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# **Prabuddha Bharata**

*OR*

## **AWAKENED INDIA**

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# Prabuddha Bharata

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NOVEMBER 1975

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Cover :

Kanchenjanga from Sandakphu

Photo: Bimal Dey



# Prabuddha Bharata

VOL. LXXX

NOVEMBER 1975

No. 1

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

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## SRI RAMAKRISHNA REMINISCES

‘Gauri used to worship his wife with offerings of flowers. All women are manifestations of the Divine Mother.’

\*

‘Gauri used to say that one must become like Sita to understand Rama; like Bhagavati, the Divine Mother, to understand Bhagavan, Siva. One must practise austerity, as Bhagavati did, in order to attain Siva. One must cultivate the attitude of Prakriti in order to realize Purusha—the attitude of a friend, a handmaid, or a mother.’

\*

‘Gauri would not refer to himself as “I” lest he should feel egotistic. He would say “this” instead. I followed his example and would refer to myself as “this” instead of “I”. Instead of saying, “I have eaten”, I would say, “This has eaten.” Mathur noticed it and said one day: “What is this, revered father? Why should you talk that way? Let them talk that way. They have their egotism. You are free from it; you don’t have to talk like them.”

‘I said to Keshab, “Since the ego cannot be given up, let it remain as the servant, the servant of God.”’

\*

[The ‘Bhairavi Brahmani’, a wandering Sannyasini of a Sakta (Tantrika) group, had recently come to Dakshineswar and—at once impressed by Sri Ramakrishna’s spiritual potentialities—undertaken to teach him certain paths of discipline prescribed in the scriptures. She rightly felt this would convince him that his extreme ‘abnormal’ states of mind were no disease, but only symptoms resulting from the highest spiritual yearning and striving.]

‘In the daytime the Brahmani went to various places far away from the temple garden and collected and brought various rare articles prescribed by the Tantras. Placing them under the Vilva tree or under the Panchavati at night, she called me, taught me how to make use of those things, and helped me in the performance of the worship of the Divine Mother according to the prescribed rules with their aid, asking me at last to merge in Japa and meditation.



I acted accordingly. But I had to perform almost no Japa; for, hardly did I turn the rosary once when I merged completely in Samadhi and realized the results proper to those rites. There was thus no limit to my visions and experiences, all very extraordinary. The Brahmani made me undertake, one by one, all the disciplines prescribed in the sixty-four main Tantras, all difficult to accomplish, in trying to practise which most of the Sadhakas go astray; but all of which I got through successfully by Mother's grace.

'On one occasion, I saw that the Brahmani had brought at night—nobody knew whence—a beautiful woman in the prime of her youth, and said to me, "My child, worship her as the Devi." When the worship was finished, she said, "Sit on her lap, my child, and perform Japa." I was seized with fear, wept piteously and said to Mother, "O Mother, Mother of the universe, what is this command Thou givest to one who has taken absolute refuge in Thee? Has Thy weak child the power to be so impudently daring?" But as soon as I said so, I felt as if I was possessed by some unknown power, and an extraordinary strength filled my heart. And no sooner had I, uttering the Mantras, sat on the lap of the woman, like one hypnotized, unaware of what I was doing, than I merged completely in Samadhi. When I regained consciousness, I saw the Brahmani waiting on me and assiduously trying to bring me back to normal consciousness. She said, "The rite is completed, my child; others restrain themselves with very great difficulty under such circumstances and then finish the rite with nominal Japa for a trifling little time only; but you lost all consciousness and were in deep Samadhi." When I heard this I became reassured and began to salute Mother again and again with a grateful heart for enabling me to pass that ordeal unscathed.

'On another occasion, I saw that the Brahmani cooked fish in the skull of a dead body and performed Tarpana.<sup>1</sup> She also made me do so and asked me to take that fish. I did as I was asked and felt no aversion whatever.

'But on the day when the Brahmani brought a piece of rotten flesh and asked me to touch it with my tongue after Tarpana, I was shaken by aversion and said, "Can it be done?" So questioned, she said, "What's there in it, my child? Just see, I do it." Saying so she put a portion of it into her mouth and said, "Aversion should not be entertained", and placed again a little of it before me. When I saw her do so, the idea of the terrible Chandika Form of the Mother Universal was inspired in my mind; and repeatedly uttering "Mother", I entered into Bhavasamadhi. There was then no aversion felt when the Brahmani put it into my mouth.'

---

<sup>1</sup> A ceremony in which a libation of water is made to dead relatives.

## ONWARD FOR EVER!

If we look at a picture through a pin-hole in a cardboard, we get an utterly mistaken notion; yet what we see is really the picture. As we enlarge the hole, we get a clearer and clearer idea. Out of the reality we manufacture the different views in conformity with our mistaken perceptions of name and form. When we throw away the cardboard, we see the same picture, but we see it as it is. We put in all the attributes, all the errors, the picture itself is unaltered thereby. That is because Atman is the reality of all; all we see is Atman, but not as we see it, as name and form; they are all in our veil, in Maya.

They are like spots in the object-glass of a telescope, yet it is the light of the sun that shows us the spots; we could not even see the illusion save for the background of reality which is Brahman. Swami Vivekananda is just the speck on the object-glass; I am Atman, real, unchangeable, and that reality alone enables me to see Swami Vivekananda. Atman is the essence of every hallucination; but the sun is never identified with the spots on the glass, it only shows them to us. Our actions, as they are evil or good, increase or decrease the 'spots', but they never affect the God within us. Perfectly cleanse the mind of spots and instantly we see, 'I and my father are one.'



## REFLECTIONS ON THE 'TWO BIRDS' IN THE UPANIṢADS

EDITORIAL

### I

From the viewpoint of Vedānta, the story of man's bondage and freedom is greatly absorbing. In truth, the human soul can never be bound. To speak of freedom for that which never comes under bondage would be meaningless. Advaita Vedānta declares in clear language that the Ātman, or the Self, is none other than Brahman, the absolute, non-dual, indivisible, changeless Reality. Nevertheless, the experience of bondage, misery, and limitation is an irrefutable fact of human life. How then does Vedānta account for this experience? While not compromising even by as much as a hair's breadth its declaration about the unsullied freedom of the Self, Vedānta accommodates the experienced fact of bondage by qualifying it as only 'apparent'. To make it as clear as possible, the Upaniṣads employ the imagery of two beautiful birds, inseparably associated and occupying the same tree. Says the *Muṇḍaka-Upaniṣad*:

'Two birds, united always and known by the same name, closely cling to the selfsame tree. One of them eats the sweet fruit; the other looks on without eating.

'Seated on the same tree, the soul moans, bewildered by his impotence. But when he beholds the other, the Lord worshipped by all, and His glory, he then becomes free from grief.'<sup>1</sup>

In this significant imagery, the two birds represent respectively the jīvātman, the individual soul, and the Paramātman, the Supreme Soul. Since, according to the nondualistic Vedānta, the jīvātman is like a mirror image of the Paramātman, the birds are said to be 'united always' and 'known by the same name'. The tree

<sup>1</sup> III, i. 1-2; cf. *Śvetāśvatara-upaniṣad*, IV. 6-7



referred to in these verses is the body. The individual soul becomes involved in endless physical and mental experiences, which involvement is like eating the 'sweet' fruit. As the experiences of the soul are due to its past actions—good and bad—in former bodies, the fruit it enjoys is not all sweet: it is sometimes sweet, sometimes bitter; the soul experiences both happiness and sorrow. In fact, on analysing human experiences we come to know that the bitter fruits borne by this body-tree are far more numerous than the sweet ones. Though residing in the body as the inseparable companion of the *jīvātman*, the *Paramātman* remains untempted by the fruit and looks on with supreme detachment. Deluded and miserable, the individual soul plunges again and again into a welter of sense-experiences which makes it more deluded and more miserable. After almost endless bouts of enjoyment and suffering, but still seeking happiness and peace, the soul moves towards the *Paramātman* and realizes His glory. Then, becoming aware of its own essential divinity, the soul attains freedom and bliss.

Swami Vivekananda, who considered the Upaniṣads as a mine of mystical truths, some of which were expressed in highly poetic language, was very fond of these verses and expounded them more than once with his characteristic insight. In one context he said:

"Two birds sat on one tree. The bird at the top was calm, majestic, beautiful, perfect. The lower bird was always hopping from twig to twig, now eating sweet fruits and being happy, now eating bitter fruits and being miserable. One day, when he had eaten a fruit more bitter than usual, he glanced up at the calm majestic upper bird and thought, "How I would like to be like him!" and he hopped up a little way towards him. Soon he forgot all about his desire to be like the upper bird, and went on as before, eating sweet and

bitter fruits and being happy and miserable. Again he looked up, again he went up a little nearer to the calm and majestic upper bird. Many times was this repeated, until at last he drew very near the upper bird; the brilliancy of his plumage dazzled him, seemed to absorb him, and finally, to his wonder and surprise, he found there was only one bird—he was the upper bird all the time and had but just found it out. Man is like that lower bird, but if he perseveres in his efforts to rise to the highest ideal he can conceive of, he, too, will find that he was the Self all the time and the other was but a dream.'<sup>2</sup>

Vedāntic teachers point out that the root cause of the *jīvātman*'s craving for the objective world is *avidyā* or ignorance of its own essential infinite blissful nature. 'Why does *avidyā* arise? When and how?'—these questions are not logically tenable. For such questions can arise only within the realm of *avidyā* and in the intellect which is also a product of *avidyā*. From the standpoint of the Absolute or infinite Reality, no such questions can be posed, because by definition the Absolute can admit of no second entity. From the relative standpoint, the Vedāntic teachers counsel us, *avidyā* is a fact of experience, and the means for its destruction is the Knowledge of the Absolute. Questions of 'why', 'when' and 'how', concerning *avidyā*, are utterly meaningless and wasteful of energy and time.

*Avidyā*, on the one hand, superimposes limitations (*āvr̥ti* or veiling) on the unlimited soul, and on the other, projects the objective world both mental and physical. Because of this limitation the soul desires fulfilment from the external world. Through the instrumentality of the ego, mind, and body, the soul repeatedly enters into a fierce vortex of activity. Actions

<sup>2</sup> *The Complete Works* (Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Dt. Pithoragarh, U.P.), Vol. VIII (1959), pp. 4-5



bear both good and bad fruits, which the soul has to enjoy and suffer. *Avidyā*, which is constituted of the three *guṇas* (qualities) of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* (tranquillity, activity, and inertia), manufactures the soul's psychological world consisting of the causal and subtle bodies, as well as the empirical universe of space, time, and causation. Furthermore it causes the soul to pass by turns through the three states of waking, dream, and deep sleep. However, it is the soul's light of consciousness (*cit*) that invests the objective world, and the experiences of it, with an apparent sense of reality. The Vedāntic teachers point out again and again that despite the soul's sense of limitation, misery, and helplessness in the embodied state, its intrinsic perfection remains totally unimpaired.

If the soul can overcome the two effects of *avidyā* (veiling and projecting) then consequently it overcomes *avidyā* itself—for these alone constitute the whole of the bondage of *māyā*. The knot of ignorance (*avidyā-granthī*) that the Upaniṣads speak of is this subtle delusive linkage between spirit and matter, wherein the spirit apparently seeks bliss, immortality, and fulfilment from the latter. To impress the soul with the fact that the objective world of matter can never give what the soul is seeking, repeated suffering and misery—the taste of the bitter fruit—is essential. Misery thus has a constructive role to play in freeing the soul from its slavery to matter. Swami Vivekananda explains this truth with great force, and draws our attention to the type of spiritual aspirant who, even in the grip of misery, develops discrimination and becomes devoted to the higher Self in him:

'Reading from scriptures or hearing from the lips of the preceptor, one has some idea of It, but when the hard lashes of the bitter sorrow and pain of the world make the heart sore, when on the death of one's near and dear

relatives, man thinks himself helpless, when the impenetrable and insurmountable darkness about the future life agitates his mind, then does the Jiva pant for a realization of the Atman. Therefore is sorrow helpful to the knowledge of the Atman. But one should remember the bitter lessons of experience. Those who die, merely suffering the woes of life like cats and dogs, are they men? He is a man who even when agitated by the sharp interaction of pleasure and pain is discriminating, and knowing them to be of an evanescent nature, becomes passionately devoted to the Atman.'<sup>3</sup>

Because of the soul's attraction to the objective world, misery and sorrow pursue it through life after life. When, on occasions, the tempest of misfortune blows the hardest with bereavements, loss of money, health or friends, the soul's faith in the world outside is rudely shocked. It is then that it catches a glimpse of the Supreme Soul, the other bird—calm, majestic, and immersed in His own glory. An urge to be like Him comes to the soul and it moves a little closer. But the momentum of the previously ingrained attachment to matter pulls it outward again. Nevertheless, that material attachment has been loosened, at least slightly, and a new attachment, a spiritual relationship with the higher Self, has sprouted. With the association and guidance of holy men and teachers, and by the cultivation of self-control, truthfulness, and such spiritual virtues, the new attachment grows in strength and gradually develops into loving contemplation and meditation on the Divine Lord, the Paramātmā. Through spiritual disciplines such as prayer, meditation, and self-surrender, the soul moves closer and closer to the Supreme Soul and discovers by degrees that its very existence is due to Him. When it attains complete union, then comes the realization that it was all

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, Vol. VII (1958), p. 227



the while the Infinite, immersed in Its own joy and always free.

