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

INTEGRAL VISION OF VEDIC SEERS*

"Truth is one : sages call It by various names"

स्वस्ति न इन्द्रो वृद्धश्रवाः

स्वस्ति नः पूषा विश्ववेदाः ।

स्वस्ति नस्तार्क्ष्यो अरिष्टनेमिः

स्वस्ति नो बृहस्पतिर्दधातु ॥

भद्रं कर्णेभिः शृणुयाम देवा

भद्रं पश्येमाक्षभिर्यजत्राः ।

स्थिरैरङ्गैस्तुष्टुवांसस्तनूभि-

र्व्यशेम देवहितं यदायुः ॥

शतमिन्नु शरदो अन्ति देवा

यत्रा नश्चक्रा जरसं तनूनाम् ।

पुत्रासो यत्र पितरो भवन्ति

मा नो मध्या रीरिषतायुर्गन्तोः ॥

अदितिर्द्यौरदितिरन्तरिक्षम-

दितिर्माता स पिता स पुत्रः ।

विश्वे देवा अदितिः पञ्च जना

अदितिर्जातिमदितिर्जनित्वम् ॥

1. May Indra of great fame grant us what is auspicious. May the all-knowing Sun give us what is auspicious. May Garuḍa,¹ the destroyer of evil,² give us what is auspicious. May Bṛhaspati³ grant us what is auspicious. *Rg-Veda* 1.89.6

2. O Gods, may we hear with our ears what is auspicious. O presiding Deities of sacrifices, may we see what is auspicious. Praising Gods with strong limbs and body, may we live in accordance with the will of Gods. *Rg-Veda* 1.89.8

3. O Gods, a hundred autumns stand before us. During this period we grow old and our sons become fathers in turn. Do not cut short our life before we complete the full span of it. *Rg-Veda* 1.89.9

4. Aditi is the heaven, Aditi is the sky, Aditi is the mother, the father and the son.⁴ Aditi is all the Gods, Aditi is the five types of people,⁵ Aditi is all that has been born and shall be born. *Rg-Veda*, 1.89.10

* This selection concludes the hymn called *Ano bhadrah Suktam* begun last month.

1. Garuḍa is called Tārksya because he was the son of Tṛkṣa, the sage Kasyapa.

2. According to Sāyaṇa, *ariṣtanemi* means one whose weapons or chariot wheels are undamaged by enemies.

3. Bṛhaspati is the Guru of gods.

4. This is a remarkable verse which regards Godhead as a female deity, Aditi, and identifies her with the whole universe. Etymologically, Aditi means the boundless, the unbroken or the inexhaustible. This and several other verses indicate that the worship of the divine Mother of the universe was prevalent even during the Vedic period.

5. The five people are the four castes and those who are beyond caste. Or, Sāyaṇa says, *pañca jana* may mean Gandharvas, Devas, Asuras, Manes and Rākṣasas.

ABOUT THIS NUMBER

The majority of modern people in different walks of life who want to lead a spiritual life need an ideal which they can follow, and which avoids the extremes of monasticism and worldliness. The theme of this month's EDITORIAL is that the ancient Vedic ideal of the Ṛṣi which Sri Ramakrishna embodied in his life fulfils this need.

In his thought-provoking article RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS, Swami Shradhdhananda, Head of the Vedanta Society of Sacramento, California, speaks of two types of religious conflicts, namely, inter-religious, and personal. After touching upon the first type, he discusses in detail the causes and solutions for the second type in a lucid way which religious seekers are sure to find helpful.

One of the important socio-cultural trends sweeping through the rapidly changing Western society in recent times is liberalization. In science, art, religion, social norms, in every field of life, the tendency to liberate the soul of man from conventional frames of reference is becoming stronger. In THE AGE OF LIBERALIZATION Swami Nityabodhananda, Head of the Vedanta Centre in Geneva, Switzerland, gives a succinct account of the new movement, and points out how it is in tune with the spirit of Vedanta.

In the growth of Hinduism and in the development of Indian culture no other personality has played a more important role than Śrī Kṛṣṇa. None else has received the boundless adoration of so many millions and, paradoxically, none else has been the object of so much criticism. In SRI KRISHNA—THE MAN, THE LEGEND AND THE IDEAL Swami Sastrananda, Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission in Chandigarh, has undertaken an admirable reappraisal of the significance of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's actions, which is at

once a convincing rebuttal of the charges levelled against the great Avatar and an impassioned vindication of His charisma.

It is doubtful whether any other great saint or world teacher radiated so much joy as Sri Ramakrishna did. As a fitting conclusion to his widely appreciated serial, JOY OF THE ILLUMINED, Swami Budhananda, Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission in New Delhi, gives a vivid account of the manifestation of bliss in the life of Sri Ramakrishna.

Few people understand the importance of right mood in practising meditation successfully. It is difficult to meditate when the mind is dull or restless. The contemplative mood is not experienced constantly and has degrees of depth. A clear and insightful account of the different internal and external factors that influence the contemplative mood has been given in THE MOOD FOR MEDITATION which we hope will be read with profit by spiritual aspirants. Its author, Swami Adiswarananda is the Head of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre, New York, and a former editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*.

Right from its inception eighty-two years ago, the Ramakrishna Mission has been continually engaged in rushing aid to millions of people who are the victims of various calamities all over India. The worst havoc in recent memory was caused by the terrible cyclone that hit coastal Andhra in November 1977 killing more than 10,000 people and thousands of cattle. Swami Someswarananda of Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, gives a vivid and gripping account of the tragedy and the saga of relief operations organized on a gigantic scale by the Ramakrishna Mission in the article ALL IS NOT LOST, which will be a moving experience to everyone who reads it.

Beauty is one of the values of life which

has a universal appeal but is difficult to define. In *THE VEDANTIC IDEAL OF BEAUTY* Dr. Leta Jane Lewis, Professor in the Department of Foreign Languages, California State University, places before us the fruit of her deep thinking on the spiritual dimension of beauty, its place in Reality, and her own personal experience of it. The article was originally given as a lecture at the Vedanta Society temples in Hollywood, Santa Barbara and Sacramento.

Dr. Vinita Wanchoo, M.A., M.A., D.Phil., former professor in Isabella Thoburn College, Lucknow, has prepared a deeply researched and scholarly dissertation, *IS VEDANTA A PHILOSOPHY OF ESCAPE?*, the first instalment of which is appearing in this issue. With it we are beginning a new feature which seeks to inform our readers about the importance and contemporary relevance of Vedanta as a perennial philosophy of life.

As announced earlier, we are starting with this issue a forum for inter-religious understanding. The first article in this forum, a brilliant essay, *MAN'S DIALOGICAL NATURE AND THE DIALOGUE OF RELIGIONS*, by Dr. John B. Chethimattam points out that

human life is not lived in isolation and that every thought and activity involves a 'we'. The learned author, who holds a double doctorate in philosophy, is a monastic member of C.M.I., an Indian Catholic congregation, and is a professor of Dharmaram College, Bangalore, and Associate Professor of Philosophy at Fordham University, New York.

Christianity has two major spiritual traditions: the Eastern and the Western, of which the former is closer to Indian spiritual tradition. For more than a thousand years the heart of Eastern Christian spirituality and monasticism has been centred on a small, rugged, forest-clad Greek peninsula known as Mount Athos, which is the only exclusively autonomous monastic state in the world. There hundreds of monks lead an intensely contemplative life in silence and solitude. In the illustrated article *PILGRIMAGE TO MOUNT ATHOS*, Swami Ganeshananda of the Vedanta Society of Southern California narrates his recent visit to that place, his unforgettable personal encounter with the holy monks, their austere and pious life, the great monasteries, and the peculiar mystique of the place which had lured him there in the first place.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND THE VEDIC IDEAL

EDITORIAL

The Vedic vision

At the dawn of civilization when a major part of the world still lay enveloped in the darkness of ignorance, the soul of India awoke to the light of the Spirit. Mystic consciousness bloomed in the hearts of hundreds of R̥sis. The cosmic vision imprinted in the soul of India during those primeval times has remained with the race

as a dream for more than three thousand years.

Just as an individual's development is determined by the early experiences of childhood, so also a nation's growth in history is determined by the primordial vision of the first seers. Each of the four great cultures of the world—the Hellenic, the Hebraic, the Indian and the Chinese—has for its foundation a particular vision

or view of reality acquired during its beginnings. The vision of reality that was revealed in India was the vision of Brahman, an absolute spiritual principle of infinite Being-Consciousness-Bliss which is the substratum of the whole universe and one with the Atman or self of man. It was this unitary vision which controlled individual and social life and activities and gave an indestructible vitality to Indian culture. Every time the culture and religion of the land faced the danger of being overpowered by hostile historical forces, the original vision reasserted itself and saved them.

It is as the first record of this integral vision of Reality and the spiritual laws based on it that the Vedas have been cherished by the Hindus. The unitary vision unfolded itself in four successive stages or modes, and accordingly the Vedas have been divided into four parts: the Samhitā consisting of the Mantras or hymns, the Brāhmaṇa (spiritual experience through rituals), Āraṇyaka (experience through meditations) and the Upaniṣads (experience through philosophical enquiry). Each book represented a particular view of Reality. In a general way, these four divisions respectively correspond to the four types of yoga—Bhakti, Karma, Dhyāna and Jñāna—that developed later on in Hinduism. During the post-Vedic period arose a tendency to divide the Vedas into two parts: the Jñāna-Kāṇḍa consisting of the Upaniṣads and the Karma-Kāṇḍa consisting of the other three parts. Under the name 'Vedānta', the Upaniṣads soon came to be regarded as an independent and the only authoritative scripture, while the other division of the Vedas was thrown into the limbo of racial memory.

However, the hypothesis of some modern scholars that the Upaniṣads are entirely different from the rest of the Vedas, and represent a revolt of mystics and intellectuals against the sacerdotalism of a class of un-

enlightened priests, is neither borne out by internal evidence nor acceptable to the great Ācāryas. The Upaniṣads frequently quote the Vedic Mantras and in some of them, especially the *Chāndogya* and the *Bṛhadāranyaka*, the so-called Jñāna and Karma Kāṇḍas are so inextricably mixed up that this distinction loses all relevance. The Vedas from beginning to end stand for a total vision of Reality, and the Upaniṣads only make explicit what is implied in the earlier parts. As Edgerton asserts: 'Every idea contained in at least the older Upaniṣads, with almost no exceptions is not new to the Upaniṣads but can be found set forth or at least very clearly foreshadowed, in the older Vedic texts.' Even Deussen concedes that 'the sparks of philosophic insight appearing in the *R̥g-Veda* shine out brighter and brighter until at last in the Upaniṣads they burst out in that bright flame which is able to light and warm us today.'

All the great teachers of Vedānta looked upon the Upaniṣads as the refined product of Vedic experience, but never called in question the sanctity and authority of the Mantras and the Brāhmaṇas. It is true that Śrī Śaṅkara criticized Vedic rituals, but he did not reject them as meaningless, as the modern intellectualists do. Vedic hymns and rituals have for him a great value, but the higher goal that they lead to falls short of the highest goal he envisions. It should also be remembered that he restricted his teaching to an elite group of orthodox monks who had already had a living acquaintance with the earlier part of the Vedas.

The Hindu tradition holds that both the Samhitās and the Upaniṣads were revealed and uncreated (*apauruṣeya*). This would have been impossible if the former were nothing but the shibboleths of shepherds. The quality of poetic intuition and literary artistry shown by the Vedic sages prove that they were men of high intellectual and spiritual calibre. In fact, the Sanskrit word

for poet is *kavi*, which means one who has transcendental vision (*kavi krāntadarśī*).

Types of religious language

What the distinction between Śruti and Smṛti really means is that the fundamental truths of religion are eternal and unchanging, and these were discovered once for all in the earliest period of Hinduism, and all subsequent developments are only restatements of the original revelation. In other words, the language or mode of expression of religious truth has changed from time to time. The Vedas, the Upaniṣads, the *Gītā*, the Purāṇas and the innumerable teachings of saints and sages use different types of language, and without understanding these languages we cannot understand the truths that they contain. In recent years the study of language as a vehicle of religious truths and researches into its evolution have aroused considerable interest among Western scholars after Wittgenstein.

Broadly speaking, religious language may be divided into six groups. One is the language of dialectics. Here expression takes the form of well-defined concepts which follow one another in a sequential order. When formalised, it becomes logic. This is the commonest type of language used by philosophers. In India dialectical language appears for the first time in the Upaniṣads. The second type of language is the language of negation, often found in the Upaniṣads, which does not directly state the truth but points to it by eliminating all other attributes. The third type is the language of evocation, widely used in poetry. Various symbols and rituals may not in themselves mean much but evoke a wide variety of feelings in those who understand them. A wooden cross has tremendous evocative power to those who believe in Christ. To the Vedic Aryans the sun, the sky, the wind, fire and water meant something quite different from what they

mean to modern people. The fourth type is the language of analogy, which places two different facts of experience side by side. This is the language of parables and allegories frequently used by Jesus Christ and, in modern times, by Sri Ramakrishna. The fifth type is the language of paradox, involving the use of contradictory or even absurd statements. Its purpose is to break the logical conditioning of the mind, to stop its constant attempt to conceptualize, and to make it encounter reality afresh. The Koan puzzles of Zen are the best known examples of this language.

Lastly, we come to the language of myth. Until the end of the first quarter of this century myths were regarded as stories spun out of the irrational fantasies of primitive men. But, thanks to the researches of a number of brilliant psychologists and sociologists, this erroneous notion is now fast disappearing. A myth, says Malinowski, 'is not merely a story but a reality lived.' Myth is a fundamental expression of the human psyche and is related to the archetypes of the collective unconscious. Says Dr. Jung, 'Myth is the natural and indispensable intermediate stage between the unconscious and the conscious cognition. True, the unconscious knows more than consciousness does, but it is knowledge of a special sort, knowledge in eternity, usually without reference to the here and now, not couched in the language of the intellect.' A myth is more like a dream than like a story. It is well-known that dreams, in spite of their irrationality, tell us a lot of truth about our mental life. Similarly, myths provide us a lot of insight into the nature of spiritual Reality which is otherwise unavailable to the rational mind. The myths and symbols of the Vedas evolved out of the deepest levels of consciousness of pure and perfect sages, and have therefore a value and meaning far greater than what appears to ordinary minds.

Logic and science, however great they are, cannot adequately describe Reality in all its fullness. Love, joy and fear are as true aspects of reality as space-time and subatomic particles. In order to relate himself fully to Reality man has to use all the different types of language mentioned above. One of the important contributions of Sri Ramakrishna to modern world-thought is the revival and authentication of all the different types of religious language used not only in Hinduism but also in Christianity, Islam and other religions. Through his own realizations he has proved that religions of the world are attempts to express the ultimate Reality using different types of language.

The Upaniṣads are, no doubt, the highest expressions of truth; but the modern man, alienated from a living religious tradition, cannot realize the truth hidden in them at one jump. He needs the simplicity of faith, reverential understanding of Nature, and openness to Truth in all its aspects which characterized the Vedic attitude. It was this attitude of the Vedic Aryans that made the Upaniṣads possible, and it was this attitude that Sri Ramakrishna has revived in modern times. It is true that he practised the Tantras, but he was not a Tantracist; he was essentially a teacher of Vedanta and revived the Vedic spirit and attitude.

Need for an alternative ideal

A striking feature of religious life in India during and after the Middle Ages was the identification of spirituality with sannyāsa or monastic life. This was possibly caused by the influence of Buddhism. There were only two paths open to people: either to renounce the world and become a monk or to lead a worldly life. The latter was regarded as very much inferior, and those who accepted it lived with the hope of renouncing the world some

day. Renunciation of the world was known even during the time of the *R̥g-Veda*, and in the Upaniṣads it is pointed out as a necessity for the realization of Brahman; but formal sannyāsa as a para-social institution started dominating Hinduism only during the early centuries of the Christian era.

The ideal of sannyāsa, monasticism, can be followed in all its purity and brilliance only by a select group of all-renouncing men and women who are competent enough to keep inviolate its sublime principles. It cannot be the ideal of the majority. When it is popularized as the only means of salvation, a certain loss of national vigour is unavoidable. Swami Vivekananda has pointed out that this was the mistake that Buddhism committed in India. When Swamiji says that renunciation and service are the national ideals of India, he does not mean that everyone should become a sannyāsin. What he means is that detachment from selfishness and sense-enjoyments and a sincere pursuit of truth must become the national ideal. This is the ideal of the R̥ṣi. Sannyāsa as an ideal and practice must remain as the core of national life, but the vast majority of people need an alternative ideal which will enable them to realize the highest Truth through self-control, service and meditation, without formally taking monastic vows. The ancient R̥ṣi ideal satisfies these conditions.

The great teachers we meet in the Vedas and the Upaniṣads were not all sannyāsins. Many of them were married people, but they lived austere lives in hermitages engaging themselves in worship, study, teaching, philosophic enquiry. They exemplified the truth of the saying, *nivṛtta-rāgasya grham tapovanam* ('For a man of self-control his home is a hermitage'). The Vedic R̥ṣis did not feel the conflict between work and knowledge as Indians of a later age felt. For them the whole of life was a constant

seeking of the ultimate goal. They did not shirk the responsibilities of social service. Many of the Ṛṣis lived in cities and sat in courts advising kings. The others kept the lamp of knowledge burning in forest hermitages, and helped hundreds of earnest seekers to see the light of Truth.

This is the ideal that the modern world needs, for only such an ideal can penetrate deep into society. And we believe that it is this ideal that Sri Ramakrishna has revived through his life and teachings. He had formally taken the vows of sannyāsa and could have lived the life of a wandering monk had he so wished. But he chose to live the simple, normal life of an ordinary man. He could have easily avoided his early marriage, and yet he not only chose his own bride, but later on allowed her to live with him and be his helpmate. He did not allow any of his householder disciples, including the great Nag Mahashaya, to renounce the world. Though he trained a band of young men to become sannyāsins and spread his message, in his teachings addressed to common people he stressed only mental renunciation and self-surrender to God. He advised them to discharge their duties in a detached way just as a maid-servant did work in a rich man's home. In fact, when his life and teachings are properly evaluated, Sri Ramakrishna will emerge as one of the great teachers of Karma-yoga in the modern world. Everything goes to show that he consciously strove to set up a new ideal for the modern age. And this is nothing but the rejuvenation of the ancient Vedic ideal of the Ṛṣi.

What are the characteristics of the Vedic attitude towards life and the Vedic vision of Reality that Sri Ramakrishna has captured for the modern world?

Recovery of the sacred

Among the several undesirable trends of modern life the most insidious is what is

called desacralization—the elimination of sacredness from different departments of human life. Empirical science has reduced all the achievements of man to refined forms of simian antics, and so life has lost its sanctity and divine purpose. The sacred is now associated only with a few places of worship.

Quite the opposite of this was the Vedic attitude which looked upon everything in the universe as sacred. Not only the altar which contained the sacrificial fire but all natural objects and forces like the sun, the sky, the earth, fire, water and wind were manifestations of the Divine and hence sacred. Life was looked upon as a participation in the drama of divine apocalypse. The whole universe belonged to the Divine, and everyone was obliged to return to the divine source what he got from it. This continual sacrifice was the law of life which not only human beings but even the gods obeyed. The whole of human life was to be lived in accordance with the will of the Divine (*vyaśema deva hitam yadāyuh*).

