .. ..	323
Letters of a Saint .. ..	328
On Making Spiritual Progress —Swami Budhananda .. ..	329
Profiles in Greatness: Reflections on the Spiritual Life of Abraham Lincoln—I —C. H. MacLachlan .. ..	340
Supreme Need for Human Excellence— Neo-Brāhmanahood—Dr. K. S. Rangappa and A. V. Venkatasubban .. ..	346
Excursions into Uddhava-Gītā —Swami Yatiswarananda .. ..	349
City of Vivekananda—S.P. .. ..	356
Notes and Comments .. ..	357
Reviews and Notices .. ..	359
News and Reports .. ..	360

## Cover:

Morning Sun over Nandakhat, Central Himalayas

Information for subscribers, contributors and  
publishers overleaf.



# Prabuddha Bharata

VOL. LXXIX

SEPTEMBER 1974

No. 9

---

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

---

## SRI RAMAKRISHNA REMINISCES

'As there was no attention at all at that time to the cleaning of the body, the hairs of the head became long and got matted owing to dirt and dust adhering to them. At the time of meditation the body used to become motionless like the trunk of a tree. Thinking it to be an inert thing, birds came and remained sitting on the head without any hesitation and stirred up the dust in the hair in search of small particles of rice! Again, impatient on account of the separation from the divine Lord, I rubbed my face against the ground so vehemently that it got cut and bruised and bled in many places. I had no consciousness how the whole day slipped away in prayer, meditation, devotional exercises, offering of the self, and so on. When afterwards, at the approach of the evening, conchshells were blown and bells rung, I remembered that the day was at an end. Another day passed in vain, and I had not yet seen the Mother. Intense sorrow seized me and made the heart so restless that I could no longer remain calm. I threw myself violently on the ground saying, "Mother, Thou hast not shown Thyself to me even yet." I filled the quarters with wailing and struggled on account of pain. People said, "He has got colic pain and that is why he is crying so much."'

\*

'I used to show to my mind the image of Bhairava in meditation on the parapet of the roof of the music-hall and said to it, "You must be firm and motionless like it and meditate on Mother's lotus Feet." No sooner had I sat down for meditation than I heard that clattering sounds were produced in the joints of my body and limbs from the direction of the legs upwards, and they got locked one after another as if some one from within turned the keys. As long as I meditated, I had no power to move my body and change my posture even slightly or give up meditation and go elsewhere or do anything else at will. I was, as it were, forcibly made to sit in the same posture, so long as the joints did not make clattering sounds as before and were unlocked this time from the direction of the head to the legs. When I sat and meditated I had,

in the beginning, the vision of particles of light like groups of fire-flies ; I saw sometimes all quarters covered with masses of mist-like light ; and at other times I perceived that all things were pervaded by bright waves of light like molten silver. I saw these things sometimes with my eyes shut and sometimes open. I did not understand what I saw nor did I know whether it was good or bad to have such visions. I therefore prayed to Mother with a troubled heart, "I don't understand, Mother, what is happening to me ; I don't know Mantras etc., by which to call Thee ; please teach me personally what may enable me to realize Thee. Mother, if Thou dost not teach me, who else will ? For, there is no other refuge for me except Thee." I used to pray thus with a concentrated mind and weep piteously on account of the eagerness of my heart."

\*

"The Divine Mother revealed to me in the Kali temple that it was She who had become everything. She 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.

'I found everything inside the room soaked, as it were, in Bliss—the Bliss of Satchidananda. I saw a wicked man in front of the Kali temple ; but in him also I saw the Power of the Divine Mother vibrating. That was why I fed a cat with the food that was to be offered to the Divine Mother. I clearly perceived that the Divine Mother Herself had become everything—even the cat. The manager of the temple garden wrote to Mathur Babu saying that I was feeding the cat with the offering intended for the Divine Mother. But Mathur Babu had insight into the state of my mind. He wrote back to the manager : "Let him do whatever he likes. You must not say anything to him."'

\*

'I put the palm of my hand near Her nostrils and felt that Mother was actually breathing. I observed very closely, but I could never see the shadow of the Mother's divine person on the temple wall in the light of the lamp at night. I heard from my room that Mother, merry like a little girl, was going upstairs, Her anklets making jingling sounds. I came up to test it and found that She, with Her hair dishevelled, was actually standing on the verandah of the first floor of the temple and was now viewing Calcutta, now the Ganga.'

---

## ONWARD FOR EVER!

*A huge locomotive has rushed on over the line and a small worm that was creeping upon one of the rails saved its life by crawling out of the path of the locomotive. Yet this little worm, so insignificant that it can be crushed in a moment, is a living something, while this locomotive, so huge, so immense, is only an engine, a machine. You say the one has life and the other is only dead matter and all its powers and strength and speed are only those of a dead machine, a mechanical contrivance. Yet the poor little worm which moved upon the rail and which the least touch of the engine would have deprived of its life is a majestic being compared to that huge locomotive. It is a small part of the Infinite and, therefore, it is greater than this powerful engine. Why should that be so? How do we know the living from the dead?... In the living there is freedom, there is intelligence; in the dead all is bound and no freedom is possible, because there is no intelligence. This freedom that distinguishes us from mere machines is what we are all striving for. To be more free is the goal of all our efforts, for only in perfect freedom can there be perfection. This effort to attain freedom underlies all forms of worship, whether we know it or not.*

*Vivekananda*

## CASTE SYSTEM VS CASTEISM —PART I

EDITORIAL

I

For the past near-eight-decade existence of the *Prabuddha Bharata*, the theme of the caste system, its merits and defects, the ways and means of conserving and strengthening the merits while minimizing and eradicating the defects, have rather frequently been discussed in these columns. Many times caste has formed the main theme of our editorials. Here and elsewhere this subject has been taken up and so intensely discussed by scholars and social reformers, thinkers and leaders, historians and sociologists, for so many decades that there seems hardly anything new that can be said about it today. Some of our readers may then wonder why this old, depleted and threadbare theme is being revived now.

However, regular readers of periodicals in India surely know that the hydra of perverted caste has raised its heads once again. More than twenty-five years after achieving political independence and constitutionally prohibiting the practice of untouchability and discrimination on caste grounds, we are rudely shaken to read reports of brutal oppressions inflicted by the upper castes on our own sisters and brothers belonging to the lowest caste, whom Gandhiji called 'Harijans' or 'People dear to God'. It is not that these unhappy incidents have occurred in a particular part of the country only. Reports appearing in the daily press make it plain that the trouble is country-wide—from the Punjab and Haryana in the North to Kerala and Karnataka in the South, from Gujarat in the West to Bihar in the East. It is even more distressing to read that in some cases the police—the law-enforcing machinery of the Government—have failed to carry out their duties, or even aided and abetted the oppressors. These developments must make any res-

possible, decent, conscientious citizen hang his head in shame. The most recent President of India, who has all his life been a champion of the underprivileged and the labouring classes, has repeatedly condemned these incidents and demanded 'severe and deterrent punishment' for all those who perpetrate any disability based on caste, and asked our countrymen to consider such people as 'the worst enemies of society'. How then can this caste-theme be considered as old, depleted or irrelevant?

Of all the great leaders that Indian humanity produced at the beginning of the modern renaissance, Swami Vivekananda—and his great Master no less, for they are inseparable—stands as one of the foremost who lived, worked and died for the uplift of the down-trodden masses. He had the broad heart of a Buddha and it bled at their sufferings and handicaps. He had the sure vision of a prophet to lay out a master-plan for their betterment, for their emancipation. He was the founder of this Journal and so it becomes the Journal's imperative duty to speak out against this ugly and unfortunate development in the body-politic.

The caste system in Indian society is a very ancient institution. It has rendered to this country, its culture and society, invaluable service. Possibly the very survival of Vedic wisdom and culture to this day is owing to the institution of caste. Again, it has played an outstanding role in absorbing and assimilating into Hindu society even the most heterogeneous racial elements which poured in from outside for thousands of years. If its positive aspects are understood, preserved and practised, caste may yet have a future in spiritualizing not only Indian society but the whole of humanity.

But unfortunately the caste system has been perverted and gradually turned into 'casteism'. (This word, though not found in the dictionary, is frequently seen in our

journals, and its meaning is unmistakable.) When caste was a mobile system, based on *guna* and *karma*—quality and duty—and permitted its worthy practitioners to evolve higher and higher, it was dynamic and vital. But when it became rigid, hereditary, and dominated by a privileged aristocracy, when its soul departed, 'casteism' was what was left behind—a festering carcass filling this country and society with endless sociological pestilences and problems. 'But in spite of all the ravings of the priests,' declared Swami Vivekananda, 'caste is simply a crystallized social institution, which after doing its service is now filling the atmosphere of India with its stench...'<sup>1</sup>

Why then are we clinging to this carcass and why do we love this stench? The answer is not easy. With epoch-making leadership we attained our political independence. We declared in our Constitution the equality of all citizens and vowed to eradicate untouchability and all such other caste-based disabilities and abominations. Our great leaders and social reformers tried their best to translate these humanitarian and equalitarian ideas into practice. And they did achieve remarkable success. It appeared for a time that casteism had at last become a thing of the past and that our nation had really entered the modern, scientific age—a new age of human equality, prosperity, enlightenment. Unfortunately this optimism has proved too easy, premature, and groundless. Casteism like the mythical hydra has grown fresh heads and is attacking our body-politic. Some sections of the people, it seems, have turned traitors to the spirit of our immortal leaders and let down the Constitution-makers. They seem unworthy recipients of the great Vedāntic heritage which teaches the fundamental

<sup>1</sup> Swami Vivekananda: *The Complete Works* (Advaita Ashrama, Mavavati, Dt. Pithoragarh, U.P.), Vol. V (1959), pp. 22-3.

spiritual potentiality and equality of all living beings and of humanity in particular.

In such a situation, what are we to do? Are we to throw up our hands and declare that Hindu society is incorrigible, that casteism is unbeatable? Are we to accept defeat and somehow console our own insidious egos, and secretly cherish privilege-loving arrogance? That would be, in plain words, cowardice, educated hypocrisy, and brutal inhumanity. But we feel our countrymen are made of a different stuff. They have in them still, the heroic fibre of their self-sacrificing, compassionate, patriotic renaissance leaders, and of their sages and seers. As such, they must accept the challenge of casteism and vow to wage relentless war against this inveterate enemy, until complete victory. Otherwise we will stand condemned before our own conscience, our brethren, our unborn descendants, the rest of humanity, the spirits of our immortal leaders, and above all before God—the all-pervading ever-manifest Truth, the inner Witness of all.

## II

Most of those who want to fight and destroy the evil effects of caste, first try to attack Hinduism. And that is a mistake. This mistake has been made repeatedly by almost all our social reformers. As Swami Vivekananda pointed out, 'Beginning from Buddha down to Ram Mohan Roy, everyone made the mistake of holding caste to be a religious institution and tried to pull down religion and caste all together, and failed.'<sup>2</sup> Most reformers who have come after Ram Mohan have also tilted at Hinduism, and even today the first target of attack by any anti-caste crusader is our eternal religion. One reason for this may be that Hindu scriptures, both the *Vedas* and the *purānas* (history-cum-mythology),

speak of the fourfold division of human society and insist on adherence to it. In the *Gītā* Śrī Kṛṣṇa speaks of himself as the author of the four castes which he has created according to *guna* and *karma*. The other reason seems to be that people who observe the external rules and regulations of caste always consider themselves as highly religious. But in fact caste is only a socio-economic institution depending upon the nature and aptitude of individuals and the material and vocational needs of society. And these have been always changing. Whereas religion which concerns the eternal verities in man and the universe is immutable, caste divisions and functions go on changing from time to time like all else in society. During the course of social evolution, caste may very nearly or entirely disappear. But that will not affect religion in the least. Frequently a man may be seen observing rigorously all the rules and rituals of his caste, but morally and spiritually he may be a mere novice. And the conclusive demonstration of the fact of religion's utter dissociation from caste is seen in the genuine *sannyāsin* who stands above and beyond all caste while yet embodying the highest moral and spiritual virtues. Furthermore, saints and godmen have arisen from even the lowest castes, and they have commanded the respect and adoration of many if not all members of the upper castes. Essential Hindu religious teachings insist on a person's reaching the state of *nīstraigunīyam* (state beyond the three *gunas* of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*): and that means complete transcendence of society, caste, and its laws, which are all within the realm of the *gunas*.

Though the caste system has been existing from Vedic times, it was not then rigid and inflexible as in later and modern times. Its degeneration started when caste tended to become hereditary, oppressive, and privilege-loving. The Buddha was the first to strike at the root of this degenerating system. Down

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 22.

these shining centuries, religious teachers and social reformers have been trying to minimize the harshness of caste tyranny and raise the members of the lower castes to higher levels. With the diversification in occupations and increase in technical knowledge, especially after the onset of the Industrial Revolution, Indian caste in its original fourfold division has nearly disappeared. There has taken place a sweeping change in Hindu society which has dislocated the caste system almost beyond recognition. Caste now remains only in name—the *brāhmana*, for instance, taking to any profession he likes or can get at, from that of professor or administrator, to that of vegetable vendor or bus-conductor. This is seen in the *ksatriya* and *vaiśya*, down to the *sūdra*. Paradoxically enough, in spite of this 'great fall' of the upper castes, which actually should have made them humble, they seem to be possessed by a demonic, unregenerate caste-pride and desire for domination. This weakness is due more to the innate hauteur and outsized self-consciousness in human beings than to either religion, which is hardly practised, or the caste system which has nearly disappeared. Sociologists have noted this human weakness and drawn our attention to it. For instance, Park and Burgess observe:

'Self-consciousness in the individual arises in contacts and conflicts of the person with other persons. It manifests itself variously in pride and humility, vanity and self-respect, modesty and arrogance, pity and disdain, as well as in race prejudice, chauvinism, class and caste distinctions, and in every other social device by which the social distances are maintained.