## II

Though the Upaniṣads frequently speak of the unconditioned aspect of Brahman, they also refer to Its conditioned aspect. As the originator, as it were, sustainer and re-absorber of the empirical universe, Brahman becomes its Īśvara or Lord. He, as the Īśvara, brings forth the cosmos and all its living beings out of Himself; and pervades and presides over them all. In this, māyā or His power becomes His instrument and servant. While māyā with respect to the individual soul acts as *avidyā*—subjugating the soul—with respect to Īśvara it is a humble slave. Śaṅkara appropriately describes Īśvara as Him 'who is by nature eternally pure, wise and free, who is omniscient, and has the totality of māyā as His limiting adjunct (*upādhi*)'. He is always pure, because there is no 'fall' for Him, no identification with the external world, the world of objects conjured up by māyā. Likewise His knowledge is never eclipsed, as in the case of the jīvātman which is overwhelmed by *avidyā* and forgets itself. He is constantly aware of His infinite glory. Though māyā is His limiting adjunct, He is never bound by it. Without this 'self-imposed' limitation, Īśvara could not carry on the cosmic process of creation, sustenance, and dissolution. Nor would man be able to love Him and endeavour to attain union with Him. Since it is a self-imposed limitation, He is perfectly free at all times. Even the tasks of creation, etc. do not bind Him, for His agentship consists in 'observation' only. He looks on, and—somewhat as in the case of an earthly emperor—the cosmic processes go on without a hitch.

The ideal of the Īśvara is absolutely necessary to the jīvātman for its libera-

tion; otherwise it will always remain immersed in misery, bondage and utter helplessness. Glimpsing the calm majesty of Īśvara, the soul aspires and struggles to attain Him. That there is a Being who rules over māyā, who is eternally free, blissful, immortal, and that He is an eternal companion of the human soul, brings boundless hope for our desolate, miserable souls. As we look up to Him, freedom, power, wisdom, and bliss—so long dormant in our own self, are aroused: the purity of the Īśvara helps the soul to shed its sense of sin and impurity; His bliss sweeps away all misery and grief; His freedom and lordship suffuse the soul with strength and power to triumph over ignorance. When by self-surrender and meditation, its natural purity and bliss become fully manifest in the soul, it ceases altogether to crave for the objective world. It is able to remain in its own undimmed glory. Witness-consciousness, an inalienable characteristic of Īśvara, becomes the characteristic of the soul also. With the attainment of freedom, the knot of ignorance that had bound up matter and spirit is severed once for all. This *avidyā* is finally destroyed and the soul knows that it is one with the Supreme and was always so.

Says Vyāsa in his *Brahma-sūtras*:

'From the meditation on the supreme Lord, however, becomes manifest that which remains obscured; because the soul's bondage and freedom are derived from Him.'<sup>4</sup>

Śaṅkara's commentary on this aphorism has much light to throw on the issue of how meditation on the supreme Lord helps the soul to attain freedom:

'That similarity [between God and soul], remaining hidden, becomes manifest in the case of some rare person who meditates on God with diligence,

<sup>4</sup> *Brahma-sūtras*, III. ii. 5



for whom the darkness of ignorance gets removed, and who becomes endowed with mystic powers through the grace of God, like the regaining of the power of sight through the potency of medicine, by a man who had lost it through the disease called *timira*. But it does not come naturally to all and sundry.... Bondage comes from ignorance about the nature of God, and freedom, from the Knowledge of His reality.'

### III

Undoubtedly, the concept of *Īśvara* is a powerful ideal, constantly attracting the entangled soul towards freedom and infinity. He is no doubt the inseparable comrade of the soul; He dwells in the cave of the heart. But the human being craves for an ideal that is more concrete, more proximate—in short, a human embodiment of *Īśvara* with whom an intimate relationship of love can be established. To see *Īśvara* embodied as man and yet sustaining His mastery of *māyā*, is a cherished desire of the helpless soul. As if to fulfil this secretly cherished human desire, *Īśvara* does incarnate as man—lives among men, teaches them their own essential perfection while fully demonstrating His control over *māyā*—and thus sets in motion a great wave of spiritual regeneration which rolls on for centuries. As the history of almost all great religions shows, these incarnations (and/or prophets) have been coming from time to time with a divine concern for the spiritual welfare of humanity.

From birth till death, the career of an incarnation is marked with special features. It is generally seen that an incarnation of God appears when religion and spirituality have touched their lowest levels. An implacable resolution to realize the highest spiritual truths is manifest in him even from early age. The attractions of material wealth and comforts, sensual

enjoyments and achievements, or worldly name and fame, fail to move him. He exercises a tremendous magnetism on those around him, from his childhood, through his selfless love and great purity of motive. His struggles for realizing the truths of religion and God are so intense that they seem superhuman. Sacrifice, dispassion, dedication, divine love and compassion for all seem the very stuff of his soul. In him becomes manifest a spiritual insight rarely witnessed in human beings, by the aid of which he becomes a teacher *par excellence*. As in life, he is great in death. He faces death calmly, with a smile on his face. Unlike ordinary mortals who disappear from this earth leaving hardly a trace, an incarnation of God blazes an immortal trail for humanity for realizing their essential divine nature. He dies physically, but as a spiritual ideal of humanity he is immortal.

In the lives of all the great incarnations of God known to religious history, these features are witnessed with more or less emphasis on the one or the other. *Śrī Rāma*, *Śrī Kṛṣṇa*, Gautama Buddha, Jesus Christ, *Śrī Chaitanya*, and Sri Ramakrishna, among others, stand forth as conquerors of *māyā* and inspire humanity, by their bright examples, to do likewise. Their renunciation and dispassion, detachment and self-control, resolution and fierce struggles for realizing the highest truths, their conquests and realizations, unselfish love and service to humanity—all these call upon man to be a conqueror of relative existence and a sharer of immortal bliss. On this tree of the world-process, the divine incarnation is one with *Īśvara*, the higher bird, calm and majestic, immersed in his own glory. The individual soul which is helpless and miserable is the lower bird which catches stirring glimpses of the higher bird and is drawn towards it by a strange magnetism. That

magnetism is a mixture of many forces, festes the divinity potential in the human of which the love, compassion, and grace soul. Then dawns the nondualistic of the divine incarnation are the foremost. knowledge which has been repeatedly Meditation on and submission to the incar- taught in such Upaniṣadic statements as nation cuts the knot of *avidyā* and mani- *Tat-tvam-asi* (That thou art).

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## LETTERS OF A SAINT

The Ramakrishna Mission Sevashram  
Luxa, Benares City.  
21st December/1919

My dear Doctor,

Yours of the 14th inst. is to hand.... I am so glad to know that you will get a chance soon to leave Rangoon for India, where you hope to secure an appointment. May you get the post at Ooty and be in India once again....

You need not be disheartened, but be of good cheer remembering the answer which Sri Krishna gave to Arjuna that 'the doer of good never comes to grief', in the sixth chapter of the immortal *Gita*. If you are not fit for the life of Sannyas (renunciation) just now, there is no reason for you to be depressed. For are you not the son of the Mother anyhow, and devoted to Her already? What if you are not a Sannyasin? You are Mother's child just the same and are no less dear to Her. You only look up to Her for everything and love Her with all your heart and soul. She knows better where to keep you and in what manner than you can possibly do yourself. Only stick to Mother and never forget that you belong to Her. Do your duty manfully in whatever station of life you may be put and prove yourself a Mother's child by bringing all sorts of circumstances under your feet, having full consciousness that you are above them all, and they have no power to frighten you, far less to gain ascendancy over you in any way. May Mother give you strength and vigour to accomplish this....

Yours in the Mother  
TURIYANANDA

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The R. K. M. Home of Service  
Luxa, Benares City, U.P.  
The 14th February/1920

My dear Doctor,

Many thanks for your kind letter of 4/2/20 received day before yesterday. I was very glad to know therefrom that you were doing very well spiritually. Try to be in touch with Mother always and She is sure to protect



you and lead you aright without fail. It gave me very great satisfaction to learn from your letter that you could understand Mother's play [which] She had with you—to rouse you to your senses, when you went astray in thought—by giving a shock to you. That was very nice. Be on the alert now as to how you should think things that are not congenial to Mother.... It pleased me immensely to note that you have got a friend in the person of Mr. Raj Krishna, a native of Punjab who is so helpful to you in matters spiritual. It is nice to have such a companion to whom one can open his heart and get response.

You must fight your case to a finish by all means. You must do it fully. For things done by halves are never done right. Only do it, trying to remain unaffected, using your efforts in full, giving the results over to Mother. Know that you are engaged in doing it for somebody else. Know yourself to be the witness always, and not a participant. That is the secret of doing *nishkama karma*—unselfish work.

I think '*Mithilayam pradagdhayam na me dahati kinchana*'<sup>1</sup> is complete in itself. If it has another part I am not aware of the same. What a grand idea of unselfishness expressed in that one line!... It is so difficult to be rid of the 'Aham' (the sense of 'I') that is so deeply implanted in the human mind. But by the grace of the Mother some one can eradicate it if he works hard, sincerely and with unbounded patience. Mother Herself obliterates it with Her own hand, if the aspirant gives himself up to Mother fully and unconditionally....

Trusting you are hale and hearty, with my best wishes and love to you and dear Delicia,

Yours in the Mother  
TURIYANANDA

---

The R. K. M. Home of Service  
Luxa, Benares City, U.P.  
The 22nd March/1920

My dear Doctor,

I received your kind letter of the 13th inst. duly. I have been exceedingly happy to learn that you have secured a post in Ooty where you are going to join it very soon. I think you have done right in choosing the post that is permanent to avoid unnecessary anxiety and exertion after some time by joining one that is temporary. Never be mindful of pecuniary gain only. You shall have other advantages in the post you have accepted such as time for meditation and communing with Mother which is indeed so vitally indispensable for spiritual development. Besides the climate of Ooty is so inviting, and that means a good deal no doubt.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Even if the whole of Mithila burns down, nothing that is mine burns.' These are the words of Janaka, King of Mithila, to a sannyasin.

What nonsense have you written about your Kundali (horoscope), and the reading of your palm, etc.? Don't you believe in such nasty things at all, leaving aside your faith in Mother. Mother alone is Omnipotent. She can do anything and everything if She wills it. She is able to do away with Fate even if there be any such thing as Fate. Don't be credulous. Don't lose faith in Mother. If you have a desire for marriage that is another thing. But if you are determined to lead a single and spiritual life there is no power on earth or above it to dissuade you from your noble purpose. Be sure about it. If you marry you shall do it wilfully and there is none else to decide it for you. If you have a tendency or leaning towards marriage that is a different thing altogether. But if you are sincerely averse to it, if you really want to remain free, you shall have all help from within. This is hypnotism pure and simple that you are told by way of prediction. Throw it off by implicit faith in Mother and in your own soul, which is always free and independent. If I hear that you have married I shall know that it is your own will that has made you marry and not any outside influence that has acted on you. Be cautious and strong. Don't be weak and yield to any persuasion whatever if you want to make yourself really happy and peaceful. If Mother has been pleased to bring you out of the mire of Samsara (worldly existence) you should not willingly get entangled in it again and prove yourself wretched....

Trusting this will find you well and prosperous with my best wishes and love, and asking you again to be strong and wary,

Yours in the Mother  
TURIYANANDA

## AT THE FEET OF SWAMI AKHANDANANDA—VIII

BY 'A DEVOTEE'

May 1936—*Sargachi* (Annual Celebrations day in the Ashrama).

Centenary celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna's birth were being held in many different places. News of these was coming out in the papers. Side by side with one such report, the remarks of a sectarian preacher had been published in a Bengali newspaper: 'Ramakrishna was an epileptic patient. He knew hypnotism and made young Vivekananda his propagandist.' A devotee from Berhampur had brought the paper, shown it to Bābā,<sup>1</sup> and

read it out. Bābā remained silent. When the devotee attempted to draw his notice to it a second time and requested him to protest in the paper, Bābā after a while said—breaking the silence—:

You crazy boy! What is the good of reading such items in the papers and showing them to others? If a fool criticizes a superior person, wise people take no notice of it at all. If someone comes and shouts, 'Kṛṣṇa is a lewd fellow!', have we got either to lend our ears to him or to be all up to contradict him? He that has realized the mystery of spiritual persons is all right—let others understand it in time.

<sup>1</sup>The name by which Swami Akhandananda was called by most of his disciples and devotees.



You need not do anything. Tear up the paper. You are preaching their ideas more than they.

The devotee tore up the paper and threw it away.

After some time Bābā began again to talk:

At Alwar I went into a house for a night's halt. During the talk after dinner, someone started to belittle Swamiji [Vivekananda]. I protested and left the house then and there. It was about eleven o'clock.

\*

One night, at a time when the Math was located at Nilambar Babu's garden at Belur, there were discussions on Vedānta which continued up to two o'clock in the morning. Towards the end the matter for debate centred around the question whether the soul is reborn after death, and later, whether man is reborn as lower animals or not.

Swamiji had started the debate, and the brothers had taken whichever sides they pleased. Swamiji remained neutral and generally silent; but at times he supplied arguments to the losing side. At last he stopped it at two o'clock. Everybody went to sleep, but just at 4 a.m., Swamiji asked me to ring the rising bell. He was by then walking up and down singing to himself, after his morning ablutions.

Seeing me hesitating, he said to me: 'Ring the bell, let them all wake up. I cannot see them sleeping any more.' I replied: 'They all went to sleep only two hours ago. Let them sleep a little more.' But in a firm voice Swamiji said: 'They went to sleep at two, so they will get up at six—is that your plea? All right, give me the bell, I will ring it! Are we starting the Math for sleeping?'

Then I rang the bell quite vigorously, and everybody got up crying, 'Who is that? Who are you?' If I were alone, perhaps

they would have finished me; but when they saw Swamiji smiling behind me, they one by one went to the adjoining rooms on the other side—yawning and rubbing their eyes.