The Vedic seers could see divinity everywhere because they saw divinity in themselves, for man's conception of reality depends upon his conception of himself. The Vedic Ṛṣis looked upon the human soul as an immortal spark which through prayer and sacrifice rose to join the Divine Flame in the world of the Gods. This deification of the human soul implied in the Saṁhitās finds full expression in the Upaniṣads which identify the individual soul with the Supreme Spirit. It is this idea of the divinity of the soul and the sacredness of nature that Sri Ramakrishna has recovered for the modern man.

He did not revive the Vedic pantheon, but through his stupendous spiritual efforts he established the reality of the later divinities and thus gave back to Hindus the faith that they had lost in the Images of prosperity, power and glory. He has re-

covered the Vedic man's faith in the manifoldness of divine manifestation. In place of the Vedic man's worship of nature, Sri Ramakrishna has given the worship of the Mother of the universe. During the R̥g-Vedic period almost the only spiritual discipline practised was simple prayer and worship. But these were animated by the power of blazing aspiration. Sri Ramakrishna has brought back that fire of aspiration (which he called *vyākulatā*) and has revitalized prayer and worship as much as he rejuvenated the Upaniṣadic spirit of meditation, enquiry and self-analysis.

Recovery of the universal

The Vedic ideal of the sacred was based on the realization of the all-pervading universal Spirit which was sometimes regarded as the Personal and sometimes as the Impersonal. The Semitic type of monotheism did not develop in India. Here unity of Godhead was reached by seeking the great common power (*mahat devānām asuratvam ekam*) working through the gods, and its discovery was expressed in the famous statement: 'Truth is one, sages call It by various names'. The Upaniṣads identified this universal Spirit or Brahman with the individual self (or Atman) of man.

It was the full spectrum of Vedic vision of Reality that Sri Ramakrishna has recovered for the modern man. His doctrine of *dharma samanvaya* or harmony of religions, for which he is famous, is only a re-interpretation of the Vedic ideal of unity in diversity which India had forgotten for centuries. It should, however, be understood that Sri Ramakrishna did not believe in 'indifferentism', the naive modern theory which holds that all religions are one. He fully accepted the uniqueness of every religion as a separate path to the same ultimate Reality.

Traditional Advaitins try to realize

Brahman by negating the world. The knowledge thus attained Sri Ramakrishna called 'Jñāna'. According to him this should be followed by the realization of Brahman in the manifested world through a process of affirmation. This fuller knowledge he termed 'Vijñāna'. He saw the light of Brahman shining everywhere—in his wife and disciples, in the stone image, in the trees and grass, in fallen men and women.

It was this doctrine of Vijñāna of his Master that Swami Vivekananda converted into a basis for his doctrine of social equality. Swamiji used to say that with the birth of Sri Ramakrishna the Satya Yuga or Golden Age has begun again. Hindu tradition divides human history into four ages, which are repeated cyclically, and identifies the first one called the Golden Age with the Vedic period. It was an age of harmony and equality. Social inequalities caused by sex, caste, wealth, monasticism were minimum during that period. According to Swamiji the modern world is moving towards such an age. It can, however, be established only by recognizing the potential divinity of the soul and the basic unity of all souls in the universal Spirit.

Recovery of the positive outlook

The doctrine of the unity of spiritual substratum of the universe and the diversity of its manifestation introduces a tremendous dynamism into life. It removes all unnecessary distinctions between the sacred and the secular, gives meaning to every experience, assigns the right place to every object in the universe, transforms every activity into a spiritual discipline, and makes every man a child of immortality (*amṛtasya putra*). This is the positive approach to Reality which characterized the Vedic Age. It is an attitude of acceptance—acceptance of everything as divine and sacred and useful—which spontaneously

detaches the mind from the world, purifies it and turns it towards God. It is an attitude that brings as its reward not only *niḥśreyasa* or liberation but also *abhyudaya* or prosperity to the world. It was this attitude which produced not only the greatest sages but also the greatest heroes, which made India the richest country in the world, made arts and sciences flourish, and raised culture to its highest level.

It was this attitude that India lost during the Middle Ages. Misunderstanding and perversion of the Advaita philosophy led to the development of a negative attitude towards life which looked upon life as evil and the world a meaningless illusion. Unfortunately, this change in attitude coincided with the political downfall of the nation. To the disinherited, disunited people of India *Māyā* became a dope, a cloak to hide intense selfishness, an alibi to avoid true heroism in facing the challenges of life. India cannot rise to the state of its former glory unless it regains the integral vision and positive attitude of the Vedic age. Swami Vivekananda believed that the purpose of Sri Ramakrishna's life and the meaning of his teachings were precisely the recovery of this Vedic view.

Recovery of seership

A *Ṛṣi* is not merely a man who has accepted a certain view of Reality and follows a certain way of life, but is one who has a direct perception of supersensuous truths. A *Ṛṣi* is a *mantra-draṣṭā*, a seer of Vedic truth. In Western culture there has always been a conflict between *credere* (believing) and *scire* (knowing), Christian religion emphasizing the former and Greek philosophy emphasizing the latter. In Indian culture this conflict has been avoided by the concept of seership, direct perception, which alone is accepted as the test and criterion of religion. This supersensuous

seeing is achieved by awakening the higher faculty of intuition lying dormant in all people which the Vedic sages called *dhī*. The celebrated *Gāyatrī* is a prayer meant for the awakening of this *dhī*. It was through the awakened *dhī* that the Vedic sages got revelations about the mysteries of life and Reality.

It was this idea of seership that Sri Ramakrishna has revived and placed before the modern world. God, soul and the bliss of divine communion must be directly experienced. He tested and proved the truth of this idea not only in Hinduism but also in Christianity and Islam, thereby making it a universally valid principle. What his disciple Swami Vivekananda did was to proclaim it to the world and make it the common inheritance of humanity. In his 'Lectures from Colombo to Almora' Swamiji places this ideal before mankind again and again. 'This Rishi-state is not limited by time or place, by sex or race. *Vātsyāyana* boldly declares that this Rishihood is the common property of the descendants of the sage, of the Aryan, of the non-Aryan, of even the *Mlechcha*. . . and constantly we ought to remember this ideal of religion in India, which I wish other nations of the world would also remember and learn, so that there may be less fight and less quarrel.'

If religion is to inspire and guide not only a small group of monks but all people, it must provide an ideal which the majority of people can practise. The world is now in need of an ideal which opens the soul of man to both Nature and God, which eliminates the invidious distinctions between man and woman, which avoids the extremes of asceticism and worldliness, which makes every soul a mirror of divine glory and plenitude, and which converts every activity into a search for truth and service of God. The ancient *Ṛṣi* ideal fulfils all these requirements. Only such an

ideal can make religion the privilege and responsibility of all people. Only such an ideal can transform every man's life into yoga.

It was the belief of Swami Vivekananda that this would become the future ideal of mankind. Himself a seer of the highest spiritual eminence, he has prophesied: 'They had hundreds of R̥sis in ancient India. We will have millions—we are going to have, and the sooner everyone of you

believes in this, the better for India and the better for the world.'

The conflicts and turmoils now going on all over the world may be the sign of the emergence of a brighter future for mankind. There is, however, no doubt that thousands of people will hearken to Swamiji's exhortation, which is also his benediction pronounced upon this gloomy world, 'Be a R̥si!'

RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS

SWAMI SHRADDHANANDA

There are two kinds of religious conflicts, namely, inter-religious and personal. The first category is very well known to us. Some examples of this are the clashes between the Christians and the Muslims, the 'holy wars', the Crusades, and most recently, the conflicts between the Catholics and the Protestants in Ireland, between the Christians and Muslims in Lebanon, and also between the Hindus and Muslims in some parts of India. These conflicts happen because of dogmatism, sectarianism, bigotry—small-mindedness, in general. Sometimes they take place due to political reasons. There is no speedy remedy for this kind of conflict; we have to wait with patience until mankind as a whole receives more and more understanding about religion.

When nations lived far apart from each other, people belonging to one religion could pretty well live within their own borders without coming into contact with people of other faiths. However, with the progress of commerce, science and technology, peoples are coming closer and closer together. There is no longer any such thing as a world of multifarious nations isolated from

one another; more and more the world is becoming one. So, of necessity, men have to understand each other in different areas of life. Religion is no exception. For peaceful living, inter-religious understanding is essential for people of all faiths. We have to give up the idea that ours is the only path to God, and that salvation is possible through our particular faith only—whether that faith be Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, etc.

The life and message of Sri Ramakrishna is precisely relevant to this point. In fact, in India Sri Ramakrishna is called 'the prophet of harmony'. He had practised many different religious disciplines in his life and, out of his own experience, boldly asserted that each religion is a way to God. Those who are familiar with the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna's chief disciple, Swami Vivekananda, will recall the latter's very powerful and significant statements in this context in his concluding address at the Chicago Parliament of Religions in 1893:

If the Parliament of Religions has shown anything to the world, it is this: It has proved to the world that holiness and charity are not the

exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. If anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart, and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance, 'help and not fight, assimilation and not destruction, harmony and peace and not dissension'.

It is encouraging to see that from time to time religious leaders are organising inter-faith conferences. At the Ecumenical Council in Rome in 1962, arranged by Pope John XXIII, it was declared that the presence of other religions in the world, non-Christian religions, the tenets of which contain some wonderful truths, must be recognized. Protestants and Catholics are more and more feeling the necessity of coming closer to one another. Different Protestant denominations are also trying to unify themselves, as much as possible, with reciprocal recognition. There have been moves for friendship and understanding between the Jews and Christians. The present Pope, it is learnt, is trying to have an assembly with the Greek Orthodox Church, with the object of bringing that Church closer to Rome. In India it is essential to have similar periodical conferences between Hindus and Muslims, with a spirit of 'give and take'.

Now, to the other kind of conflict, that is, personal religious conflict. This occurs when a person begins to take religion very seriously. When religion to us is just a social custom, there is rarely any occasion for conflict. We go to our temples, churches or mosques, go through the religious observances, and feel satisfied; it is sufficient to feel that we are Hindus, Christians or Muslims, etc., as the case may be. We do not try to bring religion too closely or intimately into our lives. At this level there will be little, if any, personal religious tension. When you have taken religion as

just a social custom, you do not question the different facets of spiritual life. You accept God because that is the respectable thing to do, and also because He is not demanding too much from you—He is not disturbing your life.

But the true purpose of religion is to take man from his ignorant level to the level of knowledge and understanding, to where he can recognize his true spiritual nature, his eternal relationship with God. The first question, then, that comes to a serious-minded religious man, is the conflict about God Himself—Does God really exist? If He does, then how can He be known?

Saints and sages and all the great spiritual teachers tell us that within this body of flesh and bones, at the back of our mind, there is a shining spirit, the flame of God, which normally we do not see or feel. But if we come seriously to religious life, we shall have to be conscious of that flame, that divine element within us.

Christ said, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God'. Actually, we don't want to see God. We want to keep Him on the altar. We say, 'God, you stay there; don't come too close!' But if someone does want to bring God closer and closer to his heart, then he must realize the fact that tremendous conflicts will come. The natural bent of the mind is selfishness. It is our nature to think in terms of 'I', 'me', 'mine'; it is natural for us to be attracted to pleasure and to cherish, with great care, our attachments. But if we want to follow the path that the great spiritual teachers have followed, we have to give up all forms of selfishness. We shall have to control the outgoing propensities of our minds, develop new attitudes towards our neighbours, give up cravings for unnecessary earthly possessions. If our hearts are to become pure, we must give up lust, greed, jealousy, envy, anger, etc. These ideas are frightening, but if we have set our foot upon the spiritual

path, we must understand that we are getting into a real war, and that although the conflict between the natural tendencies and the spiritual ideal may become terrible, one doesn't give up religious life because of that. Now, none of us likes to fight. Fighting is not a pleasant task. But when a soldier has gone to the battlefield, he understands that this is his Dharma for the time-being, and he feels a joy in fighting. The same thing happens to the spiritual seeker. Spiritual life has its own Dharma. When love for the ideal has come and there is understanding, inspiration comes; then there is joy in fighting with our lower nature.

In order to wage this battle more successfully, the spiritual seeker needs to have 'holy company'. The lives of the great saints and seers of all religions become his models. These men and women of God are his companions now, and he finds great joy in reading about them. He needs the inspiration they provide, for they too faced many doubts and confusions but they never gave up the struggle. Eventually they won. Light came and they were able to 'live in God'. Like them, the spiritual seeker has to penetrate this material level of existence and find the spiritual core—to find God within and without his heart. He is tremendously strengthened by the example of these great souls. Their examples resolve many of his doubts, hesitations and weaknesses.

Sri Ramakrishna began his life as a priest. There are thousands of brahmin priests in India. Their profession is to conduct the worship in temples. They bathe, wear clean clothes, collect flowers, chant *mantras*, etc. It is a pleasant profession. Their fathers, grandfathers, and great grandfathers have been priests. It is a family tradition. Things are taken for granted without much questioning. They do not ask themselves whether God is really present in the image, whether He is really accepting the flowers and incense and sweets they are

offering Him. There is no conflict, no tension in their minds. But in the case of Sri Ramakrishna it was another matter. At the urging of his elder brother, he became a priest at the Kālī temple in Dakshineswar when he was nineteen years old. Very soon, serious questions arose in his mind. Questions such as, 'What am I doing?' 'Does this image of Mother Kālī really have life, or am I doing some mechanical thing?' 'Is this chanting and offering of flowers really reaching God, whom I'm trying to worship through this image of Kālī?' His spiritual life began with this kind of serious inquiry. It is this kind of conflict which is an essential feature of our spiritual life. Without conflict there is no growth. So when these questions came to him, he found that he had no knowledge of scriptures or books. He had no teacher. There was only an innate urge to cry. He felt that if this image was really the Mother Kālī, She would surely respond; and if She did not, there was no use to this life. He would pray and cry from the depths of his heart, and the pain and anguish became so acute that by the end of the day he would be found rolling on the ground, crying out, 'Another day of this life has gone and I have not been able to have Your conscious vision, O Mother!' People would gather round him and wonder what was wrong. When the anguish became so keen that he could not bear it any longer, he gave the Mother the ultimatum that if She did not show Herself, he would kill himself—and that worked! He had his first vision of the Divine Mother. The image in the temple disappeared: his body disappeared; the temple surroundings disappeared. There was only a vast ocean of consciousness engulfing everything on all sides. He lost all normal consciousness, and was engulfed in bliss for a long time. He felt that without any doubt this was the vision of the Mother. The true Mother is the infinite

Consciousness. He saw that Consciousness everywhere.

Similar things have occurred in the lives of great devotees of God in all religions. Fortunately, on each path to God there have been people who have taken religion seriously. If we study the life of St. Francis or of many Buddhist saints or Islamic and Sufi saints, we shall see that they too had to face this conflict—is this a material world or is it a divine world?—they didn't back away. Rather, they felt joy in pursuing that struggle. They knew that the resolution of this conflict was the price they had to pay for spiritual truth. So the primary conflict is about God Himself. Is there a living God? Is there a responding God? This conflict can be overcome by faith, prayer and patient pursuit of the spiritual life.

There is also what we call the conflicts about the scriptures. The experiences of saints and seers are recorded in the scriptures of religion—the Upaniṣads, the Gītā, the Bible and others. In these writings we find the truths of God, not mere theology. Theology is man-made. Studying theology is often an intellectual luxury. If theology contradicts the truth of God and the nature of the human soul as recorded in the scriptures, it is wise to follow the latter. The words of seers are words of direct experience. They are more helpful to spiritual seekers than the intellectual formulations made by scholars. In India we have the tradition of following the Śruti rather than the Smṛti in the case of a conflict.

Another conflict comes regarding the nature of God. Is God personal or impersonal? In the scriptures we study the lives of some saints, and they talk about their experience of an impersonal God. Again, some seers and saints have established a personal relationship with God. In the Upaniṣads they usually speak of the impersonal Brahman and man's true Self. In

man's mind there are different elements. The element of emotion is one very important constituent of the human mind. Sri Ramakrishna has said that God can be both personal and impersonal, according to our own attitudes: if at one time your mind is inclined to a personal God, follow that; at another time your mind may be drawn to the impersonal aspect of God—that is also good, there is really no conflict. Only a person who has experienced the truth about both the personal God and the impersonal God could say this. Sri Ramakrishna was such a person.

Some religions have the idea of Divine Incarnation. They say that the infinite God can work through the human body, as in the case of Rāma or Kṛṣṇa or Jesus Christ. Sri Ramakrishna too is considered by many as a Divine Incarnation, an Avatār. God's power works through these great souls, these divine personalities. We can worship them as veritable manifestations of God. The great teachers say that it is possible for God to take human form in this way. We have no right to say that it is not possible! If God can do wonderful things, he can also descend as an Avatār. This is only rational. God is all-powerful. He can do anything. He can create a world in one second, and can destroy it in another second. The impersonal God can become personal. He can become the Divine Incarnation. Each person should be given the freedom to have his own belief about the nature of God.

A similar conflict arises as to whether God has form or is formless. This conflict too can be resolved by following the examples of great spiritual persons—those who have attained illumination through meditation and worship of God with a form, and those who attained illumination by meditation on God without any form. Both these classes of worshippers attained peace and freedom. Buddha is an example

of those of the latter case. He refused even to use the name of God. But that did not mean that he refused to acknowledge the ultimate spiritual Reality. He had given that Reality a different name, that's all. By studying the examples of great seers and saints, and remembering their teachings, this conflict can be resolved. God can be formless, or He can reveal Himself before the devotee with a form. He can be both. Form melts into the formless, and the formless condenses into a form, just as in the case of ice and water, which was Sri Ramakrishna's analogy.

Sometimes in spiritual life when, after practising disciplines for some time, and no progress has come, the doubt arises—'Am I really ready for this kind of thing?' If we lose faith in ourselves, that is a greater catastrophe than losing faith in God. When a spiritual interest has been kindled in our heart, we should not allow the mind to drift away from that perspective. Spiritual practice is not like baking bread. We must have great patience. Depression, or losing faith in oneself, is a great danger in our religious life. We must have the kind of patience that says—'If not in this life, then I will go on with my struggle for as many lives as necessary, but my goal is God, somehow I must reach Him.'

Again, there is very often a conflict when, after having accepted a personal relationship with God, we do not get from Him a prompt response to our prayers. The teachers and the scriptures tell us that we must not dictate to God. Let God be God. If you are praying to God for something, and a response does not come, don't lose your faith. Rather remember Jesus Christ's teaching: 'Thy will be done.' Self-surrender to God under all situations should be our guiding motto. In days of crisis during the Civil War in America, some church men came to President Lincoln. They were of course, from the North, and

they wanted to give the President some encouragement. So they asked him, 'Mr. President, don't you think God is on our side?' Lincoln answered them by saying, 'It doesn't concern me whether God is on our side.' Now, they knew that Lincoln was a deeply religious man, and although he was not a formal member of any church, he had great faith in the Bible. So this answer from him, came as a shock. 'What do you mean, Mr. President, that it doesn't concern you whether God is on our side?' Lincoln replied, 'Yes, what I said is true; what concerns me is whether I am on God's side.' A wonderfully fine distinction. It demonstrates the spirit of self-surrender. A true spiritual seeker always depends on the judgement of God. In the Indian tradition there is the concept of the law of karma which says that our joys and sufferings do not happen by chance. There is such a thing as moral law which operates on a strict cause and effect relation. If I am suffering, I deserve the suffering by my own karma. Reward and punishment in the moral sphere happen by man's own actions. If you are suffering, don't blame God. You can pray to God, of course, but if God does not listen, it is because you have to work out your karma yourself.