'It is in these various responses called forth by social contacts and intercourses that the personality of the individual is developed and his status defined. It is in the effort to maintain that status or improve it, to defend his personality, to enlarge its possessions, extend its privi-

leges, and maintain its prestige that conflicts arise.... This applies to all conflicts, whether they are personal and petty squabbles, sectarian differences, or rational and patriotic wars, for the personality of the individual is invariably so bound up with the interests and order of his group and clan, that, in a struggle, he makes the group cause his own.'<sup>3</sup>

In addition to a natural human *self-consciousness* and caste-arrogance, Indians have long been suffering from personal and group *jealousies*. Swami Vivekananda more than once drew our attention to this besetting sin on the individual and collective levels. This mortal vice, he pointed out, is the characteristic of all enslaved races. Because of this we are unable to make progress individually or collectively. If anyone rises higher or goes forward a little, all others join together to pull him down. It is the dog-in-the-manger attitude, said Swamiji, which asserts, 'I won't rise nor will I let others rise above me.'<sup>4</sup> In studying all the inter-group and inter-caste conflicts and rivalry in India, these two factors must be kept clearly in mind as basic causes. Division, diversity, or stratification nonetheless exist in all societies. It is only the naive who assert and advocate the contrary. Creation means diversity. Ending of diversity or bringing of uniformity will mean death and destruction. Classes and castes have existed in most ancient civilized societies; for instance, the Sumerian and Assyrian. They exist today in all the advanced countries, whether democratic or totalitarian. In England there are the four estates—Lords Spiritual, Lords Temporal, craftsmen, and serfs. In America, especially the U.S.A., people are divided into groups on the basis of their economic status, political or church affiliations, or

<sup>3</sup> R. E. Park and E. W. Burgess: *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (Chicago, 1924), p. 576.

<sup>4</sup> *vide The Complete Works*, Vol. V, p. 56; Vol. VI (1963), pp. 285-6.



what is worse, racial characteristics.<sup>5</sup> In the so-called classless socialistic republics, the rulers always enjoy perquisites and privileges. Their intellectuals seem to be crystallizing as a class, while the party-machine adopts with conspicuous failure every available means for 'levelling' them down to a mindless proletariat mass. India, distinguished as one of the oldest surviving civilizations, has the further asset of the caste system which is at least theoretically based on the principles of aptitude and division of labour. And the whole system aims at spiritually perfecting human individuals through a gradation of discipline. If, as Swamiji more than once hinted, castes or classes are thus inevitable in a human society, then it is better to have a system which is based on spiritual values than on money or melanin—skin or hair colours. But casteism or 'caste' as we see it today must on no account be allowed to flourish in this or any society.

Casteism could have been very effectively fought in the wake of the winning of Independence, mainly through mass-oriented campaigns and education. Because it had been then greatly subdued and weakened by the powerful influence of social reformers and national leaders. But the general euphoria in the political leaders as well as citizenry was nevertheless fostering an attitude of complacency towards the problems of casteism. The leaders became preoccupied with the framing of the Constitution, among whose numerous articles are those concerning eradication of untouchability, while the masses slowly slipped back into their conservative ruts. Education in the home, the school, and for the public at large failed to concentrate on training for right attitudes towards caste. As a result casteism remain-

ed smouldering in young and old alike, for another gust of social breeze to fan it again into a blaze. Stranger still was the insidious entry of casteism into the Indian Universities. These centres of teaching and training which are supposed to mould our future teachers and leaders have themselves become conveyors of the contagion of casteism. At one North Indian University, foreign students and teachers have been disagreeably surprised at the prevalence of casteism among the students and even the faculty. If such is the case among the educated and the learned, we can well imagine the condition of the illiterate and ignorant in villages and towns.

It is said that 'justice delayed is justice denied'. This law may be applied to the emancipation of the underprivileged and the downtrodden. Our poor and depressed masses have patiently waited for centuries to come into their own. When the country has at last become politically liberated and when their hopes are at the highest pitch, the hydra of casteism again raises its many hoods and tightens its vicious coils round them. We can very well imagine the disappointment and rage that this situation creates in them. This is the psychological juncture when the underprivileged masses tend to turn militant—a sociological phenomenon very much in evidence in the U.S.A. in the last eight years. If in America there have come into existence 'Black Panthers', in India we hear already of the emergence in one state of 'Dalit (Down-trodden) Panthers'. Before these 'panthers' spread to other States and bring about a bloody confrontation with the oppressors, will it not be sanity on the part of the privileged castes to reach out to their disowned brethren and enfold them in a fraternal embrace?

We do not want to take our analysis any further. For, that might carry us into the hierarchy of the Government services—central and state—where also, we hear, caste-

<sup>5</sup> *vide* Donald W. Calhonn: *Social Science in an Age of Change* (Harper and Row, New York, 1971), pp. 131-2.

ism has spread its formidable tentacles. We where it is not and strengthening it where hope this is not true or only a partial truth. it is. For this no sacrifice should be considered too great, especially when it is the Our country is facing immense problems on sacrifice of false pride, outsized self-consciousness, narrow-mindedness, jealousy, privilege, and the slavery to which they lead. at present is national unity. It is the duty of every responsible, conscientious, decent citizen to struggle for achieving that unity

## LETTERS OF A SAINT

### THE LORD MY REFUGE

Sasiniketan

Puri

7. 9. 1917

Dear N—,

I have duly received yours of 28 August.... At first one has to comprehend only through reasoning; after that, with one's becoming firm and free from doubt, comes realization. When doubt, non-understanding, contrary-understanding cease to be, then the modification of firm comprehension becomes steadfast, and that state is called direct realization of Truth. By the Lord's grace it so happens that 'in good time, one realizes Brahman in one's self'.<sup>1</sup>

Today I received a postcard from M—. Please tell him that one cannot become egoless by simply sitting down without moving one's limbs; through work alone lies the way to becoming egoless. If uncooked oil is to be brought to a boil, it can only be done with the help of fire. If sugar is to be refined, a lot of dross has to be removed [after melting]; thereafter it becomes refined. Similarly, if the mind is to be purified, it has to be done through work by freeing it from desires—not merely by withdrawing one's hands and feet like the tortoise. If I work, I become egotistic, so I won't work—this attitude is the outcome of utter selfishness. When the nature that is steeped in inertia (*tamoguna*) is through work suffused with *rajas*, and gradually becomes endued with *sattva*, then egotism really leaves one. 'He in whom there is egotism, though he does not act, still he acts.'<sup>2</sup> He in whom egotism abides, though he does not do anything, still he is filled with egotism; and he who is devoid of egotism, that calm man, though doing everything, still he does not act.

Please accept all of you my good wishes and love.

Ever your well-wisher,

SRI TURIYANANDA

<sup>1</sup> कालेनात्मनि विन्दति । *Bhagavad-gītā*, IV. 38

<sup>2</sup> यस्यान्तः स्यादहंकारो न करोति करोति सः ॥

ON MAKING SPIRITUAL PROGRESS  
OVERCOMING OBSTACLES TO SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

SWAMI BUDHANANDA

Apart from seasonal tides, there are appearances of sudden obstacles in spiritual life. An aspirant may move with utmost caution, but he does not always know when an obstacle will confront him, from within or without. He knows only when he is already beset by it.

About obstacles we may remember that these are phenomena on the way through which we have to pass, and do not constitute the dead end of the road. As every wall has potential doors, so every obstacle has potential openings for new spiritual emergence and advancement.

Now, what should we do when faced with obstacles to spiritual progress? Many aspirants tend to use their own intelligence and ingenuity to get over obstacles. They may do so, not because no experienced helper is available to them. They may do so out of a harmful sense of self-esteem. 'What will he think of me if I say I am being assailed by lust or dogged by some temptations?—he has such a high opinion about me!': such are the thoughts which sometimes prevent us from seeking even readily available help; and we gradually sink in the inner morass until we become inextricable from a ruinous situation. There is no need to be ruined by one's false self-esteem. In spiritual difficulty one should seek the help of one's guru if he is available, or some other dependable guide, who is a man of unimpeachable character, deep meditation, selfless, kind-hearted, well-versed in the scriptures, and also receptive. One should never speak of one's spiritual diffi-

culty to any characterless man. On one's own, one should always pray with the humble attitude that Swami Sivananda urged, in the passages quoted in the preceding section.<sup>1</sup>

It is also good to know that obstacles are not novel phenomena in spiritual life; these have been the concomitants of spiritual life from the beginning of time. In authentic scriptures we find that teachers warn us of the possible obstacles and give clear instructions as to how to overcome them.

Patañjali catalogues the obstacles to yoga as follows:

'Disease, mental laziness, doubt, lack of enthusiasm, lethargy, clinging to sense enjoyments, false perception, non-attaining concentration, and falling away from the state when obtained, are the obstructing distractions.

'Grief, mental distress, tremor of the body, irregular breathing, accompany non-retention of concentration.'<sup>2</sup>

Commenting on these two aphorisms of Patañjali, Swami Vivekananda taught:

'*Disease.* This body is the boat which will carry us to the other shore of the ocean of life. It must be taken care of. Unhealthy persons cannot be Yogis. *Mental laziness* makes us lose all lively interest in the subject, without which there will neither be the will nor the energy to practise. *Doubts* will arise in the mind about the truth of the science, however strong one's intellectual conviction may be, until certain peculiar psychic experiences come, as hearing or

<sup>1</sup> 'On Making Spiritual Progress: Ebb-Tide and Flow-Tide in Spiritual Life', *P. B.*, Aug. 1974

<sup>2</sup> *Yoga-sūtras*, I. 30, 31

seeing at a distance, etc. These glimpses strengthen the mind and make the student persevere. *Falling away...when obtained.* Some days or weeks when you are practising, the mind will be calm and easily concentrated, and you will find yourself progressing fast. All of a sudden the progress will stop one day, and you will find yourself, as it were, stranded. Persevere. All progress proceeds by such rise fall.'

'Concentration will bring perfect repose to mind and body every time it is practised. When the practice has been misdirected, or not enough controlled, these disturbances come. Repetition of Om and self-surrender to the Lord will strengthen the mind, and bring fresh energy. The nervous shakings will come to almost everyone. Do not mind them at all, but keep on practising. Practice will cure them, and make the seat firm.'<sup>3</sup>

Swami Turiyananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, teaches:

'These [obstructions mentioned by Patañjali] disturb the mind and prevent Yoga. All these obstructions are removed if one meditates on Om. But then, a man may not at all be disposed to meditate!

'When one suffers from biliousness, even sugar-candy tastes bitter. But that is the medicine for it. If one regularly uses it, the disease will disappear and the sugar-candy also will taste sweet. The trouble will go and he will also be able to taste the sweetness of the Lord's name. It will destroy the very roots of the disease of nescience. Therefore one should practise repeating it even against one's wishes. He who gives it up is lost. The *Gita* says, "The mind, O Arjuna, is controlled by practice and non-attachment." It also says, "One should slowly withdraw one's mind from sense-objects through patient discrimination. Fixing the mind on the Self, one must no more think of anything else."

'The author of the *Yoga-sutras* says,

"By carefully persisting in practice, for long and without intermission, the concentration becomes steady." We must attain to a steady concentration. The young plant needs to be hedged round, but when the tree is big, it requires protection no more. We must have steadfastness to the ideal. As soon as we decide that a certain course is right, we must resolve to give up our life for it. We must have decision in our character. "O Arjuna, the decisive judgment here is one, but people of unsettled minds have innumerable varying ideas." We must decide on a particular course and devote our whole life to it.'<sup>4</sup>

Śrī Śaṅkarācārya teaches:

'While practising meditation there appear unavoidably many obstacles, such as lack of inquiry, idleness, desire for sense-pleasure, sleep, dullness, distraction, tasting of joy, and the sense of blankness. One desiring the knowledge of Brahman should slowly get rid of such innumerable obstacles.'<sup>5</sup>

In Sri Ramakrishna's teachings, we find the mention of the following obstructions to spiritual progress: book-learning, egotism, ignorance, lack of perseverance, occult powers, past impressions, lust and lucre, worldliness, timidity, hatred and fear, criticism of others, restlessness, narrowness of outlook, unintelligent imitation, attachment to relatives.

Though illumined persons may also have book-learning, as for example Śrī Śaṅkarācārya and Swami Vivekananda, book-learning as such is not necessary for attaining spiritual illumination. The most convincing proof of this is to be found in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Again, among his disciples, who attained illumination, there were learned persons no doubt; but there was one—Swami Adbhutananda—who like his Master had no book-learning at all.

<sup>3</sup> *The Complete Works* (Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Dt. Pithoragarh, U.P.), Vol. I (1962), pp. 221-2

<sup>4</sup> *Spiritual Talks* (Advaita Ashrama, 1936), pp. 207-8

<sup>5</sup> *Aparoksānubhūti*, Verses 127-8

Sri Ramakrishna teaches:

'*Grantha* does not always mean a holy scripture, but often it comes to mean a 'Granthi' or a knot. If a man does not read it with an intense desire to know the Truth and renouncing all vanity, the mere reading of books only gives rise to pedantry, presumption, egotism, etc., which would be an encumbrance on his mind like so many knots.

'Only two kinds of people can attain to Self-knowledge: those whose minds are not encumbered at all with learning, that is to say, not overcrowded with thoughts borrowed from others; and those who after studying all the scriptures and sciences, have come to realize that they know nothing.'<sup>6</sup>

Once a devotee asked Sri Ramakrishna, 'Sir, why are we in bondage like this?' Sri Ramakrishna answered:

'Man's ego itself is Maya. It is the veil that shuts out the Light. Verily, with the death of the "I" all troubles cease. If by the grace of the Lord a man once gains the knowledge that he is not the doer, then he assuredly becomes a *jivanmukta*, one freed in this very life, and transcends all fear.'<sup>7</sup>

Spiritual progress cannot be made without the grace of God. But who can hold even the given grace? Sri Ramakrishna teaches:

'The rain-water never stands on high ground, but runs down to the lowest level. So also the mercy of God remains in the hearts of the lowly, but drains off from those of the vain and the proud.'<sup>8</sup>

According to Vedāntic scriptures the fundamental obstacle to spiritual progress is ignorance, which is also called *avidyā* or *māyā*, and which obscures God from men. *Māyā* creates no end of difficulties on the path of the aspirant, but these constitute no irremovable mass. Sri Ramakrishna teaches:

'God has covered all with His maya. He doesn't let us know anything. Maya is "woman" and "gold". He who puts maya aside to see God, can see Him. Once, when I was explaining God's actions to someone, God suddenly showed me the lake at Kamarpukur. I saw a man removing the green scum and drinking the water. The water was clear as crystal. God revealed to me that Satchidananda is covered by the scum of maya. He who puts the green scum aside can drink the water.'<sup>9</sup>

In the words 'Maya is "woman" and "gold";' 'woman' symbolizes man's psychic bondage and 'gold' represents his material bondage. These obstructions have their original tangles in man's mind itself, in his ignorance, expressing itself as desires.