Again—perhaps a little later, at Belur Math—Hari Maharaj [Swami Turiyananda] one day could not come for meditation to the shrine, or was a bit late. He had had an attack of cold and fever. On hearing this, Swamiji flared up and exclaimed, 'Still this body? Shame upon you!' Among us, Hari Maharaj was the most intense *tapasvī* (man of austerity). He hung his head. Then Swamiji began to talk to him affectionately: 'Do you know why I rebuke you all, my brothers? You are all the children of the Master. The world will learn from you. It hurts me very much when I see in you anything short of the ideal. If the new-comers see such laxity in us, they will become still more lax in their behaviour. The Master used to say: "If I do the full sixteen parts, you will do only one." Now if you do that one part, others will do only one-sixteenth of that. If you do not do that one part even, where will they stand?'

\*

At eight o'clock one evening, Bābā asked his secretary—a brahmacārin (monastic probationer)—to come at 9 p.m., that he might dictate some of his reminiscences. The brahmacārin replied that after the evening meal it would be inconvenient for him to write. Bābā said in a tone of reproof:

What? You say you can't? I am asking you to come and write and you say you can't? I an old man am ready to dictate, but you a young man can't write? Eating and sleeping—no reading, no good discussion, not to speak of *japa* (repetition of the holy name) or meditation!

Bābā got up and sat on his bed, and spoke again, his eyes flashing:

Swamiji knew it beforehand, and warned us about it. Monastic indolence is a dangerous thing. It is this that we should be afraid of. It may ruin us. Only eating and sleeping, no high thinking—nothing of the kind! Gradually you will lose all power to grasp any great thoughts. Just remember the great ideal for which you have come here; then do you think, with this attitude of yours, you are going to serve this Saṅgha (Organization) of Swamiji's?

If you cannot sit down to meditate, if you cannot dig the earth with a spade, you can learn languages: if not English, French or German, you can learn Sanskrit and Hindi. Even that will be a great service.

I asked S—— to learn Hindi. Now he is a fluent Hindi speaker. Do something, otherwise you will become inert, an invalid; you will be of no use. You, a young man, are you not ashamed to say, 'I cannot do anything after 9 p.m.'? Don't you see this old man, working still and marching towards death? Observe all this and learn a little!

Well, you will go to bed at nine. Can you say that you will get up at 3 a.m., and sit for meditation? I know you can't. You will get up at 6; and again you will have another three hours' rest in the afternoon.

Fresh from sleep they come to me at 3 p.m. and say, 'I was taking rest.' By rest, we understand some change of work—reading some book, lying down, and then back to work again.

\*

One afternoon a brahmacārin wearing a turban and holding a monk's staff in one hand and *kamaṇḍalu* (water-pot) in the other, was moving about near Bābā, who was resting in the outside veranda. The brahmacārin moved from this side to that, and back, to attract the notice of Bābā.

Looking at him, Bābā asked:

What is it that's playing in your mind? A turban on your head and a *daṇḍa* (staff) and a *kamaṇḍalu* in your hands! I understand by this that you have a desire to be a wandering monk! You are at liberty to become one, but what have I got to do with that? Can you go out and live on alms? Otherwise work and remain here.

Just before the evening *ārati* (service with waving of lights, etc.), Bābā was sitting on a reclining chair in the hall silent and alone. There was no one nearby. The Devotee approached him: when Bābā saw him he asked that he bring a palm-leaf fan. So, the Devotee began to fan him. Bābā asked him to fan slowly the whole body including the feet, to drive away the mosquitoes.

That afternoon Bābā had felt hurt by the behaviour of an orphan boy living at the Ashrama,<sup>2</sup> and was talking as if to himself now:

None of the boys grows up with the idea of renunciation. Not one of them can grasp the ideas of our Master or Swamiji. Of what avail are all these activities? It's so painful for me.

But then, the Master has told me: These boys had been wandering in the streets for a morsel of food, with only a torn cloth to put on. How can they grasp these great ideas? Even if they do so by imitation, they cannot retain them. What they need is food and clothes and with that a little education so that they can eke out a living of their own. This life will be spent in this way; only an impression of the life at the Ashrama (Monastery) will remain in their mind.

Sometimes I feel much pained to see the pettiness of some people—for getting little things. I never take any good thing for

<sup>2</sup> This Ashrama had been from the start centred around a Home for orphan boys.



myself before giving it to others, not even a clove after meals. Throughout my life I have served food to others, and only then taken food myself. How many days without having eaten have I fed them [the orphans of the Ashrama] and myself not well-clothed have clothed them well! Will they not learn anything from all this? But still, one or two have become imbued with the idea of renunciation and courage and energy for work.

Bahadur! Oh, he was not human, he was divine! He came down as if from heaven—from the Himalayas. He could not stay long in the dust of this world! He was too young to die—so tender! What strength of body and mind he had! What spirit of enquiry, simple faith, and desire to do good to others!

Before going to sleep, he would ask me question after question: Where do men go after death? Why are men born? And so on. Some questions I would answer then and there; to others I would reply, 'You will know when you grow older.' A few days afterwards, he would ask me, 'Bābā, have I now grown older? Will you answer that question?' Sometimes I had to lull him to sleep with stories.

Here during the rains, a farmer's little boy was being carried away by the current into deeper waters and was gasping. Bahadur saw him, jumped into the river, and saved his life without any thought of the danger to his own.

Of course, he would show his physical prowess sometimes. Once he lifted a heavy weight and perhaps there was a rupture somewhere within. And the bright boy began to wither away. No treatment

was of any avail. Such a serious disease, yet he would take his food without any help. Only on the day before the last could I feed him a cup of milk with my own hand. On the last day, from the morning he kept telling me, 'Bābā, I will go to the shrine room.' I said to him: 'How can it be? You are so ill. Get well and then I will take you to the shrine.' Still he insisted, 'No, Bābā, take me to the shrine and I will be well.' So I did at last. He looked at the picture of the Master and uttered 'Parameśwar, Parameśwar' (Great Lord, Great Lord). He breathed his last with the name of our Master on his lips when the sun was setting in the western sky.

Another day I was thinking: I love them so much, yet they leave me and go away, as if they cared nothing for me. They do not once look back. They have no affection for me! But then the Master made it clear to me: 'No other affection can touch you. You are encircled by the light of my love. You are filled with my love. Can worldly love and affection touch you in any way?' Then I understood everything and the mind became calm and I came to the conclusion that it matters little whether they remain or go. We shall have to get along with each other for the destined number of days.

Once the Master in a vision showed me mother Yaśodā following after Gopāla (the child Kṛṣṇa), and said to me, 'Just see here!' And they three mingled together and entered into me. Then after a long silence Bābā cast a glance at the Devotee and said, 'Sometimes they come out again. Do you understand?'

## **THE GRACE OF GOD**

SWAMI BUDHANANDA

*(Continued from the previous issue)*

### **IV**

But what practically can we *do* towards attaining God's grace? From man's side there is one basic thing to be done: and that is to remove our drowsiness—the non-comprehension of grace—as quickly as possible.

What does removing drowsiness mean?

'One day a disciple said to the [Holy] Mother with great earnestness: "Mother, I am coming to you so frequently, and I have received your grace. But why have I not achieved anything? I feel that I am as I was before." In reply she said: "My child, suppose you are asleep on a bed, and some one removes you with the bed to another place. In that case will you know, immediately on waking, that you have come to a new place? Not at all. Only after your drowsiness clears away completely, you will know that you have come to a new place'.<sup>1</sup>

Grace being always there, our present business is to remove this ever-recurring drowsiness—to clarify our understanding.

Swami Brahmananda, the great disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, used to give this significant advice to his disciples, 'Always pray to God that you may feel His grace within your heart'.

If there is water flowing in the river, that is very good. But what I need for my purpose is water in the faucet of my 16th-floor apartment. Otherwise even a flood in the river below, will leave me high and dry.

But if I feel the Lord's grace flowing through my heart, or even the very disposition to pray for it when I do not feel its presence in my heart, it is like the water in my faucet. Prayer and practice of the other spiritual disciplines can remove our drowsiness, and open our perception of the ever-existing grace: of how tenderly God holds us by the hand. Then we begin to feel the tremendous impact of grace on our inner life.

In this sense at least, one can work for attracting God's grace. In this sense at least, there remains something for us to do to become particular recipients of the abundant grace of God, which is all the time flowing, which is unconditioned and unconditional.

As to the technique of becoming a particular recipient of infinite grace, Sri Ramakrishna gave out an invaluable simple secret, which any good-hearted person of any intelligence can practise. One day a devotee asked, 'By what kind of work can one realize God?' Sri Ramakrishna replied:

'There is no difference in work. Do not think that this work will lead to God and that will not.

'Everything depends upon His grace. To have His grace, whatever work you perform, do it with sincerity and earnest longing for Him. Through His grace the environment will become favourable and the conditions of realization will become perfect'.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sri Sarada Devi *The Holy Mother* (Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras 600004, 1949), p. 512

<sup>2</sup> *Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras, 1938), Saying No. 674



We have to remember not only what is being said but also who is saying it. A God-man speaking is the same as God's speaking. And what is he saying here about the way of getting grace? He is giving out the whole secret: 'To have His grace, whatever work you perform, do it with sincerity and earnest longing for Him.' It is the same ancient open secret which Śrī Kṛṣṇa had long before declared in the *Gītā*:

'Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice, whatever you give away, and whatever you practise in the form of austerities, O son of Kuntī—do it as an offering to Me.

'Thus shall you be free from the bondage of actions, which bear good or evil results. With your mind firmly set on the yoga of renunciation, you shall become free and come to Me'.<sup>3</sup>

And what more could one ask of grace?

Suppose it is raining. If you want water to accumulate in your palms, you must cup them and hold them up in the rain. If you keep your fingers loose, how can water accumulate there? Will you not do even as much as to hold your cupped hands out in the rain?

Sri Ramakrishna says:

'A man does not have to suffer any more if God, in His grace, removes his doubts and reveals Himself to him. But this grace descends upon him only after he has prayed to God with intense yearning of heart and practised spiritual discipline. The mother feels compassion for her child when she sees him running about breathlessly. She has been hiding herself; now she appears before the child'.<sup>4</sup>

Grace of God is that central and all-important factor in spiritual life, which makes it possible and also fruitful. Without it, spiritual life does not blossom forth. It does not even begin.

Given the grace of God, even seemingly unhelpful and unfavourable circumstances turn helpful and favourable; nay, even the impossible becomes possible. Miracles happen. But when that grace is wanting, even seemingly favourable situations unexpectedly go against us. Stone walls rush out of their places, as it were, hit us and knock us down. Whereas, if we have grace, every wall reveals a potential door for a new opening of the spirit.

Sri Ramakrishna once said to Keshab Chandra Sen and other devotees:

'They are heroes indeed who can pray to God in the midst of their worldly activities. They are like men who strive for God-realization while carrying heavy loads on their heads. Such men are real heroes. You may say that this is extremely difficult. But is there anything, however hard, that cannot be achieved through God's grace? His grace makes even the impossible possible'.<sup>5</sup>

In a parable, Sri Ramakrishna further explains how incredible things can happen through divine grace:

'A man had a son who was on the point of death. In a frenzy he asked remedies of different people. One of them said: "Here is a remedy: First it must rain when the star Svati is in the ascendant; then some of the rain must fall into a skull; then a frog must come there to drink the water, and a snake must chase it; and when the snake is about to bite the frog, the frog must hop away and the poison must fall into the skull. You should give the patient a little of the poison and rain-water from the skull." The father set out eagerly to find the medicine when the star Svati was in the sky. It started raining. Fervently he said to God, "O Lord, please get a skull for me." Searching here and there, he at last found a skull with rain-water in it. Again he prayed to God, saying, "O Lord, I beseech Thee, please help me find the frog and the snake." Since he

<sup>3</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā*, IX. 27-8

<sup>4</sup> 'M': *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Tr. by Swami Nikhilananda, Pub. Madras, 1947), p. 43

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 1009

had great longing, he got the frog and the snake also. In the twinkling of an eye he saw a snake chasing a frog, and as it was about to bite the frog, its poison fell into the skull.

'If one takes shelter with God, and prays to Him with great longing, God will surely listen; He will certainly make everything favourable.'

Here a devotee exclaimed, 'What an apt illustration!' At this, Sri Ramakrishna added:

'Yes, God makes everything favourable. Perhaps the aspirant doesn't marry. Thus he is able to devote his whole attention to God. Or perhaps his brothers earn the family's livelihood. Or perhaps a son takes on the responsibilities of the family. Then the aspirant will not have to bother about the world; he can give one hundred per cent of his mind to God'.<sup>6</sup>

And this parable Sri Ramakrishna had prefaced with a question which many of us have asked many times of ourselves but to which we perhaps received no satisfying answer:

'Some people ask me: "Sir, why has God created such a world? Is there no way out for us?" I say to them: "Why shouldn't there be a way out? Take shelter with God and pray to Him with a yearning heart for a favourable wind, that you may have things in your favour. If you call on Him with yearning, He will surely listen to you".'<sup>7</sup>

Again we have to take note not only of what is being said but who is saying it.

Another important teaching of Sri Ramakrishna in regard to obtaining grace is, 'One must propitiate the Divine Mother, the Primal Energy, in order to obtain God's grace'.<sup>8</sup> In explaining this statement he says that the Divine Mother alone is the root of the universe and all things in it; that She alone spreads the veil of ignor-

ance before our eyes. And then, as he implies, we get caught in māyā, commit sins, and suffer. When the Mother is propitiated She removes our ignorance. Thus the way for attaining illumination is cleared.

This is the significance of worship of the Divine Mother.

From the life and words of Sri Ramakrishna comes out this teaching: if one flings oneself unreservedly on the mercy of God, and stays lying at His door, he receives grace.