When we go more and more into the depths of spiritual life, there will be other types of conflicts. The Vedantic scriptures tell us that our real nature is Atman, the shining spirit surrounded by five walls. The body is a wall, the *prāṇa* (vital force) is a wall, the mind is a wall, the ego is a wall, the causal body is the last wall. We have to go beyond these five walls; then alone can we experience our true nature. When we begin to practise this, we are in the midst of a great struggle. Body-consciousness does not go in one day. And we are all the time identifying with our *prāṇa*, our mind and our ego. This is natural. Wrong identification with the five

sheaths is coming from an infinitely long past. But we must not be afraid of encountering this problem. Through the practice of discrimination (*viveka*) and dispassion (*vairāgya*) many have broken the five barriers and discovered that inner spirit, that Atman, that Soul, residing in the depths of the personality. We also can do that.

In a serious spiritual life, conflicts are bound to come at different stages. Whether we are Bhakti-yogis, Jñāna-yogis, Rāja-yogis or Karma-yogis, we should never be frightened or discouraged by them. They offer tests of our faith, love, patience, and courage. There is absolutely no uncertainty

in man's spiritual journey. Scriptures, of course, give the seekers stern warnings like, 'It is as difficult as walking on a sharp razor' (*Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 1.3.14), or 'One, perchance, among those striving for perfection knows the truth' (*Gītā*. 7.3). But these warnings are meant to rouse in us our faith and unflinching devotion to our spiritual ideal, and also to emphasize the necessity of constant attention and care for our practices.

God is neither deaf nor blind. If someone earnestly seeks Him, He certainly helps that seeker and fulfils his heart's desire. The Upaniṣads and the *Gītā* assure us over and over again of the possibility of man's spiritual fulfilment.

THE AGE LIBERALIZATION

SWAMI NITYABODHANANDA

'Man has fragmented Being into bits. In my paintings I present the broken bits of Being by displacing the eyes, sometimes even by putting the head on the legs and so on.'

This was the answer of Picasso to a question put to him about the strange representations of human beings in his paintings.

Man has dismantled Being with the fond hope that he can reconstruct it. But alas !

Picasso was neither speaking as a moralist nor as a philosopher. An artist too has his notion of Being. Life and the world around him is his Being. When he sees life mutilated by violence and human perversity his artistic sensibility gives expression to his anguish by creating mutilated 'forms'. Remaining faithful to the artist's credo, namely, creating forms, all sorts of forms, not only beautiful ones, Picasso was opening up his understanding to comprehend others' way of expressing their concern for the

mutilated Being. He was discarding his 'blinkers'. He was liberalizing his understanding without abandoning the artist's credo.

An artist who creates only beautiful forms understands only one half of life. Beauty is not everything. There is suffering, morbidity, ugliness and anguish in this world. What is the artist's reaction to these phenomena? The Hindu aesthetics long ago spoke of *śoka-rasa*, the sentiment of sorrow-anguish. This sentiment inspired the poet Vālmīki to compose the *Rāmāyaṇa* in verse (*ślokatvam āpadyata yasya śokah*).

A famous painting of Picasso, *Guernica*, depicts the artist's intellectual pain at the violence of the civil war in Spain. There are others who have made similar creations to express their anguish; here too the artist or artists were not moralizing, but liberalizing the message of art which should cover the whole of life and should be addressed

to the whole world and not only to beauty-lovers.

Let us consider another field, that of science. A modern scientist, instead of keeping himself strictly confined to the limits of his field, goes out of it and brings in inspiration to enrich science so that it takes a more complete view of man. Science today is no longer technology nor the science of the scientists. As Fritjof Capra says :

Science and mysticism are two complementary manifestations of the human mind, of man's rational and intuitive faculties. Modern physics goes far beyond technology; the Way or Tao of physics can be a path with a heart, a way to spiritual Knowledge and Self-realization.¹

A path with a heart is the mystic's job and not the scientist's. Is not Capra making an unauthorized incursion into the mystic's domain? Definitely not. While remaining faithful to his science he is anxious to affirm that science is not simple technology. On the atomic and subatomic levels the laws of unity and interpenetration that govern matter and life can be demonstrated by the new physics. Testimony of the experience of unity and interpenetration is the domain of mysticism, Hindu or Buddhist. But that modern science can demonstrate the truth of this evidence is an extraordinary achievement. Saints and sages *lived* the testimony. Science today can demonstrate its validity. This achievement was possible only because the scientists who attacked the problem of synthesis practised liberalization of their views by taking off their 'blinkers' and by integrating with the insights of the mystics.

If a scientist behaves as one of the five blind men who wanted to know the elephant and maintained that the elephant was like a pillar (by touching the legs), that the

elephant was like a fan (ears) and nothing else, then science will be cut down to unworthy unscientific limits. Instead, if a scientist is attentive to other disciplines and opens his doors widely allowing other winds to come in, then science will be richer. It can cover greater areas of life and spirit.

In the field of psychology and psychoanalysis liberalization started with Jung. He spoke of the self as the centre and circumference of the human personality. Unlike Freud, Jung spoke of the possibilities of leading repression of instincts to sublimation without satisfying them on the sensate plane. 'The Self is our life's goal for it is the completest expression of that fateful combination we call individuality.' Binswanger, the founding father of the school of existential psychoanalysis, says that psychotherapy and psychoanalysis are concerned *not* primarily with the mentally ill man, but with man as such, with man's existence as such.

The liberalizing élan of our epoch is very evident in the religious field. I am not thinking of the ecumenical efforts made by the Catholic and Protestant churches since Pope John XXIII who initiated the movement for dialogue between Jewish, Christian and non-Christian denominations. There is evidence of an increasing desire to liberate religious belief from dogma. The more a Christian is cultured, the less he believes in the dogmas of the Church. He will agree that an intelligent way is to replace dogmas by symbols. A symbol like the door as is contained in Jesus' declaration, 'I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture'² has more convincing power to a cultured conscience than the dogma: 'Outside the Church there is no salvation.'

1. Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1976), p. 12.

2. John, 10.9.

Let us try to collect more relevant material from the field of science.

An eminent French physicist of today, Jean E. Charon, in his recent book entitled *Spirit, the Unknown* makes a sustained effort to support by scientific arguments religious positions like survival after death, and to show the spiritual potential of the atom to manifest the soul's capacity to love and to know. We summarize very briefly a few of his arguments :

All of us have the aspiration for eternity. It is by and through the microscopic elementary particles which are the electrons or protons of our living body that the Spirit or our Spirit works and survives.

If by survival is meant the survival of the totality of the multitude of electrons or protons making up our body, then there will be nothing left after our physical death. But if by survival is meant the survival of a few of the millions of electrons which individually carry our complete 'I', then after death the 'I' will not have disappeared but will multiply itself and will continue its spiritual adventure till eternity, sharing with other living and thinking beings in other universes and in ours.³

In a chapter entitled 'Reflection, Knowledge, Love and Act', Charon says :

Every living electron in our body contains 'space-time' and stocks information or memory. The electron 'I' carrying the memory of previous situations and stimulated by a new situation in the outside world and helped by the memory of similar situations prepares to act. It makes a centripetal movement to grasp itself, to know itself, to enrich itself. There is a sudden intensification of consciousness. It is a movement typical of the process happening in knowledge. Also there is communication between electrons ; and the attraction of the one to the other culminating in union is the prototype of the movement symbolized in Love.⁴

All this is not simply science desiring to shake hands with religion. These are the

rays of dawn of a liberalizing consciousness which the soul of science radiates. Science is eager to look at the total man.

We now answer the question : What has Vedanta done and is doing to help liberalization, as the latter is a significant step towards making man complete?

Centuries ago the great liberalizing declaration came from the Vedic seer : 'Truth is one ; sages call It by various names.' To have a full vision of Truth, one should take into account all the possible views of It. Nay, more, one should be generous enough to accept all views, should liberalize one's faculties and vision and harmonize with the numerous approaches to It.

A very effective method of liberalizing is contained in the '*neti neti*' ('not this, not this') discipline taught by the Upaniṣads. It is more than a dialectic. It is a way of expanding our intellect and intuition to capture more of inner space, more of the inner Kingdom. Swami Vivekananda, utilizing the '*neti neti*' method, says in his talk on 'Is Vedanta the Future Religion?' that three things are necessary to make a religion : (1) the Book, (2) veneration for some person, and (3) it must believe that it alone is truth. But, the Swami goes on, Vedanta has no need of these : 'No book, no person, no personal God. All these must go.'⁵ Swamiji was not speaking as a revolutionary. He was just giving expression to the liberalizing élan at the heart of Vedanta.

Side by side with the liberalizing forces in our world there are groups propelled by narrow visions and fanaticism. To close our eyes to this corroding influence will be to close ourselves in an ivory tower. All the more reason then to keep alive the fountains of liberalization.

Liberalization is a growth from within.

3. Jean E. Charon, *Spirit, the Unknown* (in French, without English translation), p. 109.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

5. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 8 vols. (Calcutta : Advaita Ashrama, 1971-72), vol. 8, p. 127.

Of all faculties of man it is the heart that can be liberal and generous. Not the emotional heart, but the spiritual heart which includes in its sweep love-intuition. From the heart comes inspiration, dedication to an ideal. In the present context of liberalization, the ideal is to gather up in man the totality of his forces and certitudes. To work up to this ideal the heart radiating the charism of love should take up the initiative. When the heart is inspired correctly, the intellect obeys and adheres to its directives. The heart has the faculty of a special knowledge which the intellect lacks. The knowledge that transforms itself into the certitude of being oneself and then into will, comes from the heart, not from the intellect. As the 'knowledge' reaped by the heart is often mixed up with affectivity, we have a tendency to underestimate its judgements. But then, an overall notion of our successes and failures, of our pleasures and sufferings—who gives it to us, if it is not the heart? We shall ask science in vain to discover the meaning of our anguish and tears.

Since the successes of science, man has exalted reason and underestimated the powers of the heart, especially the heart's charismatic capacities. The man of today should invest more love in his heart to

balance the dilated intellect that gives the sentiment of the existential void and metaphysical anguish. Very meaningfully has Sri Ramakrishna placed the accent on Bhakti-yoga as the most effective spiritual path for our age. Swami Vivekananda speaking of the religion for our age mentions a special 'butter' which man is capable of making. 'The knowledge of man, his powers of perception, of reasoning and intellect and heart, all are busy churning the milk of the world. Out of long churning comes butter and this butter is God, God-realization. Men of heart get the butter, and the buttermilk is left for the intellectual.'⁶

The world-machine is moving forward making awful creaking noises. It has to be greased. Applying buttermilk will make the parts rusty. Applying the grease of the butter of which Swamiji speaks—butter in Sanskrit has the synonym *sneha*, which means both love and grease—will reduce the creaking noises and make the machine go forward easily. We want more men and women of heart who can produce more 'butter' to grease the wheels of the world-machine plodding its way to goals of Liberalization.

⁶. *Complete Works*, vol. 1, p. 413.

SRI KRISHNA—THE MAN, THE LEGEND AND THE IDEAL

SWAMI SASTRANANDA

It would be no exaggeration at all to describe Śrī Kṛṣṇa as that unique personality, power and phenomenon which has exercised a profound influence on the Indian people over thousands of years, an influence which has been most pervasive, positive and potent. The Sanskrit root-verb

'*karṣ*' means 'to pull or draw to oneself'. When derived from this, 'Kṛṣṇa' connotes one with that power; and from all accounts we have of him, he was a veritable 'divine magnet' who irresistibly attracted to himself all created beings—men, women and children, young and old, saints and sinners,

sages and the unlettered, royalty and common folk, heroes and refugees, and even animals like the cows.

Both illumined sages and innocent devotees have adored Kṛṣṇa as the ideal of all that is good and great, noble and beautiful. He has been considered the most perfect manifestation of divinity on earth.¹ But there have also been critics, both Westerners and their Indian counterparts, who consider him just a product of the infantile imagination of a people who possess neither lofty intellect nor high ethical standards.

Notwithstanding the opinions of such critics, Kṛṣṇa remains and prospers as a continual power, a living and wholesome ideal illuminating the minds, inspiring the hearts and moulding the lives of millions of good, worthy and intelligent people. What may appear to the dry intellect of the ill-informed critic as a bundle of contradictions and confusions—that very Kṛṣṇa lives on in the consciousness and race-memory of the devoted as the sublime, if indefinable, fusion of a many-faceted magnetic personality, a grand all-round ideal and a delightfully uplifting legend. Refusing to be disturbed by the doubts, comments or critical onslaughts of the sceptic, the rationalist of the hide-bound historian, they have blissfully allowed themselves to be drawn to one or more of Kṛṣṇa's aspects. They find themselves elevated and enriched by the light, love and joy radiating from their great teacher who is also 'Mādhava', the embodiment of sweetness' and bliss.² Śrī Kṛṣṇa is not merely the great lover, but equally the great hero, the great yogi and the supreme Guru for aspiring and adoring humanity.

* * *

The two important classics which, among others, deal with Kṛṣṇa are the *Mahābhārata*, of which the *Bhagavad-Gītā* is a part, and the *Srīmad Bhāgavatam*, both in Sanskrit. Much of the criticism against Kṛṣṇa centres mainly round two aspects: firstly, his dealings with women, specially the Gopīs of Vrindaban; and secondly, the 'questionable' means or tactics he employs or advocates to help his protégés, the Pāṇḍavas, to destroy their enemies.

A right and proper understanding of these issues is possible only for those who can study the concerned books first-hand, comprehensively and with a perspective in tune with the spirit and purpose of the composers. Scrappy, partial or second-hand data are bound to result in distorted evaluations and judgements. Much also depends on the approach of the reader, whether it is open-minded, receptive and wholesome or narrow, prejudiced and partisan. What Śrī Kṛṣṇa says in the *Gītā*—'Even as men approach me, so do I respond to them'³—very well applies to those who study these classics. Seekers of wisdom discover sublime truth; seekers of love and devotion get transported into ecstasy; aspirants after perfection get inspiring ideals and examples; seekers of dirt end up in find what they are after. The swan gets the milk, the crow filth.

The high-brow, puritanical critics of the *Bhāgavatam*, including some 'educated' Indians, feel embarrassment and even indignation at the descriptions of Kṛṣṇa's 'sports' with the Gopīs of Vraja, for instance. Had they a free hand, perhaps, and authority, they would promptly censor or re-edit the whole thing! Fortunately, they don't.

1. कृष्णस्तु भगवान् स्वयम् ।

Bhāgavatam 1.3.28

2. वन्दे जगद्गुरुम् । वन्दे परमानन्द माधवम् ।

'*Gītā-Dhyāna*' 5, 8

3. *Gītā* 4.11.

Much of the criticism is also due to the failure of the critic to understand and appreciate the fact that the *Bhāgavatam* is not intended to be either a historical document, a textbook of morals or a standard work of systematic philosophy. Its purpose is to attract all varieties of people—be they of the upper classes or the masses—to God and spiritual life. That is done through glorification and presentation of divine love in its various aspects; this purifies the hearts and minds of the readers or hearers and finally leads them on to the highest truth, which is also simultaneously highest love and bliss, of which Kṛṣṇa is the supreme embodiment.

The *Bhāgavatam* is a combination of exquisite poetry, sublime philosophical ideas and captivating mythology. Its appeal and operation are primarily through the heart. It is intended for, and succeeds in, capturing the heart and imagination. By means of certain potent sights, suggestions, allegories, images and stories it enables the mind and soul to take off from their mundane moorings and soar into the infinite, ethereal realm of light, love and bliss, impossible for pedestrian, earth bound intellect and dry reasoning. It enables us to taste and enjoy the delicious mango and be nourished by it, instead of getting bogged down in mere leaf-counting.

* * *

Hasty critics should pause to consider the entire background before jumping to conclusions. The *Bhāgavatam* describes itself as the 'Paramahansa Saṁhitā', the compilation dealing with the ways of life of the highest renunciators. It is not erotic literature related by, or meant for, the sensually-minded. The one who relates the story is none other than Śukadeva, who in Hindu tradition is the eternally pure; and the one who hears it is King Parīkṣit, who is under a curse to die within seven days and is keen

to have his mind and heart utterly purified meanwhile, so that they can dwell on God.

And again, the tree is to be judged by its fruits. What has been the effect of the *Bhāgavatam* on later generations of pure souls? The very Gopī-episode, which self-appointed critics deprecate, has inspired and exalted some of our purest and noblest men of God, especially the Vaiṣṇavite saints. Even in modern days Sri Ramakrishna, the purest of the pure, who could not bear the slightest touch of sensuality, would often fall into Samādhi whenever he heard or thought of the Gopīs. To him the devotion of the Gopīs was the devotion of love, constant, unmixed, unflinching. His worthy disciple Swami Vivekananda, a paragon of renunciators, considered the Gopī-līlā as the acme of the religion of love.

One should not forget that the episodes and descriptions are not to be taken literally but as allegories and pointers to certain grand truths and experiences, which go beyond sense-life, beyond words and earthly thoughts. They are meant to launch the earnest devotee, to transport him into the realms of the transcendental, which is impossible so long as the slightest trace of body-consciousness or sensuality still remains.

Swami Vivekananda makes the issue clear in telling words in his lecture on the 'Sages of India':

Ah, that most marvellous passage of his [Kṛṣṇa's] life, the most difficult to understand, and which none ought to attempt to understand until he has become perfectly chaste and pure, that most marvellous expansion of love, allegorized and expressed in that beautiful play at Vrindaban, which none can understand but he who has become mad with love...⁴

There are not wanting fools even in the midst of us, who cannot understand the marvellous

⁴. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 8 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1973-77), vol. 3, p. 257.

significance of that most marvellous of all episodes. There are, let me repeat, impure fools, even born of our blood, who try to shrink from that as if from something impure. To them I have only to say, first make yourselves pure... Ay, forget first the love for gold, and name and fame, and for this little trumpery world of ours. Then, only then, you will understand the love of the Gopīs, too holy to be attempted without giving up everything, too sacred to be understood until the soul has become perfectly pure... The love of the Gopīs is the very essence of the Kṛṣṇa Incarnation.⁵

The objections of the critics have been voiced and met in the scripture itself at various levels. It is pointed out that the primal goal and purpose of life is God and His love; and Kṛṣṇa is the manifestation of that Divinity. 'Therefore by some means or other direct your mind to Him' and you will be blessed.⁶ Even if the Gopīs approached him at first in terms of human love, it was soon purified and transformed into the divine. Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who is fully aware of their basic devotion as well as their possible human failings, time and again points out to them that devotion and sensuality, Bhakti and Kāma, are incompatible, and that physical proximity is unnecessary for such love.⁷

He himself clears the issue in his talk to the Gopīs, where he points out that the lower desires of those who approach him for their fulfilment are like grains subjected to roasting and boiling, and as such can never sprout into a plant!⁸ Such is the effect of the holy personality of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The Gopīs also give expression to their realization that he is not merely the cow-herd boy and lover but the indwelling divine Self in all.⁹

The various Gopī-episodes presented in

vivid colourful language are but allegorical pictures intended to convey the glory of that self-forgetful, all-consuming love which considers no sacrifice too great—individual or social, earthly or heavenly, of wealth or family, of the nearest and dearest, ready to court even social opprobrium and outcasting. The word *līlā* or 'sport' or 'delighting' need not be interpreted only at the sensual level but understood in terms of the heart and the soul.