Sometimes we enter the path of spiritual life without any comprehension of the immensity of the undertaking. We may not realize that to attain illumination is the hardest task in life. Failing to get quick results from our inadequate efforts, we tend to lose heart. But this is no help if we mean business in spiritual life. Without bending all our energies to this task—giving ourselves entirely to it—we cannot make it. Sri Ramakrishna says:

'There are pearls in the deep sea, but you must hazard all perils to get them. If you fail to get at them by a single dive, do not conclude that the sea is without them. Dive again and again, and you are sure to be rewarded in the end. So also in the quest for the Lord, if your first attempt to see Him proves fruitless, do not lose heart. Persevere in the attempt, and you are sure to realize Him at last.'<sup>10</sup>

The true devotee wants nothing but pure devotion to God and absorption in Him. It is not however very easily that a seeker be-

<sup>6</sup> *Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna* (Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras-4, 1938), Sayings No. 149 and 162

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, Saying No. 101

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, Saying No. 105

<sup>9</sup> 'M': *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Tr. by Swami Nikhilananda, pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras-4, 1964), p. 199

<sup>10</sup> *Sayings*, Number 13

comes a true devotee. To become what Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā* calls a single-minded devotee (*eka-bhaktih*)<sup>11</sup> is the fruit of great spiritual effort. But those who persist with unflagging zeal on the path, eventually attain it by God's grace. There are many instances in man's religious history of common aspirants' attainment of exalted states through unflagging *sādhana*.

The pity however is that often enough even our spiritual aspirations are not pure. We do not really long for God, for pure devotion, and His vision. What we secretly desire is God's groceries. Some of the most attractive of these are the psychic or occult powers. Many aspirants, in delusion, even think that these powers are laudable objectives. They do not realize that these are some of the most formidable temptations and obstacles on the spiritual path. Such powers may come of themselves to an aspirant who has been striving on the way. If he gets entangled in them he is done for: not only can he not proceed any further on the way, but in all probability he falls away from the path itself.

Sri Ramakrishna was never tired of warning aspirants against rushing after occult powers, for the simple reason that one cannot have occult powers and God together. He says:

'Krishna once said to Arjuna, "If you desire to attain Me, know that it will never be possible so long as you possess even a single of the eight psychic powers (*ashta-siddhis*)."<sup>12</sup> For occult powers increase man's egotism and thus make him forgetful of God.'

How far away we should keep from whatever makes us forgetful of God, if we are really seeking Him! But alas, we rush after these, leaving behind all our chances of attaining genuine spirituality in this life. The tragedy is more poignant in that we

sometimes do this even self-righteously. We say: this man speaks against these wonderful powers because he has no chance of getting them—the grapes are sour! But if we are true seekers, we surely must listen to one like Sri Ramakrishna who had all these powers. These powers came to him unsought but he had no use for them. Once, again, he wanted to transfer these powers to his disciple Narendranath, who later on became Vivekananda. He called him to the Panchavati in Dakshineswar and said:

'Through the practice of severe spiritual discipline I have acquired supernatural powers. But of what use are they to me? I cannot even keep my body properly covered. Therefore, with the Mother's permission I am thinking of transmitting them to you. She has made known to me that you will have to do much work for Her. If I impart these powers to you, you can use them when necessary. What do you say?' Narendranath knew that the Master possessed powers. After a moment's thought he said, 'Will these help me to realize God?' 'No,' replied the Master, 'they will not help you to do that, but they will be very helpful to you when, after realizing God, you will be engaged in doing His work.' Naren said, 'I do not want them. Let me realize God first; maybe then I shall know whether I want them or not. If I accept them now, I may forget my ideal and in making use of them for some selfish purpose come to grief.' We do not know whether Sri Ramakrishna really wanted to impart his powers to Naren or whether he was simply testing him. But we do know that he was much pleased when Naren refused them.<sup>13</sup>

It is to be noticed that Sri Ramakrishna here made a very subtle test of his disciple. Only one with Vivekananda's spirit of renunciation could pass it. The simple truth is that after an aspirant realizes God,

<sup>11</sup> VII. 17

<sup>12</sup> *Sayings*, Number 374

<sup>13</sup> *Life of Swami Vivekananda* by His Eastern and Western Disciples (Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, 1949), pp. 68-9

it is God's business to use him or not, for His purpose. Man does not have to worry about doing God's work by acquiring occult powers, which are like filth !

'What do you mean ? Are you comparing occult powers with filth ?' you may ask.

Well, so did Sri Ramakrishna. We shall quote here unhesitatingly a passage from the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, and you take it as your understanding permits you.

'People of small intellect seek occult powers—powers to cure disease, win a lawsuit, walk on water, and such things. But the genuine devotees of God don't want anything except His Lotus Feet.'

Then he narrated a vision in which the Divine Mother showed him that occult powers are as abominable as the filth of a prostitute. Continuing he said :

'People with a little occult power gain such things as name and fame. Many of them want to follow the profession of guru, gain people's recognition, and make disciples and devotees. Men say of such a guru: "Ah! He is having a wonderful time. How many people visit him! He has many disciples and followers. His house is overflowing with furniture and other things. People give him presents. He has such power that he can feed many people if he so desires."

Then came his devastating analogy regarding people who use occult powers to carry on the profession of a teacher. He said :

'The profession of a teacher is like that of a prostitute. It is the selling of oneself for the trifle of money, honour, and creature comforts. For such insignificant things it is not good to prostitute the body, mind, and soul, the means by which one can attain God. A man once said about a certain woman: "Ah! She is having a grand time now. She is so well off! She has rented a room and furnished it with a couch, a mat, a bed, pillows, and many other things. And how many people she controls! They are always visiting her." In other words, the woman has now become a prostitute. Therefore her happiness is

unbounded. Formerly she was a maid-servant in a gentleman's house ; now she is a prostitute. She has ruined herself for a mere trifle.'<sup>14</sup>

So Sri Ramakrishna's most forceful teaching is :

'*Siddhis* or psychic powers are to be avoided like filth. These come of themselves by virtue of *sadhanas* or religious practices, and *samyama* or control of the senses. But he who sets his mind on *siddhis* remains stuck thereto, and he cannot rise higher.'<sup>15</sup>

'A beggar would be acting very foolishly were he to go to the king's palace and beg for such insignificant things as a gourd or pumpkin. Similarly, a devotee would be acting foolishly were he to appear at the threshold of the King of kings and beg for psychic powers, neglecting the priceless gifts of true Knowledge and love of God.'<sup>16</sup>

A sincere seeker who has purity of spiritual aspiration will easily understand the value of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings about the injuriousness of hankering after occult powers. It is only through constant prayers for purity of heart, and God's grace, that we can save ourselves from being tempted by these powers. Those who succumb to this temptation often fall away from the path never to rise again in this life.

Sri Ramakrishna's guru, the Bhairavi Brahmani, had another disciple by the name of Chandra. About him Sri Ramakrishna said :

'There was a man named Chandra who acquired the power called *gutika-siddhi*. Keeping an amulet (*gutika*) with him, he could roam anywhere at will or penetrate into any place without being seen by any person. The man was at first devoted to God and austere in his spiritual disciplines. Later on, however, when he came to possess that power, he began to use it for satisfying the demands of his lower nature. I warned him against

<sup>14</sup> *The Gospel*, pp. 722-3

<sup>15</sup> *Sayings*, Number 376

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, Number 380

doing so, but he paid no heed. He used to frequent unseen a gentleman's house and had illicit amour with a young lady of the family. He lost all his power thereby, and became a fallen soul.'<sup>17</sup>

So great is the fascination of occult powers that we are often caught up in their pursuit almost unawares. Our learning, rationality, scientific spirit—nothing can save us from this fascination. Only purity, discrimination, aspiration for God, and His grace can help us in firmly rejecting them.

There is this interesting episode in Swami Vivekananda's life. Once on a long railway journey Swamiji had as his fellow passenger a learned occultist who besieged him with all sorts of questions : whether he had been in the Himalayas, whether he had met Mahatmas possessed of various incredible powers, etc. The Swami, wishing to teach him a lesson, encouraged him to talk. Then, smiling within himself, he gave such a glowing description of the miraculous performances of the Mahatmas that his listener gasped in amazement. The Swami had noticed that the man was essentially good-hearted, and learned also, but because of his credulous nature had become entangled in pseudo-mysticism. To help him out of this situation the Swami now spoke to him frankly and sternly : 'You who boast so much of your learning and enlightenment, how could you unhesitatingly swallow such wild, fantastic tales !' The gentleman hung his head at this reproof and did not utter a word. The Swami continued :

'My friend, you look intelligent. It befits a person of your type to exercise your own discrimination. Spirituality has nothing to do with the display of psychical powers, which, when analysed, show that the man who deals with them is a slave of desire and a most egotistical person. Spirituality involves the acquisition of that true power which is

character. It is the vanquishing of passion and the rooting out of desire. All this chasing after psychical illusions, which means nothing in the solution of the great problems of our life, is a terrible waste of energy, the most intense form of selfishness, and leads to degeneracy of mind. It is this nonsense which is demoralizing our nation. What we need now is strong common sense, a public spirit and a philosophy and religion which will make us *men*.'

The gentleman on hearing this was overcome by emotion and understood the saving meaning of the Swami's words. He assured him that he would thenceforth shape his life accordingly.<sup>18</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna often mentions past wrong impressions or inimical tendencies as obstacles to spiritual progress. One day a visiting young man asked him :

'If the world is of the nature of illusion—magic—then why does not one get rid of it ?'

Sri Ramakrishna : 'It is due to the *samskaras*, inborn tendencies. Repeated births in this world of maya make one believe that maya is real.

'Let me tell you how powerful inborn tendencies are. A prince had, in a previous birth, been the son of a washerman. While playing with his chums in his incarnation as the prince, he said to them : "Stop those games. I will show you a new one. I shall lie on my belly, and you will beat the clothes on my back as the washerman does, making a swishing sound."

'Many youngsters come here. But only few long for God. These few are born with a spiritual tendency. They shudder at the talk of marriage. Niranjana has said from boyhood that he will not marry.

'More than twenty years ago two young men used to come here from Baranagore. One was named Govinda Pal and the other Gopal Sen. They had been devoted to God since boyhood. The very mention of marriage would frighten

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, Number 377

<sup>18</sup> *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, pp. 262-3



them. Gopal used to have bhava samadhi. He would shrink from worldly people as a mouse from a cat.

'What are the other youngsters about? Money, house, carriage, clothes, and finally marriage. These are the things that keep them busy. If they want to marry, at the outset they make inquiries about the girl. They want to find out for themselves whether she is beautiful.'<sup>19</sup>

Man has in his subconscious both good and bad inherent tendencies. These were manufactured by his own thoughts and actions in past lives and the present life. As the good tendencies help, the bad ones impede his spiritual progress. Giving an explanation of how these tendencies are created and how the bad ones are to be countered, Swami Vivekananda teaches:

'...each action is like the pulsations quivering over the surface of the lake [of the mind-stuff]. The vibration dies out, and what is left? The *samskaras*, the impressions. When a large number of these impressions are left on the mind, they coalesce and become a habit. It is said, "Habit is second nature;" it is first nature also, and the whole nature of man; everything that we are is the result of habit. That gives us consolation, because, if it is only habit, we can make and unmake it at any time. The *samskaras* are left by these vibrations passing out of our mind, each one of them leaving its result. Our character is the sum-total of these marks, and according as some particular wave prevails, one takes that tone. If good prevails, one becomes good; if wickedness, one becomes wicked; if joyfulness, one becomes happy. The only remedy for bad habits is counter habits; all the bad habits that have left their impressions are to be controlled by good habits. Go on doing good, thinking holy thoughts continuously; that is the only way to suppress base impressions. Never say any man is hopeless, because he only represents a character, a bundle of

habits, which can be checked by new and better ones. Character is repeated habits, and repeated habits alone can reform character.'<sup>20</sup>

Speaking in general, by these practices we can counter the wrong tendencies of the past and present. We must not forget that besides acquiring wrong tendencies from our past, we also go on manufacturing more of them in the present. We must see that we do not manufacture any more new ones. How do we do that? One teaching of Swamiji will give the answer: 'We are what our thoughts have made us; so take care of what you think.'<sup>21</sup> If we do not stop adding to wrong tendencies now, we cannot really fight those of the past. In the course of isolating the past wrong tendencies, we can gradually counter those of the present by following this teaching of Patañjali: 'To obstruct thoughts which are inimical to Yoga, contrary thoughts should be brought.'<sup>22</sup>

Commenting on this aphorism, Vyāsa says:

'When during the practice of the restraints and observances, sinful thoughts give trouble, the mind is to be habituated to the contrary ideas. When for instance thoughts of sins involving injury to others, appear in the mind of the wise devotee—such as "I shall kill the evil-doer", "I shall tell lies", "I shall appropriate this man's wealth", "I shall spoil this man's wife", "Why should I not possess the things which this man possesses?"—when touched by the high fever of these sins which tend to push him along the wrong path, he should habituate himself to think upon their contraries. He should entertain such ideas as these: "Being burnt up as I am in the fires of the world, I have taken refuge in the practice of Yoga, giving as it does protection to all living beings. Were I to take

<sup>20</sup> *The Complete Works*, Vol. I (1963), pp. 207-8

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, Vol. VII (1958), p. 14

<sup>22</sup> *Yoga-Sūtras*, II. 33

<sup>19</sup> *The Gospel*, p. 549

up the sins, having once given them up, I should certainly be a dog in my conduct. As the dog licks up his own vomit, so should I be acting, if I were to take up again what I have once given up.”<sup>23</sup>

Besides practising this method, the aspirant can derive great benefit from holy company. In holy company, not only are one's past good impressions awakened, but wrong tendencies are also attenuated. The good tendencies of the mind can also be strengthened by giving it wholesome food—holy thoughts—by reading inspiring religious literature.