## V

We may however remember that the grace in fact is God's burden and not man's.

Some of us will have seen mothers taking babies in perambulators into the park. The sturdy baby jumps and frisks in any way it likes. It wants to eat the toy or to swoop down and catch the tail of the poodle-dog. But mother has fixed the straps in such a way that while it has all possible means of freely being naughty, there is no freedom to fall and get hurt. The grace of God signifies those straps and it is the Mother's business to fix them in a way that may prevent our destruction. It is our privilege of course to try to catch the tail of the poodle!

There is this basic principle involved in the whole phenomenon of grace. As Sri Ramakrishna says:

'It is the nature of a child to soil itself with dirt and mud, but the mother does not allow it to remain dirty always. She washes it from time to time. So it is in the nature of man to commit sin; but as sure as he commits sin, even so is it doubly assured that the Lord creates the means for his redemption'.<sup>9</sup>

From the lips of every prophet of the world has gone forth this message in all ages. It is not a declaration of a mere

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 775

<sup>7</sup> *loc. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 43

<sup>9</sup> *Sayings*, Saying No. 646



man, or even a saint, but of a God-man who alone can interpret God's ways to man.

## VI

God's grace may sometimes manifest itself as affluence. And it is then easy to grow eloquent in regard to God's goodness. But, as again Sri Ramakrishna points out, grace of God does not at all necessarily improve one's material condition. What is more, grace can and very often does co-exist with most miserable conditions of living.

Before Śrī Kṛṣṇa was born, his expectant parents Devakī and Vasudeva, then in prison, had the vision of the Lord. But that did not end their imprisonment or their suffering.

We read in the *Mahābhārata* that when Bhīṣma, the grandsire, lay on a bed of arrows in the battlefield of Kurukṣetra, he was found shedding tears. Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍava brothers were standing near by.

'Arjuna exclaimed: "How strange, brother! Our grandfather Bhishma himself—so truthful and wise, the master of his self, and one amongst the eight Vasus (a class of deities)—even he is overcome by Maya in his dying hour and is shedding tears!" When this was communicated to Bhishma he replied: "O Krishna, you know full well that I am not crying for that. But when I think that even the Pandavas, whom the Lord Himself is serving as charioteer, have to pass through endless troubles and tribulations, I am overpowered with the thought that the ways of God cannot be in the least comprehended, and I cannot restrain my tears".<sup>10</sup>

## VII

Grace is sometimes hidden, sometimes open; sometimes it is soothing, sometimes it is scorching; sometimes it comes upon us like a shower of flowers,

sometimes like a thunderbolt. It is natural for us to wonder how grace can come like a thunderbolt. This is what Śrī Kṛṣṇa says in the *Bhāgavatam*:

'I take away the fortune of those to whom I show My grace. For, intoxicated with wealth, a person becomes stiff with pride and disregards the whole world and even Me'.<sup>11</sup>

In another passage from the same scripture the Lord says:

'I gradually deprive the man of his wealth, to whom I choose to extend My special grace; thereupon his relatives abandon him, finding him penniless and deep in misery'.<sup>12</sup>

In the story of Job in the Old Testament, we find how poignantly these disconcerting words of Kṛṣṇa can be borne out. The once-affluent Job lost everything. Here is how Job describes some of his woes:

'He hath put my brethren far from me, and mine acquaintances are verily estranged from me.

'My kinsfolk have failed, and my familiar friends have forgotten me.

'They that dwell in mine house, and my maids, count me for a stranger: I am an alien in their sight.

'I called my servant and he gave me no answer; I entreated him with my mouth.

'My breath is strange to my wife, though I entreated for the children's sake of my own body.

'Yea, young children despised me; I arose and they spake against me.

'All my inward friends abhorred me; and they whom I loved are turned against me'.<sup>13</sup>

But taking the account of Job as a whole, must we not regard the testing of him as the Lord's Grace? How, then, can the gracious Lord be so cruel? Well, we have to consider more realistically what grace is.

<sup>11</sup> *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, VIII, xxii. 24

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, X, lxxxviii. 8

<sup>13</sup> *The Bible: Job*, XIX, 13-19

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, Saying No. 667

Why do we suffer? It is because we are separated from God—or do not realize that He is always with us. What separates us from Him? It is our attachments to our *upādhis*—our embellishments and endowments, our possessions and positions, our opinions and our prejudices. So, when out of His infinite compassion the Lord wants to confer His special grace on us, He does not wait for the soul to get over these attachments in a ‘natural’ process. He forcibly tears them away.

Thus when a spiritual seeker receives such blows, it may be the Lord is seeking to bring him a special awakening, to confer on him a special grace.

The truth of Kṛṣṇa’s disturbing words we find wonderfully illustrated in Swami Vivekananda’s life. When he (as Narendranath) was being drawn up into the great life he was to live, as spiritual realizations were crowding in upon him, as Sri Ramakrishna’s grace continued to shower upon him in endless streams, Narendranath faced the most harrowing days of his life. His father died leaving the family in penury and debt; relatives filed lawsuits; and starvation stared him in the face. Yes, starvation was the price Naren had to pay for received grace. And what hurt him most was not his own starvation but his inability to feed his mother and brothers and sisters.

In those days when he was receiving these severe blows of what we now see as grace, even Vivekananda’s stout heart quaked. There is a poignant narrative in his own words which will vividly show us what it means even to such a great devotee, to receive the impacts of supreme grace:

‘In spite of all these troubles, however, I never lost faith in the existence of God, nor in His divine mercy. Every morning taking His name I got up and went out in search of a job. One day my mother overheard me and said bitterly, “Hush, you fool, you have been crying yourself

hoarse for God from your childhood, and what has He done for you?” I was stung to the quick. Doubt crossed my mind. “Does God really exist”, I thought, “and if so, does He really hear the fervent prayer of man? Then why is there no response to my passionate appeals? Why is there so much woe in His benign kingdom? Why does Satan rule in the realm of the Merciful God?” Pundit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar’s words—“if God is good and gracious, why then do millions of people die for want of a few morsels of food at times of famine?”—rang in my ears with bitter irony. I was exceedingly cross with God. It was also the most opportune moment for doubt to creep into my heart’.<sup>14</sup>

Like Job of the Old Testament, Vivekananda revolted against God for a while, but after receiving even more blows, his faith became firm like the anvil. So came to him greater awakening, greater seeing, and greater power. And after that, Vivekananda always thrived in miseries that visited him abundantly and lived a life of absolute abandon to God’s will, with this song on his lips, ‘Thou art all that exists.’

It was the heroic mother of the Pāṇḍavas, Kuntī, who had perfect insight into the nature of the grace which comes in a fearful manner. So she prayed to Kṛṣṇa:

‘O Father of the Universe, may there be calamities for us always and at every step whereby we shall have that sight of You which saves us from experiencing another birth’.<sup>15</sup>

Such a teaching may frighten many, but not the person who sees calamities as heralding the advent of God.

## VIII

Grace, thus, clearly does not mean escape from suffering. If the devotee thinks that

<sup>14</sup> His Eastern and Western Disciples: *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Dt. Pithoragarh, U.P., 1955), p. 92

<sup>15</sup> *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, I, viii, 25



because he has prayed or practised spiritual disciplines, he must be treated by the world and by God in a special deferential way, that is not devotion, whatever else it may be.

The Holy Mother says:

‘Everybody says regretfully: “There is so much misery in the world. We have prayed so much to God, but still there is no end of misery.” But misery is only the gift of God. It is the symbol of His compassion’.<sup>16</sup>

But it takes God’s grace also, to understand this fact. This one great truth we have to remember: grace is not so much in what comes or goes, in what is conferred or taken away, but it is in the way we are given to receive whatever comes to us—happiness or misery.

What actually is the proof of grace when it comes in the form of suffering? The proof is here: when you know how to receive it—like Sītā who had to undergo the fire-ordeal, but came out from it like a golden goddess—though passing through fire you will not only not get burnt but emerge effulgent.

## IX

Śrī Kṛṣṇa says in the *Gītā*: ‘Proclaim it boldly, O son of Kuntī, that My devotee never perishes’.<sup>17</sup>

In what sense is it that the devotee of God will not perish? Won’t he die? Most certainly he will. And quite possibly at an early age. Christ died at 33; Śaṅkara, at 32; Vivekananda, at 39.

Will not the devotee of God suffer from afflictions? Often it is seen that His devotees suffer more than other persons.

When Socrates drank hemlock, it did its deadly work very well. No deity prevented its action. The Heavenly Father did not act to save His only begotten Son

when He was being nailed to the cross. Sri Ramakrishna’s Divine Mother did not do a thing to cure his painful throat cancer. Even those who differ with Mahatma Gandhi’s political views are likely to agree he was a devotee of God. Yet the assassin’s bullets went right through his chest.

In what sense then is the grace of God present in these cases, among countless others? In what sense then did they not perish?

You can see it for yourself. Call in, if you wish, even the all-destroying Time. *They* cannot be destroyed. Could hemlock destroy the glory of Socrates’ soul? Did not crucifixion, for Christ mean resurrection? Sri Ramakrishna’s body died of cancer; but he emerged as a world-saviour. As Gandhi fell, the name of Rāma came from his lips, and he thus, according to Hindu belief, triumphed over death.

This is how the devotee of the Lord dies but does not perish.

## X

Now the final question for us is to know how we may discern God’s grace in our own life, even when it comes in painful manner. There are certain signs which will help us.

The Holy Mother says:

‘It is the nature of water to flow downwards, but the sun’s rays lift it up towards the sky; likewise it is the very nature of mind to go to lower things, to objects of enjoyment, but the grace of God can make the mind go towards higher objects’.<sup>18</sup>

This movement of the mind towards higher objects is not often like the vertical course of a rocket. In the beginning, strange to say, it usually manifests itself as our inner struggles. We must clearly understand why these inner struggles occur,

<sup>16</sup> Sri Sarada Devi ..., p. 334

<sup>17</sup> IX, 31

<sup>18</sup> Sri Sarada Devi ..., p. 486

before we can know how they are associated with grace.

When we try to fix our mind on higher things, this mind which has so long dwelt on low things, revolts. Our lower impulses clamour for their wonted share of attention. Hence must result a struggle, and this itself indicates that we are fighting against the dominance of our lower impulses. This we would never do if the mind were not trying to rise to higher things. And since, as Holy Mother said, the grace of God can make the mind go towards higher things, our very struggles—dissatisfaction with our own state of being—are signs of received grace.

Another positive sign of received grace is the development of a right understanding. How can we know we are developing a clear understanding? These are the signs: the mind will then change its centre of gravity from ego to God—we shall then begin to perceive that when our thoughts and work have not been linked with God, we have behaved to ourselves like our own enemies. There will be then no more doubts in the mind that God-realization alone is the ultimate objective of life. And all the movements of our psychophysical organism will then be gradually but surely directed and oriented to that master purpose of life.

This received grace which symptomatically manifests itself as a clear understanding will lead us to twin results—which again are suggestive of grace: Certitude of faith, and Enthusiasm for right efforts.

As to the first, one cannot perhaps find a better example than the valiant Sikh Guru Tegh Bahadur, who chose to give up his head, with the remark, 'I give my head, but not the essential thing, my faith'.<sup>19</sup> As to enthusiasm for right effort

Śrī Kṛṣṇa teaches in the *Gītā* his noted doctrine that one should lift oneself by oneself, and not lower oneself (*vide* VI. 5). Again, in the same scripture He Himself teaches further the doctrine of complete self-resignation (*vide* XVIII. 66).

Both the capacity for self-effort and the attitude of self-resignation, when genuine and whole-hearted, are signs of received grace.

A monk of the Ramakrishna Order had been practising hard austerities at a cremation ground in Varanasi. A disciple of the Holy Mother was going to Calcutta, and the monk said to him, 'Please ask the Mother when the grace of God will descend on me.' When the disciple communicated this to the Mother, she said in a serious tone, 'Please write to him that there is no such rule that the grace of God will fall on one simply because one is practising austerities. In olden days the Rishis practised austerities for thousands of years with their feet up and head down and a lighted fire burning under them. Even then, only some of them received the grace of God'.<sup>20</sup>

On another occasion a disciple said to the Mother:

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... Aurangzeb (the Mughal emperor) was determined that the Shikh (Guru Tegh Bahadur) should be put to death.

... At Delhi, the story continues, he was summoned before the emperor, and half insultingly and half credulously, told to exhibit miracles in proof of the alleged divinity of his mission. Tegh Bahadur answered that the duty of man was to pray to the Lord; yet he would do one thing, he would write a charm, and the sword should fall harmless on the neck round which it was hung. He placed it round his own neck and inclined his head to the executioner: a blow severed it, to the surprise of the court tinged with superstition, and upon the paper was found written, "*Sir dia Sirr na dia!*"—he had given his head but not his secret; his life was gone, but his inspiration of apostolic virtue still remained in the world. [The incident took place in 1675].

—*vide*: *The History of the Sikhs* by J. D. Cunningham, S. Chand & Co., Delhi, 1955, p. 58.

<sup>20</sup> Sri Sarada Devi, pp. 511-2

<sup>19</sup> The story runs as follows:



'I have practised austerities and Japa so much, but I have not achieved anything'. In reply the Mother said, 'God is not like fish or vegetables that you can buy Him for a price'.<sup>21</sup>

When one really has grace, one never feels he has done anything to deserve grace, or the vision of God. One's self-effort leads only to resignation. One then feels: How little have I done! How can I expect His vision except through His utmost unreasoned grace? And how can I be impatient? Can any amount of human effort be adequate for the vision of God?

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p. 512.

When all is said and done, as far as we are concerned, the greatest sign of our received grace is that we realize the truth of Sri Ramakrishna's words: *the wind of the Lord's grace is always blowing*.