And this is what Śrī Kṛṣṇa has to say regarding their love: 'I cannot sufficiently reward your devoted service even through the granting of long life in heaven—the service of you who have resorted to and worshipped me, conceiving a pure and faultless relation to me, and having cut asunder the very hard ties of domestic life. May your righteousness be its fullest reward.'¹⁰ 'With their minds fixed on me through love, they knew neither kinsmen nor their bodies, nor things far and near, as sages in the super-conscious state knew not name and form...'¹¹ And finally Uddhava, the first disciple and devotee of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, declares: 'How blessed should it be to live in Vrindaban as one of the shrubs or creepers or plants or herbs that come in contact with the dust of the feet of these Gopīs, who abandoned their kinsmen and social code of honour, hard to give up, and resorted to the feet of Mukunda, sought after by the Vedas...'¹²

* * *

Now let us consider the role of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the epic *Mahābhārata*.

In regard to the so-called questionable, unethical, steps taken by Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata* War on behalf of the Pāṇḍavas, it is no new discovery of the critics. The author has deliberately highlighted them in the epic itself, and that not

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 258-59.

6. *Bhāgavatam* 7.1.31.

7. *Ibid.*, 10.23.32.

8. *Ibid.*, 10.22.26.

9. *Ibid.*, 10.31.4.

10. *Ibid.*, 10.32.22.

11. *Ibid.*, 11.12.12.

12. *Ibid.*, 10.47.61.

once, while at the same time unflinchingly continuing to delineate Śrī Kṛṣṇa as the great Man and the Avatāra. There must certainly be some purpose and design behind this apparent paradox. The author himself brings out, through the words of various characters, a stronger attack on Śrī Kṛṣṇa than any external critic could perhaps hope to do. Typical of them is that of Duryodhana who, after being struck down by Bhīma in single combat, denounces Śrī Kṛṣṇa, detailing his charges :

Wretch ! Son of a slave ! I saw you instigate Bhīma to aim his blow at my thigh ... disregarding the laws of single combat. You have neither pity nor shame. Did you not contrive the death of the grandsire Bhīṣma through stratagem? ... You brought about the end of Droṇācārya through making Dharmaputra utter a falsehood. You were the father of that deadly lie that issued from Yudhiṣṭhira's mouth. ... Did you not look on without protest, and rejoice, when that wretch Dhṛṣṭadyumna attacked and killed the Acārya, who had stopped fighting, throwing away his weapons, and settled down in yoga posture for meditation on the Supreme? Was it not you who wickedly contrived to make Karṇa hurl the fatal spear at Ghatotkaca instead of reserving it for Arjuna as he had all along resolved to do? ... It was you who brought about the death of Karṇa by inducing Arjuna to attack him in a cowardly manner when he was engaged in lifting his chariot wheel which had sunk and stuck in the mud in the field of battle. O worthless man, sole cause of our destruction, the whole world has condemned your act when, by sorcery you made it appear as if the sun had set, and made Jayadratha, the Sindhu king, believe that the day was over and he was past danger, and thus he was slain when he was off his guard.¹³

Śrī Kṛṣṇa's calm and cool reply gives the key to his thinking and outlook :

Son of Gāndhārī, why do you let your anger add to the pain of your last moments? It is your own misdeeds that have brought about your end. Do not attribute it to me. So also were you the

cause of the death of Karṇa and others. Need I recount all the wrongs that you were guilty of against the sons of Pāṇḍu? What punishment can be too severe for the great outrage which you inflicted on Draupadī? The animosities and passions that resulted from your misdeeds cannot be made ground for condemning others. All the deceptions and lapses you charge us with were forced on us by reason of your wicked conduct. You have paid off on the battlefield the debt incurred by your greed. But you are dying the death of a brave man. You will go to the happy regions reserved for Kṣatriyas who lay down their lives on the field of battle.¹⁴

Duryodhana continues unrepentant and defiant and speaks as if his is the more glorious lot. Śrī Kṛṣṇa then points out to the Pāṇḍavas that Duryodhana could not have been defeated by conventional means in war, and so other means had to be adopted to meet the ends of true justice, Dharma. Dharma has to be protected and preserved since it is the very basis of life.

'Justice and fair-play' cannot be taken piece-meal and limited only to certain situations. Life has to be taken as a whole. It is the basic right of wrong motivation behind a person's actions and his essential goodness or wickedness that determine his destiny and deserts. Isolated observance or transgression of man-made and technical rules, whether in war or in social or political relations, is not enough to judge anyone as good or wicked.

At all times, the reader of the *Mahābhārata* has to remember the basic and repeated thesis of the epic—that where there is Dharma or basic righteousness, invariably there is victory, and where there is Kṛṣṇa there is inevitably Dharma.¹⁵

In spite of certain inevitable human weaknesses and errors of judgement, the Pāṇḍavas are basically righteous. They are intent on truth and virtue, striving con-

13. *Mahābhārata*, trans. C. Rajagopalachari (Bombay : Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1977), pp. 293-94.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 294-95.

15. यत्तः कृष्णस्ततो जयः, यतो धर्मस्ततो जयः ।

sciously to practise Dharma, God-fearing, self-controlled, compassionate and generous and ever open to correction, advice and instruction. They are fallible but not wicked. They may err but they do not justify it and persist in it. Circumstances get them involved in various difficult human situations—individual, social, political. They become the victims of the jealousy and persecution of their cousins the Kauravas, and in spite of all the best intentions and efforts to find an honourable way out, they are dispossessed and humiliated and an all-out war is forced on them, with all its disastrous consequences.

There is no question as to the Kauravas' being the wanton aggressors, with Duryodhana as their leader. He is basically proud and arrogant, greedy and cruel, and above all, jealous of his cousins, who have virtues and talent and so are more popular. Right from boyhood he is intent on destroying them. Ruthless means are employed for the purpose; and when they also fail and the Pāṇḍavas continue to live and to prosper, he and his henchmen contrive a rigged game of dice to lure and deprive the Pāṇḍavas of all their possessions and exile them. When still they survive and come back and ask for a minimum fair share of the kingdom, Duryodhana refuses to give them even a pinpoint of land. All wiser people realize the injustice and plead with him to relent and take to the right path. But Duryodhana is obstinate, blind with pride and passion, and precipitates the war, sure of victory, depending on his own military might, material resources, cunning and allies. Invoking by all means possible a variety of legal provisions and traditional usages, he manages to muster a bigger army and the service of several mighty generals. Yet except for a few of his closest henchmen, all the others realize both the mettle of the Pāṇḍavas and the righteousness of their cause. So, while mighty heroes are somehow forced to fight on the side of the

Kauravas and try to do their best in war, their heart is not in it; and the net result is that both sides suffer loss of life but the Pāṇḍavas emerge as the victors and the Kauravas are utterly defeated and destroyed.

We find that the life and actions of the Pāṇḍavas are primarily centred on truth and righteousness (*satya* and Dharma), guided by self-control, generosity and compassion (*dama*, *dāna* and *dayā*) even though extreme circumstances compel them to resort to a few white lies and breaches of conventional laws regarding warfare or social conduct. About this they themselves are not happy. On the other hand, Duryodhana and his followers are mad after power and possessions, wilfully and unrepentantly resorting to the most foul means to fulfil their ambitions. They are, in the main, characterised by passion, pride and greed, though they display some of the Rājasic virtues such as bravery on the battlefield and giving away gifts, which naturally appeal to popular sentiment. They don't scruple to exploit conventional laws to further their own ends or to hide their sins.

But the ends of true justice must be served and Kṛṣṇa sees to it that this is done.

* * *

Men may be misled by, or misjudge, the externals. But God or His Incarnation sees the whole. He has to protect Dharma and its votaries and punish those who dare to meet it with impunity. Kṛṣṇa sees that this is done. For the purpose he knowingly supports and guides the Pāṇḍavas, even when they have to resort to certain breaches of technical rules or conventional morality. And he is ever alert and active to see that the wanton aggressors do not get away with their ill-begotten gains and glory, however capable and clever they may otherwise be.

Bhīṣma is great indeed, a towering colossus, whom all revere, specially the Pāṇḍavas. But certain considerations of

polity make him lead the fight on the side of the Kauravas, the side of basic Adharma. He has to pay the price. None can defeat or kill him unless he himself chooses to allow it, but he indicates under what circumstances he may not fight. Providence makes use of precisely this loophole and arranges circumstances so that his support is taken away and justice is done.

Droṇa is the great Ācārya who taught archery to both the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas, and Arjuna is his favourite disciple. Yet he gives his services to the wrong side, on the basis of certain traditional loyalties. He has to pay the price. Though a Brāhmaṇa, he departs from brahminic virtues such as non-killing and takes up arms. He invites violence. Sowing the wind, he reaps the whirlwind. Again, as a holy Brāhmaṇa and worthy teacher, he should have been above petty attachments to kith and kin and influenced more by higher issues. But he is so much attached to his son Aśvatthāmā, that the news of his death is enough to unnerve him and make him stop fighting. Providence makes use of this chink in his armour to meet the ends of true justice, in however unpleasant a way. War is ghastly. No sane person should ever advocate or eagerly participate in it; and if he does, he must certainly take all its ghastly consequences. Droṇa's physical death was indeed ghastly.

Karṇa is tragically great, renowned for his generosity and noble in his own way. He has suffered greatly on account of his extra-marital birth, no fault of his own. But his blind loyalty to Duryodhana, who befriended him, at the cost of other bigger issues and higher values leads him astray. He proceeds to support Duryodhana indiscriminately, and thereby becomes a party to various wrongs, to Adharma. He therefore forfeits his right to talk of Dharma; he, too, has to pay the price.

This is brought home to him on the battlefield when in the thick of battle his chariot

gets bogged down and he asks Arjuna for respite till he sets it right, according to the rules of war. Arjuna hesitates. Karṇa appeals to Arjuna's sense of honour, Kṣatriya chivalry. But Kṛṣṇa intervenes and exclaims :

Ha, Karṇa ! It is well that you too remember that there are things like fairplay and chivalry ! Now that you are in difficulty you remember them indeed ; but when you and Duryodhana and Duhsāsana and Śakuni dragged Draupadī to the Hall of Assembly and insulted her, how was it you forgot them utterly? You helped to inveigle Dharmaputra, who was fond of play but unskilled at it, into gambling, and you cheated him. Where had your fairplay hidden itself then? Was it fairplay to refuse to give to Yudhiṣṭhira his kingdom when according to the pledge the twelve years of forest life and the thirteenth year incognito were duly completed? What had happened to the Dharma you appeal for now? You conspired with the wicked men who sought to poison and kill Bhīma. You acquiesced in the plot to burn the Pāṇḍavas alive when sleeping in the palace of wax into which they had been lured. What had happened to Dharma all that time? What did Dharma tell you when violent hands were laid on Draupadī and you were looking on, enjoying the sight? Did you not then mock at her saying : 'Your husbands have left you unprotected, go and marry another husband'? The tongue, that was not ashamed to utter those words now talks of chivalry. Chivalry indeed ! When a mob of you surrounded the young Abhimanyu and shamelessly slew him, was that chivalry ! Wicked man, do not talk now of chivalry and fairplay, for you have never honoured them !¹⁶

Karṇa has to bend his head in shame and cannot utter a word. He has to continue the fight with his physical handicap. Arjuna hesitates but Kṛṣṇa urges him to go ahead and finish the foe, which is done.

* * *

In all these cases, Śrī Kṛṣṇa actively guides, and takes the responsibility. His one and sole purpose is to protect Dharma and the good, virtuous and innocent by all means, even if in the process he is misunderstood, condemned, even if he has to go to

hell for it. All the time he is striving his utmost to provide the real good and welfare of all, including the Kauravas. He is impartial; his partiality is only for the good and virtuous, for the welfare and happiness of all. He does his best to see that justice and fairplay prevail, that there is reconciliation between the cousins, that war is not resorted to. He makes it clear that he will not fight or bear arms. None realizes better than he—himself an invincible warrior and hero of many a campaign—that war is terrible, futile and disastrous, and so he leaves no stone unturned for preventing it. He employs all means of conciliation and negotiation, political diplomacy and warnings. He stakes his own personal safety and honour, though all his friends and well-wishers are against his taking the risks. He is sure of himself; he has done his best. He is not moved by the consequences.

When, however, war becomes inevitable for protecting Dharma itself, he sees to it that the Pāṇḍavas pursue it vigorously as their Svadharma and come out victorious. Others, who were not earlier so clear about the terrible evils of war and to some extent even gloried in 'heroic' wars, are shocked at the total destruction brought about by the Mahābhārata War. But Śrī Kṛṣṇa is calm and detached, though none has greater love for humanity than he.

And, in spite of all this, many including leading personages, overcome by the horror of it all, give vent to their feelings by attacking him, of all people, as responsible for the holocaust! Typical is the emotional outburst of Gāndhārī (the bereaved mother of the Kauravas) and a recluse Uttanka.

Gāndhārī, overcome by grief at the loss of all her sons, charges Kṛṣṇa with being responsible for all the slaughter, and in a fit of rage curses him that a similar fate may overcome him, that he may be a witness to the destruction of his own race who would perish by internecine fighting. Not in the

least perturbed by the terrible curse, Śrī Kṛṣṇa asks her not to be overcome by grief and anger, rebuts her charges, and points out that it was all brought upon themselves by their own wicked deeds—which Gāndhārī also concedes in her cooler moments. As regards her curse, out of regard for an otherwise paragon of womanly virtues, Kṛṣṇa accepts it and says, 'Well, when the Yādavas become proud and wicked they too will meet with destruction, and since there will be none else powerful enough to do it, they will destroy themselves!'

In the desert on the way back to Dvārakā, he meets Uttanka, an old Brāhmaṇa friend, now a lonely recluse. When Uttanka hears from Kṛṣṇa about the war, he also suddenly loses balance and cries out in wrath, 'Vāsudeva, were you there standing by and did you let all this happen? You have indeed failed in your duty. You have surely practised deceit and led them to destruction. Prepare to receive my curse!'

Smilingly, Kṛṣṇa advises him not to be needlessly excited and not to waste his powers in mistaken directions, and explains:

I am born in various bodies from time to time to save the world and establish the good. In whatever body I am born, I must act in conformity with the nature of that body. . . . I do what is natural to that birth and complete my task. I begged hard of the Kauravas. They were arrogant and intoxicated by power and paid no heed to my advice. I tried to intimidate them. Therein also I failed. . . . They persisted in wrongdoing. They waged war and perished. . . .¹⁷

Hearing this, Uttanka recovered his calm. And this should silence all the other critics of Kṛṣṇa too.

If sublime love be the soul and substance of the Kṛṣṇa of the *Bhāgavatam*, it is comprehensive righteousness or Dharma in the *Mahābhārata*. That Dharma is the essence and central purpose of his advent, his life

17. *Ibid.*, p. 310.

and actions as well as his teachings.¹⁸ A life full of energy and beneficial activity, faith in oneself and faithfulness to one's own Svadharma, calm and detached performance of duties, unconcerned with profit or loss, pleasure or pain, praise or blame, honour or dishonour, all in the framework of a total surrender to the Divine within, the only Being who is all-pure, all free and all-perfect—this then is the essence of the life, actions and message of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, clear and unfaltering.

The *Mahābhārata* in all its epic grandeur and proportions seeks to present such a Kṛṣṇa in a dual role. First, he is the ideal man, Ādarśa Puruṣa, the great exemplar and illustration of his own teachings in the context of various complex life situations. Then he is also the 'Parama Puruṣa', Supreme Being, who provides the inspiration and refuge for all. He is the Divine Incarnation, God playing the role of man, and opening up the path for mortals to God. This is the Kṛṣṇa who is utterly sure of himself, of his actions and what he says, with no trace of weakness or fear, doubt or vacillation, confusion or regret, irrespective of the various intricate, baffling, fearful or even desperate situations he is involved in, irrespective of what others may think or say of him.

From the various accounts given in the *Mahābhārata* as well as the *Bhāgavatam*, we see clearly that Kṛṣṇa does all that can be done for the protection of Dharma and good people. From his birth in prison till his exit from the world, his life is one unremitting and dynamic saga of activity for this purpose—gladly courting dangers, calmly accepting all difficulties, ignoring the wrath of enemies and the calumny of detractors. All this stems from his infinite love for humanity, his concern for the good and

the innocent, for the weak and the oppressed and specially for women and the masses, whose greatest champion, protector and refuge he is. He has no selfish interest or ambitions whatsoever, being perfect and contented in himself. He fights only for the cause of Dharma, defeats or destroys tyrants only to save the oppressed and hands over conquered kingdoms and wealth to their rightful heirs. As for worldly possessions, he is a 'have-not', an *akiñcana*, one who takes to the 'have-nots' and the humble as his own.¹⁹ In their hearts is his throne, and their love is his prized possession.

He is perfectly clear as to his mission, as to what is right and wrong and the course he or his followers should pursue. He is against all those customs and usages called Dharma which go counter to the fundamental Dharma of universal good, love and service; they are actually Adharmas. At all levels of life he tries to eliminate superstitions and non-essentials, leading men to the essence and truth of things. In war too, which of course is a matter of life and death, he sees to it that the good and just prevail, and the wicked and clever are not allowed to get away with their ill-gotten gains.

He is utterly impartial, fair and courteous to all, recognizes merit even where his sworn adversaries are concerned, and works for their real good also. This is admitted even by Duryodhana in his saner moments. Ever eager to serve and never making an issue of his personal prestige, he is ready to forgive numerous insults to himself but strikes when Dharma itself is at stake, as in the case of Śiśupāla, his inveterate foe and detractor. His own people are not spared when they go wrong. Thus the Pāṇḍavas are taken to task for accepting the call to play dice, which is only gambling

18. This becomes clear by some verses of the *Gītā*: 3.8, 19, 20-25; 4.8, 16; 11.33; 18.7, 8, 12-15, 17, 47, 48, 61, 62, 66.

19. *Bhāgavatam* 10.60.14.

and not Dharma. When his own descendants, the Yādavas, become insolent, overbearing and a menace to humanity, he promptly sees that they too are eliminated. Finally, at the end of all this when he is mortally struck down by the arrow of a hunter who mistakes him for a deer, even then he reacts neither in panic nor wrath. Instead of cursing the offender, as Gāndhārī and others did in his own case, he calmly consoles, reassures and blesses him. No wonder that this magnificent marvel that was Kṛṣṇa, stirs another Kṛṣṇa-like spirit, namely, Swami Vivekananda, into offering a full-throated tribute :

He was the most wonderful sannyasin and the most wonderful householder in one; he had the most wonderful amount of Rajas, power, and was at the same time living in the midst of the most wonderful renunciation.... Kṛṣṇa, the preacher of the *Gītā*, was all his life the embodiment of the Song Celestial; he was the great illustration of non-attachment.... A great landmark in the history of religion... the ideal of love for love's sake, work for work's sake, duty for duty's sake, and it for the first time fell from the lips of the greatest of Incarnations, Kṛṣṇa, and for the first time in the history of humanity, on the soil of India....²⁰

His was the first heart large enough to see truth in all.... In Kṛṣṇa we find two ideas supreme.... The first is the harmony of different ideas, the second is non-attachment.²¹

He does not need anything. He does not want anything. He works for work's sake. He is the most rounded man I know of, wonderfully developed equally in brain and heart and hand. Every moment of his is alive with activity.... Five thousand years have passed and he has influenced millions and millions.... My regard for him is for his perfect sanity. No cobwebs in the brain, no superstition. He knows the use of everything....²²

Limited, finite persons and themes are

easily to grasp and delineate. But Śrī Kṛṣṇa belongs to the dimension of the unlimited, beyond the understanding of ordinary minds and measure of ordinary standards. Just as in God, the Infinite, all contradictions meet and become harmonized, so also in Kṛṣṇa. He is the confluence of the highest expressions of knowledge, love and action, heroism and tenderness, strength and grace, might and humility, splendour and renunciation. In short, he has emerged as the composite ideal of various human aspirations, the fulfilment of the quest for perfection—ethical, aesthetic, spiritual, altruistic—of various hearts and minds. It is because of this that he often becomes the central theme of not only religion and philosophy, but of art and sculpture, music and poetry, a phenomenon that defies all delimiting definition or classification. Kṛṣṇa stands out and stays on eternally as the ideal and inspirer for the classes and the saviour and refuge for the masses. And that is how the Vedas and the Purāṇas depict him :

The swift and nimble Kṛṣṇa occupied the banks of the Yamunā, followed by tens of thousands as he moved from place to place, enlightening them with eloquent words of wisdom.... I have seen the fleet Kṛṣṇa moving about on the solitary banks of the Yamunā, blue and infinite like the sky.... How I wish you also had the good luck to behold him. When attacked, he protected his followers, who were to him his own body, the uncultured masses who ever sought refuge in him. He was shining like a blazing fire.²³

As he entered the arena [of Kamsa] with his brother, Kṛṣṇa appeared like a thunderbolt to the wrestlers, superman to men, god of love incarnate to women, their own to the cowherd Gopas, a child to his parents, as Death itself to Kamsa, the vast cosmos to the gross, ultimate reality to the yogis, and Supreme Deity to the Vṛṣṇis.²⁴

20. *Complete Works*, vol. 3, pp. 256, 258.