Because past tendencies are very deeply rooted in us, we need to cultivate good tendencies with unflagging zeal, in as many ways as possible. There is no room for complacency. This is the gist of all authentic spiritual teachings.

The secret of all spiritual progress is in meditation on the chosen ideal. Everyone who has sincerely tried to practise meditation must have come upon one inevitable phenomenon—distraction. Distractions not only impede the process of meditation but also tend to scatter the very inclination or enthusiasm for it. One feels disheartened, not knowing what to do with the distractions or oneself. Some in panic over-react to this inner situation, with the result that distractions, instead of decreasing, come up in howling hordes. Then in dismay they settle down in dark despair and give up any further attempt at meditation, strongly feeling that they are none the better for having ever attempted meditation!

Despair, however, never helps anyone to remove distractions. What helps is the careful application of proven methods taught by saints from the store of their ex-

perience. Once a nun wrote Brother Lawrence about her distractions in meditation and asked his guidance. What he replied can help any aspirant in such a situation no matter what his religion, because the teachings are based on universal facts of spiritual life and sound psychological principles.

Brother Lawrence wrote:

‘You tell me nothing new: you are not the only person troubled by distractions. The mind is given to roving, but the will is mistress of all our faculties, and must recall it and redirect it to its last end in God.

“When the mind is untrained and has got into bad habits of wandering and dissipation, they are most difficult to overcome, and frequently draw us, against our wills, to the things of earth. I believe that one remedy is to confess our faults, humbling ourselves before God. I advise you to avoid much talking in prayer; long speeches often induce distractions. Hold yourself in prayer before God like a dumb or paralysed beggar at a rich man's gate; rivet your attention on keeping your mind in the presence of the Lord. If it wanders away from Him, don't get upset; to worry about it serves rather to distraction than to recollection: let the will bring back the mind quietly. If you persevere in this way, God will have pity on you.

‘One way of becoming recollected easily at the time of prayer, and of remaining so, is to keep the mind under control at other times—that is, keep it strictly in the presence of God. Being accustomed to think of Him often, it will then be more easy to remain undisturbed in prayer, or at any rate to recover from distractions.’<sup>24</sup>

The deeper the meditation the greater is the progress. The depth of meditation depends on the quality of concentration. Concentration in its turn depends on the state of the mind. If the mind is tossed by attach-

<sup>23</sup> *Sacred Books of the Hindus* (Ed. by B. D. Basu), Vol. IV: *Patañjali's Yoga-Sūtras* (tr. by Rama Prasada, Pub. by Bhuvanewari Asrama, Bahadurganj, 1912), p. 161

<sup>24</sup> *The Practice of the Presence of God*, (Templegate Publishers, Springfield, Ill., 1963), pp. 36, 37

ments and aversions, concentration becomes a difficult task and meditation a far cry.

Our identification with the body and attachment to the world force us to seek the pleasures of the body and the increase of possessions. We become slaves of whatever gives pleasure to our bodies; and what we possess we become possessed by.

Becoming victims of this process, we have perforce to give away more and more of our mind to the world and its claims. Such a mind cannot be concentrated.

Sri Ramakrishna never tired of warning aspirants against this pair of obstacles to yoga. The substance of his teaching on this point is put briefly here:

“‘Woman’ and ‘gold’ alone are the obstacles: they make them [the aspirants] deviate from the path of yoga and drag them into worldliness.”<sup>25</sup>

“The term ‘woman and gold’, which has been used throughout in a collective sense, occurs again and again in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna to designate the chief impediments to spiritual progress. This favourite expression of the Master, ‘kaminikanchan’, has often been misconstrued. By it he meant only ‘lust and greed’, the baneful influence of which retards the aspirant’s spiritual growth. He used the word ‘kamini’ or ‘woman’, as a concrete term for the sex instinct when addressing his men devotees. He advised women, on the other hand, to shun ‘man’. ‘Kanchan’, or ‘gold’, symbolizes greed, which is the other obstacle to spiritual life.”<sup>26</sup>

Lust symbolizes man’s psychic bondage, greed symbolizes man’s material bondages. These two are man’s most formidable obstacles to spiritual progress.

In the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* there are exhaustive discussions about the nature of these obstacles and how to overcome them. In brief, Sri Ramakrishna teaches the householder aspirants :

“‘Woman’ and ‘gold’ will not be able to harm you in the least if you go home and lead a householder’s life after increasing your spiritual strength and developing love for the Lotus Feet of God through the practice of spiritual discipline in solitude.”<sup>27</sup>

He also advises them to practise discrimination :

‘... Always analyse what you see. What is there in the body of a woman? Only such things as blood, flesh, fat, entrails, and the like. Why should one love such a body?’<sup>28</sup>

As to the basic attitude that is to be cultivated toward women by earnest spiritual aspirants, he teaches :

‘All women are parts of the Divine Mother, and therefore they should be looked upon as mothers by all.

‘Women, whether naturally good or not, whether chaste or unchaste, should always be looked upon as images of the blissful Divine Mother.’<sup>29</sup>

Arjuna asked Śrī Kṛṣṇā a fundamental question, ‘Under what compulsion does a man commit sin, in spite of himself and driven as it were by force?’

Śrī Kṛṣṇa said : ‘It is desire, it is wrath, which springs from rajas. Know that this is our enemy here, all devouring and the cause of all sin.’<sup>30</sup>

Spiritual aspirants are commonly persuaded that lust is an obstacle to spiritual progress, but there are many who do not seem to realize that anger is just as devastating an obstacle. Religious people exhibiting flames of anger at the slightest provocation, are common sights. Some even seem to think that precisely because they are religious they have a special justification for exhibiting what is called ‘righteous anger’, so that the world may not decay altogether.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 592-3

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p. 40

<sup>29</sup> *Sayings*, Numbers 435, 436

<sup>30</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā*, III. 36, 37

<sup>25</sup> *The Gospel*, p. 40

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p. 6 fn.

But it is good to remember that as there is nothing like holy incontinence, there is nothing like righteous anger. (Here we are not referring to the simulated anger of saints, prophets, and saviours.) Every lapse into anger is a spiritual retrogression, a temporary loss of self-control and sanity, which destroys calmness of mind—all retarding spiritual progress. Besides, a religious man's anger is often characterized by a sort of self-righteousness which is nothing but hardened egotism, that high mound blocking the door to the shrine of the Divine.

So Sri Ramakrishna warns: 'It is not lust alone that one should be afraid of in the life of the world. There is also anger. Anger arises when obstacles are placed in the way of desire.'<sup>31</sup>

One of the ways of getting rid of proneness to anger is to clearly comprehend the fact that it is as destructive to our spiritual sensibilities as is lust. If we can get rid of the sense of superiority, self-righteousness, and possessiveness, through exercise of discrimination and prayer, we may gradually cut at the roots of habitual anger. Thus genuine humility is of great help in curbing the menaces of this impulsive enemy within man.

There is another obstacle to spiritual progress—a treacherous one. We call it 'treacherous' because without looking like an obstacle it acts as a formidable one. And this is complacency—our tendency to be satisfied with ever so little, when what we could get is immeasurable. In a letter to a nun, Brother Lawrence, quoting the opinions of an exalted friar, wrote:

'He often complains of our blindness, exclaiming at our piteousness in that we are satisfied with so little. God, he says, has infinite treasure to bestow, and we are satisfied by a passing moment of devout feeling; we are blind, and our

blindness stays the hand of God when He would pour out abundance of grace. But when He finds a soul imbued with a living faith He floods it with grace, which, like a stream dammed up and finding a new outlet, spreads abundant waters far and wide.

'Yes, indeed, we often stop these healing waters by our indifference to them. Let us check their course no longer, my dear Mother; let us go down into them, destroy the bank, and make a way for grace; let us atone for lost time; may be we have but little longer to live; death is never far away, we die once only, let us be prepared.

'Again I say, let us go into these waters ourselves; time flies by and every man is responsible for himself. I believe that you have taken such effectual measures that you will not be taken unawares; you do well, for that is our business in life. Nevertheless we must go on working, because not to advance in the spiritual life is to go back. But those on whom the Holy Spirit has breathed go forward even when they sleep. If the vessel of our soul be still battered by winds and storms, let us wake the Lord who sleeps therein, and He will quickly calm the waves.'<sup>32</sup>

The reference here is to Christ asleep in the boat while crossing the sea of Galilee. In St. Mark's Gospel (IV. 35-41) we read:

'And the same day, when the even was come, he saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side. And when they had sent away the multitude they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships.

'And there arose a great storm of wind and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow; and they awake him and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish? And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

<sup>31</sup> *The Gospel*, p. 185

<sup>32</sup> *op. cit.*, pp. 20, 21

'And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith? And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'

When we are battered by opposing winds and storms which impede spiritual progress, instead of making futile efforts at halting the storms, we should waken the sleeping Lord within, in any manner we can, and tell Him, 'Master, carest thou not that we perish?' The awakened Lord will then rebuke the storm and still it.

It is important to remember that 'not to advance in the spiritual life is to go back'. Therefore, in his parable of the wood-cutter,<sup>33</sup> Sri Ramakrishna laid so much emphasis on 'going forward'.

Going forward is possible only through unremitting methodical practice of spiritual disciplines. Swami Brahmananda teaches:

'An aspirant should first learn about the spiritual path from some great soul, then follow it methodically. If he does it haphazardly, he cannot make much progress. If he gives it up again, he will have to make twice as much effort to gain the desired result. But, of course, no effort is wasted. Lust, anger, greed, gradually leave a man who practises spiritual disciplines.'<sup>34</sup>

One's spiritual difficulties are very much one's own. They may not be at all similar to those of his own brother or most intimate friend. And these difficulties may change their appearances in a baffling variety of ways, so much so that it is impossible to prescribe a particular remedy for each phase. Neither can we nor need we foreknow the remedies, for we have no way of knowing

now what difficulties may confront us in future. What however is important to us is to know the broad remedial principles, taking our firm stand on which we may successfully fight every form of difficulty that may confront us at any place or time.

Here are these main principles:

(1) An aspirant should always remember that an obstacle is never more powerful than the power which is within him, though perhaps not yet known to him.

(2) He should know that in spiritual life every inch of the ground will have to be conquered in the teeth of opposition; and no other qualities are more needed in this life than patience and single-minded perseverance.

(3) In difficulty, one should not be in a hurry—for in a hurry one seldom acts properly—, but calm, circumspect, and prayerful.

(4) In difficulty, one should never submit to it, nor be frightened by it. As one cannot smash an atom with a hammer, one cannot solve spiritual difficulties by fretting and fuming. One must cultivate the needed dexterity as taught in the scriptures.

(5) In dealing with one's difficulties and wrong movements of mind, one should not make the mistake of identifying oneself with them. One should draw back, detach and dissociate oneself, and look upon them as separate from his inner being.

(6) Above all, one should never be complacent and 'stay the hand of God when He would pour out abundance of grace'.

The obstacles to spiritual life, when handled properly, serve to strengthen an aspirant's spiritual fibre. No one knows what is his strength if he has not passed through rough weather. But he who has gone through storm and fire, stood and withstood, will shine, and great will be his joy.

<sup>33</sup> *The Gospel*, p. 406

<sup>34</sup> *The Eternal Companion: Spiritual Teachings of Swami Brahmananda* (Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras 600004, 1945), p. 164



## PROFILES IN GREATNESS

### REFLECTIONS ON THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN—I

It has always been considered politically advantageous for American public officials to set a good example as God-fearing, church-going citizens. Most Presidents of the United States have had some kind of church affiliation, and have attended religious services with some regularity. Not all have been deeply spiritual men.

Abraham Lincoln was a notable exception. He never was a member of any church or religious body. He never subscribed to any creed. Some who thought they knew him well considered him an unbeliever. Yet he had been a daily reader of the Bible from his earliest reading days. He often quoted from it in private conversations and public addresses. More important, his actions and reactions in times of crisis pointed to an inner spiritual life and its part in shaping his character. He was more deeply religious than many so-called orthodox persons.

It may have been embarrassing to his friends and close political associates that he did not belong to any religious denomination. Henry C. Deming, a Congressman from Connecticut, once asked Lincoln why, with his obvious interest in religious matters and his familiarity with the Bible, he didn't join a church. Lincoln replied :

'When any church will inscribe over its altars, as its sole qualification for mem-

bership, the Saviour's condensed statement for substance of both law and gospel, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself", that church will I join with all my heart and soul.'<sup>1</sup>

#### LINCOLN'S INNER PRIVACY

Lincoln never had any close confidants. He was a man of profound inner privacy. His law partner, William Herndon, said that no man had a stronger belief in God than Lincoln, but because he was so often a candidate for public office he said as little about his religious opinions as possible, especially if they failed to coincide with those of the orthodox world. 'Everybody knew him and nobody knew him',<sup>2</sup> his great biographer Carl Sandburg said.