And not only that, but that He Himself has become our boat, our sail, and our helmsman.

What could be a more triumphant sign of received grace?

Let us therefore rejoice in our good fortune and stay awake for greater happenings, in whatever outer forms they may come, as thorns or flowers.

(Concluded)

## THE DEVOTIONAL POETRY OF SAROJINI NAIDU

DR. NARSINGH SRIVASTAVA

Sarojini Naidu, the greatest of Indian poetesses in English, is generally described as a great humanist who expresses in her poetry a genuine reverence for all religions of the world. But it is worth noting that she had an intense religious feeling which finds emotional expression mainly in her poems on Hindu deities, especially in her lyrics on Sri Radha and Krishna. In this respect, she is a true child of the age, as besides writing poems of nature and village life, folk songs and songs of life and death, she celebrates the theme of religious devotion with equal emotional fervour and remarkable poetic sensibility. Sarojini began her poetic career in an age in which, owing to the impact of religious revivalists as well as of great saints like Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, religious themes had as great an appeal for the poets as for the common people. Even Toru Dutt, a new convert to Christianity, brought out her well-known *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1882), which

included her most popular longer narrative poems such as 'Savitri' and 'Lakshman'. Henry L. Derozio also wrote poems such as 'Chorus of Brahmins'. Ram Sharma (Nobo Kirsan Ghose) wrote excellent mystical poems like 'Music and Vision of the Anhat Chakram' and 'Bhagobati Gita'. A. M. Kunte's 'A Hymn to Surya', Romesh Chunder Dutt's 'Sita Lost', Swami Vivekananda's 'Kali the Mother', Brajendranath Seal's 'An Ancient Hymn'—are all evidences of the nineteenth century Indo-Anglian poets' interest in religious themes. In most of these poems of spiritual, religious or mystical subject-matter we notice a remarkable harmony between the English form and Indian sensibility—the unity of the foreign body and the native spirit. Sarojini Naidu has done, indeed, yeoman service to the cultural and religious heritage of our country through her poems such as: 'To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus', 'Hymn to Indra, Lord of Rain', 'The Temple', 'Lakshmi—The Lotus Born', 'Kali—the Mother', 'Song

of 'Radha the Milkmaid', and 'Song of Radha-Kanhaya'.

Although in these poems there is an obvious lack of the philosophical profundity that we find in the poetry of Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda, Sarojini is always inspired by the truth that spirituality and religious faith are the dominant notes of Indian life. Besides, she also understands well as an artist how religious themes can be made fitting subjects for rendering into poetry in a foreign language. In this respect, she is no less inspired by the tone and texture of Indian religious poems than by their content. As a result, we find in her religious poems an ingenuity and diversity of form rather than a stereotyped unity of style, and the form in each lyric is chosen to suit the theme. Some of her poems such as 'Hymn to Indra, Lord of Rain' and 'Lakshmi—The Lotus Born' are pure invocations to deities rendered in moving lyrical forms comprising balanced and rhymed stanzas. What is remarkable in these lyrics is a fine fusion of descriptive imagery and traditional themes:

Thou who didst rise like a pearl from  
the ocean,  
Whose beauty surpasseth the splendour  
of morn!

Lo! we invoke thee with eager devotion,  
Hearken, O Lotus-born!

( 'Lakshmi—The Lotus Born' )

Thou, who with bountiful torrent and  
river  
Dost nourish the heart of the forest and  
plain,

Withhold not thy gift, O omnipotent  
giver

( 'Hymn to Indra, Lord of Rain' )

It is obvious from these excerpts that the drive of feeling and the imaginative appeal we find in her poems on Radha and Krishna—the divine lovers of Indian mythology—are wanting in these poems of formal invocation. The poet seems to compensate for this want of vitality by a powerful lyricism and diction as well as an

elevated tone. In these poems she makes her mark more by her sense of sound and form than by poetic insight.

'To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus' presents another variety of Sarojini's devotional poetry. It is a fine specimen of a powerful descriptive poem in which the imaginative power of the poet is employed in depicting the silent suggestion of a stone image, radiating tranquillity and poise. The divine serenity and harmony of Buddha's face evoke thoughts that resolve the very mystery of life. Sarojini Naidu attains a level which is quite close to the heights of Shakespearean diction, imagery and tone:

The wind of change for ever blows  
Across the tumult of our way,  
Tomorrow's unborn griefs depose  
The sorrows of our yesterday.  
Dream yields to dream, strife follows  
strife,

And unweaves the webs of life.

The suggestion of sharp contrast of such a picture of our ordinary human life with that of Buddha highlights the sublimity of his stature:

But not the peace, supremely won,  
Lord Buddha, of thy lotus-throne.

Devotional poetry aims at the realization of or experience of the unifying of all other feelings and attractions into a meaningful whole of unconditional devotion to the beloved deity. It enables the poet to realize the existence of a higher reality not merely as an eternal absolute but as a benign entity, a loving person to whom he can make a whole-hearted surrender. Even when the mode of expression is objective, the creative power lies in the emotional charge of the theme with which the poet is identified. This is what we find in most of the devotional poems of Sarojini Naidu mentioned earlier. Still some of her poems such as 'The Soul's Prayer' and 'The Flute-Player of Brindaban' are entirely subjective poems of spiritual longing. 'The Soul's Prayer'—actually verging upon a mystical experience





Govinda' is not only an additional source of melody in the poem, but it also strikes the recurring note of self-annihilating love:

But my heart was so lost in your wor-  
ship, Beloved,  
They were wroth when I cried without  
knowing:

'Govinda! Govinda!  
Govinda! Govinda!'

In its melodious texture the poem is comparable to her 'Kali—The Mother' which in its lyrical force and rhythm even captures the very tone of a prayer in chorus, a *Kirtan*:

O terrible and tender and divine!  
O mystic mother of all sacrifice,  
We deck the sombre altars of thy shrine  
With sacred basil leaves and saffron-  
rice;

All gifts of life and death we bring to  
thee,

Uma Haimavati!

But in spite of all its music and force it remains closer to invocation and fails to achieve the emotional drive of the poems just discussed. Again, the 'Song of Radha-Kanhaya' celebrates the delicate theme of loving reproach by Krishna's playmates—the boys and girls of Vraja who are deeply enamoured of each and every deed of Krishna. ('Kanhaya' is one of the nicknames for Krishna.) Even while making complaints to Yashoda—the wife of Nanda and foster-mother of Krishna—they all feel in the heart of their hearts that their

naughty darling is no one else than the incarnation of the Almighty:

Nanda's wife, Nanda's wife, Kanhaya  
brawls and boasts

He is stronger than the fire and storm  
and all the demon hosts.

He says a mountain he can hold in one  
hand and uproot

The forest trees of Mathura by playing  
on his flute.

Boastful one! Boastful one! Yashoda  
took a rod

And hushed the piquant lips of his—  
who was a laughing God.

Obviously, these poems evidence Sarojini's devotional bent of mind as well as her capacity to present religious themes in lyrical pieces of moving poetry. Apart from the colour and beauty of the poetic details, and the sweetness of her diction, her devotional poems are charged with the drive of feeling as much as with a rare melody which also evokes the very tone of folk-songs on similar themes. Sarojini Naidu has made, undoubtedly, a remarkable contribution to the devotional poetry of India and Indian culture as a whole.

#### SOURCES CONSULTED:

<sup>1</sup> Sarojini Naidu: *The Sceptred Flute* (Katabistan, Allahabad, 1943)

<sup>2</sup> V. K. Gokak: *The Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglian Poetry, 1828-1965* Sahitya Akademy, (Delhi, 1970)

<sup>3</sup> William Walsh, *Commonwealth Literature* (Oxford University Press, London, 1973)



# WORK OR WORSHIP?

SWAMI NIRAMOYANANDA

TRANSLATED FROM ORIGINAL BENGALI BY SWAMI CHETANANANDA

It was 1935.

Grand preparations were going on for Sri Ramakrishna's Centenary celebration. One day I went to visit the 'Holy Mother's house', the Udbodhan, in Calcutta. Swami Arupananda (Rashbehari Maharaj) who had been an attendant of the Holy Mother, had come from Varanasi, and I was to take him to the Eye doctor in the afternoon. That same afternoon Swami Madhavananda (Nirmal Maharaj), then Assistant Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, came from Belur Math to the Udbodhan with a file of legal documents. He went upstairs and after saluting the Mother in the shrine, came quickly down again. Then we three started along Bagh-bazar street. Both the Swamis were disciples of the Holy Mother; and their conversation began thus:

Swami Arupananda: Brother Nirmal, where are you going this afternoon with these files?

Swami Madhavananda: Rashbehari-da,<sup>1</sup> I am going to the house of an attorney. I will have to consult him because we are going to acquire some land on the western side of the Belur Math.

Rashbehari Maharaj became silent and then gravely said: Brother, do you remember when we came, what we saw? And those who are coming now, what do they see?

S. M: Everything is in man's destiny.

S. A: (in an indrawn way): When we came we observed a tremendous current of *japa* (repetition of the Lord's name), meditation, and other spiritual disciplines flow-

ing in our Order. Do you remember?

S. M: Of course I do. By the impetus of that spiritual current we are moving even now.

S. A: Now the present generation is seeing tables, chairs, typewriters, accounts, and files. Can you tell me what force will guide them?

S. M: Then let me tell you, Rashbehari-da, that he who has brought them will guide them. We never say, follow us! We tried to learn from the lives of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, and they instructed us to work for Thakur (Sri Ramakrishna) and Swamiji (Vivekananda); and thus we jumped into their work. I know very well Thakur and Swamiji are at our back—they are seeing everything—and they will see till the end.

S. A: What will happen to this present generation who did not witness the holy lives of the direct disciples and did not get any instruction from them? What will be the fate of this present generation who are only working and working?

S. M: Rashbehari-da, did we ask this present generation to join the monastery? They have come after reading the literature of Thakur and Swamiji, and hearing about them. They have come because of their attraction, and they love their ideal. So they want to dedicate their lives to that noble cause. What a greatness they have! They will not have to learn from seeing our lives; their passionate love for their ideal will guide them.

Both were silent. I listened to the sound of their footsteps. After a while Swami Madhavananda again broke the silence:

S. M: Rashbehari-da, the water of the

<sup>1</sup> The Bengali suffix '-da' means 'elder brother'.

Ganga at Gangotri (source of the Ganga), Hrishikesh and Hardwar is crystal clear, but that at Dakshineswar and Belur is muddy and dirty, and moreover so many things are floating on it. It does not mean that the mother Ganga has lost her purifying power!

We reached Shyambazar.<sup>2</sup> A bus was about to leave. Swami Madhavananda quickly jumped on the footboard of the bus and, holding the hand-rail, said: Good bye, Rashbehari-da.

We moved towards our Doctor's clinic. Rashbehari Maharaj, after a long silence, said: Did you notice—what a genius! The Ganga at Belur may not be crystal clear as at Hardwar and Hrishikesh, but she does not lose an iota of her purifying power.

## II

Now it is 1942.

I had come to see the crystal clear Ganga at Hardwar and also at Hrishikesh, although I hardly had the capacity to evaluate her purifying power. I saw the busy hospital centre at Kankhal, as well as the solitary and serene hermitages. My mind was occupied with the riddle: work or worship?

In our Hardwar centre there were two types of monks—some who favoured work and others who preferred worship; and they used to talk about that riddle: work or worship. Soon I heard that Swami Virajananda, then President of the Ramakrishna Order, was coming to Hardwar for a day on his way to Shyamala Tal.<sup>3</sup> After vespers, the Swami met the monks of the Centre in the Library hall. He gave an illuminating talk on this very problem,

most probably on request, which touched our hearts deeply, inasmuch as his own life was beautifully balanced between work and worship. I recorded his talk on the back page of *Paramartha Prasanga* (*Towards The Goal Supreme*) of which he was the author:

'Work and worship—both are needful. One should not under-rate either one. You have left your homes to become monks according to the ideal of Swamiji—so giving up work, where will you stand? And again, without *tapasyā* [austerity—including contemplation, meditation, retired life, and worship] how is it possible to perform unselfish work? You need both in your life. The work which you are doing now, you will have to do with the attitude of service and worship; in other words, shunning selfishness and ego. This attitude does not come without *tapasyā*. This *tapasyā* does not mean that you will have to go to the secluded places of Hrishikesh and Uttarkashi; yet on the other hand, there is no injunction against going to these places. Swamiji introduced this plan of work; and at the same time what a longing he had to practise *tapasyā* in the Himalayas! You will have to bring a synthesis of work and worship into your life. If there is no *tapasyā* behind your work, the terrible ego will creep in and you will forget the goal of life.'

In this connection I remember another of the Swami's talks, which he gave to the newly initiated monks and brahmacārins of the Order, four years later:

'*Sannyāsa* (monasticism) is not the goal of life but a means to attain the knowledge of the Ātman. *Sannyāsa* itself is not perfection, but a discipline. After taking these monastic vows do not think that the purpose of leaving the worldly life is achieved. Now you have got the opportunity to enter into higher realms of life. Always honour these vows. Never forget

<sup>2</sup> A busy section of northern Calcutta, about a mile from The Udbodhan.

<sup>3</sup> An Ashrama founded by the Swami himself in 1915, in the lower reaches of the Himalayas.



that memorable, great day—the day you left your parents and relatives, hearth and home, for God—and the intensity of renunciation and love for God that filled your mind. Keep that attitude of renunciation vividly alive in your mind, and that will save you.

‘I look at these<sup>4</sup> young and pure brahmacārins with great regard. They are walking steadily towards God with intense love and devotion.’

### III

A retrospect: 1933.