21. *Complete Works*, vol. 1, pp. 438, 439.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 456, 457.

23. *Rg-Veda* 8.96.13-15.

24. *Bhāgavatam* 10.43.17.

JOY OF THE ILLUMINED—VII

SWAMI BUDHANANDA

In Sri Ramakrishna's life what a magnificent manifestation of the joy of enlightenment is to be seen!

For twelve long years he practised one set of spiritual disciplines after another and reached their goals. When he started out on each spiritual path, the agony of his separation from God would be so intense that even to read about it is painful. But when one struggle after another was over, bringing into him one joy of enlightenment after another, when he had thus come to the end of his spiritual struggles and strivings and fulfilments, Sri Ramakrishna became a veritable confluence of many mighty streams of the joys of enlightenment.

There was a time when Sri Ramakrishna would rub his face on the ground while crying that another day had passed and he had not realized God. But after his realizations were complete, when he was overflowing with joy and bliss, he was seized with another agony as intense as the former one. A time came when the vesper bell would ring in the temple and he would go up to a terrace and cry out, filling the firmament with his cries: 'Come, my boys! Oh, where are you? I cannot bear to live without you.'⁹⁸ This was in a sense the same cry as that spoken in another language: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'⁹⁹

In response to this fervent call of the blissfully enlightened one, God-seeking people began to pour into Dakshineswar. And what did they see there? A transfigured person, immersed in God, ever bliss-

ful, melting in unreasoning love, waiting anxiously to remove all their pains and sufferings and to dower them with his joy and peace and enlightenment.

So Dakshineswar became a veritable world of joy, where constant worship of God went on in various ways, through singing, dancing, and talks that welled forth from the depths of his experience. There was merriment, there was laughter, there were gushing tears of joy and sudden stillness in the overpowering absorption of bliss. What a drama it was!

People scorched and battered by the world, bereaved, confounded and lost in the mazes of not-knowing, came to him as if drawn by an invisible force. The first things that impressed people when they came near him were his scintillating joy—a joy uncompounded with the slightest tinge of the world's worries and miseries—and his supreme compassion for all that breathed and suffered. Sri Ramakrishna did not psychoanalyse, he did not theorize how the miseries of people could be removed. One came near him and under the impact of his joy and compassion, all one's sufferings were at least temporarily destroyed, as the talk on God spontaneously streamed from his mouth.

Seekers came to him and were at once able to taste in his presence divine bliss, which they had never known before. Said Swami Turiyananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, in recalling his experiences:

An hour of congregational singing in the company of the Master used to fill us with such an exuberant joy that we would feel transported, as it were, into an ethereal region. But now even meditation fails to evoke that celestial bliss, or even a semblance of it. That bliss would abide in us for a week continually. We used to feel intoxicated, though we did not know the why

⁹⁸. *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1964), p. 296.

⁹⁹. Matthew 11.28.

or how of it. Who will believe it? It is difficult to convince anyone.¹⁰⁰

Swami Vijnanananda, another disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, says of the Master :

One who can detach his mind from material things will see the light of God and His presence in everything. Worldly attachments draw people away from God and scorch them in the wildfire of the world. The Master was all the time immersed in thoughts of the Universal Mother, and therefore worldly sufferings had no effect on him. He often used to regret that he could not share with others the sublime and ineffable joy that he derived from constant communion with God—the joy that suffused his entire being and kept him floating on an ocean of divine ecstasy. He was always eager to impart this joy to others. Compared to that heavenly delight, all these worldly occupations, even studies, are as worthless as dust. He would always see only the light of Brahman, while we see only material things.¹⁰¹

Among those who are fortunate enough to experience divine bliss, all are not of the same nature. As Sri Ramakrishna points out humorously :

There are some who would wipe their lips clean after eating a mango lest others should know of it; but there are those who if they get a mango, would call others and share it with them. So there are some who, having realized Divine Bliss themselves, cannot rest without helping others also to realize it.¹⁰²

Sri Ramakrishna's joy of illumination was so uncontainable that he found it impossible to wait for people to come to him. He went about seeking the seekers of God so as to feed them with the wonderful fare of his joy. In their company he danced and sang, intoxicated with the love of God. His

biographer, Swami Saradananda, vividly describes an occasion of such joy :

When we came to know that it would be some time before the prayer would begin, we went out. Afterwards, at dusk, we came back to the place. Scarcely had we reached the road in front of the house, before sweet music and the loud sounds of the Mridanga greeted our ears. Knowing that the Kirtan had begun, we hastened to the parlour. But what we saw there beggars description. There were crowds of people inside and outside the hall. So many people stood before every door and on the western roof that it was absolutely impossible to push through the crowd into the room. All were craning their necks and looking into the hall with calm eyes full of devotion. They were not at all conscious as to who was or was not beside them. Knowing that it was impossible to enter the room through the front door, we went round, crossed the western roof and were near a northern door of the parlour. As the crowd here was somewhat thin, we thrust our head somehow into the room and saw :

A wonderful scene! High waves of heavenly bliss were surging there in strong currents. All were lost altogether in the surge of the Kirtan, and laughed, wept and danced and, unable to control themselves, many were falling now and then violently on the ground—swirled by the emotion they behaved like a troop of lunatics. The Master was dancing in the centre of that God-intoxicated assemblage, now going forward with rapid steps, now going backward in a similar way to the cadence of the music. Thus wherever he was going forward in any direction, the people there, as if enchanted, made room for his free movement. An extraordinary divine light was playing on his smiling face all the while. A wonderful blending of extraordinary tenderness, sweetness and leonine strength was visible in every limb of the Master's body. That superb dance! In it there was no ostentation, no jumping or hopping; no unnatural gestures of the body, no acrobatics; nor was there to be noticed any absence of control. There were in it the natural posture and movement of each limb as a gushing overflow of grace, bliss and sweetness surging within, the like of which may be noticed in a large fish, long confined in a mud puddle, when it is suddenly let loose in a vast sheet of water—swimming in all directions, now slowly, now rapidly, and expressing its joy in diverse ways. It appeared as if the dance was the dynamic bodily expression of the surge of Bliss, the Reality of Brahman, he was experiencing within.

¹⁰⁰. Swami Turiyananda, 'The Reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna', *Prabuddha Bharata*, February, 1936.

¹⁰¹. 'Spiritual Discourses of Swami Vijnanananda', *Prabuddha Bharata*, April 1963.

¹⁰². *Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1930), saying no. 934.

Thus dancing, sometimes he lost his external consciousness, sometimes his cloth would slip which others would fasten firmly round his waist. Again, sometimes seeing someone losing external consciousness on account of the infusion of spiritual emotions, he touched his breast and brought him back to consciousness. It seemed that alighting on him, a divine bright stream of Bliss was spreading on all sides and enabling true devotees to see God face to face. It enabled those of lukewarm disposition to intensify their fervour, idle minds to go forward with enthusiasm to the realm of spirituality and those extremely attached to the world to become fully free from that attachment for the time being. The surcharge of his divine emotion caught others and overpowered them. And, illumined by his purity, their minds ascended to an unknown high spiritual stratum. That Vijaykrishna Goswami, the Acharya of the General Brahma Samaj, went now and then into Bhāvasamādhi and lost external consciousness needs no mention; many other Brahma devotees also were in the same condition. Besides, the sweet-voiced Acharya Chiranjiv Sarma, as he was singing to the accompaniment of a one-string musical instrument the song, 'Dance, O children of the Blissful Mother, round and round', became absorbed in the idea and lost himself in the self. When a period of more than two hours was thus spent in enjoying the bliss of Kirtan, the song, 'Who has brought down to the world the name of Hari, so sweet?' was sung and the waves of emotions, produced by that extraordinary Kirtan gradually subsided, when salutations were made to all the teachers of devotion and religious communities.¹⁰³

Even while suffering from the excruciating pain of cancer in the throat, there was no cessation of Sri Ramakrishna's ecstasy of divine bliss. 'M', the writer of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, says :

Such suffering in the body [due to cancer], but he was always full of joy, always in ecstasy; with the name of the Mother always on his lips. His face was like a blooming lotus.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, trans. Swami Jagadananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1952), pp. 701-02.

¹⁰⁴. Swami Nityatmananda, *Śrī Ma Darsan* (in Bengali) (Calcutta : Presidency Library, 1st edition), p. 276.

Sri Ramakrishna was brought to Calcutta for treatment of the cancer. Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar, an aggressive rationalist, came to see Sri Ramakrishna, his patient. And what did he find? 'M' writes :

Dr. Sarkar arrived. At the sight of him Sri Ramakrishna went into Samādhi. When his ecstasy abated a little, he said, 'First the bliss of divine inebriation and then Bliss of Saccidānanda, the Cause of the cause.'

Doctor : 'Yes'.

Master : 'I am not unconscious.'

The doctor realized that the Master was inebriated with divine bliss. Therefore he said, 'No, no ! You are quite conscious.'

Sri Ramakrishna smiled and said :

I drink no ordinary wine,
but Wine of Everlasting Bliss,
As I repeat my Mother Kali's name ;
It so intoxicates my mind that
people take me to be drunk !
First my Guru gives molasses for
the making of the Wine ;
My longing is the ferment to
transform it.
Knowledge, the maker of the Wine,
prepares it for me then ;
And when it is done, my mind imbibes
it from the bottle of the *mantra*,
Taking the Mother's name to make it pure.
Drink of this Wine, says Rāmprasād,
and the four fruits of life are yours.

As the doctor listened to the words, he too became almost ecstatic. Sri Ramakrishna again went into a deep spiritual mood and placed his foot on the doctor's lap. A few minutes later he became conscious of the outer world and withdrew his foot. He said to the doctor, 'Ah, what a splendid thing you said the other day ! "We lie in the lap of God. To whom shall we speak about our illness if not to Him?" If I must pray, I shall certainly pray to Him.' As Sri Ramakrishna said these words, his eyes filled with tears. Again he went into ecstasy and said to the doctor, 'You are very pure ; otherwise I could not have put my foot on your lap.' Continuing, he said : ' "He alone has peace who has tasted the Bliss of Rāma." What is this world? What is there in it? What is there in money, wealth, honour, or creature comforts? "O mind, know Rāma ! Whom else should you know?"'

The devotees were worried to see the Master's

repeated ecstasies in the state of ill health. He said, 'I shall be quiet if someone sings that song—"The Wine of Heavenly Bliss".'

Narendra was sent for from another room. He sang in his sweet voice :

Be drunk, O mind, be drunk with the Wine of Heavenly Bliss.

Roll on the ground and weep, chanting Hari's sweet name !

Fill the arching heavens with your deep lion roar, Singing Hari's sweet name ! With both your arms upraised,

Dance in the name of Hari and give His name to all !

Swim day and night in the sea of the bliss of Hari's love ;

Slay desire with His name, and blessed be your life !

Master : 'And that one—"Upon the Sea of Blissful Awareness".'

Narendra sang :

Upon the Sea of Blissful Awareness waves of ecstatic love arise :

Rapture divine ! Play of God's Bliss !

Oh, how enthralling ! ...

Narendra sang again :

Meditate, O my mind, on the Lord Hari, The Stainless One, Pure Spirit through and through.

How peerless is the light that in Him shines ! How soul-bewitching is His wondrous form ! How dear is He to all His devotees !

Ever more beauteous in fresh-blossoming love That shames the splendour of a million moons, Like lightning gleams the glory of His form, Raising erect the hair for very joy.

Worship His feet in the lotus of your heart ; With mind serene and eyes made radiant With heavenly love, behold that matchless sight. Caught in the spell of His love's ecstasy, Immerse yourself for evermore, O mind, In Him who is Pure Knowledge and Pure Bliss.

Dr. Sarkar listened to the songs attentively. When the singing was over, he said, 'That's a nice one—"Upon the Sea of Blissful Awareness".'

At the sight of the doctor's joy, Sri Ramakrishna said : 'The son said to the father, "Father, you taste a little wine, and after that, if you ask me to give up drinking, I shall do so." After drinking the wine, the father said: "Son, you may give it up. I have no objection. But

I am certainly not going to give it up myself !"'¹⁰⁵

When once asked, 'What is the state of one's mind in Samādhi?' Sri Ramakrishna said,

It is like the state of bliss that is experienced by a live fish which after being kept out of water for some time, is again put into it.¹⁰⁶

He further said :

Ananda, or perfect bliss within, is one of the signs of God-vision. The waves roll on the surface of the ocean but the deep expanse of water lies unruffled beneath.¹⁰⁷

When divine bliss is attained, a person becomes intoxicated with it ; even without drinking wine he looks like one fully drunk. When I see the feet of my Divine Mother I feel as intoxicated as if I have drunk five bottles of wine.¹⁰⁸

There are certain characteristics of God-vision. One sees light, feels joy, and experiences the upsurge of a great current in one's chest, like the bursting of a rocket.¹⁰⁹

Infinite joy can be worked for and attained

The vast recorded testimonies of the joy experienced in spiritual illumination, only a particle of which has been presented here, is one of the most valuable treasures of mankind. They prove that man, instead of being a plaything in the hand of the forces of life and death, can conquer all these forces and control his destiny. What is infinitely more, they demonstrate that the fact of God is experientially knowable ; and that this knowable God is the supreme joy unqualified. When this supreme joy is attained, through that joy man can under-

105. 'M', *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (New York : Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1942), pp. 923-24.

106. *Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna*, saying no. 914.

107. *Ibid.*, no. 940.

108. *Ibid.*, no. 941.

109. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 161.

stand every riddle of the world in a creative manner, and love every creature. He can then offer his own life for a mere lamb as the Buddha did. He can then see that God has become the universe, as Sri Ramakrishna said. This joy makes one's vision perfect and one's love universal. For the individual there cannot be a greater gain, if we are thinking of gain. From the source of this joy alone can come all the true solutions to the problems of man. Whatever we may build on any other foundation will be a problematic structure. Actions which do not issue from the attained joy of God, or from the effort to attain it will in the nature of things be full of errors. From errors can only come errors. Darkness cannot be light's mother. But light can disperse darkness. The joy of God can enlighten everything, sweeten every dust particle.

Nothing in the world makes sense until this joy is experientially attained in a man's life. But when it is attained, everything makes sense for him. About such a person the Upaniṣad says :

He attains self-rule. He attains lordship of the mind ; he attains lordship of speech ; he attains lordship of sight ; he attains lordship of hearing ; he attains lordship of intelligence. Furthermore, he becomes this—he becomes Brahman, whose

body is space, whose nature is true, who delights in life and rejoices in the mind, who abounds in peace, who is immortal.¹¹⁰

This joy, experientially known, is the only cake in the whole universe which may be eaten and still possessed. And the more one shares it, the more it increases, from everlasting to everlasting, for this joy is God-become experience. Until we have experienced this joy, we are the fools of the world, notwithstanding all our civilization, culture, knowledge, skill, progress and power. This joy attained, we have conquered the world, even though we may eat our food from the begging bowl. Life then has attained supreme meaning for us.

Religion, the Ancient Mother of Man, knocks on the head and heart of the modern man with that stroke of supernal love which awakens the soul, and says : 'My child, if you would not be scorched by the flames of this world, make haste to get the joy of God any way you can. God is this Joy. And this Joy is the ground of your being, your heritage and destiny. Claim it and be blessed.'

(Concluded)

¹¹⁰. *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 1.6.2.

THE MOOD FOR MEDITATION

SWAMI ADISWARANANDA

Meditation is a state of inner absorption in which the mind of the meditator flows continuously and spontaneously toward the object of meditation. The *Bhagavad-Gītā* compares this inner absorption to the steady flame of a lamp sheltered in a *windless* place. Patañjali describes this state as the unbroken flow of the whole mind toward the object of concentration (*pratyaiikatānatā dhyānam*).

According to the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* this is a state in which the meditator becomes one with the object meditated upon. Rāmānuja considers this state as a spontaneous and loving remembrance of the most beloved (*dhruvā smṛti*).

The state of meditation is reached by a process of gradual devolution, or folding oneself back. The speech is folded back

into the mind, the mind into the intellect, and the intellect into the indwelling Self. Meditation culminates in the state of *samādhi*, in which the individualized consciousness, or microcosm, becomes completely merged in the infinite expanse of absolute and all-pervading pure Consciousness, the macrocosm. It is like a piece of ice slowly getting dissolved in the water of the ocean. The *Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad* speaks of the three states of our existence—waking, dream and dreamless sleep. Beyond these three there is another state, which the same *Upaniṣad* describes as *turīya*, or the fourth. The state of *samādhi* is the state of *turīya*, and the state of *turīya* is reached by transcending the three states of waking, dream and dreamless sleep. The goal of meditation is to achieve this transcendence consciously and voluntarily. Meditation, as a spiritual discipline, has three aspects: the object of meditation, the act of meditation, and the meditator. As absorption in meditation deepens, the three aspects begin to coalesce into one. Vedanta philosophy describes this culmination as *triputivilaya*, or mergence of the three into one.

Meditation is not just one of the many spiritual practices; it is the culmination and consummation of all spiritual practices, irrespective of the meditator's philosophy and creed. In the words of Sri Rama-krishna: 'The *sandhyā* merges in the *gāyatrī*, the *gāyatrī* in Om, and Om in *samādhi*.' That is to say, ritualistic worship and prayer merge in the *gāyatrī*, which is the highest and most concentrated prayer of the Vedas. The *gāyatrī* then becomes further concentrated into the sacred word Om, from which all words emanate; and, finally, Om merges in the profound silence of *samādhi*. It is not that the meditator attains to the state of meditation. It is rather the other way; he is taken over by that state. As a weary person is taken over by the state of deep sleep, in spite of his best efforts to remain awake, even so the

aspirant, weary of the unsubstantiality of the world, is taken over by the state of *samādhi*, the boundless and fathomless ocean of silence.

The depth of inner absorption is measured by the intensity of each of the following three kinds of spontaneous transcendence: Firstly, the meditator, as he loses himself in the state of inner absorption, transcends the idea of time, and, therefore, becomes oblivious of the lapse of time. Secondly, he transcends the idea of place and is not aware of the surrounding environment. And thirdly, he completely transcends his 'I'-consciousness and, therefore, everything about himself. This inner absorption cannot be attained in a single day; it cannot be programmed, hastened, or scheduled. It is not dependent on specific posture, diet, duration of sitting, or any other factor accessory to the practice of meditation. That which is most vital is the meditative mood. The aspirant must feel the mood for meditation. Sri Rama-krishna describes this spiritual mood as a kind of divine inebriation. No meditation is possible without this inebriation.