Lincoln saw life as an inseparable compound of good and evil. Sandburg quotes him as saying :

'The true rule in determining to embrace or reject anything is not whether it have any evil in it, but whether it have more of evil than of good. There are few things wholly evil or wholly good. Al-

<sup>1</sup> Carl Sandburg: Introduction to 'Lincoln's Devotional' (Channel Press, Great Neck, N.Y., 1957.), p. xiii

<sup>2</sup> Carl Sandburg: *Abraham Lincoln—The Prairie Years* (Harcourt Brace, New York, 1925-26), Vol. II, p. 307

most everything is an inseparable compound of the two, so that our best judgment of the preponderance between the two is continually demanded.'<sup>3</sup>

When he was twenty-four and living in New Salem, Illinois, he revealed a facet of his character that earned him his reputation for honesty and the nickname 'Honest Abe'. He was in business with two partners when the business failed. One of the partners absconded, the other died, and Lincoln was left to pay the bills of the partnership. He could have freed himself from the obligation by going into bankruptcy, but he wouldn't. Eventually he paid everything, but it took fifteen years of striving and self-denial.<sup>4</sup>

Lincoln had inner resources of self-reliance and independence of others in conscience as well as action. Herndon said: 'He would listen to everybody; but he rarely if ever asked for opinions. I never knew him in trying a case to ask for the advice of any lawyer he was associated with.'<sup>5</sup>

#### ON THE SIDE OF THE NEEDY

In his law practice Lincoln was always on the side of the poor and needy. He often worked without fee, or returned what he regarded as overpayment. Lord Charnwood says that he never developed even a reasonable desire to be rich: 'Wealth remained in his view a superfluity of the things one does not want.'<sup>6</sup>

In Bloomington, Illinois, passing a mansion with large pretensions to grandeur, Lincoln said that for any man to live in a house like that, must have an effect on his

character. 'If he's at all sensitive he'll feel it.'<sup>7</sup>

One judge complained that Lincoln was impoverishing the bar with his 'picayune' fees, and that fellow lawyers had reason to resent him. It was also charged that he often went to the limit of what is permissible in refusing legal aid to a cause he disapproved. He once said to a client: 'I can win your case; I can get you \$600. I can also make an honest family miserable. But I shall not take your case, and I shall not take your fee. One piece of advice I will give you gratis: go home and think seriously whether you cannot get \$600 in some honest way.'<sup>8</sup>

He refused to take advantage of subterfuge and trickery to win a case, and once withdrew a plea made by his partner on such evidence, although they stood a good chance of winning. 'Hadn't we better withdraw that plea?' he said to Herndon. 'You know it's a sham, and a sham is very often but another name for a lie. The cursed thing may come back staring us in the face long after this case is forgotten.'<sup>9</sup>

#### LINCOLN'S INTEGRITY

An old friend and fellow lawyer, Judge David Davis, in an address he gave a month after Lincoln's death, added this further testimony to his former associate's integrity as a lawyer:

'The framework of his mental and moral being was honesty, and a wrong case was poorly defended by him. The ability which some eminent lawyers possess of explaining away the bad points of a case by ingenious sophistry was denied him. In order to bring into full activity his great powers it was necessary that he should be convinced of the

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 307

<sup>4</sup> Lord Charnwood: *Abraham Lincoln* (Henry Holt & Co., New York, 1916), p. 67

<sup>5</sup> William Herndon: *Life of Lincoln* (World Publishing Co., 2231 West 110th St., Cleveland, 1949), p. 432

<sup>6</sup> Charnwood: *loc. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> Sandburg: *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 305

<sup>8</sup> Charnwood: *op. cit.*, p. 107

<sup>9</sup> Herndon: *op. cit.*, p. 267

right and justice of the matter which he advocated.'<sup>10</sup>

Lincoln served one term (1847-48) in Congress. This was not long enough to bring out his full powers, but he was able to meet the nation's leaders and measure his own capabilities. He conscientiously opposed the Mexican war which he denounced as politically and unconstitutionally begun by President Polk. This has been described as 'an extraordinarily clear, strong and upright presentment' of the complex and unpopular case against the war. His Whig constituents were offended. Opposition within his own party was so strong that he did not seek renomination when his term expired.

Disillusioned with politics, Lincoln settled down to the practice of law, working as he had never worked before. Between 1849 and 1854 he made rapid progress. No man had greater powers of application. He once said that the time he spent in school would aggregate one whole school year; and so he studied hard to make up the deficiency. He studied the law and was a close reasoner. He also studied and mastered Euclid. 'I am never easy', he said, 'when I am handling a thought, till I have bounded it north, bounded it south, bounded it east, and bounded it west.'

#### LINCOLN'S PERSPICUITY

Leonard Swett, an Illinois lawyer who knew Lincoln well, said that the secret of his power lay in the clearness and perspicuity of his statements. 'When Lincoln had stated a case it was already more than half argued, and the point more than half won', he said.<sup>11</sup>

There were other facets of this manysided man. Much of his time as a lawyer was spent away from home, accompanying the

judge from court to court in the Eighth Judicial Circuit, comprising fourteen counties in central and eastern Illinois. Here his daily companions were judges, lawyers, clients and politicians. He would be away from home for weeks at a time. It was here that he developed his natural talent as a storyteller into a fine art. In this he is said to have been without an equal, and he possessed an equally unique gift for mimicry.

Then there was his melancholy. He could be sad and humorous by turns. He could entertain individuals or gatherings of men with stories and then relapse into one of his frequent periods of gloom. A friend, Jonathan Birch, reported that an hour after Lincoln had been in a court clerk's office entertaining a crowd and himself shaken with laughter, he might be seen in the same office in a changed mood:

'His chair would be leaning back against the wall, his feet drawn up and resting on the rounds, so that his knees and chair were about on a level, his eyes no longer sparkling with merriment, but sad and downcast, and his hands clasped around his knees. There, drawn up within himself, he would sit for hours at a time. No one ever thought of breaking the spell by speech; he had thrown about himself a barrier no one dared to break through.'<sup>12</sup>

#### THE EMERGENCE OF LINCOLN

The emergence of the new Lincoln began with the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. This legislation had been adopted in 1820 as a device to satisfy both the pro-slavery and the anti-slavery factions of the country. When Missouri was admitted to the Union as a 'slave' state the feelings of the Southern pro-slavery elements were appeased. Maine, which had just detached itself from Massachusetts, was admitted as a 'free' state, calming the North. There were now twelve 'free' and twelve 'slave'

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 270

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 431

<sup>12</sup> Sandburg: *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 479



states and it was agreed by both factions that slavery thereafter would be prohibited in all new states north of the latitude of the Southern boundary of Missouri. This seemed likely to put to rest the problem of the extension of slavery for the foreseeable future.

But in 1854, primarily through the efforts of Stephen A. Douglas, U.S. Senator from Illinois (a free state), the Missouri Compromise was repealed—a staggering blow to the anti-slavery cause. Slavery was no longer explicitly forbidden north of Missouri's Southern boundary, but could be adopted or rejected by a vote of residents in the new territories.

When Lincoln returned to politics in 1854 it was as one of the founders of the new Republican Party which was to succeed the old Whig party on the national scene. Lincoln had always hated slavery and had often spoken out against it, but now it was a more sober, more mature Lincoln whose voice was raised in Illinois. Crowds who attended political gatherings, that fall, heard him speak with the deep conviction that the nation was in danger. He spoke without any of his former clowning, and with an eloquence he had never before achieved.

#### MODERATION TOWARDS SLAVERY

Some of Lincoln's supporters would have liked him to be less tolerant of slavery. But he refused to be goaded into impatience or violence as John Brown had been. Brown had struck out against slavery without noticeably hastening its end. Lincoln would not make that mistake. He was convinced that slavery was wrong and that it would be useless to seek a common ground with those who said it was right. But he would not attempt to force issues before they were ripe. He denounced slavery in his 'House Divided' speech, but did not urge its overthrow. 'His whole soul', Lord Charnwood

wrote, 'expressed itself in a policy of deadly moderation towards it. He preached anti-slavery without malice or hatred toward the slave-owner.'

Lincoln knew that slavery's only chance of survival lay in its expansion into new territories. The South had been dominant in Congress and in the country when there had been fewer states, but this superiority was being whittled away as the free states of the northwest grew in number and population.

Cotton growing as practised in the South exhausted the soil. Small planters, unable to restore the soil by rest and enrichment, sold off their lands to larger landowners and left in search of virgin lands. This meant a continuous search for fresh soil and also a continuous pressure to extend slavery into new territories of the expanding nation.

#### THE 'HOUSE DIVIDED' SPEECH

In 1858 when Lincoln was seeking the Republican nomination for U.S. Senator, in opposition to the popular Senator Douglas, he delivered an address which his political friends and associates thought unwise. Some called it radical; others, a 'fool's utterance', and 'ahead of its time'. Today the 'House Divided' speech seems self-evident truth. But friends with whom Lincoln discussed it before its delivery said it would drive votes away. Lincoln listened politely but declined to alter or abridge. He delivered the speech and won the nomination.

Delegates to the convention which met in Springfield, Ill., on June 16 heard him say:

'If we could know where we are and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do and how to do it. We are now far into the fifth year since a policy was initiated with the avowed object and confident promise of putting an end to slavery agitation. Under the creation of that policy, that agitation has not only not ceased, but has constantly augmented. In my opinion it

will not cease until a crisis shall have been reached and passed. "A house divided against itself cannot stand." I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push forward till it shall become lawful alike in all States, old as well as new, North as well as South.<sup>13</sup>

#### LINCOLN'S MAGNETISM

Lincoln was not impressive at first sight. He was six feet four inches in height, but lean and ungainly in figure. His voice, Herndon said, was 'shrill, piping and unpleasant'. He was careless in attire and his clothes hung loosely on his great frame. When he rose to address courts or juries, or gatherings of people, he was awkward at first, and it seemed a great effort to adjust himself to his surroundings. But as he gathered momentum in his speech, his voice would mellow, his movements become easy, and his figure graceful and imposing.

During the famous debates with Senator Douglas, a New York *Evening Post* reporter gave this appraisal :

'In repose I must confess that "Long Abe's" appearance is *not* comely. But stir him up and the fire of genius plays on every feature. His eye glows and sparkles, every lineament, now so ill-formed, grows brilliant and expressive, and you have before you a man of rare power and magnetic influence. He takes the people every time, and there is no getting away from his sturdy good sense, his unaffected sincerity, and the unceas-

ing play of his good humour, which accompanies his close logic, and smooths the way to conviction. Listening to him on Saturday, calmly and unprejudiced, I was convinced that he has no superior as a stump speaker. He is clear, concise and logical; his language is eloquent and in perfect command. He is altogether a more fluent speaker than Douglas, and in all the arts of debate fully his equal.'<sup>14</sup>

Appraising Lincoln's performance in the debates with Douglas, Lord Charnwood wrote :

'Passages abound in these speeches which to almost any literate taste are arresting for the simple beauty of their English, a beauty characteristic of one who had learned to reason with Euclid and learned to feel and to speak with the authors of the Bible. And in their own kind they were a classic and probably unsurpassed achievement... In expressing the result of thought so far deeper than that of most men, he achieved a clearness of expression which very few writers, and those among the greatest, have excelled...'<sup>15</sup>

Lincoln won the popular vote that year, but was defeated in the Illinois Legislature, where the contest was decided, because of the apportionment law then in effect. But in their political results, the debates were of far-reaching importance. Douglas won another term in the Senate, but Lincoln had forced him to take positions which made him unacceptable to the Southern wing of the Democratic Party, and cost him the chance of being elected President in 1860. The debates were useful in bringing the slavery issue to a head and focusing national attention upon the emerging figure of Abraham Lincoln. In any case, Lincoln had set his sights on the Presidential race of 1860 and was not deeply concerned about his defeat for the Senate.

<sup>13</sup> *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (Rutgers Univ. Press, New Brunswick, N.J., 1953), Vol. II, p. 461

<sup>14</sup> Sandburg: *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 141

<sup>15</sup> Charnwood: *op. cit.*, pp. 132-3

## WARNING ON SLAVERY

After 1860 the Democratic Party was split in two over the slavery issue. The Southern Democrats wanted slavery. Northern Democrats, not daring to go too far, temporized with it. 'The fate of America', Lord Charnwood wrote, 'may be said to have depended in the early months of 1860 on whether the nominee of the Republican Party was a man who could maintain its principles with irresolution, or with obstinacy, or with firm moderation.'<sup>16</sup>

But although Lincoln would force no issue, he was always uncompromising in his opposition to slavery; and pro-slavery leaders in the South knew what to expect from him if he became President. He never abandoned his central argument: that slavery must not be permitted to expand. And it was his refusal to surrender on the issue of extension of slavery in the territories, that brought the gathering storm of the Civil War to a head.

In a letter to a committee in Boston which had invited him to speak there in 1859, Lincoln wrote:

'...This is a world of compensation; and he who would be no slave must consent to have no slave. Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves; and under a just God cannot long retain it.'<sup>17</sup>

During their debates Douglas had told audiences that he didn't care whether slavery was voted up or voted down, and had shown in many of his speeches a callous disregard and want of sympathy for the Negro. With eloquence, logic and compassion, Lincoln addressed a gathering in Edwardsville, Illinois, on Sept. 11, 1858, in a speech crowded with implications:

'When by all means you have succeeded in dehumanizing the Negro; when you have put him down and made it impos-

sible for him to be but as the beasts of the field; when you have extinguished his soul, and placed him where the ray of hope is blown out in the darkness that broods over the damned, are you quite sure the demon you have roused will not turn back and rend you? What constitutes the bulwark of our liberty and independence? It is not our frowning battlements, our bristling seacoasts, the guns of our war steamers, or the strength of our gallant army. These are not our reliance against the resumption of tyranny in our land. All of these may be turned against our liberties without making us stronger or weaker for the struggle.'