Swami Shuddhananda (then General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission) was strolling on the bank of the Ganga at Belur Math, and talking about the budget of the Math with a young man. I had been sent by the Secretary of the ‘Vivekananda Society’ to Swami Shuddhananda, for a special purpose. The Secretary had informed me of all relevant details, in expectation that Swami Shuddhananda might ask about them; and actually he did so. He was looking very cheerful. Boldly I asked, ‘Maharaj, do those who

come here only work, or do they practise spiritual disciplines also?’

The Swami replied with surprise: ‘What do you mean? Look at the holy atmosphere of the Ganga, the serene temples, and beautiful monasteries! Moreover, these men have embraced this pure monastic life—if they do not practise *japa* and meditation, what else will they do? How long can a man work and how long can he practise spiritual disciplines? So Swamiji started this monastery. Those who will come here, in the beginning may work *and* worship with different attitudes, but gradually will learn to work *as* worship, and at last the work will *be* worship. Haven’t you heard Swamiji’s saying, “*Work is worship*”?’

‘Those who join the monastery do not all have tremendous renunciation when they leave home, so there is a need for a spiritual organization. In a place where most of the people are inspired by spirituality, whoever comes will be inspired in the same way. Swamiji used to call it “purity drilling”—or, you may say, “spiritual training”. Swamiji sometimes mentioned the monastery as a “springboard”—where people would try to build their lives for higher spiritual realization.’

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<sup>4</sup> The brahmacārins were, of course, only a part of the group being addressed.

## SERMONETTES AT ST. MORITZ—VI

SWAMI YATISWARANANDA

What are the preliminary steps in spiritual life? Performance of duty, purity, and devotion to God. From time immemorial these have been advocated by all great sages.

The nature of duty varies from person to person. But everyone must discharge his duties with the utmost sincerity. Serve your

parents if they need your help. Laziness or mistaken notions should not prevent you from helping those who are in need of help. By discharging our duties properly we get strength of mind. And this is necessary to get a proper attitude of detachment towards the world. If work is done with a spiritual aim it won’t bind us,

Every work should be a service and a sanctifying act. The secret of success in spiritual life is dispassion towards the world. Only when we try to do work in a detached way do we realize how bound we actually are. But if we continue the struggle the needed detachment will come to us. Attachment leads to waste of energy. Through controlled work energy can be increased. New channels can be opened that increase this flow of energy. Stop useless work and gossip, phantasies and worries. These are like weeds which take the nourishment intended for the crop.

Detachment leads to purity of mind. Purity is the real foundation of spiritual life. Any attempt to lead a spiritual life without this foundation not only is futile but may even be dangerous. Impure actions and impure thoughts must sooner or later bring us nothing but regret. Don't do anything which you think is impure. Truthfulness, non-violence, charity, and non-exploitation are the time-honoured virtues in India. In Christianity you have the commandments of Christ. Follow these not like a beast of burden but as a free agent. Follow them because they will lead you to greater, richer life of the spirit.

The purified soul hungers and thirsts after God. Devotion is not just an ordinary emotion. It is the hunger of the soul for the Divine. In everyone there is a sort of vague hunger or restlessness for the Divine. But it is usually at the bottom of the mind. In passing through the impure mind, this yearning is distorted, and thus we run after the various objects of the world. When the mind is purified, the soul shines forth. We stop running after sense-pleasure. Then we understand what is true longing for God. We must not allow ourselves to be swept away by feeling. Let us control our moods.

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We must proceed towards Truth. There are many approaches to Truth. But the

first step is to find out where we stand. We must first of all know our bearings. Then we should move upwards. Our movement must be systematic and with a definite aim. We must have very clear ideas. They may be simple as a child's at first, but they must be definite, clear-cut. And they should improve as we proceed.

Find out how you are oriented to life and Reality. Find out how your soul, God, and the universe are inter-related. Let us first of all stand where we are and perform our duties. And then we can evolve. And as we evolve, our concept of duty also changes.

\*

We have moods. But we should not be swayed too much by them. If we are angry we should at least not be angry with our whole mind. With one part which is calm, keep the whole mind under control. Thus learn how to remain unaffected. We need steadiness. We need poise and balance in our thinking and actions. Can true religion help you in achieving all this? It can and it does.

Develop the witness attitude. You may look upon yourself in any of the following ways: (1) I am a body, (2) I am a mind, (3) I am the spirit, the witness of my own thoughts. You will soon find that you can have stability, balance, and peace only when you take up the third attitude. The principle of self-consciousness comes first. Mind and body are only instruments of the Spirit. Think along this line, and you will soon learn to be unaffected by your moods.

\*

What is our relation to God? He is within us. He is the thread connecting us all. We often forget that and get too self-conscious. A spiritual aspirant must be primarily concerned with the inner relationship between him and God.

Imagine yourself as a point. There is no point through which the circle of Divine



Reality does not pass. By this circle we are connected with one another, and not directly, or materially. The ideal is to look upon all with the same eye. But charity begins at home. First of all you should learn to look upon yourself as divine. Our personal relationship with others may change but our relationship with the Divine does not change. We are eternally linked to the Divine. We are bubbles in the ocean of divinity. Even if a few bubbles burst there is no break in continuity. The ocean as the substratum of all bubbles continues to exist.

Take a synoptic view of things, a view of the whole. Death is not destruction. We are only changing, shifting our place. The self never changes.

\*

Do not get attached. Do not get upset. Try to see the Reality behind the phenomenon. We should be kind but not blind. Have infinite sympathy. Pain and sorrow are a means to education. Bear them. Turn to God even through suffering. Hunger for Truth makes us turn to God in spite of suffering.

## SOME SIGNIFICANT TEACHINGS OF THE *BHAGAVAD-GITĀ*

DR. S. N. L. SHRIVASTAVA

(Continued from the previous issue)

### II

We have pointed out that two unique teachings of the *Gītā* are its principle of spiritualizing the secular, and its insistence on the performance of one's *svadharma*, a vocation in consonance with one's congenital psycho-physical make-up and dedicated to the realization of the welfare of the social whole, the *lokasaṅgraha*. In the following sections I shall pin-point some other central and characteristic teachings of the *Gītā*—not attempting to exhaust the list.

#### ATTITUDE TOWARDS TRADITIONALISM

The *Gītā* is a great harmonizer of seemingly conflicting views. It strikes a balance, for instance, between traditionalism and non-conformism. Ordinarily all men, swayed as they are by lust, anger, and greed, should accept the discipline of the *śāstras* (scriptures). If they are left free to follow

unfettered their natural inclinations or instinctual urges, the 'three gates of hell' will always be wide open before them and they will never reach Perfection. Therefore, the *Gītā* says :

'He who discards the injunctions of the scriptures and acts upon the impulse of desire attains neither perfection nor happiness nor the Supreme Goal.

'Therefore let the scriptures be your authority in determining what ought to be done and what ought not to be done. Having learnt the injunctions of the scriptures, you should do your work in the world'.<sup>1</sup>

But then, situations arise in life calling for action hard to reconcile with the ordinances of the scriptures, and one who has learnt only to cling to the very words of the *śāstras* is bewildered, as Arjuna was on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra. His per-

<sup>1</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā*, XVI 23-4

plexity was the perplexity of a conventional moralist, shuddering at the idea of killing elders and preceptors, and at the prospect of the destruction of caste and family traditions (*jātidharmas* and *kuladharmas*). Śrī Kṛṣṇa taught Arjuna to set aside these traditional considerations and see things from the cosmic point of view.

#### ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE VEDAS AND VEDIC RITUALISM

The Vedas are of course highly venerated by all Hindus ; but higher than the knowledge of the Vedas is the knowledge of the Supreme Spirit. The view of the *Muṇḍaka-upaniṣad*, which relegated the knowledge of the Vedas to the sphere of *aparā vidyā* (lower knowledge) distinguishing from it the knowledge of Brahman as *parā vidyā* (higher knowledge) is restated by the *Gītā* in its own words :

‘The Vedas deal with the three *guṇas*. Be free, O Arjuna, from the three *guṇas*. Be free from the pairs of opposites. Be always established in *sattva*. Do not try to acquire what you lack or preserve what you have. Be established in the Self.

‘To the enlightened Brahmin all the Vedas are of as much use as a pond when there is everywhere a flood’.<sup>2</sup>

‘When your mind—now perplexed by what you have heard—stands firm and steady in the Self, then you will have attained yoga’.<sup>3</sup>

‘Flowery speech is uttered by the foolish, rejoicing in the letter of the Vedas, O Pārtha, saying “There is naught but this”’.<sup>4</sup>

Summing up the nature of this universe and its relation to the Vedas, the *Gītā* says :

‘They speak of an imperishable *Aśvattha* Tree with its root above and branches below. Its leaves are the Vedas, and he

who knows it knows the Vedas’.<sup>5</sup>

This is a very suggestive verse. It says that the world-tree has its roots above, that is, in Brahman, and that the Vedas are its leaves. As Śrī Śaṅkara explains it in his commentary on this verse, the Vedas, by pointing out what is dharma and what is adharma and their respective consequences, maintain the moral equilibrium of the world-order just as the leaves of a tree protect its life. (Modern botanists say that the leaves are the ‘lungs’ and even the ‘mouth’ of a tree.) The true *vedavit* or knower of the Vedas, according to the *Gītā*, is one who understands that the source and sustenance of the world is Brahman, whose realization is the goal of all Vedic learning—*sarve vedā yatpadamāmananti* (the goal which all the Vedas declare).

Regarding the performance of Vedic rituals and the various sacrifices, the attitude of the *Gītā* is clear as daylight. It is men full of desires for enjoyment, says the *Gītā*, who perform these sacrifices and in consequence attain the world of the *devas*, live a life of celestial enjoyment for a certain period of time, and—when they have reaped the fruits of their merits—return to the world of mortals. Such men, hankering after enjoyment, perennially go round the cycle of birth and death.<sup>6</sup> The seeker of the Ātman must relinquish the desire for enjoyment, both earthly and heavenly. But for those who do not aspire after the highest end and are unable to erase from their minds the craving for enjoyment, ritualism is enjoined in so far as it purifies the mind. ‘Let no enlightened man’, says the *Gītā*, ‘unsettle the minds of the

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, II. 45-6

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, II. 53

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, II. 43

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, XV. 1. The word *aśvattha* literally means that which does not stand till tomorrow (*a*, *śva*, and *stha*). The world is transitory, an incessantly changing process with Brahman as its eternal and unchanging Ground.

<sup>6</sup> *vide ibid.*, IX, 20-1



ignorant, who are attached to action'.<sup>7</sup>

Nowhere else, moreover, has the concept of *yajña* (sacrifice) been given such an extended and elevated meaning as in the *Bhagavad-gītā*. It describes various kinds of *yajñas*.<sup>8</sup> One kind is that in which the sacrificer pours oblations into fire to propitiate the gods. Another kind is that in which the *yajña* itself is poured into the fire of Brahman. The *yajña* that is poured means here, as Śaṅkara explains, the individual soul (*yajña* being one of the appellations of the soul or Ātman, *ātmanāmasu yajñasabdapāṭhāt*). This *yajña* is of the form of the vision of the identity of the soul with Brahman (*brahmātmaikatvadarśana*). A third kind of *yajña* is that in which hearing and other senses are poured into the fire of self-restraint; a fourth is that in which sound and other sense-objects are poured into the fire of the senses. And so on. Śrī Kṛṣṇa concludes by saying that higher than all material sacrifice (*dravyamaya-yajña*) is the knowledge-sacrifice (*jñāna-maya yajña*).

The grandest formulation of this idea of *yajña* which the *Gītā* offers is that of turning the entire course of life into one continuous sacramental offering to the Divine. Actions performed in the spirit of *yajña* render the performer immune from the bondage which the same actions, if done for selfish reasons, would have imposed on him.<sup>9</sup>

#### IDEAS OF GOD, INCARNATION, AND RELIGIOUS HARMONY

Religious dissension is as old as religion itself, and not a small part of the world's misery can be traced to religious intolerance. It is a happy sign of the times that amongst thoughtful persons the world over, there is a growing tendency towards under-

standing religions other than their own. Still, exclusivist claims have as yet not ceased to sway the minds even of the learned and the scholarly. This exclusivism, on deeper analysis, is found to be related to narrow and misleading ideas, especially about God, the soul, and Incarnations. The *Gītā* makes a significant contribution towards removing these mistaken ideas and providing the *raison d'être* of genuine religious tolerance.

The *Gītā* does not disparage any mode of worship or devotion to any Form of God one chooses to be devoted to, but blesses them all:

'In whatsoever way men approach Me, even so do I reward them; for it is My path, O Pārtha, that men follow in all things'.<sup>10</sup>

'Whatever may be the form a devotee seeks to worship with faith—in that form alone I make his faith unwavering'.<sup>11</sup>

This does not mean, as some critics are fond of pointing out, that the *Gītā* does not discriminate between lower and higher forms of religion but lumps them all together as if on a par with one another. No, the *Gītā* does discriminate. It has already been pointed out that according to Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the aspiration after Self-realization is higher than ritualistic religion. He has also discriminated between worship of the gods (*devas*), ancestor-worship, the worship of the spirits, and the worship of God Himself, with the respective results of each.<sup>12</sup>

But why such tolerance in the *Gītā*? It is because all cannot rise to the highest conception of Godhead. There are men of lesser understanding who are devoted to lower forms of God; there are men who are devoted to gods rather than to the Supreme God. All must go their ways. The vital thing is the *religious impulse*

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, III. 26

<sup>8</sup> *vide ibid.*, IV. 25-33

<sup>9</sup> *vide ibid.*, III. 9, and IV. 23

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, IV. 11

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, VII. 21

<sup>12</sup> *vide ibid.*, VII. 23, IX. 25

itself, which has to be given free play and a forward push. No Godward move, whatever be its outer form, is to be discouraged. The religious nature of man expresses itself in various ways; hence the means adopted must also be various.