The favourable and unfavourable moods

An ordinary person experiences many moods and he is at the mercy of them. His moods are diverse and variable, and he has no control over them. All his thoughts and perceptions, cognitions and volitions, are greatly and variously charged by these moods. The *Bhagavad-Gītā* broadly classifies the different moods into three categories and they are: *sāttvika*, *rājasika* and *tāmasika*. The *tāmasika* and *rājasika* moods are not favourable for meditation. The first one, the *tāmasika* mood, darkens the mind and forces it to lapse into the state of inertia, which is the opposite of contemplative alertness. The second one, the *rājasika* mood, brings in its wake turbulence and restlessness, which make the mind unfit for

any meditative endeavour. The third variety of mood, the *sāttvika* one, is a mood of tranquillity and detachment, and, therefore, is the most favourable mood for the practice of meditation.

Different aspirants experience different degrees of the contemplative mood, depending upon their respective inner disposition and self-control. Therefore, aspirants have been classified into four categories: the beginners, the striving, the adept, and the perfect. Those who are perfect in meditation always remain absorbed in a contemplative mood, irrespective of time, place and circumstances. The adept aspirants can call forth this mood from their mind without much difficulty whenever they will to do so. The striving ones are able to experience this mood only under favourable circumstances and conditions; but those who are beginners are very much dependent upon the favourable disposition of their mind. The practice of meditation for beginners is not always inspired by any contemplative mood and, therefore, their practices frequently prove to be dry, monotonous, and mechanical. Even when they feel a favourable mood, that too proves to be very short-lived and unsteady. Lacking in the proper mood, they fail to participate emotionally in their practices and very often are filled with a sense of frustration. The meditative mood for a beginner is generally influenced by the following factors: place, time, surrounding environment, sights and sounds, speech, company, diet, physical conditions, feeling of dispassion, steadiness of practice, one-pointed loyalty to his Ideal, and his motive for meditation. Therefore beginners, until they have developed an inner mood that is strong enough to overcome external distractions, must depend upon circumstances favourable to their practices.

The cultivation of the right mood

The conditions which contribute to the cultivation and development of the medita-

tive mood are said to be the following : (i) right living place ; (ii) propitious time ; (iii) congenial environment ; (iv) favourable physical conditions ; (v) holy company ; (vi) right speech ; (vii) purity of diet ; (viii) right method ; (ix) one-pointed loyalty to the Ideal ; (x) right motive ; (xi) acts of service ; (xii) practice of discrimination ; (xiii) devotional music ; (xiv) practice of *prāṇāyāma* ; (xv) study and chanting of sacred scriptures ; (xvi) regularity and balance of practice ; (xvii) ritualistic practice ; and (xviii) *japa*, or practice of the repetition of a holy name.

(i) *Right living place.* Place plays a vital role in the development of the meditative mood. It is easy for a beginner to feel the mood for meditation in a solitary place, away from the distractions of the world. Meditation, according to the traditions of yoga, is to be practised in solitude. A beginner especially is required to isolate himself from the preoccupations of everyday life and retire into solitude from time to time. Physical withdrawal from objects of distraction eventually leads to the withdrawal of the mind from such things. It is extremely difficult to devote one's mind to meditation by living in proximity of things which are disturbing and distracting, and therefore inner solitude must be sought in the solitude of nature.

Accustomed to living in the midst of the bustle of everyday life, many, however, find it difficult to live in solitude, enjoy its silence, and derive spiritual benefit thereby. For them external solitude often proves to be suffocating and oppressive. Therefore a beginner is advised to go into solitude occasionally for short periods, for example one or two days at a time, and gradually to extend such durations of living in solitude. Solitude, as Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, points out, deepens one's spiritual mood : 'If you practice spiritual disciplines for some time in a solitary place, you will find that your mind has become strong, and then you

can live in any place or society without being in the least affected by it. When the plant is tender it should be hedged around. But when it has grown big not even cows and goats can injure it.'

In the words of Sri Ramakrishna : 'To meditate, you should withdraw within yourself or retire to a secluded corner or to the forest.' Meditation is to be practised in secret and in solitude, and Sri Ramakrishna indicates three solitary places which are appropriate for this purpose : the inner recess of one's own mind, some secluded corner of one's own house, and the solitude of the forest. The beginner is advised to select for his practice any or all of these places, according to the opportunities available to him. Under any circumstances he must seek solitude for his practice until he has developed his inner solitude. Living in solitude calms the mind. It has been said that distracting things and situations which are out of sight also tend to drop from the mind. The practice of withdrawal into solitude, however, must be backed up by a spirit of dispassion and prayerfulness, in the absence of which a beginner is likely to be taken over by a holiday mood instead of a meditative one.

(ii) *Congenial environment.* Congenial environment is a powerful aid in creating the mood for meditation. The environment, in order to be congenial, must be tranquil, far from the haunts of the worldly-minded, pure, and pleasant to the sight. According to the Hindu scriptures, the places which are favourable for the practice of meditation are the following : a mountain ; a river bank ; a temple ; a place where the practice of meditation has been successfully carried out by many spiritual seekers; and a solitary place free from ferocious animals and other distractions. The yogin should always live alone. As stated in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, where many dwell in one place there is the possibility of noise and quarrelling. Even where there are only two people there is the

possibility of harmful gossip. Therefore, the yogin should live in solitude and be alone. By living in solitude and being alone the yogin gradually overcomes the tumult of the external world and by the repeated practice of meditation he eventually rises above the distracting vibrations of his own mind. The state of meditation is achieved when the heart becomes tranquil. When one is no longer stirred by desires, one attains, tranquillity of heart, which has been likened to the stillness of a fire that is no more being fed by any fuel.

The environment selected for the practice of meditation must not merely be solitary ; it must also be pure. An environment which is not clean and where holy persons are not honoured and adored, is not to be considered as pure and is, therefore, not conducive to the practice of meditation. The purity of an environment depends upon the purity of its spiritual vibrations. The sacred traditions of yoga mention that every person is constantly emitting, as it were, some subtle essence of his personality, known as *tanmātras*, which remains present in the environment where a person lives or spends much of his time. The environment of a temple, or a place of worship or pilgrimage, is naturally pure because of the accumulated deposits of spiritual vibrations and, therefore, such a place is regarded as most congenial for the practice of meditation.

Swami Vivekananda emphasizes the need of a congenial environment and observes the following : 'Those of you who can afford it should have a room where you can practise alone. Do not sleep in that room ; it must be kept holy. You must not enter the room until you have bathed and are perfectly clean in body and mind. Place flowers in that room always—they are the best surroundings for a yogi—and pictures that are pleasing. Burn incense morning and evening. Have no quarrel or anger or unholy thought in that room. Only allow

those persons to enter it who are of the same thought as you. Then gradually there will be an atmosphere of holiness in the room, so that when you are miserable, sorrowful, or doubtful, or when your mind is disturbed, if you then enter the room you will feel inner peace. This was the real idea behind the temple and the church; and in some temples and churches you will find it even now; but in the majority of them this idea has been lost. The fact is that by preserving spiritual vibrations in a place you make it holy.' It is traditionally believed that meditation should always be practised in a lonely spot, in dim light or in darkness. The ideal environment, however, is never given. The yogin must build his own inner environment by his own effort, so that he may remain unaffected by the distractions of the external world.

(iii) *Propitious time.* The meditative mood depends to a certain extent on the temper of the time selected for practice. The traditions of yoga consider the following periods of day and night as most propitious for the practice of meditation: (a) The conjunction of day and night; that is to say, at dawn and at dusk—when night disappears and day arrives and when day disappears and night arrives. (b) The moment of Brahman, which is an hour before sunrise. (c) Midday; that is to say, the conjunction of the two halves of the day. (d) Midnight, the conjunction of the two halves of the night. The mind is said to remain collected and pure at those periods, because the spiritual current of the spinal column generally remains active and, secondly, breathing is done through both nostrils, which is the indication of inner tranquillity. At other times one or the other of the two nerves, *idā* and *pingalā*, on either side of the *sūṣumnā* nerve, becomes active, quite in keeping with the heightened vibrations of Nature, and, therefore, breathing is done through either the right or the left nostril, which indicates unsteadiness of

mind. The yogin is often advised to observe carefully the *sūṣumnā* nerve by keeping watch over the nature of his breathing to determine when he is breathing evenly through both nostrils, and to sit for meditation as soon as such moments arrive by throwing aside all activities. His mind, which is like a river, has its ebb tide and flow tide, particularly in the early stages of the practice of meditation. But such ebb and flow are overcome when the practice becomes regular and steady.

It is also said that in every place of pilgrimage there are special times each day when the spiritual current flows throughout the surroundings, and practice of meditation at those times helps the aspirant in his absorption of the mind. According to the orthodox Hindu view, there are particular days which are especially auspicious for the practice of meditation and these are: new moon, full moon, the eighth day after the new or full moon, and days of special religious celebrations.

(iv) *Favourable physical condition.* The mood for meditation does not come if the physical condition of an aspirant is not favourable. Body and mind are closely related to each other and, therefore, when the body remains disturbed, the mind too becomes distracted. Meticulous care is very necessary to maintain the proper health of the body through regulated diet, exercise, and rest. Even a little over-eating or fasting or lack of sleep or any imbalance of the three elements of the body (bile, phlegm, and wind) makes the physical condition unfavourable for meditation. No effective practice of meditation is possible when the body is over-tired through over-work or tense or charged due to mental distractions. The body must be healthy, rested, and free from tension. Steadiness of posture is an important prerequisite for the practice of meditation. An aspirant is advised not to overdo his practice when his physical condition is not favourable. The brain becomes

over-heated as the result of forced practice and on account of constantly sitting on the meditation rug.

A favourable physical condition, however, is dependent not just on proper diet, exercise, and rest, but also on purity of habits. The aspirant is required to be endowed with three gifts: (a) purity of character; (b) tenacity of purpose; and (c) strength of body. Without having the first, one cannot have the other two. One aspiring after the meditative mood must be careful not to over-tax the body by over-eating or over-fasting or any form of over-indulgence. One who eats indiscriminately, lives

a disordered existence, and is a slave to his passions and whims, is never capable of any tenacity of purpose. Such a person wastes half of his energy in digesting his food and even eight to ten hours of sleep is not enough to give him rest. Whatever energy is left is frittered away in idle gossip and aimless pursuits, leaving no energy whatsoever for the practice of meditation. Small wonder then that such persons feel no real mood to meditate and even should they force themselves to sit for meditation, only yawn and doze.

(To be continued)

ALL IS NOT LOST

(Ramakrishna Mission's Flood-Relief Work in Andhra Pradesh)

SWAMI SOMESWARANANDA

*The stars are blotted out,
The clouds are covering clouds.
It is darkness vibrant, sonant....
Wrenching trees by the roots,
Sweeping all from the path.
The sea has joined the fray,
And swirls up mountain-waves,
To reach the pitchy sky.¹*

...And so it really happened. Rain started from 17 November 1977. It was just a drizzle at first, then slow showers—not uncommon in this coastal region of Andhra. But from the 19th morning the rain began to increase. By noon a strong wind had joined the heavy downpour and changed it into an ominous storm.

Children were at school. Venkat, a fisherman, did not dare to go out in his dinghy, though his brother went to office as usual.

By two in the afternoon it was physically impossible to go out. The deafening roar of the storm frightened Venkat—doors and windows seemed to fly away, the roof above seemed only too eager to follow them.

Ramalu was in the field, sickle in hand, weeding his lush crop. At about four in the evening, as he straightened up he saw a tide racing in from the sea as if to engulf his very existence. He climbed up a palm tree, and felt the approach of his last day. The fierce wind was smashing whatever it got on its way—it seemed as if the very sky had caved in on the earth. Soon it was pitch dark all round, and in its midst he saw a bright fire in the sea. Death seemed to have readied even a funeral pyre!

At school the children were crying; they wanted to go back to their parents at home. But the teachers consoled them, asked them not to go out. They told the students they were safe in the school building. Then the

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 8 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1978), vol. 4, p. 384.

tide came in, scoffing, bursting through the doors and devouring all who were there.

In his house Shyam and his wife stood up on the cot to save themselves from the knee-deep water. The water-level rose. Shyam made a hole in the roof and crawled with his family to the top. But the next moment the wind launched the roof over into the surging waters, and it started to float. Yamuna, Shyam's two-year-old daughter, was wrested out of her mother's hold and washed away. Wave after wave was coming from every direction.

The first warning had come from the Meteorological Department, which had got signals from a weather satellite. On the 17th November it had sent out a warning : a cyclonic storm, centred 900 kilometres south-east of Madras, was changing direction and was heading towards the Andhra coast. Next morning it had sent another warning : the storm was going to be severe. After that it had continued sending calls every now and then. The Army was alerted ; government offices started to mobilize all their resources.

Warning of a storm had been given, no doubt, but it brought something unexpected in its wake. First came the storm . . . next the tide . . . and then the flood. The storm lashed the seashore at a velocity of 200 kilometres per hour, followed by a twenty-foot-high tide, and as a result an area of 350 square kilometres was flooded.

Kutty, a four-year-old child, was miraculously bobbing with the tide. Water had entered his house, he had heard his mother crying, and then he had fainted. When he came to his senses he found himself caught in a bush. That was on a strip of high land. Kutty tried to find where he was, but could not—it was pitch dark all round. He could hear the sound of fierce winds and the turbulent tide. He stood up, and cried, '*Ammā*'.² The sound seemed to

echo back ; but the next moment he fell down—the trunk of a floating palm tree struck him. It was also being carried away by the flood. Kutty tried to stand up once again ; he searched for his parents, for his brothers. Nature seemed to him a demon, a black monster with a thousand teeth. When his eyes got adjusted to the dark, he could see some bodies around, many corpses moving away with the tide. He called them, but no one answered. Kutty was frightened—he couldn't understand a thing. Then he found his mother, lying near him, also entangled in the bush. '*Ammā*', he shouted, and ran to her side on his small legs. '*Ammā, Ammā, see, I am Kutty, I'm Kutty ; Ammā see, get up Ammā !*' He caught hold of her shoulders, he jerked her—yet found no answer. '*Ammā !*' he cried out again. No answer. Kutty thought she was sleeping ; he tried to save her from the howling wind, from the surging tide, from the biting chill. As a worthy child, he tried to help his mother sleep comfortably. 'Perhaps she's a little tired,' Kutty muttered. He was only four—he didn't know what death was ; as a child he knew only life—life, full of joys, smiles, and toys. He couldn't realize that it was his mother's last sleep, from which she wouldn't wake up. He caressed her, wrung water from her dripping clothes. He was feeling hungry, but wouldn't ask for food. He knew his mother was sleeping !

A dawn, darker than night

By 3 a.m. the wind had died down, and the showers had stopped. The next morning it seemed as if nothing had happened. The same sun rose—the same red beautiful sun—its face was so innocent ! But the earth was not the same. There was practically no land—everywhere it was water, water, water ! There was not a single house, nor a tree nor even a telegraph post. The government officers who flew over for a

². In Telugu, the local language, *Ammā* means 'mother'.

survey were puzzled. They had arranged to send asbestos sheets for the broken houses—but where were the houses? They had arranged to restore power—but not a single iron pole could be seen standing. They tried to reach the flooded area—but there were no roads to name, the railway lines were all uprooted with merciless violence. And when they tried to establish contact on the wireless, there was no reply from the other end.

When the army rushed in helicopters, the pilots saw no land to come down on—it was all water. They saw thousands of corpses moving with the tide, hundreds caught in bushes. The trees, stripped of all their leaves, were swimming aimlessly. Hut-tops were floating silently. And with all these there were thousands of cattle—floating, and some trying to swim. The helicopters were hovering slowly, the pilots trying to find if there was even a single man alive to be rescued. They dropped food-packets and water-buckets wherever they thought they found anyone moving—but none was there to receive them. The packets of food joined the bloated corpses, and they all floated together.

A new light in the dark

The All-India Radio broadcast the catastrophe next morning. The Rajahmundry branch of the Ramakrishna Mission took the initiative at once to provide relief to the victims of the killer cyclone. Swami Nandananda, Secretary of the Rajahmundry Centre, deputed a young Swami to proceed immediately to the cyclone-hit region and organize primary relief in the worst affected areas. But there were no trains to reach the place, nor buses, not even a cycle. It seemed a terrible disaster, the real nature of which no one knew except the dead. Taking a Brahmachari along with him, the Swami somehow reached Vijayawada and commenced the survey of the flooded area.

Sri Bapi Raju of the local Ramakrishna Samiti joined them. A few hundred people had gathered there. They had lost everything—their homes, their kith and kin. They looked pale. With vacant eyes they could not express what had happened to them. With a stick in his hand came a tottering old man, his lips quivering: 'Swamiji,—all—all is—lost', he burst into tears. The monk clasped his hands, hugged him to his broad chest and murmured:

What though the field be lost?
All is not lost; the unconquerable will...
And courage never to submit or yield...
Fallen Cherub, to be weak is miserable,
Doing or suffering...³

The Swami was penniless, but all the people came forward to help. He immediately set up a relief camp at the Vivekananda High School, and the Brahmachari was entrusted with the duty of feeding all the 3,500 people who took shelter there. He collected rice and dal, and started cooking, helped by the local volunteers, so as to feed the God-in-man. The Swami then proceeded to Guntur. He was shocked by the awful devastation he witnessed on the way—huge trees uprooted, electric and telegraph poles twisted and fallen, housetops blown off, huge factories broken and crumbled. News came on the radio, cables, teleprinters, papers. Every hour the count of the dead jumped: 5,000, 7,000, 8,000, 9,000... and finally over 10,000. Every receding wave-line appeared to be hurrying back to the coast, carrying at least one trophy—a dead child, a man or woman, cattle, or a roof. Another Swami came from Madras and together they surveyed many areas, set up pumps to de-water Nellacheru where 2,500 huts had been inundated by the flood, and started two relief-camps at Nagarapalem and Sri Ramanamakshetra.