'Our reliance is in the love of liberty which God has planted in our bosoms. Our defence is in the preservation of the spirit which prizes liberty as the heritage of *all men, in all lands, everywhere*. Destroy this spirit and you have planted the seeds of despotism around your own doors. Familiarize yourself with the chains of bondage and you are preparing your own limbs to wear them.'<sup>18</sup>

## LINCOLN LEAVES SPRINGFIELD

When after his successful election campaign in 1860—built on these high principles, vindicated by the people's native love of freedom and truth—Lincoln left Springfield for Washington and his Inauguration as President, most of the Southern States had either passed ordinances of secession or were in the process of doing so. That day, February 11, 1861, standing on the platform of a coach at the end of his train at the outset of the journey from which he never returned, Lincoln spoke briefly and movingly to his old neighbours and friends, about a thousand of whom had come to see him off:

'My friends, no one, not in my situation, can appreciate my feeling of sadness at this parting. To this place, and the

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, p. 160

<sup>17</sup> Sandburg: *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 182

<sup>18</sup> *The Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 95

kindness of these people, I owe everything. Here I have lived for a quarter of a century, and have passed from a young to an old man. Here my children have been born and one is buried. I now leave, not knowing when or whether ever I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of that Divine Being who ever attended him, I cannot succeed. With that as-

sistance I cannot fail. Trusting in Him who can go with me, and remain with you, and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well. To His care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell.<sup>19</sup>

—C. H. MACLACHLAN

<sup>19</sup> Charnwood: op. cit., p. 203

## SUPREME NEED FOR HUMAN EXCELLENCE— NEO-BRAHMANAHOOD

DR. K. S. RANGAPPA AND A. V. VENKATASUBBAN

[Glancing at the caption of this article some of our readers may be tempted to wonder if the *Prabuddha Bharata* has turned Brahminic in a single month! Then we hasten to assure that the Journal steadily continues to be what its illustrious founder Swami Vivekananda intended it to be, namely, Vedāntic. Vedānta, as our readers know, stands above all for the manifestation of the divinity inherent in man—in fact in all living beings—through the cultivation of human excellence, by the practice of the highest spiritual principles. This in short is what is attempted in this brief paper by the learned and well-meaning authors. Readers of Vivekananda's Indian lectures are likely to know that he pointed out that 'from the highest man to the lowest Pariah, every one in this country has to try and become the ideal Brahmin'. In another lecture he said: 'The Brahminhood is the ideal of humanity in India, as wonderfully put forward by Shankaracharya at the beginning of his commentary on the *Gita*, where he speaks about the reason for Krishna's coming as a preacher for the preservation of Brahminhood, of Brahminness. That was the great end. This Brahmin, the man of God, he who has known Brahman, the ideal man, the perfect man, must remain; he must not go.'

Along such lines this article is a rational and scripture-authenticated plea to all humanity for reviving in contemporary life, individual and collective, the virtue, serenity, and God-centredness of the ideal brāhmaṇa of ancient times. Dr. K. S. Rangappa, M.Sc., Ph. D., is a writer and scientist, and Sri A. V. Venkatasubban is a Sanskrit scholar; both are retired officers of the Government of India. This article was originally presented as a paper at the First Bharatiya Sanskriti Sammelan held in March-April 1972 at Kurukshetra, India. —Ed.]

### NEED FOR INCISIVE THINKING

The necessity for reformation in social conduct would perhaps be questioned by very few today, although the shape of proposed change will depend on the generation to which one belongs.

It is the nature of elders in every age to be alarmed at the contemporary situation and to fear for the future of their heirs. But it is pertinent to ask if the alarm today is as relatively groundless as it used to be in the past.

In terms of social behaviour, the western hemisphere is in the grip of a wave of violence and moral unsettlement and confusion of values. And, thanks to the efficiency of mass communication and the licence enjoyed by the communication media in the name of freedom, India has to expect to be attacked more and more fiercely by that wave. Student violence and rising promiscuity, and drink and drug addiction are already upon us in urban centres. The clamour is gaining strength for a 'permissive society' in the name of 'enlightenment' and 'art' and 'liberal thought'. And youth is insisting on 'managing its own education' and on 'running the government for all'.

In earlier days, youthful ebullition used to have time to sober down with experience, sift out vaporous enthusiasms and opt for long-range social values before putting its hand to the building of a new world. But the staggering pace of change today denies it the chance to grow out of the phase of impatience and protest into that of knowledge and discipline, discrimination and vision, so indispensable for viable contributions to society.

If India is not to be overwhelmed by the 'new wave', and the world is to have a ray of light to guide it, the spiritual moorings which have enabled India to withstand onslaughts of conquering civilizations in the past, must be renewed in every generation. Few will perhaps contradict the fact that the absence of attention to our abundantly existing spiritual heritage is responsible for the evils that are raising their heads today. Although there is a school of thought which holds that the revolt of youth is only a reaction to corruption and hypocrisy as a way of life among the elders, this amounts to a restatement of the same fact.

The heritage we refer to is in essence the recognition by the ancients that the senses are futile as means of achieving lasting happiness; that the importance attached to

external living as a way to inner peace is so much blind waste.<sup>1</sup> This discovery led to the quest for the source of unbroken happiness and serenity. When it was demonstrated to be beyond the reach of the senses, it was most fortunate for mankind that a distinctive pathway to perfect tranquillity could be carved out by the sages of India. This inward probing and seeking—the keenest intellectual exercise and spiritual discipline placed before man—is the life of the brāhmaṇa, the ideal man.

#### CLASSICAL DEFINITION

The seminal meaning of brāhmaṇa is: one who seeks Brahman, the ultimate Truth, the Supreme. It can also be: one who is aware of Brahman.<sup>2</sup> To acquire knowledge of the ultimate Truth, and finally to realize the Supreme in all that exists, a tried discipline is enjoined, the path to the ideal brāhmaṇahood.

Obviously Brahman is not the immediate goal of every soul. Much less is everyone prepared to go through the rigorous control of body and mind demanded of the seeker of Brahman. The religion of the Neo-brāhmaṇa has therefore to be the spiritual order of the hardy few—the few with the deep urge and strength of mind to opt for the apparently difficult life.

#### ESSENCE OF THE IDEAL

Now, what precisely is the path of the brāhmaṇa or the ideal man? Simply put, it is only logical that one who is aiming at the ultimate Truth is dedicated to truth in every aspect, in every thought and action of life.<sup>3</sup> In other words, the religion of the Neo-brāhmaṇa enjoins truth as the foremost tenet of living for its adherents. And

<sup>1</sup> vide *Bhagavad-gītā*. V. 22; II. 43-4

<sup>2</sup> vide *Yājñavalkya-smṛti*. I. 6. 8; *Smṛtipārijātam*: *Sāntājah Smṛti*; *Mahābhārata*, 'Vanaparvan' cccxii. 105-9

<sup>3</sup> vide *Gītā*. XII. 3-4, 13-14

it may not be necessary at all to insist on more. For one sworn to truth surely cannot stoop to selfish acts, or to acquisitions beyond that of his poorest neighbour, without naggings of conscience. Convinced that the rule of the senses cries 'Death!' to truth, he strives to escape from their insatiable lure. To one who is aware, at least intellectually, of Brahman in all that exists, attachment to oneself and one's own—and indifference to others—comes to appear increasingly incongruous. Compassion to the suffering and the urge to alleviate their misery tend to dominate his conduct.<sup>4</sup> All these basic virtues, it is worth repeating, spring in the Neo-brāhmaṇa as in olden times from adherence to just one principle—loyalty to truth.

#### FEASIBILITY OF THE IDEAL

All this would sound Utopian if it were not for the fact that many have lived at the exalted level of the brāhmaṇa in many lands throughout the ages. Thoreau and Tolstoy, Gandhi and Einstein, Toyohiko Kagawa, and Albert Schweitzer—to mention only a few recent examples—were surely men who struggled to this end. They were *karmayogīs*, devoted seekers who lived and died in the great quest. Historical figures who actually achieved the ultimate through the brahmanic path are also well known—Ramakrishna, Ramana Maharshi, Vivekananda—and there are numerous others who somehow avoided public recognition. They are standing witnesses to not only the potential of the brahmanic path but also its feasibility within the ambit of human living.

#### CODE AND CONDUCT OF NEO-BRAHMANAS

It is best to be concrete and explicit in regard to the way of life of the Neo-brāhmaṇa (aspirant for the ideal). It has earlier

been described how all humane traits spring from adherence to a basic tenet—devotion to truth. The Neo-brāhmaṇa has not merely nothing to hide, but nothing to keep back as his own. This was how gurus and sages of old—leaders of society—lived. The ideal brāhmaṇa's house was closed to none. Nor was his knowledge. What he had was available to all who needed it and were capable of assimilating it. No effort was devoted to acquire wealth, which to him was solely a means to an end, the end being service to all who depended on him. He accepted what was voluntarily offered by those who valued his precept and example. He had no thought for the morrow but what was due from him to his pupils and his community, which was world-wide. Those who still doubt the practicability of such a life have only to dip into the biographies of any of the great ones mentioned above—for instance, Mahatma Gandhi. Immersed in the deepest spiritual quest, he eschewed self-indulgence like poison.

It is not to be assumed that the ideal of the Neo-brāhmaṇa should or can be adopted as a practical path of life by all. But at the same time it need not be feared that if adopted by only a few, its impact on the world at large would be little. The transformation that one Gandhi or Ramakrishna could effect proves that numbers count for little in matters spiritual and in their electrifying impact on the contemporary world and the generations to come.

This ideal of the brāhmaṇa was never necessarily caste-tied or hereditary (witness Janaka, Vālmīki, Nārada, Bhīṣma), and therefore need not be so now. In fact, one distinction of the Neo-brāhmaṇa ideal would be its freedom from hereditary imposition. The offspring of such a brāhmaṇa would not automatically be brāhmaṇas, although they would have the opportunity of being exposed to the culture and self-discipline of the parents. Acceptance by the Neo-brāhmaṇa

<sup>4</sup> *vide* *ibid.*, V. 25; VI. 29-32

fold would be governed only by each seeker's fitness for the particular way of life and its declared spiritual objective.

The spiritual Order of Neo-brāhmanas would be analogous in certain respects to the *guru-kulas* of old. Entry to the fold would be voluntary, while, once having joined, the code of conduct would be imperative. But the Neo-brāhmaṇa fold would be less rigid, in that those who felt at any time that they could not measure up to its standards or had mistaken their calling, would be free to withdraw from it. Those who qualified through an apprenticeship would no doubt accept the normal life of domesticity and active profession, but adhere to the fundamental aims and discipline of Neo-brāhmanas. In other words, acceptance into the Neo-brāhmaṇa following would be a 'life peerage' for the aspirant.

Neo-brāhmanas would not—unlike the traditional Hindu monks, or even Christian missionaries, etc.—make of their faith their

sole occupation. On the contrary they would, through enlightened knowledge, adherence to truth and dedication to world-welfare, function as inspired torch-bearers in their chosen walks of life—from street-sweeper to prime minister. The spreading wave of benefit to society from the dynamic presence of Neo-brāhmanas in varied spheres, can hardly be questioned.

There is little doubt that there are many today who are convinced of the need for a moral transformation, and also of valid means by which it can be achieved. But each feels helpless in his isolation. Kindred souls banded together in a dedicated spiritual Order of pristine brāhmaṇahood—a life simple and indifferent to want; a life of contentment through curtailment of want, of joy through intellectual and spiritual achievements and service to fellow beings—can attain the goal so much desired by every man in his heart.

## EXCURSIONS INTO UDDHAVA-GITĀ

SWAMI YATISWARANANDA

### DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE BOUND SOUL AND THE LIBERATED ONE

The sixth chapter opens with Śrī Kṛṣṇa's answer to Uddhava's question about the characteristics of a liberated man. As an illustration, Śrī Kṛṣṇa uses the famous Upaniṣadic imagery of two birds.<sup>1</sup> In the Upaniṣad the two birds stand for Īśvara and jīva respectively. But here, though the bird which eats the fruits of the tree stands for the bound jīva, the second bird which looks on unattached stands for the liberated man: that is the difference.

The characteristics of the liberated soul

narrated in the stanzas 8 to 17 of the sixth chapter<sup>2</sup> are an echo of the famous lines in the second chapter of *Bhagavad-gītā* describing the qualities of a man of steady wisdom. The fundamental characteristic of the liberated man is detachment of his self from identification with his body and the objects around him. This is an experience which can be known fully only by him alone. But this experience is apparent in all his actions and attitudes. It is these that are described in the above verses. What

<sup>1</sup> *Mundaka-upaniṣad*, III. i. 1-2

<sup>2</sup> *The Last Message of Śrī Kṛṣṇa* ("L.M."). (Tr. by Swami Madhavananda, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati Himalayas, 1956).

he experiences inwardly, the others cannot know. Only when we ourselves get an experience of a higher type can we understand the nature of the consciousness he lives in.

#### THE CONDUCT OF A SPIRITUAL ASPIRANT

After listening to Śrī Kṛṣṇa's narration of the characteristics of a liberated man, Uddhava asks him:

'O You of supreme glory, O Lord, what sort of a sage do You prefer most? What kind of devotion approved by sages is most acceptable to You?'<sup>3</sup>

In answer to this question Kṛṣṇa begins to tell Uddhava about the nature and conduct of a person who is intensely devoted to God.<sup>4</sup> What is the purpose of this sort of cataloguing of the characteristics of a perfect devotee which you find repeated in many places in this book and also in other scriptural texts? Śaṅkara in his commentary on the second chapter of the *Gītā*<sup>5</sup> gives the reason why. He says that the characteristics of a liberated man are to be considered as the virtues or disciplines to be practised by the imperfect. What is a strenuous discipline for the struggling soul is an embellishment to the perfected man. Hence the importance of knowing the conduct and character of an advanced soul.

The rest of the sixth chapter is devoted to giving actual instructions as to what a true devotee should do.<sup>6</sup> The main point to note in all these instructions is the importance of keeping the mind on a higher plane. The mind should never be allowed to come down. This happens when you forget the supreme ideal and get absorbed in worldly affairs. Since works and duties are unavoidable these are to be converted into means for keeping contact with the

Divine. Unless one does it, a little *japa* (repetition of a holy name) and meditation done in the morning and evening do not help much. We should remember the Lord always and the only way of doing this is to connect everything we do and think, to the Divine.