Why is there intolerance amongst the followers of different religions? In other words, why do the followers of any one religion think that theirs is the truest and the best? If we go to the bottom of this problem we shall find that the claim for any one religion's being the highest and the truest rests on at least two basic assumptions: (1) that its conception of God is the highest and truest, and (2) that its Incarnation or Prophet is the only true one that has appeared on this earth—appeared once for all.

Regarding the first assumption it may be pointed out that people would cease quarrelling about conceptions of God if once they understood that God in His ultimate essence is above all conception. And that is what the *Gītā* has pointed out. Says Śrī Kṛṣṇa:

'I will now describe that which ought to be known, through the knowing of which one attains Immortality. It is the Supreme Brahman, which is without beginning and is said to be neither being nor non-being'.<sup>13</sup>

Brahman is not non-existent: It is not void or nothingness. It is also not existent like any existent object in the spatio-temporal universe which is graspable by our intellectual understanding. It is too subtle to be known (*sūkṣmatvāt tadavi-jñeyam*).<sup>14</sup> In describing the Ineffable, the mystics cannot help employing contradictory terms.

Not only is God, according to the *Gītā*, indescribable; He is also, in a sense, unknowable: that is, He cannot be known in

His completeness—*mām tu veda na kaścana*, says Kṛṣṇa.<sup>15</sup> Who has known God in His completeness? We all draw our bucketfuls of water from the unfathomable ocean, as Sri Ramakrishna used to say. That being the case, religious chauvinism is an altogether indefensible position.

Then, as against the theory of the one and the only true Incarnation, vouched for by some alleged 'unique Revelation'—the hot-bed of much of our bigotry and fanaticism—the *Gītā* espouses the doctrine of a multiplicity of Incarnations. Age after age (*yuge yuge*) they come, *whenever* there is a decline of righteousness on earth and an ascendancy of unrighteousness, for the protection of the holy and the destruction of the unholy.<sup>16</sup>

What is an Incarnation? It is the descent of the divine power and lordliness in a human body specifically chosen for the purpose. The Incarnation of God in a human body does not mean that the entire being of God is condensed into that human being. How could that be? The body is a part of *prakṛti*, a portion of the physical universe. The body of the Incarnation is the vehicle, the conduit, for the inflow of the energy of God, who in His essential nature remains the supreme transcendent Being, the great Lord of all beings. The foolish, says the *Gītā*, despise the essential nature of God when they take the personality to be all in all.<sup>17</sup> The eternal, unborn Spirit takes hold of a part of *prakṛti* and manifests Himself through it by His own divine power.<sup>18</sup>

### III

The *Gītā* has done invaluable service to Hinduism in correcting many wrong and  
(Continued on p. 477)

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, XIII. 12

<sup>14</sup> *vide ibid.*, XIII. 15

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, VII. 26

<sup>16</sup> *vide ibid.*, IV. 7-8

<sup>17</sup> *vide ibid.*, IX. 11

<sup>18</sup> *vide ibid.*, IV. 6





## HUMILITY IN THE HIGHEST PLACES: U THANT OF THE U.N.

In the history of international affairs—what to speak of global politics—a virtue, an attribute of greatness, which is very rarely met with is humility. Thus when we come on a man of great prominence in such affairs, about whom all—even his closest associates—stress this quality repeatedly, our eyes open very wide. And here we have only to scratch the surface to see that this quality was grounded in a deeply religious nature. How could it be otherwise? For one who has risen so far above his fellows, in an atmosphere of bitter competition between ‘sovereign’ nations with only the lowest concepts of justice or truth or sympathy, there remained very few of the ordinary checks on human pride and none at all of the humiliations from which most of us learn ‘humility’. What source then could remain, except for someThing or someOne of the nature of Spirit?

It would not be hard, again, to guess that we are speaking of U Thant—for ten years the Secretary General of the United Nations, despite his earnest and repeated attempts to avoid re-elections. It is perhaps significant that of the three most notable tributes<sup>1</sup> which we have seen

since his death on November 25, 1974, two stressed particularly this theme of his religiousness and humility. We turn first to that by Robert Muller, Director of the U.N. Office for Inter-Agency Affairs and Coordination, in his Guest Editorial for the *Saturday Review*: Describing him as ‘master in the art of living’, ‘humble and unobtrusive’, he continues:

‘...kindness and restraint were part of a deep philosophy of life and the result of intensive training. I never heard him say anything adverse about another person. Considering the experiences and exposures of a Secretary-General, such restraint was tantamount to sanctity. Nor did I ever hear him complain. His capacity to endure the shortcomings and errors of other people was boundless...in the evening, after seeing dozens of visitors... bombarded by a succession of insistent

Robert Muller, ‘U Thant the Buddhist’.

(ii) *ibid.*, Editorial (by Norman Cousins), ‘U Thant’.

(iii) *Secretariat News* (United Nations Headquarters, New York) 16 December 1974, C. V. Narasimhan, ‘U Thant As I Knew Him’. Sri Narasimhan is presently Under-Secretary-General for Inter-Agency Affairs and Coordination; and was one of U Thant’s chief assistants throughout—beginning in 1962 as ‘Chef de Cabinet’.

<sup>1</sup> (i) *Saturday Review*, January 25, 1975:



problems, he was as calm and controlled as when he arrived at the office in the morning.'

Then, sketching U Thant's approach to the knotty problems within the Secretariat itself—always taking time to contemplate the factors involved, the hazards of any 'backing' of one man against another, and the healing power of the common ideals which all professed to follow—Mr. Muller gives as example one typical memo, which he had to take to two combatants each of whom was seeking the Secretary-General's total support:

'U Thant will simply not take an absolute decision in favour of either one of you. Your memoranda will be returned to you unanswered, no matter how many times you will raise the issue with him, unless you yourselves take the initiative in proposing a common course of action. He feels that you know the answer to your problem much better than he does. You are well trained and highly skilled officials. You are expected to solve problems, not to create them. The U.N. is preaching understanding and accommodation between nations. This is the least that can be expected of officers of the U.N.'

Next, Mr. Muller gives glimpses of U Thant's wide religious and philosophical interests, and climaxes these with excerpts from U Thant's talk to a group of Buddhists who urged him to continue on as Secretary-General. Although unswerving in his resolve to resign he made it very clear that his duties with the U.N. entailed no least contradiction to his devotion to the teachings of Lord Buddha:

'I wake up in the morning as a Buddhist and a Burmese and meditate at least for a short while in order to set my work, actions, and thoughts into the right perspective. When I return home in the evening, I become again a Burmese and a Buddhist: I exchange my Western clothes for the Burmese longyi and reintegrate my family, which has retained fully the Burmese and Buddhist ways of life.

'But when I enter my office in Manhattan, you will understand that I must forget that I am a Burmese and a Buddhist. One of my duties is to receive many people... Most of my visitors have something specific to say to me; they wish to leave with me a message, a deeply felt belief or an idea. In order to receive and fully understand what my human brother has to say to me, I must open myself to him, I must empty myself of myself....'

In summing up, Mr. Muller well says that U Thant did not entirely *forget* that he was a Buddhist: '...on the contrary, by practising kindness, serenity and understanding, he applied his religion fully...' To 'empty oneself of oneself' is surely among the highest manifestations of this as of all religions.

Norman Cousins, in his Editorial tribute which accompanied Muller's in the *Saturday Review*, discussed mainly the outer manifestations of U Thant's greatness, starting with the last and most melancholy—the fighting over his dead body when it was carried back to Burma.

'To many of his countrymen, U Thant was a symbol of both peace and social justice. They eagerly anticipated his return... But U Thant had no desire to become embroiled in political battles. And so he stayed in the United States, working on his memoirs [barely completed before his death from cancer]....

'The battle over the corpse, however, is evidence of the impact he has made not just on his countrymen but on people everywhere. Just as Mahatma Gandhi's name symbolized non-violence during his lifetime but was invoked as a call to militant action after his death, so the name of U Thant, the peaceful Buddhist, will be a prime force for justice in his native land. Gentility and kindness were high among his articles of faith but there was no lack of conviction or dynamism in his quest for peace. His style as U.N. Secretary-



General was to avoid open breaks but not to abandon a cause or yield on principle. He never shied away from a confrontation he knew to be essential, distasteful though it might be to him philosophically.'

The third notable Tribute comes from a fellow-Asian, C. V. Narasimhan, who for many years was one of U Thant's closest associates, and who as a representative of India naturally focused on the universality of U Thant's religious bent:

'I have asked myself the question what was the key to U Thant's dedication to the United Nations and to his human qualities of modesty, serenity and integrity. I believe that the key is to be found in the fact that U Thant was a deeply religious person, and a devout Buddhist. I put them in that order because U Thant's religiousness came before his personal faith as a Buddhist. Indeed U Thant used to say that there was not much difference between a good Buddhist, a good Christian, a good Hindu, a good Jew, or a good Moslem....

'U Thant was a Buddhist, but not a fanatic. Indeed one could not conceive of his being fanatical on any subject, except perhaps in respect of his total commitment to the Charter of the United Nations. From his religion derived his modesty and humility. It was these qualities which made him repeatedly assert in the course of 1966 that he would not be available for a second term as Secretary-General. He used to say that no person should aspire to a second term as Secretary-General. His calmness in times of crisis bordered on nonchalance and was in fact sometimes even criticized when it was mistaken for indifference....

'U Thant's integrity was universally recognized. Of this quality of his, I may recall a statement made by Lord Caradon ....

'“We believe in no man's infallibility, but it is restful to be sure of one man's integrity.”'

Then, following a description of U Thant's painful last illness, which he bore 'with fortitude and without a word of complaint', Sri Narasimhan ends by quoting in full a statement which U Thant wrote, on request, about the relation of his Buddhist faith to the work at the U.N. Since this somewhat parallels that which we have already quoted, we shall only note, (1) that it occupies more than half of Sri Narasimhan's Tribute—thus underlining the basic importance due to it; (2) that it stresses in two separate paragraphs the 'doctrine of non-egoism' in Buddhism, so beautifully described in the passage from Mr. Muller, and so relevant to problems of both microcosm and macrocosm.

Finally, returning to Sri Narasimhan's intuition that U Thant was first a religious man and then a Buddhist, we will recount some of what he said about Swami Vivekananda at the time of his Centenary<sup>2</sup>—a talk still warmly remembered by one of our staff today. As it takes much spiritual maturity to appreciate a great spiritual luminary, this will also afford glimpses of U Thant's own greatness, making it clear that his humility never outweighed his courage, steadfastness, and sympathy. For Swamiji's example had little of external humility to attract one!

'Swami Vivekananda, as most of you are aware, was the greatest spiritual ambassador of India, not only in her own history, but also in the history of Asia. One of the main results of his historic visit... was the finding of a synthesis between India and the United States, and through it, between Asia and the West. To understand Swami Vivekananda, it is very important to understand the cultural and spiritual background of India and Asia.

'In Asia... we attach more importance to the mind than to the body, and still more importance to the spirit than to

<sup>2</sup> Published in the *Prabuddha Bharata* for May, 1963.

the mind. Traditionally, the aim of education in Asia has been—I stress the word traditionally—to discover what is happening inside of us, to discover what is the truth... the truth inside of us, to learn to understand the extraordinary moral and spiritual qualities of man. In other words... the discovery of oneself, and to try to understand the spiritual qualities such as humility, reverence for old people, and so on.

‘In the West, the stress has been on the development of intellect.... I feel rather strongly that the exclusive intellectual development without a corresponding moral and spiritual development is sure to lead us from one crisis to another. At the same time... in this space age and atomic age, a purely moral and spiritual development unaccompanied by a corresponding intellectual development is also an anachronism. So what is necessary... is a certain kind of synthesis... by which man may be fully integrated.’

Pointing out how Swamiji’s message was to this same point, and then outlining Swamiji’s tolerance and acceptance of all faiths and the extension of this logically to political ‘faiths’, U Thant generalized even further, to the supposed basic ‘differences’ among cultures and civilizations. Here again, he showed, Swamiji’s insight probed to the deeper layers of human greeds and passions—the same everywhere despite cultural overlays. Thus he takes us step by step to what he seems to feel was

Swamiji’s greatest contribution to world-welfare, namely, his stressing and teaching ‘meditation and contemplation’:

‘Swami Vivekananda attempted to present a very simple exposition of these methods of contemplation and meditation, so that the Westerners may not be lop-sided in their development—exclusively in the intellectual field.... In America, in Europe, in Russia, what is outside of us is very clearly defined, while what is inside of us remains a deep, dark, jungle tract. So he brought out this idea of meditation and contemplation... and I think it may perhaps be appropriate for me to read one of his statements regarding this method...’

And having read out this passage in detail U Thant concluded, ‘To my knowledge this is the simplest recipe to practise this very noble and very desirable art...’

As we noted at the outset, humility is an extremely rare virtue in the circles of global politics where U Thant was called to live and work. Meditativeness, devotion to the inward life, are perhaps equally rare—what to speak of preserving these qualities intact in that hostile environment, year after year! Again, who would dare predict that a world, a mêlée of grasping bickering murdering sovereign nations, would ever have begun to appreciate a man of that type? That the world did glimpse something there, is one slim tangible hope for this world: only a lion can appreciate a lion.



## NOTES AND COMMENTS IN THIS NUMBER

Reminiscences are taken from: 'M': *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Tr. by Swami Nikhilananda, Pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 600004, 1947); and Swami Saradananda: *Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master* (Madras, 1970). References: *Gospel*: No. 1, p. 340; No. 2, p. 291; No. 3, pp. 772-3. *Great Master*: No. 4, pp. 195-6.