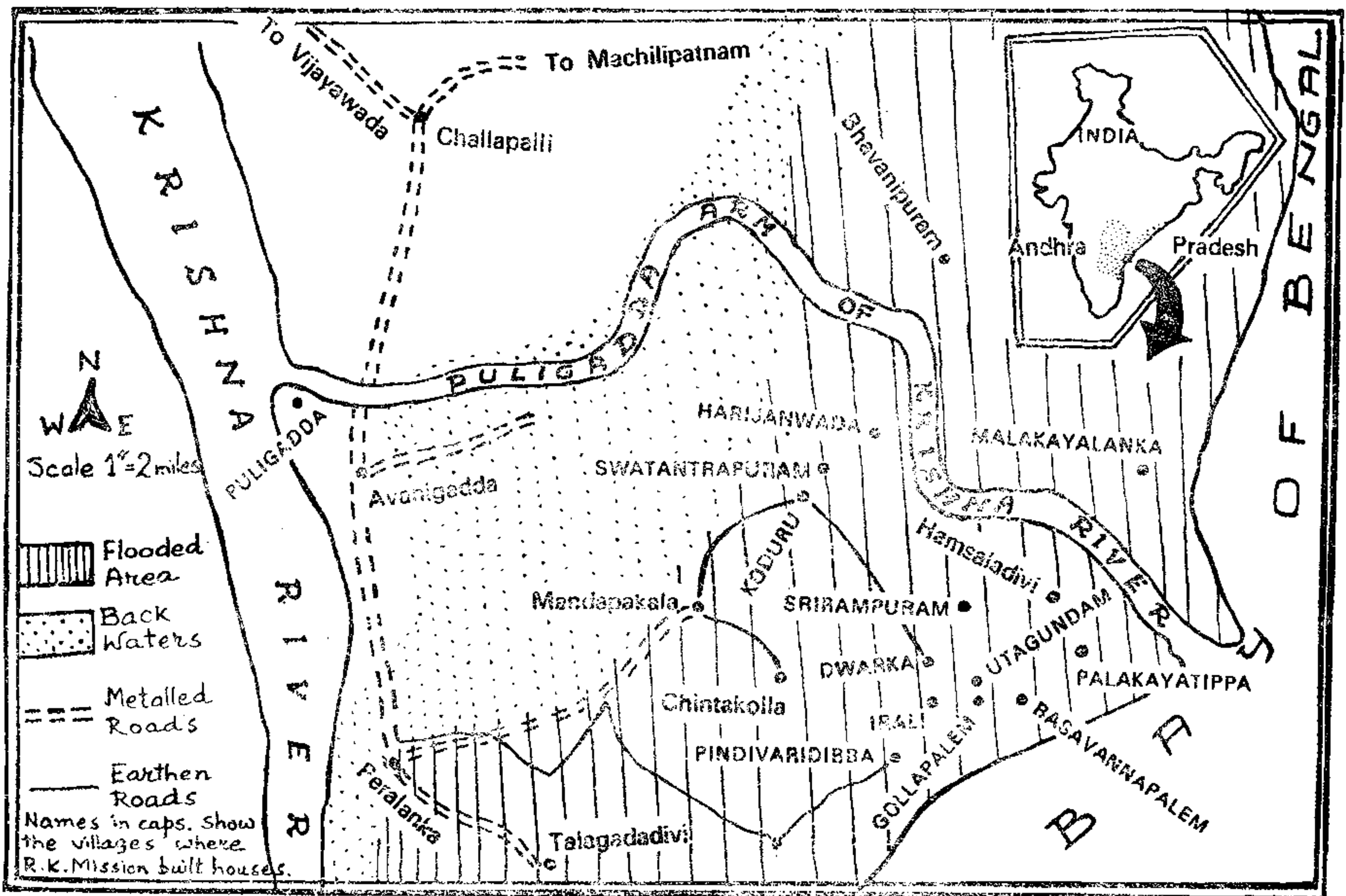
³. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, bk. 1, lines 105-06, 108, 157-58.

With the help of doctors they arranged to inoculate the people against cholera. At Bapatla, with the help of Sri Anjaneyulu of the local Ramakrishna Seva Samiti, they started more relief-camps to serve more than 5,000 destitutes.

At night, after toiling for the whole day, the monks sent a report to the Belur Math, headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission: In the Krishna District, the Divi-Seema area alone had seventy-three villages affected, of which sixty-one were washed away com-

Coimbatore—they all wanted to take active part in the relief-work.

Relief materials were mobilized on a large scale and a massive operation started. Many monks and Brahmacharins from different centres of the Mission joined in. Koduru was made the centre of operation, from where the widely scattered relief camps were to be kept supplied to serve the thousands. The destitutes were served with almost everything—rice and dal, greens, vegetables, chillies, cooking oil, lanterns,



pletely; more than 10,000 people and one lakh head of cattle were dead; nearly 16,000 houses were razed to the ground. The tidal wave had affected more than 70,000 people in 350 square kilometres area; nearly 34,000 people had lost their houses. Swami Atmasthananda, Assistant Secretary at the headquarters in charge of the relief department of the Ramakrishna Mission, assured all help. Aid came also from other centres of the Mission—Madras, Bombay, Delhi, Lucknow, Trivandrum, Hyderabad, Calcutta, Bangalore, Mysore,

matches, kerosene, utensils, trunks, garments, bedding, and, of course, LOVE, that infectious gift of God, the magic touch of which eradicated all suffering from the hearts of those homeless people and broadened the hearts of the helping volunteers.

After a few days the water-level subsided. Swami Atmasthananda visited the relief camps and met the destitutes. With tears in his eyes he said: 'You have suffered a lot; but that is not the only thing in life. You have to fight, you have to struggle for

a bright future. The whole country is behind you. My dear brothers and sisters, we have come here to serve you—to serve GOD in the garb of men and women. You have ignored death; now the time has come to march on.' The *Times of India*, Bombay edition, reported on 19 February: 'The [Ramakrishna] Mission distributed cooked food among 2.5 million flood-victims and also gave them woollen and cotton blankets, saris, dhotis and lungis and children's garments.'

For a bright future

A new programme 'for a bright future' was taken up. The relief-operations and dole-distributions continued, and at the same time many thatched houses were constructed to provide shelter. Next, it was decided to construct more than 1,000 cyclone-proof houses made of cement blocks. Twelve villages were chosen where more than fifty per cent of the inhabitants had died a few days back. Earlier the Ramakrishna Mission had built pucca houses for destitutes in Bihar, Tripura, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Maharashtra and other states. In fact, the Mission had done pioneering work in the field of rural housing in India. So when the Mission came forward for this new relief works, all were very enthusiastic. Teachers, students, labourers, journalists, merchants, ministers, film-artistes—everyone seemed eager to help. The common people launched a drive to collect money. Contributions came from the different states of India, even from Indians living abroad.

Swami Prathamanda arrived with a band of monks and Brahmacharins to start the construction work. He was an expert in rural housing and had earlier constructed houses during relief activities in many states. Testing the soil and the bricks available there, they faced an acute problem. The *Free Press Journal* wrote on 18 Feb-

ruary 1978: 'The Ramakrishna Mission, which has been rendering splendid service in regard to relief operations throughout the country, recently undertook a gigantic task ... to construct 1,000 pucca houses for the people of the worst affected villages that lie in the extreme coastal region. As the quality of terracota bricks were found to be inferior due to the black cotton soil and were not available in huge quantity, the Mission decided to build pre-fab cement houses which can stand the cyclone that has, year by year, become a regular feature in this region.... Notwithstanding several handicaps, the Mission has achieved an impressive progress in the construction of these houses.' About the various problems which the Mission faced, the *Times of India* reported on 19 February 1978: 'The Ramakrishna Mission had to set up a factory in Andhra Pradesh to get the right type of building material for houses in the cyclone-prone coastal areas of the state.... It [the Ramakrishna Mission] decided to build pre-fabricated cement houses.... To manufacture the cement panels needed for the houses, it set up a temporary factory at Puligadda, with twelve electrically operated hydraulic press machines and ten curing tanks. Nearly 600 labourers, skilled and unskilled, were employed.... One unexpected problem was transportation, as the roads were bad. The government repaired the roads but used soil and so the lorries could not pass over them.... Besides, where the side canals were dug afresh, sweet water for construction became a rarity. While these problems were being tackled, the monsoon arrived. It made the roads bad and halted erection work. Despite the handicaps, the Mission did achieve considerable progress in erecting the houses.'

The monks and the Brahmacharins stayed in thatched houses to do all these types of work. For bath they had to go to

the near-by Krishna River. Though they had a connection, water was a scarcity. The *Statesman*, an English daily published simultaneously from Calcutta and New Delhi, reported on 29 May 1978: 'At Puligadda [Ramakrishna Mission camp] a cement pre-fabrication factory has come up. Temporary sheds with palm leaves, asbestos sheets and tents with electricity and water connexions have been constructed.... About 16,000 tiles and 5,000 wall panels as well as other accessory parts for the cyclone-proof houses are manufactured daily. Monks and volunteers work tirelessly.'

The dream come true

When I went to stay with our brother-monks in Andhra Pradesh for some weeks, I could feel their problems and realize their hardships. The main roads were full of dust, and not strong enough for the trucks to ply over. In the villages there were no roads. I had to cross the fields and the streamlets in a jeep to go from one village to another. Sometimes bullock-carts, even tractors were used to carry materials. Swami Prathamanda had no rest—suffering from ulcer he lived mainly on milk, and worked throughout the day. Some of the Swamis and Brahmacharins carried their lunch with them to the construction-spots, and from 8 in the morning till 9.30 at night they would be busy working there. One Swami went every alternate day to bring materials from Vijayawada, nearly 200 kilometres away. Another had to shuttle constantly between Visakhapatnam and Vijayawada (nine hours by train) to collect the timber for the doors and windows. They worked like a powerful machine. Though they didn't get sufficient food, there was an unflinching smile on their faces. Whenever the villagers met any of the Swamis on the way, they cheered him. I personally talked to many villagers, government officers, teachers, students and common men and women. They all had

high regard for these selfless monks. In most of the villages they invited us to take refreshments. We had to go from door to door, taking tea or yoghurt offered by them. They were poor in wealth, but rich in their hearts.

When the houses were constructed—one house for each family of four members—the villagers were so charmed that they changed the names of their villages. The villagers of Gollapalem renamed their village Ramakrishna Puram (Abode of Ramakrishna). Irali's new name was Vivekananda Puram, and Utagundam's, Sarada Puram. Palakayatippa was renamed Paramahansa Puram and Harijanwada as Narendra Puram. Iron reinforcing rods and cement blocks were used in the construction, and thus the houses were made cyclone-proof. Besides, at Ramakrishna Puram, Vivekananda Puram and Paramahansa Puram, three central villages, three community hall-cum-shelters were constructed to ensure the future safety of the villagers and for holding common social functions and celebrations. Swings, seesaws, parallel bars and other game-accessories for the children were erected in the newly made parks.

Srimat Swami Vireswaranandaji Maharaj, the Revered President-General of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Swami Gambhiranandaji Maharaj, the then General Secretary, Sri Morarji Desai, the then Prime Minister of India, and several senior Swamis of the Mission went there at different times to encourage the people and to dedicate the new houses to the villagers. When the Revered President Maharaj went there from Vijayawada, he had to stop every fifteen minutes on the way as the people had assembled to greet him at their villages. The famous dancers of the village Kuchipudi showed their feats when he was passing through their village. They again came to the village where he was staying to give a performance of their world-famous classical dance. Decorative gates

with attractive festoons had been erected by the villagers at each crossroad, and long processions were organised to greet him. He reached Ramakrishna Puram at night; yet there was no rest for him as hundreds of villagers came seeking his blessings. Next morning, 29 April 1979, he dedicated Sarada Puram. There was a community feeding at which all the villagers irrespective of caste, colour, or creed took *prasāda*. People of all the villages contributed voluntarily to make it a grand success. The children wearing their new garments were playing like little angels with smiles on their faces.

'Did you mail my letter?'

And in the afternoon when I was playing with these children, I saw a girl, five years of age, standing alone. I went to her and asked, 'Won't you play?' She looked at me with her big black eyes. After a pause she said, 'Will you write a letter for me? I don't know how to write.'

'Oh yes, to whom do you wish to write?'

'To my mother.'

'Please come with me.'

I took a postcard from our tent and, sitting on the ground, asked her, 'Now tell me what do you wish to write?' She then started dictating as I penned: 'Ammā, why are you not coming to us? You need not be worried. We have got a new house, some cattle, utensils for cooking, and books to read. The monks have given us new

garments today. I've kept a sari for you. Do come now. Father, Ramu, and Yamuna are all well. Everyone is so happy here in our village. Now please come back, Ammā.'

After writing the letter I asked the girl, 'Now, tell me what is your mother's address.' I thought her mother had gone to one of the neighbouring villages on some business. But when I asked the address, the girl again looked at me, and then with a pause she said, 'Heaven. She is staying with God.'

'H-e-a-v-e-n! What do you mean?'

'Yes,' the girl said calmly, 'on the night of the last cyclone my mother fell ill. Later on I asked my father where she had gone. He told me as she was ill she had gone to heaven. God would cure her and then send her back to us. Don't you believe it?'

I was struck dumb. For a while I remained looking at her. So innocent she was! I couldn't reply. Truth seemed so inhuman! Again she spoke in her soft voice; pointing towards the dark blue sky, looking at the faint stars, she said: 'Look, there, there is where my mother has gone.' With a choked voice I tried to console her, 'Yes, my sister, your mother will surely come again.'

I had to write that address and drop the card in a postbox next day when leaving for Madras. I haven't met the girl, that little innocent girl of five, any more. But even today her soft voice seems to echo in my ears: 'I have kept a sari for my mother'; even today her face seems to loom large in my mind, asking me: 'Did you mail my letter? Did you? Did you?'

Why weepest thou, my friend? There is neither birth nor death for thee. Why weepest thou? There is no disease nor misery for thee, but thou art like the infinite sky; clouds of various colours come over it, play for a moment, then vanish. But the sky is ever the same eternal blue.

— Swami Vivekananda.

THE VEDANTIC IDEAL OF BEAUTY

DR. LETA JANE LEWIS

It is impossible to penetrate far in the analysis of beauty without discovering that there are no universally accepted criteria by which to identify a beautiful object. What seems beautiful to one person now may not seem beautiful to him tomorrow, and it may never seem beautiful to his closest friend. Some people, for instance, derive great pleasure from classical music although others are downright bored by it. And even among those who enjoy classical music, there are differences of opinion as to which works by which composers are legitimately beautiful. Thus, Wagner enthusiasts constantly feel obliged to defend him against other music lovers who vehemently attack him. Even the great Beethoven was not consistently praised by contemporary musicians. In literature, generations of realists have very different standards of beauty from the generations of romanticists whom they traditionally succeed. Extreme romanticists accuse realists of being worldly philistines, and extreme realists accuse romanticists of being confused dreamers. In areas of everyday living where the fine arts are not obviously involved there is disagreement as to what movie stars, house paint, and automobiles are beautiful. In his incisive study *Art, the Critics, and You*,¹ Professor C. J. Ducasse, formerly chairman of the philosophy department at Brown University, makes the point that no one, not even the experienced art critic, is capable of telling any other person what is beautiful and what is not. Beauty exists only where the individual sees it; if he does not see it, it is not there for him.

Thus, beauty inheres in the beholder

rather than in the object. George Santayana defines beauty in subjective terms as 'pleasure regarded as the quality of a thing ... an emotion, an affection of our volitional and appreciative nature.'² He goes on to explain that 'an object cannot be beautiful if it can give pleasure to nobody; a beauty to which all men were forever indifferent is a contradiction in terms....'³ 'In removing consciousness,' he writes, 'we have removed the possibility of worth.'⁴ Since we are conscious, sensitive beings, each one of us is capable of experiencing some type and degree of beauty, but, because of individual differences, we do not all perceive beauty with the same intensity in the same objects.

Although we are not in consistent agreement as to exactly which objects stimulate the pleasure called beauty, there is considerable agreement among us as to the nature of this pleasure. Harmony, for instance, is generally experienced as beauty and disharmony as ugliness. Few if any people would use the adjective 'beautiful' to describe noises which sound cacophonous to them or colours which appear to them to clash. Because it calms and refreshes the nerves, harmony inspires a sense of peace and well-being; it creates the impression that all is right with the world. But disharmony shatters the nerves; it is associated with conflict and anxiety, with a world that is out of whack. Knowing the soothing effect of surroundings most people find harmonious, dentists commonly play soft background music in their offices and paint them nicely, blending pastel colours.

1. Curt John Ducasse, *Art, the Critics, and You* (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1955), pp. 115-127.

2. George Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty* (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), p. 31.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Although it exhibits harmony, which is an important aspect of beauty, such dentist-office art hardly deserves to be called beautiful. There is a higher, truer type of beauty which is experienced as an expansion and elevation of the personality, a heightened sense of freedom and power. The beholder feels exalted. He exceeds himself, as it were, in the contemplation of beauty, and the object itself is transcended. Not only does he achieve a personal sense of peace and unity during beautiful moments; but all that he calls good: truth, beauty, bliss and existence itself seems to merge in a unity of perfection. One such beautiful moment inspired Keats to celebrate the unity of truth and beauty in his 'Ode to a Grecian Urn'.

Thus, beauty appears to point beyond itself to something transcendent, which is not clearly seen or understood. 'We know on excellent authority', observes George Santayana, 'that beauty is truth, that it is the expression of the ideal, the symbol of divine perfection, and the sensible manifestation of the good.'⁵ 'There is . . . a real propriety in calling beauty a manifestation of God to the senses, since, in the region of sense, the perception of beauty exemplifies the adequacy and perfection which in general we objectify in an idea of God.'⁶ Half way round the world from Santayana, India's Rabindranath Tagore concurs, saying, 'What in common language we call beauty, which is in harmony of lines, colours, sounds, or in grouping of words or thoughts, delights us only because we cannot help admitting a truth in it which is ultimate.'⁷

The Vedantist Tagore had discovered that there is a supreme beauty which earthly

beauty suggests in moments when life seems to transcend itself. He knew that there is an ultimate unity of truth and beauty in the divine Being who pervades the universe and lends it His beauty. God is the essence of living, conscious beauty, as is the human soul, the Atman, which partakes of the divine existence. The Book of Genesis symbolically relates that God first created Adam's body and then breathed into it, making Adam God's child and making all of us, Adam's supposed descendants, God's children, not in a physical but in a deeply spiritual sense. So although we are not, and never can become, our Creator, His divine beauty is our very nature.

Earthly beauty is God's supreme beauty seen through a glass darkly. In the words of Swami Vivekananda: 'Wherever anything shines, whether it is the light in the sun or in our own consciousness, it is He. He shining, all shines after Him.'⁸ 'He who is the colouring in the wings of the butterfly, and the blossoming of the rose-bud, is the power that is in the plant and in the butterfly.'⁹ The Lord of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* instructs his disciple Arjuna: 'Whatever being is powerful, beautiful or glorious, that you may know to have come forth from a fraction of my power and glory.'¹⁰ As the poet Goethe wrote in *Faust*: '*Am farbigen Abglanz haben wir das Leben.*'¹¹ That is, we live by the colourful reflection, but we do not directly perceive the beautiful source. God's effulgent

8. *The Complete Work of Swami Vivekananda*, 8 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1965-70), vol. 1, p. 378.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 338.

10. *The Bhagavad Gita*, trans. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood (New York: The New American Library of World Literature, 1972), p. 90.

11. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust II*, ed. Calvin Thomas (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1897), p. 7.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

7. Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Religion of an Artist', *A Tagore Reader* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), p. 231.

white light has been reflected—and fractured — to become this multi-coloured universe. This light is not merely external, however. It only appears that way. It exists within us in all its splendour.

In *Atman Alone Abides* Swami Atulananda states simply, 'All beauty is inside us. We extend it outwards.'¹² 'At Kashmir I was charmed by the natural beauty, but Swami Turiyananda told me, "There is more beauty inside you."¹³ Swami Prabhavananda includes the following fine passage in his description of a pilgrimage he made to Kedar-Badri many years ago :

Then we walked again. First we crossed a bridge. There were big mountains before us. The sun was rising. It was such a beautiful sight. All the pilgrims sat down and closed their eyes. Instead of seeing the beauty outside they thought of the even greater beauty within and began to meditate.¹⁴

The pilgrims closed their eyes to meditate on the supreme beauty of pure consciousness independent of any external object. Although our awareness is ordinarily so limited to the petty surface consciousness that we cannot fully experience the beauty within, we do sometimes catch fleeting glimpses of it, perhaps when we contemplate a magnificent landscape or painting. The contemplation of a beautiful object like an exquisitely shaped Grecian urn may stimulate an exalted intuitive moment, but the absolute perfection of beauty, which it only suggests, is yet to be perceived.