'Faith in listening to tales about Me, O Uddhava, meditating on Me, offering everything received unto Me, and surrendering oneself in service to Me; the recounting of My lives and deeds, observance of My special days, festivities in My temples with songs, dance and instrumental music in company (etc., are to be practised).'<sup>7</sup>

It is very dangerous to let the mind remain vacant or to brood over the past. If we allow the mind to remain unoccupied, it will go on thinking useless thoughts, brooding over past experiences. All these do no good to anybody. If you get into such a mood, at once take up reading some good book, or do some selfless service to somebody. You will find that that mood will soon pass. Otherwise, if you just sit and brood over the past, you not only waste time but produce self-created obstacles. The importance of serious studies in religious life can never be overemphasized. They are very important for most of the aspirants. It is presumptuous to think that studies are no longer necessary for you, that you can attain everything through your meditation. Meditation no doubt helps in opening up the higher centres. But all the mental and vital energies cannot be made to flow through these higher centres. A large quantity of surplus energy is left at the lower centres and if these are not channeled through some creative work, it may lead to unnecessary disturbance of mind. Studies and selfless work should be looked upon as a form of spiritual practice. They

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, VI. 26

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, VI. 29-33

<sup>5</sup> Preface to the commentary on II. 55

<sup>6</sup> L.M., VI. 34-49

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, VI. 35-6



should form a part of any comprehensive scheme of spiritual life. They should not be left out as unnecessary or useless. If you are able to do something creative at other times, you never feel the monotony of life. Otherwise, especially for the beginners, spiritual life itself may become an intolerable monotony.

Our spiritual progress is to be judged by the type and frequency of the thought of the Divine that arises in the mind of the aspirant in the course of the day. Just sitting down for an hour's meditation once or twice a day is not enough. In the midst of our daily work and duties the thought of God must constantly bubble up. That is real spiritual life. Otherwise you remain spiritual only for an hour or two a day. The rest of the time you are no different from the ordinary worldly person.

But of course this needs conscious struggle for a long time. Unpleasant situations and people cannot be avoided and these disturb our mind. So you must learn to connect them also to the Divine. Find some place for the so-called wicked people and unfortunate circumstances in the larger plan of Divine existence. Then usually you will discover that the people don't look wicked, nor the situations so unfortunate, after all. Through steady practice you will be able to throw your ego into the background, bring the Divine to the forefront and make Him dominate your thought life. It is the clinging to our little self or ego that is the major problem in spiritual life. This should be attenuated. It is your attitude to yourself that is perhaps the greatest obstacle to your spiritual progress: not so much other people and circumstances.

#### OFFER EVERYTHING TO GOD

'What is most covetable to people in general and whatever is specially dear to oneself should be offered unto Me.

That offering produces infinite results.'<sup>8</sup>

We worship with the things we get from Him. We do not create the flower, we do not create the fire etc. These come to our hands and the way we use them makes the difference. The devotee offers everything that comes to him to the Lord. And what is the fun of that? Thereby you expand your soul. By offering to God what He gives you, you yourself feel purified and your soul grows. It assimilates a larger share of the blessings of the Lord. The more you appropriate things as your own, the narrower and more clouded your soul becomes.

Anything can be offered to the Divine: your food, new dress, car, everything you get. Before you start using it, first go and offer it to the Lord mentally. Accept it as a sacramental thing and use it with care. This purifies the mind, elevates it. God is the greatest purifier. Anything connected to Him becomes holy. By handling sanctified things we sanctify ourselves, purify ourselves. In our Āśramas (monasteries), our new publications and invitation cards are first sent to the shrine. They are put in circulation only after they are offered to the Divine. This is a good practice which you can do in your home regarding everything you buy.

The act in itself may not be great. But when hundreds of little actions of that type, hundreds of little offerings to the Divine are done, the cumulative effect of all these after some years is really tremendous. Gradually a spirit of surrender and detachment will come to stay with us. In fact, there is no other way to get this. Surrender and purity do not come all of a sudden. They are the accumulated result of hundreds of little actions.

<sup>8</sup> यद्यदिष्टतमं लोके यच्चातिप्रियमात्मनः ।

तत्तन्निवेदयेन्मह्यं तदानन्त्याय कल्पते ॥

ibid., VI. 41

In the devotional schools, especially in Vaiṣṇavism, service of holy men and poor people is stressed very much. Service is an important thing in spiritual life. Offering everything to the Divine and then using it oneself is no doubt good. It connects you to the Divine. But what is the test of your sincerity? How do you know that you are prepared to renounce everything for God? The only test is your readiness for sacrifice. You should be ready to sacrifice everything for the Divine. The best way to cultivate the idea of sacrifice is through service. Service naturally implies some kind of sacrifice. When a hungry man comes to you, you give him a share of your food. When a poor man comes to you for help, you give him a share of your wealth. Similarly you have to sacrifice your time, pleasures, energy, etc., for the service of those who are ill, ignorant or suffering. Look upon everyone as the temple of God. By serving the man, you are worshipping Lord. This was the great idea behind Swami Vivekananda's philosophy of work. It is no use talking about spirituality to a man who is poor and hungry. He should be given food first. That is the way of worshipping the Lord. Offering flowers and incense is not the only form of worship.

We should develop a synthetic vision, wider perspective. At the back of our limited existence, our limited consciousness, our limited joys, there is the one undivided infinite Being manifesting Himself through every individual. Offering everything to Him is the highest form of worship. If we are capable of doing this form of worship, why remain satisfied with the lower ones alone?

#### HOLY COMPANY

The sixth chapter closes with a note on the importance of holy company:

'O Uddhava, there is almost no other efficient way except the *Bhakti-yoga*

resulting from the association of sages, for I am the goal of the sages.'<sup>9</sup>

This idea is further elaborated in the beginning verses of the seventh chapter. Through holy association one's latent good *samskāras* (tendencies) are roused and the bad ones are checked. Elsewhere in the *Bhāgavatam* itself there is this famous statement:

'Holy sages, they are the greatest purifiers. Holy waters, etc., take a long time to purify the soul but contact with a holy man frees one from impurity in no time. And these holy men make the holy places holy for they carry the Divine Being in their hearts.'<sup>10</sup>

God is the indwelling Spirit in all but we have to realize this consciously and come in direct contact with Him. Then His power works through us. That is the case with the illumined souls. They can exert tremendous influence on others, something which ordinary people just cannot do. When Sri Ramakrishna touched Narendra, the young man immediately got a super-conscious experience. Later on, Narendra too, as Swami Vivekananda, brought about changes in others. When he touched Kidi, a young mathematics professor in Madras, Kidi immediately underwent a transformation. His atheistic ideas vanished and he became a staunch follower of Swamiji and Vedānta.

These holy men are like a live electric wire which is connected to the powerhouse. They are always in conscious contact with the Divine. Their finite personalities are always in touch with the Infinite. When you touch a live wire you get a tremendous shock. When you come in contact with realized souls you can be suddenly trans-

<sup>9</sup> प्रायेण भक्तियोगेन सत्सङ्गेन विनोदव ।

नोपायो विद्यते सद्यश्च प्रायणं हि सतामहम् ॥

—ibid., VI. 48

<sup>10</sup> *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, VII. 7

formed. Through them you get contact with the Divine. When you touch the son you touch the Father too. That is the meaning of Christ's saying: 'He who has seen the Son has seen the Father too.'

The Infinite has, as it were, made a channel for Its manifestation through the mind and body of a holy man. So whoever comes in touch with the holy man, and is able to receive what he gives, comes in touch with the Infinite also. But the important point to note is that one should be able to receive, must have the capacity to feel the contact. Otherwise, as Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'The sannyasin's *kamandalu* (water pot made out of a large kind of bitter gourd) goes with him to all the places of pilgrimage, yet does not lose its bitter taste.' When we approach holy men we should be in the right mood, open to receive their blessings. God may grant us the company of holy men but if we are not open, not ready to receive, nothing will happen to us.

In India the company of holy men has always been eagerly sought by all those who desire spiritual progress. What are the benefits of holy company? Regarding this there is an important discussion in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*:

A devotee asks the Master: 'Then what is the way, sir?'

Sri Ramakrishna answers: 'Prayer and the company of holy men. You cannot get rid of an ailment without the help of a physician. But it is not enough to be in the company of religious people only for a day. You should constantly seek it, for the disease has become chronic. Again, you can't understand the pulse rightly unless you live with a physician. Moving with him constantly, you learn to distinguish between the pulse of phlegm and the pulse of bile.'

Devotee: 'What is the good of holy company?'

Sri Ramakrishna: 'It begets yearning for God. It begets love of God.'

Nothing whatsoever is achieved in spiritual life without yearning. By constantly living in the company of holy men, the soul becomes restless for God. . . . There is another benefit from holy company. It helps one to cultivate discrimination between the Real and the unreal. God alone is the Real, that is to say, the Eternal Substance, and the world is unreal, that is to say, transitory.<sup>11</sup>

In other words, holy company fosters in us a spirit of renunciation. By living with holy men who have renounced everything, others learn the value of renunciation, and acquire the strength to practise it. There is a story about a Muslim saint who was one day visited by the Sultan. The emperor praised the ascetic's spirit of renunciation, but the saint replied: 'My renunciation? Why, yours is much greater. I have renounced only the world and its pleasures. Whereas you have renounced God and all the heavenly pleasures!'

If you place perfect trust in a holy man and leave all your problems to him, he will do what is necessary for you. He will lead you along the right path. But in such a case your trust must be complete. You should not be a doubting Thomas.

#### GOD'S SANCTIFYING PRESENCE

It is the Supreme Self shining through the holy men that imparts holiness to them. It is the presence of God that sanctifies everything. Everything connected with God is sacred, holy. The more we think about Him, the more we meditate on the Supreme Spirit, the holier we become. This important point is made clear in stanzas 7 to 15 of the seventh chapter. By constantly thinking about the Divine, the devotees gradually forget their worldly interest. Love for the Lord draws away their mind from

<sup>11</sup> 'M.': *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Tr. by Swami Nikhilananda, Pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras-600004, 1947), pp. 21-2

all objects of attachment. As they progress, they feel more and more joy in contemplation on the Divine, and their thirst for worldly enjoyment proportionately becomes less. This is the experience of all sincere devotees. In their case there is less strain than in the case of *yogīs* and *jñānīs* who lay stress more on self-effort.

‘Not knowing My real nature, the Gopīs, who were ignorant women, desired Me as their beloved sweetheart, yet they attained Me, the Supreme Brahman, by hundreds and thousands, through the power of holy association.’<sup>12</sup>

Renunciation comes to them naturally. But renunciation is essential. There can be no spiritual life without it.

#### SERVICE OF THE GURU

After discussing the company of holy men and the company of the Divine, Śrī Kṛṣṇa speaks of the importance of the company of the guru.

From time immemorial Hinduism has accorded the highest place to the guru. There is a Sanskrit hymn which says that the guru is Brahman, the guru is Viṣṇu, and the guru is Śiva—the guru is none else than the Supreme Brahman. Devotion to the guru has been given the pride of place in all forms of Hindu *sādhana* (spiritual practice), whether dualist or non-dualist. Complete surrender to the guru, implicit obedience to him, is demanded of the aspirant. The teacher-disciple relationship is the highest ideal of human relationship in India.

The main benefit of this service to the guru is the curbing of the aspirant’s ego. There is no better way to reduce the impetuosity of the ego than being disciplined by an illumined soul. Himself free and detached, the guru leads the disciple to freedom. Through wise counsels and reprimands, the guru cuts down the disciple’s

infatuations and delusions. This idea is strange to the Western man, but in India it is a natural attitude cultivated through centuries of tradition.

#### THE TREE OF *Samsāra*

This is an ancient imagery—the phenomenal world as a tree, the tree of *samsāra*.

‘It has got two seeds, a hundred roots, three trunks; five main branches and eleven secondary branches; it exudes five kinds of sap, it has the nests of two birds on it; it reaches up to the sun, has three layers of bark, and produces two kinds of fruit.’<sup>13</sup>

The tree referred to here may stand for the microcosm or the macrocosm. If one is able to get a correct understanding of what the tree is one can get out of it. There must be a correct view of ourselves and also of the world. The tree grows out of the vast substratum of divine power. The mind must be raised to higher centres to discover the contact between the individual and the cosmic.

The roots of the tree stand for our innumerable desires and impulses. The root cause of all our troubles lies in these desires, this clinging to our individuality, this thirst for pleasures of the senses. Devotion and selfless service enable us to get out of the tangle of these roots.

If all the roots were cut, the tree itself should fall. But this seldom happens. We are able to destroy only a part of our desires at the most. The tree survives with the

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, VII. 22. The seeds referred to, in the verse, are virtue and vice. The roots are the innumerable desires. The trunks are *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. The main branches are the five elements (earth, water, air, fire, and ether), and the eleven secondary branches are the sense-organs plus *manas*. The saps are the five sense objects. The two birds are *Jīvātman* and *Paramātman*. The layers of bark refer to the nervous, bilions and lymphatic temperaments. The two fruits are happiness and misery.

<sup>12</sup> L.M., VII. 13

help of the remaining roots. It is not so easy to cut off all the roots of desire.

But we need not feel depressed. If our spiritual practice reveals more and more of our lower nature, if it exposes more and more of the roots of desire, we should not feel discouraged. There are lots of bad memories and instincts lying buried deep in the subconscious mind. They have been there for quite a long time without our knowledge. If they sometime start coming up we should be happy that we have discovered them. We should realize the real situation within us and calmly and sanely find a solution for all our troubles. On the contrary, if we try to hide those thoughts and just pretend that they do not exist, we only deceive ourselves. And we impede our spiritual progress. It is very difficult to be perfectly frank with oneself but this is always an indication of our growth, to be frank with oneself. If we do not like to acknowledge our faults, even to ourselves, how are we going to have the courage to face the problems of life? Keeping things hidden in the subconscious mind is not a solution for the problem, but we fool ourselves by thinking that it is so.