The words quoted in 'Onward For Ever!' are from *The Complete Works*, Vol. VII (1958), p. 75.

Upaniṣadic poetry is both suggestive and sublime. It is the expression of the mystical seers' profound perceptions in poetical phrases and imageries. Through the simile of two birds, dwelling in the selfsame tree, the whole saga of the human

soul's bondage and liberation is impressively put across. The Editorial of the month is an attempt to understand its meaning in some depth.

In this second and concluding part of the 'Essay on Applied Religion'—The Grace of God—Swami Budhananda further discusses the theme of divine grace in its many apparently inscrutable facets, quoting relevantly passages from the scriptures, and inspiring teachings and anecdotes from the lives of saints. The first part of this Essay appeared in our October issue.

Educated at King's College, London, and at Cambridge, Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949) came to wield the English language with as much felicity as any native-born English

(Continued from p. 372)

misleading ideas prevalent (unfortunately, still) in popular Hinduism, and in presenting a sane and sober view of religion. Illustrations will be pertinent.

Against the prevailing idea of *tapas* (austerity) as torture of the body, the *Gītā* registered a stern warning:

'Those fools who torture all their bodily organs, and Me, too, who dwell within the body—know that they are fiendish in their resolves'.<sup>19</sup>

And as against this demoniacal view, a sane view of *tapas* in its threefold nature—bodily, vocal, and mental—is presented.<sup>20</sup> As against the idea of indiscriminate charity, the *Gītā* praises that as the highest form of gift which is disinterested and is given to a deserving person.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, at the very commencement of the eighteenth chapter, the correctives for wrong ideas about *tyāga* and *sannyāsa* which befog the minds of our countrymen even to this day, have been clearly presented. According to

this passage, *tyāga* does not mean renunciation of action, but renunciation of the fruits of action; *sannyāsa* is not merely the formal forsaking of hearth and home, but the forsaking of all actions induced by desire. All honour and glory to Śaṅkara, Buddha, Vivekananda, and other illustrious *sannyāsins* of their calibre! But the inordinate importance which came to be attached to the mere donning of the ochre garb in this country, finally resulted in bringing into existence many 'parasites on society'.

Let me conclude by saying that the greatness and the glory of the *Gītā*, its uniqueness, consists in putting before human society the picture of that ideal man who in the words of Śaṅkara will be:

'Though without riches, yet ever content; though helpless, yet very powerful; though not enjoying the sense-objects, yet eternally satisfied; though without an exemplar, yet looking upon all with an eye of equality'.<sup>22</sup>

(Concluded)

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, XVII. 6

<sup>20</sup> *vide ibid.*, XVII. 14-16

<sup>21</sup> *vide ibid.*, XVII. 20

<sup>22</sup> *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, 543



writer. Her widespread reputation as a poetess and public speaker bears witness to an inborn poetic talent and literary flair. When in 1914 she was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, her poetical renown became established. Drawn by the magnetism of Mahatma Gandhi into the struggle for national independence, she fought valiantly under his leadership, serving in the process many jail sentences. She was one of the topmost leaders of the Indian National Congress and was elected its President—the first woman to get such recognition—of its Nagpur Session in 1925. When in 1947 India became independent, she was appointed the first Governor of Uttar Pradesh, one of the largest and most populous states of India. *The Sceptred Flute*, *Golden Threshold*, *The Bird of Time*, and *The Broken Wing* are outstanding collections of her poetry which justify her lasting fame in English literature. In 'The Devotional Poetry of Sarojini Naidu', Narsingh Srivastava, M.A., Ph. D., Lecturer in English, Gorakhpur University, discusses an important aspect of her poetry with appropriate citations from original poems.

Almost every spiritual seeker will at one time or other pass through a phase when work appears as a distraction and contemplation the only desirable course. What escapes his understanding however is the fact that the mind is the key-factor in contemplation: unless it is prepared through purification, contemplation and meditation of the right type remain a far cry. Here comes the practical value of disinterested or dedicated work, which purifies the mind by greatly attenuating attachment, selfishness, and distraction, thereby preparing the mind for contemplation. In 'Work or Worship?', Swami Niramoyananda, a monk of the Ramakrishna Order, records the interesting and enlightening opinions of three great Swamis of the Ramakrishna Order, every one of whom combined in his

life activity and contemplation in an exemplary way. Each one of them was or became President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.

'Work or Worship?' was originally published in the *Udbodhan*, the Bengali Organ of this Order, in its 10th number of the 76th volume. Swami Chetanananda, another monk of the Order, has translated it for the *Prabuddha Bharata*, from the original Bengali.

In this second and concluding instalment of 'Some Significant Teachings of the *Bhagavad-gītā*', Dr. S.N.L. Shrivastava discusses some other important teachings of the great scripture with appropriate citations. The author is Professor of Philosophy (Retd.), Vikram University, Ujjain, India. The first instalment of this erudite contribution appeared in our previous number.

U Thant (1909-1974), the third Secretary-General of the United Nations, held that highest post of the world-body for the longest period of anyone so far—ten years. He was born in Burma and became a teacher by vocation and a politician by force of circumstance. A champion of Burma's independence, he served his motherland in various capacities. In 1952 he became a member of his country's U. N. delegation, and its chairman five years later. In 1959 he was chosen vice-president of its General Assembly. After Dag Hammarskjöld's death in 1961, he was first elected acting Secretary-General, and a year later was unanimously elected to office for a full five-year term, retroactive to 1961. After the expiry of the first term, he was re-elected for a second term and finally retired in 1971. In and out of office, he was distinguished by the qualities of courage, poise, serenity, equality, humility, and above all a deep religiousness. We offer our readers this month an inspiring profile of this great 'world citizen'.



## REVIEWS AND NOTICES

**INDIAN THOUGHT:** EDITED BY DONALD H. BISHOP, Published by Wiley Eastern Ltd., J43A South Extension 1, New Delhi 110049, 1975, pp. 427, Price Rs. 36/-.

The nineteen essays (plus Prologue, and separate 'Introductions' to each of the five Parts) in this book, by eminent writers, give not only an adequate introduction to but also a synoptic survey of the several movements that constitute Indian thought. Donald Bishop, among his other contributions, writes in Part I an understanding chapter on the *Gita*, emphasizing its note of reconciliation of apparently contradictory directions of the philosophical mind of ancient India. The message of the *Gita*, says the writer, is 'consolidation through purification'. In Part II, Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya points out that the tradition of Indian materialism is older than the *Lokayata*. G. N. Joshi in Part III rightly points out that it is wrong to generalize about Indian philosophy as spiritualistic and Western as materialistic; there are empirical philosophies in India and spiritualistic philosophies in the West. G. S. Bhatt, writing on 'Social Philosophy', stresses among others Swami Vivekananda's contribution: 'a vigorous social philosophy of fearlessness ..., egalitarianism, individualism, religious pluralism and a synthesis of nativistic catholicity with the West.' Pritibhushan Chatterji in Part V underlines the fact that Sri Ramakrishna's philosophy is not a mere repetition of Sankara, but a spiritual fusion of Advaita, Dvaita, and Visishtadvaita world-views. T.K. Mahadevan is scintillating in his evaluation of Gandhi as a philosopher ('A Modernist Heresy'). The epilogue, again by the editor, is remarkable for its analysis of the illusions of contemporary man and the approach of Indian philosophy to them. With its Index, Glossary, and extensive Bibliography, the book is very well gotten up. The price is extremely reasonable. A very satisfying book.

SRI M. P. PANDIT  
Sri Aurobindo Ashrama  
Pondicherry

**EPICTETUS—A DIALOGUE IN COMMON SENSE:** BY JOHN BONFORTE, Published by Philosophical Library, New York, 1974, pp. 178, Price \$ 6.00.

Epictetus was in his early years a slave; but few men had less of slave-mentality. Rationalist that he was, he conducted his own classes and promot-

ed the exercise of common sense on a wide variety of problems. Many of the solutions he provided for the intricate problems of life are still valid today. John Bonforte takes up *The Discourses of Epictetus* as recorded by a capable disciple named Arrian, and translated by Thomas Wentworth Higginson. These he re-frames in 76 Dialogues, so as to restore the living quality of the original teachings, which Arrian seems to have recorded mainly in fragments. Though we miss here the charm of the Platonic Dialogues, we do have something of the freshness and vigour which must have typified the master. Epictetus was convinced that man must seek his own God. No one else can show us God. Each must strive in his own way. This implies that true living is inward.

John Bonforte, an airways engineer, carried his *Discourses of Epictetus* round the world with him, and discovered that the times of Epictetus did not differ basically from our own. He reveals in this work that God is the source of all goodness, that an aspect of God exists in each, and that this aspect is not different from Plato's idea of reason—the highest aspect of the soul. Reason here is similar to the Advaitic concept of *jnana* (knowledge). There is God within man, says Epictetus. Then the true brotherhood of man is the spiritual brotherhood.

This is a very stimulating book, and it may well be read by all interested in the spiritual values.

DR. P. S. SASTRI  
Professor and Head, Department of English,  
Nagpur University

### BOOKS RECEIVED

**MEDITATION:** BY MONKS OF THE RAMAKRISHNA ORDER, Published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras 600004, (first Indian Edition) 1975, pp. xxii+162, Price Rs. 4.75.

**INVITATION TO INDIAN PHILOSOPHY:** BY T. M. P. MAHADEVAN, Published by Arnold-Heinemann, AB-9, First Floor, Safdarjang Enclave, New Delhi 110016, 1974, pp. xx+435, Price 50/-.

**THE ENTIRE AVESTA IS ONE WHOLE:** BY H. S. SPENCER, Published by H. P. Vaswani, A6 Sadhu Vaswani Kunj, Poona 411001, (? 1975), pp. 111, Price Rs. 15/-.

**SRI-MA-DARSANA, VOL. XV:** BY SWAMI NITYATMANANDA, Published by Sri Ramakrishna-Sri-Ma Prakashan Trust, 579 Sector 18B, Chandigarh, Bengali year 1381, pp. 471, Price Rs. 15/-.



## NEWS AND REPORTS

### RAMAKRISHNA MISSION HOME OF SERVICE: VARANASI

REPORT: APRIL 1973—MARCH 1974

Founded in 1900 by Swami Shubhananda, disciple of Swami Vivekananda, this was among the first Centres of the Ramakrishna Order. Started as 'Poor Men's Relief Association' with a capital of four annas, and then given its present name by Swami Vivekananda himself, it began to grow. With the blessings of the Holy Mother, and generous help from the public of Varanasi, it has steadily grown to the present status, outlined as follows:

1. *Indoor General Hospital.* This includes 186 beds, of which 99 are Medical and 42 Surgical, 30 'Eye Diseases' and 15 Gynaecology; with appropriate Operating Theatres and Blood Bank. In the present year, 2960 cases were admitted, and of these 1456 were discharged 'cured'.

1-a) *Outpatients' Department.* With its two Homoeopathic Dispensaries, this department treated in the present year 63,627 new patients, with 1,59,093 repeated cases. Thus the daily average attendance was almost 721. There are separate clinics for Dentistry, Cardiology, Diseases of the Eye, and of Ear, Nose, Throat. The Clinical and Pathological Laboratory, and the X-ray and Electro-therapy unit, serve of course Indoor as well as Outdoor patients.

2. *Invalids' Homes.* For old, invalid or disabled men and women, two Homes are maintained: 23 men are accommodated in the one, and 27 women in the other. Most of these men currently are retired monks who had served the Ramakrishna Math and Mission for years; most of the women were poor widows with none to look after them. During the current year, Rs. 74,538/- were expended for these Homes.

3. *Outdoor Relief to the Poor.* For destitute and/or invalid persons—mostly ladies—pecuniary help to the total of Rs. 1,754/- was given this year; also 60 cotton blankets were distributed, and old blankets and garments distributed to the most needy. Due to paucity of funds, such help could be given to but few of

the city's many needy people. It should be noted that of the 2960 cases admitted to the Indoor Hospital, 67 were picked up from the roadsides.

4. *Goshala (dairy).* This provided somewhat less than half the milk-requirements of the Hospital. Need for improvements and expansion of the Dairy is great.

5. *Finances.* In the year under review the total expenditures were Rs. 7,07,283 plus, and income only Rs. 5,87,105 plus. This results in adding Rs. 1,20,177 plus to the accumulated deficits, to a total current deficit of Rs. 2,49,399 plus. Most of this figure can be attributed to steep rises in commodity prices, with little if any rise of income in recent years.

*Current Needs:* In view of the above-outlined financial situation, it is obvious that funds are needed in many departments. And these have to come largely from the generous support of the public, especially those sympathetic with the liberal ideals of the Ramakrishna Mission—selfless service to all regardless of caste, creed or nationality, as a form of worship to these visible manifestations of the Lord. The immediate needs may be listed thus: (1) *Hospital:* Besides the ever-present need for running-expenses (with present heavy deficit), there is urgent need for Endowment of Beds, of which only a few are yet endowed. Cost for a single bed is Rs. 30,000/-, but the memory of a dear one may be perpetuated by partial endowments from Rs. 5,000/-. (2) *Invalids' Homes:* Endowments here are also much needed. (3) *Residential Quarters* for medical Staff (including Doctors)—for adequate housing, Rs. 5,00,000/- is needed. (4) *Dairy:* as noted above, this is far from adequate. For purchase of cows and building sheds, Rs. 50,000/- is urgently needed. (5) *Deficit:* as implied in all of the above, there is urgent need of contributions toward reducing this unprecedented deficit.

Contributions large or small, in cash or kind, will be thankfully received and acknowledged by the Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service, Varanasi 221-001. Donations are exempted from payment of Income-tax.