The practice of confession in Christianity partly solves this problem of emptying the subconscious of its contents. But this is not always successful, as the power of introspection is poorly developed owing to lack of spiritual discipline. Moreover, the theological overtones connected with the custom often have a negative influence.

Another method is to place before the Divine the contents of the subconscious mind as they bubble up. You may pray to God intensely to enable you to get rid of your old impressions. Prayer can act as a powerful means for clearing the subconscious. Don't be frightened by the lower thoughts coming up in you. Offer them to the Divine just as you offer everything else. Of course this is possible only for

those who have tremendous faith in the Lord.

There is another method, perhaps the best one. That is to stand as a witness of everything that comes up, however awful it may be. We can never really get rid of any bad impulse or feeling without first recognizing it, without first acknowledging its presence. What does it matter if there are hundreds of impure ideas lying submerged in our mind? What is more important is to keep yourself unattached to them. It is only when the conscious self gets connected to them that they really belong to us and give us trouble. But knowing that the Self is pure and unattached we can remain as a witness and remain unaffected by the impure thoughts. This is a great help to the aspirant. Think more of your real nature and cease to identify yourself with your thoughts—whether good or bad. Gradually you will be able to transcend your thoughts and remain as the Self.

#### THE AXE OF KNOWLEDGE

The seventh chapter ends with the following stanza:

'Then, being steady and watchful, with the axe of knowledge sharpened by the service of the guru with one-pointed devotion, cut asunder this tree of *samsāra* rooted in the soul; and then, being identified with your self, lay down your weapon.'<sup>14</sup>

The axe of knowledge is the power of discrimination of the mind. With a blunt weapon, with an obtuse mind, nothing can be obtained. You will never be able to cut down this tree of *samsāra* with a dull, lazy mind. Only if the mind is kept sharp and alert through constant struggle can you start the cutting down process. This takes time, a long time. The weapon cannot be laid down until one has realized one's true Self and has ceased to identify oneself with the mind.

<sup>14</sup> एवं गुरुवासनयैकभक्त्या विद्याकृद्वारेण जितेन धीरः।  
विवृश्य जीवाशयमप्रमत्तः संपद्य चात्मानमथ  
त्यजास्त्रम् ॥ —ibid., VII. 24

## CITY OF VIVEKANANDA

Unmatched for breadth and depth is the message gone from here. — But not for that is our city famous.

God Herself walked these streets, laid down Her bodies here. — But not for that is our city famous.

I do not need to tell you, comrade, why our city is famous. You've seen yourself those corpse-like things that are not corpses, that nightly pain our pavements. You know those grimy shrouds are not shrouds at all, but clothing covering pulsing human life — mum, dad, and the kids. And the grime? The cause of that does not defy research.

A one-sided picture, you will say; a pessimistic view. — It may not be a balanced statement of the facts; but it is a fact. Our object is no story for foreign television show, so we can afford to be less comfortably balanced if it goads to greater good. Nor do I deny that there are healthy people who will not stir even when given scope to earn their keep. But what there is to say just now has to do with that message mentioned at the start.

One of our city's sons it was who gave the message to the world. We've enshrined him on the rock of India's southern cape. At our western gate we've stood a statue large. Through the land are memorials to him — institutions, and living statues of strong character and noble purpose. Our mother-city has herself reminders of this son of hers. The question that compels consideration is:  
Do the conditions in which her dear ones live bespeak the value and the aptness of the message?

Present facts show only this, that the message has not been tried to any large extent in a thorough-going way. And this was not surprising while we thought there was a short-cut path to solve the problem that our city is. Now it's clear enough: to achieve a fertile equipoise of complex social forces, destruction is no practical prelude to construction. The same old Adam will put his spanner in the new machine. It's persons that make the machine the kind it is. The machine changes, runs clogged or clear, when they change. Not that plans and policies have no place; but to lean too heavily on them, to look to Government for every blessed little thing, makes us fit only for the patient's feeding-cup. Never more were brains and

know-how needed, and for just that reason something more than them is needed, which we ourselves must win.

That our streets are dormitories by night, and in disorder day and night—it's true that that does not memorialize our message. The point more vital is, it shows the message is not really ours. It is the message of a resplendent Three, and we have not been true to them. Had we been, our city would not now be famous for what it chiefly is.

Yet did we dare but look things quietly in the face, we'd know we know in our root-being the truth of our unbourgeois message. To call it *our* message, therefore, is not altogether wrong. And what would better prove the peace and power packed in it, than that, through efforts message-moved and Mother-graced, our city should cease to be famous for what now it chiefly is? If this were brought about, we and many others would be further on the way to that completeness which is perfect freedom.

—S.P.

---

## NOTES AND COMMENTS

### IN THIS NUMBER

Reminiscences are taken from: Swami Saradananda: *Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras 600004, 1956—Reference No. 1, pp. 156-7; No. 2, pp. 142-3; No. 4, p. 144—, and 'M': *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Madras, 1947—Reference No. 3, pp. 290-1.

The words quoted in 'Onward For Ever!' are from *The Complete Works*, Vol. I (1962), p. 333.

In one of the most moving passages of his letters, written soon after reaching America, Swami Vivekananda urged his followers to share in his feelings of sympathy and struggle for the poor. He wrote: 'I have travelled twelve years with this load in my heart and this idea in my head. I

have gone from door to door of the so-called rich and great. With a bleeding heart I have crossed half the world to this strange land, seeking for help. The Lord is great. I know He will help me. I may perish of cold or hunger in this land, but I bequeath to you, young men, this sympathy, this struggle for the poor, the ignorant, the oppressed.'

That bequest from Swamiji should be received and cherished. Our winning of political freedom has invested us with even greater responsibility regarding the debts we owe to the country and the poor, down-trodden masses. Recent unhappy occurrences of caste-oppression show that we have disregarded the bequest of our great leaders such as Vivekananda and Gandhi.

Caste and its evils are old themes. Our

thinking on these now is mostly a representation of what has been already said by Swamiji and others. This month we are presenting a brief analysis of the problems born of casteism, and this will be followed next month by a discussion of possible solutions of these problems.

Realization of God is never an easy proposition. If anyone promises to the contrary, you had better beware of him. What make the path of the spirit so difficult to traverse are obstacles, more inner than outer. There is, moreover, nothing unusual about encountering obstacles. They are common to every aspirant's life. They also signify that our inner life is not stagnant but active and on the move, like a flowing river. Obstacles bestow another benefit—they give us opportunities to become stronger by fighting against them. They make the otherwise sedate inner life highly interesting and adventurous. Nonetheless, it is good to know something of the nature of the obstacles and the strategy for dealing with them. For, some of them are so subtle and mimetic that an aspirant may mistake them for real spiritual attainments. 'Overcoming Obstacles to Spiritual Life' by Swami Budhananda, deals in helpful detail with this very important aspect of spiritual progress.

Among the handful of all-time greats, who have been inspiring the American people and civilization towards moral and spiritual goals, Abraham Lincoln, the sixteenth president of the U.S.A., shines with his own undiminished glory. History chose for him a hero's role at a critical juncture. That role he played with remarkable sagacity, courage, humility, integrity, compassion, and above all, an abiding faith in Providence. No President has shed such a deep and beneficent influence on the American racial unconscious as Abraham Lincoln. An inspiring Profile of him is contributed

by C. H. MacLachlan, who was formerly the Editor of *The Long Islander*, a journal founded by Walt Whitman. He is also a member of the Vedanta Society of New York and has contributed valuable studies of Whitman and Thoreau to the *Prabuddha Bharata*. The second part of the present article will be published next month.

This instalment of the 'Excursions Into *Uddhava-Gītā*' contains valuable reflections by Swami Yatiswarananda on the important teachings contained in two chapters. Characteristics of a liberated soul, the offering of everything to God, holy company and its benefits, service to the Guru and godmen, and finally the 'tree of *samsāra*' and disentanglement from it—all these, which are dealt with here, deserve patient pondering by aspirants desiring to progress spiritually.

A few years ago, a leading American magazine published an illustrated study of the grave civic problems facing New York and captioned it to this effect: 'A City That is Slowly Destroying Itself'. If that was and is New York, Calcutta—it can be safely asserted—is experiencing its death rattle. But a city's last moments, unlike an individual's, may stretch for a couple of decades. Even from such a critical state it may be possible to treat and nurse a city back to health and another long lease of life. In fact, the Indian Prime Minister, on her recent visit to Calcutta, has voiced such a hope and plan. It should nevertheless be realized by all concerned that without the 'people'—that is, in the case of a city, every man, woman and child—the central Government's and the civic corporation's efforts are sure to prove fruitless. With the people's enthusiastic and enlightened participation, the governmental and corporate efforts are bound to succeed. 'City of Vivekananda' by S.P., is a fervent appeal for manly efforts



by the citizens in solving the civic problems of Calcutta, one of the most populous cities of the world. While forwarding his writing, S.P., added these lines in further explanation: 'A fit memorial to Swamj Vivekananda, and a convincing proof of the efficacy of the message which he conveyed to

the world, would be a changed Calcutta—changed, that is, by the practical application of the message for which Calcutta should be world-famous, but as yet is not. Around this thought the poem has taken shape.'

## REVIEWS AND NOTICES

**THE CONCEPT OF CULTURE.** BY DR. V. RAGHAVAN, Published by the Indian Institute of World Culture, 6 Sri B. P. Wadia Rd., Basavangudi, Bangalore-4, 1971, pp. 71, Price Rs. 2/-

This booklet comprises the Founder's Day Address of the Author, at the above-named Institute in August, 1969, plus a Foreword by Prof. Arnold Toynbee. As such, there is neither Table of Contents nor Chapter headings, although there is a very valuable bibliography of English works and periodicals, and Sanskrit and Pali works on which the address is based. This shows how much of hard work and scholarship are embodied in the address.

Dr. Raghavan, one of the most distinguished Professors of South India, maintains here that the true concept of culture developed in India in its hoary past, with basis in moral and spiritual virtues. A true and high culture must be based on peace (*santi*), discipline (*anusasana*), truth (*satya*), and other values of the highest order.

The address is a very good synthesis of all available works directed towards finding a true concept of culture. The author has presented a rather abstruse topic in a most fascinating, lucid and extremely readable style. We recommend this booklet to the public and are sure that it will be found useful.

DR. PARESH NATH MUKHERJEE

## BENGALI

**DIVYAYANA:** EDITED BY SRI MANOMOHAN DATTA (Centenary Volume on Sri Aurobindo), Published by Midnapore District Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Samiti, 1973, Pp: Bengali xvi + 160, English xiv + 128, Price Rs. 7/-

In this erudite compilation by an editorial board under Sri M. Datta, there are two sections: Bengali and English. In the former there are fifteen compositions, mainly articles and poems by eminent writers. In the English section there are twelve articles and poems. There are fourteen photographs depicting Sri Aurobindo and the Mother at different periods of their lives, including one of Sri Aurobindo's 'samadhi' in Pondicherry Ashrama.

The collection is good and very ably edited. It is indeed a rich store-house of information about one of the greatest sages of modern times and one of the most dynamic personalities in world history. The book has served the purpose for which it was published, namely to collect and present necessary information about the life and achievements of the great Yogi.

We recommend the publication to the public, both lay and scholarly, and are confident it has removed a want that was long felt.

DR. PARESH NATH MUKHERJEE,  
Head, History Department,  
D.A.V. College, Dehra Dun

## NEWS AND REPORTS

RAMAKRISHNA MISSION CHARITABLE DISPENSARY:

P.O. BELUR MATH, DT. HOWRAH

### AN APPEAL

In pursuance of its ideals of renunciation and service, the Ramakrishna Mission, since its founding in 1897 by the illustrious Swami Vivekananda, has been carrying out its programme of all-round service to humanity, irrespective of caste, creed, or colour.

The Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, besides conducting various other activities, started this Charitable Dispensary at Belur in 1913 with a view to alleviating the sufferings of poor and helpless patients in and around the locality. From very humble beginnings it has risen to be an important centre of medical relief in the district of Howrah. Its great popularity will be evident from its ever increasing number of patients as shown below:

<i>Year</i>	<i>New Cases</i>	<i>Old Cases</i>	<i>Total</i>
1913	1,000	—	1,000
1935	6,747	9,923	16,670
1955	13,157	19,578	32,735
1972-73 (Apl-Mar.)	58,941	1,17,034	1,75,975

The dispensary has both Homoeopathic and Allopathic sections, the latter with a surgical unit, and attracts thousands of poor sick people not only from Belur, Bally, Uttarpara, Ghusuri and Liloah, but also from places far beyond the Municipal limits, like Salkia and Howrah, as also from across the Ganga.

The present building of the dispensary was constructed in 1939 when a much smaller number of patients than at present was calling on us for medical care. To cope with increasing work it was extended subsequently and the amount spent on the whole building has come to more than Rs. 1,00,000/-.

Now that the number of patients has recorded sharp increases, we are finding it extremely difficult to meet the demand for our services adequately, because of shortage of space and absence of other facilities. The need for expansion of all the departments is being very keenly felt. We have therefore undertaken expansion and development of the existing dispensary building.

The estimated cost of construction and essential equipment comes to nearly Rs. 4 lakhs. Besides this, we also need sufficient funds to meet the increasing cost of its day to day maintenance. It is beyond the resources of the Mission to meet either the huge expenditure for the proposed expansion of the dispensary or to provide adequate funds for maintenance expenditure, which will also increase substantially with the widening of the scope of service. We therefore appeal to the generous public, charitable trusts and medical firms to come forward and help this noble cause by making liberal contributions in cash or in kind. The Mission gratefully acknowledges the favourable response it received on various other occasions to its appeals for help for various causes and earnestly hopes that it will receive all possible help and active co-operation on this occasion also from all those who are in a position to help. All contributions, big or small, made either at a time or on a monthly basis, will be most welcome and thankfully received and acknowledged by the undersigned. Cheques and Drafts should be drawn in favour of 'RAMAKRISHNA MISSION'. Contributions may be sent by Money Order also.

SWAMI GAMBHIRANANDA

General Secretary

RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

June 15, 1974  
Belur Math