Our concentration upon this world, upon God's multi-coloured reflection in the universe, prevents our seeing the beauty within us, much as the action going on before us

causes us to forget the infinite beauty of the sky above when we are watching an outdoor movie.

In order to see the infinite divine splendour, we must learn to be like Sri Ramakrishna, who forgot worldliness and sought that splendour. Being pure in heart from birth, Sri Ramakrishna felt the Lord's attraction so naturally that as a simple child he had a spontaneous experience of heavenly beauty. This experience was triggered off by a sight of breath-taking natural beauty. When he was perhaps seven or eight years old, he was walking along a rice field one morning with a little basket of puffed rice in his hand. Looking into the sky, he saw a flock of brilliant white cranes fly in front of a huge black rain cloud. This vision of natural beauty merged in God-consciousness. He forgot the cloud and the cranes. Completely absorbed in the Lord's supreme beauty, he lost all physical awareness and fell to the ground scattering the rice about. Although he appeared to have lost consciousness, he was actually experiencing an expanded, heightened consciousness. Enraptured by heavenly beauty, he was concentrating his whole soul on it to the exclusion of everything else including his body.

The child Sri Ramakrishna was a poet and more than a poet. An ordinary poet beholding such beauty in nature would surely have been moved and uplifted by it, but few poets are sufficiently pure in heart to become completely absorbed in the beauty of God-consciousness as Sri Ramakrishna was. Lord Byron, for instance, may have had a genuinely intuitive moment when he wrote the lines : 'Are not the mountains, waves, and skies a part/Of me and of my soul, as I of them?'¹⁵ but he did not know this truth from profound per-

12. Swami Atulananda, *Atman Alone Abides* (Madras : Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1978), p. 75.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Swami Prabhavananda, 'A Pilgrimage to Kedar-Badri' in *Prabuddha Bharata*, March 1979, p. 137.

15. Lord Byron, 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage', *The Complete Poetical Works of Byron* (Cambridge: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1933), p. 47.

sonal experience. Swami Vivekananda writes with great insight :

... 'books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything' is all very true as a poetical figure; but nothing can impart to a man a single grain of truth unless he has the undeveloped germs of it in himself. To whom do the stones and brooks preach sermons? To the human soul, the lotus of whose inner holy shrine is already quick with life. And the light which causes the beautiful opening out of this lotus comes always from the good and wise teacher. When his heart has thus been opened, it becomes fit to receive teaching from the stones or the brooks, the stars, or the sun, or the moon, or from anything which has its existence in our divine universe; but the unopened heart will see in them nothing but mere stones or mere brooks. A blind man may go to a museum, but he will not profit by it in any way; his eyes must be opened first, and then alone he will be able to learn what the things in the museum can teach.¹⁶

The real vision of God in nature will open up only after He has revealed Himself to us, perhaps in a divine Incarnation or in the holy Guru. The body, whether of an ordinary man or a divine Incarnation, is material, but the Self inhabiting that body is pure spirit. In the wonderful words of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* : 'He who glows in the depths of your eyes—that is Brahman; that is the Self of yourself. He is the Beautiful One, He is the luminous One. In all the worlds, forever and ever, he shines !'¹⁷ The divine Spirit, the Atman, does not shine clearly through most human eyes because they are more or less clouded by worldliness. But the Self shines forth in radiant beauty through the eyes of holy men and women, which are not covered by any impurity. Since spiritual consciousness can be roused by mere contact with such people, it is important to seek their com-

pany. There is a verse in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* which reads like this :

Stay your steps, O wandering monk !
Stand there with begging-bowl in hand,
And let me behold your radiant face.¹⁸

One's entire life can be changed by such a beautiful sight.

The supreme beauty of divine consciousness is most vivid in a living human being like this wandering monk. Because of the limitations both of the artist and of his medium, this living beauty cannot be perfectly expressed on canvas or in marble; it can only be suggested. No painter has adequately represented the rapturous beauty of the transfigured Christ. Only those who have had the rare opportunity to witness the transfiguration of an illumined soul can have a valid conception of its external manifestation. And only illumined souls themselves know the internal beauty of which the external beauty is a dim reflection.

Spiritual beauty obviously has nothing to do with physical beauty. A saint may be physically ugly, yet his spiritual beauty may be overwhelming. When Sri Ramakrishna was talking about God to his friends and disciples, he was breathtakingly beautiful with ecstatic love of God. God-consciousness shone through his features lighting them with an incredible divine radiance, which so captivated his companions that they took no notice of the trifling fact that he was not good-looking in the usual sense of the word. There was a Swami of the Ramakrishna Order who lived and taught for many years in America : those of us who knew and loved him hardly realized that he was not a handsome man by Hollywood standards. We who had the good fortune to attend his classes and lectures

^{16.} *Complete Works*, vol. 3, pp. 51-52.

^{17.} *The Upanisads*, trans. Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester (New York : The New American Library of World Literature, 1957), p. 68.

^{18.} Mahendranath Gupta, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (New York : Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1973), p. 513.

felt that we had never seen anything like the beauty of his face warm with loving compassion and benediction. His beautiful spirit revealed itself with complete unself-consciousness in every word he spoke and in every gesture, every movement, he made earnestly trying to help us understand the truth he knew from his own experience. For us, he was living proof that a great saint is the incarnation of that supreme beauty which earthly beauty can only suggest.

One of Sri Ramakrishna's favourite songs describes the beauty of Śrī Caitanya. In the following passage from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, M. tells of an occasion when some musicians sang this song for Sri Ramakrishna :

The Kirtan began. They sang about the celestial beauty of Śrī Gaurānga :

The beauty of Gaurānga's face
Glows brighter than the brightest gold ;
His smile illumines all the world.
Who cares for even a million moons
Shining in the blue autumn sky?

The chief musician added improvised lines as they sang : 'O friend, his face shines like the full moon !' 'But it does not wane nor has it any stain.' 'It illumines the devotee's heart.' Again he improvised : 'His face is bathed with the essence of a million moons.'¹⁹

It probably did not occur to Sri Ramakrishna that his own face shone with this very same lustrous beauty when he sat talking about God with his disciples. M. writes that Sri Ramakrishna's face would light up with heavenly joy whenever a beloved disciple entered the room. Jesus' face, also, must have been radiant with divine joy when he was surrounded by beloved disciples eagerly absorbing every word he said.

All of Sri Ramakrishna's close disciples inherited something of their master's

celestial beauty. And of these great disciples Swami Vivekananda, the greatest of them all, was the most striking. His handsome eyes flashed spiritual power. Spiritual strength and courage illumined every fibre of his body. He was strong, but not hard. His strength had its source in love which was similar to, but greater than, the love of a mother who, forgetting herself, has the courage to face a tiger for the sake of her children. He was strong and courageous, not for his own sake but for the sake of humanity, especially the deprived and suffering. His presence inspired remarkable descriptions like the following : 'I can see him yet as he stepped upon the platform, a regal, majestic figure, vital, forceful, dominant, and at the first sound of the wonderful voice, a voice all music—now like the plaintive minor strain of an Eolian harp, again, deep, vibrant, resonant—there was a hush, a stillness that could almost be felt, and the vast audience breathed as one man.'²⁰ 'He literally radiated spirituality. Indeed, that same atmosphere of ecstasy and insight that hovered about the Master at Dakshineswar, now hovered about the Swami in these strange surroundings in a far-off land. An atmosphere of benediction, of peace, of power and of inexpressible luminosity was felt by one and all who came to his classes.'²¹

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, which gives detailed accounts of Sri Ramakrishna's visits with his disciples and friends, is a masterpiece of poetic beauty. As the author of a recent splendid article on the *Gospel* wrote, 'You may think that just hearing the *Gospel* will not give you the taste for it. It will. The words of the Lord are *śrīmad*, that is, beautiful ; they are

20. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, by his Eastern and Western Disciples (Calcutta) : Advaita Ashrama, 1960), p. 331.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 339.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 212.

truly fascinating and overwhelming.²² Sri Ramakrishna especially enjoyed the inspired songs written by India's poet-saints, and the *Gospel* reports the frequent singing of these songs, often to the accompaniment of musical instruments. Sri Ramakrishna himself had a sweet voice rich with divine fervour. M. describes its charm as follows :

Yes, the song of Thakur was enchanting, indeed. He who heard him could not turn his mind in any other direction. Yadu Mallick was such a worldly type, but on listening to Thakur's song even he would become still and shed tears of joy. Totapuri, such a great Jñāni—even he would weep on listening to his song; he did not know the language and yet so.²³

Sri Ramakrishna delighted in songs about the beautiful divine Mother, who is as dark as the midnight sky. These songs, which are lovely as poetry (even without their music) must have been entrancingly beautiful when Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, or some other talented musician sang them.

In dense darkness, O Mother, thy formless beauty sparkles ;
Therefore the yogis meditate in a dark mountain cave,
In the lap of boundless dark, on Mahānirvāṇa's waves upborne,
Peace flows serene and inexhaustible.²⁴

and

Upon the tray of the sky blaze bright
The lamps of sun and moon ;
Like diamonds shine the glittering stars
To deck Thy wondrous form...²⁵

Sometimes a musician would sing:

22. Swami Chetanananda, 'The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna' in *Prabuddha Bharata*, September 1978, pp. 378-79.

23. Swami Nityatmananda, 'M'—*The Apostle and the Evangelist* (Chandigarh, India: Sri Ma Trust, 1972), vol. 1, p. 281.

24. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 692.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 775.

O Mother, dance about Thy devotees !
Dance Thyself and make them dance as well.
O Mother, dance in the lotus of my heart ;
Dance, O Thou the ever blessed Brahman !
Dance in all Thy world-bewitching beauty.²⁶

In one of Sri Ramakrishna's favourite songs the mind is told to immerse itself in God's beauty :

Dive deep, O mind, dive deep in the Ocean of
God's Beauty ;
If you descend to the uttermost depths,
There you will find the gem of Love...²⁷

Sri Ramakrishna taught his disciples to 'listen to singing to awaken the inner spirit.'²⁸

India's great poet-saints like Rāmprasād, Mīrā Bāi, and Tulsī-Dās composed and sang from the fullness of God-consciousness. Unlike them, the ordinary poet does not live in the higher consciousness. He merely experiences occasional moments of intuition which point beyond themselves to a transcendent reality he has never contemplated. As a perceptive writer has observed, 'It must be said that the aesthetic vision and the creations of the devotee-artist are in many ways superior to those of an ordinary artist.'²⁹

Sri Ramakrishna's artistic talents were by no means limited to singing inspiring devotional songs. Like all masters of the verbal arts, he was a keen observer of the world around him. Because, to repent Swami Vivekananda's words, he was a sage 'the lotus of whose holy inner shrine was already quick with life', he could see 'books in the running brooks, sermons in stones and good in everything'. Everything reminded Sri Ramakrishna of God, so, to continue with Swamiji's terminology, he was

26. *Ibid.*, p. 632.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 501.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 695.

29. Swami Shraddhananda, 'The Art of Loving God' in *Prabuddha Bharata*, January 1959, p. 12.

fit to receive teaching from the stones or the brooks, the stars, or the sun, or the moon, or from anything which has its existence in our divine universe.³⁰ Sri Ramakrishna delighted in life's most minute details and related them effortlessly to spiritual practice. His parables appealed to the people he taught because they dealt with simple things everyone around him knew from first-hand experience. For instance, he compared a spiritual aspirant to a man digging a well, a farmer trying to irrigate a crop, and a parent caring for a child. His observations of animals prompted him to compare some devotees with kittens and others with young monkeys. Because his thoughts were always on God, Jesus, too, projected spiritual meaning into life's small events. Consequently, his parables dealt with such everyday things as a man sowing grain, patching clothes, or putting wine into bottles. The mere sight of a bird or of a lily growing in a field reminded him of God's love.

Those who love a Sri Ramakrishna, a Buddha, a Jesus Christ or even some lesser great sage would like to keep him with them always, even after the death of the body. Often this desire initiates a period of artistic vitality which is not dissipated for hundreds of years after the passing of a beloved saint, to say nothing of a divine incarnation. The devotee recalls the holy man or woman to mind in beautiful music and song. He would like to bring him back again, living and breathing, in the paintings and statues he creates. This is his unconscious endeavour. It is generally believed that the great Italian renaissance in art, which produced such giants as Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci, was primarily the result of secular Greek and Latin influence. Henry Thode, however, challenges this assumption very ably in his scholarly, well-documented book on Francis of Assisi and

the beginnings of the art of the renaissance in Italy.³¹ Supporting his statements with illustrations at every step, he traces the inception of the artistic renaissance to the inspiration of St. Francis of Assisi, whose gentle love the inhabitants of the Umbrian countryside wanted to keep with them always.

Although the devotee artist paints, writes, or sings primarily for himself, other people see his work and are uplifted by it. Thus, it has been said of a beautiful song in which Rāmaprasād celebrates his Mother Kālī :

A Mother was created—the 'surpassingly black' Mother of Rāmaprasād ! Yet just as a beautiful painting or a magnificent piece of music after emerging from the creative genius of the artist becomes the common object of appreciation to many onlookers and listeners, so, too, the Kālī of Rāmaprasād was not to remain a thing of delight to his individual mind alone, but has continued to inspire through centuries thousands of receptive souls with the emotional fervour and spiritual excellence that the creator-mystic had infused into that song.³²

The devotee-poet inspired by the living presence of God employs figures of speech which are startling in their brilliance and originality. No worn-out metaphors, no dull expository prose, could express his vivid awareness of the Lord, so he invents symbols and metaphors capable of suggesting an existence far surpassing their own. Swami Vivekananda, for example, addresses Sri Ramakrishna as "Thou whom the cosmos wears, a diamond, at its heart".³³ The diamond Sri Ramakrishna must be the most precious thing in creation to be placed as

31. Henry Thode, *Franz von Assisi und die Anfänge der Kunst der Renaissance in Italien* (Berlin : G. Grote, 1904).

32. Swami Shraddhananda, 'The Art of Loving God', p. 13.

33. Swami Vivekananda, 'Hymn to Sri Ramakrishna', trans. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood in *Vedanta and the West*, January-April 1967, p. 104.

30. See footnote 16.

an ornament at the very heart—not just at the centre, but at the living heart—of the cosmos. Furthermore, the diamond's bright, sparkling light is an appropriate symbol for Sri Ramakrishna's dazzling purity. With this diamond metaphor Swami Vivekananda calls forth vision of a brilliance different from and far excelling that of an actual diamond.

Śrī Caitanya's 'Chant the Name of the Lord' opens with a cataract of meaningful figures of speech :

Chant the name of the Lord and His glory
unceasingly

That the mirror of the heart may be wiped clean
And quenched that mighty forest fire,
Worldly lust, raging furiously within.
O Name, stream down in moonlight on the lotus-
heart,

Opening its cup to knowledge of thyself.
O self, drown deep in the waves of His bliss,
Chanting His name continually,
Tasting His nectar at every step,
Bathing in His name, that bath for weary souls.³⁴

Rabindranath Tagore expresses his perception of the immanent-transcendent Lord exquisitely as follows :

Thou art the sky and thou art the nest as well.
O thou beautiful, there in the nest it is thy love
that encloses the soul with colours and sounds
and odours.

There comes the morning with the golden basket
in her right hand bearing the wreath of beauty,
silently to crown the earth.

And there comes the evening over the lonely
meadows deserted by herds, through trackless
paths, carrying cool draughts of peace in her
golden pitcher from the Western ocean of rest.
And there, where spreads the infinite sky for the
soul to take her flight in, reigns the stainless
white radiance. There is no day nor night,
nor form nor colour, and never, never
a word.³⁵

Tagore's life was by no means an easy one. He had to watch the death of several people whom he loved dearly, but he was able to console himself with the vision of God's beauty, in which the soul has its immortal existence.

Long before Tagore, the sages of the Upaniṣads, who also saw the universe pervaded by divine beauty, expressed themselves in remarkable ecstatic language. One of these sages, Śvetāśvatara, spoke :

I have known, beyond all darkness, that great Person of golden effulgence... There is nothing superior to Him, nothing different from Him, nothing subtler or greater than He... Though He fills the universe, He transcends it... The Lord God, all-pervading and omnipresent, dwells in the heart of all being... He alone is *all this*—what has been and what shall be.³⁶

The poet saint describes the omnipresent Lord quaintly but graphically :

His hands and feet are everywhere; His eyes
and mouths are everywhere.
His ears are everywhere.

He breaks into rapturous song :

O Brahman Supreme ! ...

Thou art the fire,
Thou art the sun,
Thou art the air,
Thou art the moon,
Thou art the starry firmament,
Thou art Brahman Supreme :
Thou art the waters—thou,
The creator of all !

Thou art woman, thou art man,
Thou art the youth, thou art the maiden,
Thou art the old man tottering with his staff;
Thou facest everywhere.

Thou art the dark butterfly,
Thou art the green parrot with red eyes.
Thou art the thunder cloud, the seasons, the
seas.³⁷

34. Śrī Caitanya, 'Chant the Name of the Lord', trans. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood in *Vedanta and the West*, January-April 1967, p. 93.

35. Rabindranath Tagore, 'Thou art the sky

and thou art the nest' in *Gitanjali* (New York : Macmillan Co., 1971), pp. 83-84.

36. *The Upaniṣads*, pp. 122-23.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 123-24.

God pervades the universe in all His glory, but we rarely see Him. We can learn to do so, however, by means of spiritual disciplines, which purify the soul and clarify its cloudy visions. Pure thoughts, and deeds with spiritual motivation gradually remove the film which covers the mind's eye preventing it from seeing God. It is helpful, and appropriate, to worship God, the beautiful One, with beautiful objects like flowers, incense, and music. The silent poetry of profound symbols such as the Indian *Om* and the Christian cross can accompany the devotee wherever he goes and help him maintain recollectedness. Pilgrimages to holy places associated with Christ, Kṛṣṇa, the Buddha, or some lesser holy personality will intensify his devotion and purify his mind if he feels a living presence there. Contemplation of the artistic creations of illumined sages will likewise draw his mind to God. The devotee can use his own creative imagination to bring God's beauty to mind as it was revealed in Sri Ramakrishna when he embraced the erring Girish or in Jesus when he interceded on behalf of the woman who was about to be stoned. But nothing can reveal God's beauty as vividly as living saints and sages, in whom it is directly visible. Through association with holy persons, who are transparent vehicles of divinity, we begin to learn what God is like.

When the aspirant practising spiritual disciplines has caught a glimpse of God's beauty, he will wish to repeat and intensify

the experience. In order to do so he should meditate following the directions of his guru, the living saint in whom God's presence manifests itself most vividly to him. The guru will direct the aspirant in the one method of meditation which will be most meaningful to him. In his delightful, instructive book on meditation, Swami Satprakashananda gives some of the many meditations which centre the mind on God. Here are some of his suggestions :

As you watch the lake of the mind with placid surface, radiant with the light of the spirit, you find a blooming lotus at the centre. It is a beautiful flower of many petals, all white, fresh, and fragrant. This lotus symbolizes your heart's devotion to God. It is the most precious of all the treasures that you can have in this life. It is the seat of God within your heart. Visualize the lotus as the most beautiful thing you have ever seen. The lotus of devotion grows within the heart as you open your mind to God and His light dawns upon it and disperses darkness. As you watch the lotus within the heart, you see the Divine Lord seated on it in a form of ideal beauty, radiating love, wisdom, power, beauty and peace.³⁸ ... You see His benign face with soul-enthraling smile. You see His compassionate eyes showering grace upon you.³⁹ ... All power is His power, all knowledge His knowledge, all beauty His beauty...⁴⁰

38. Swami Satprakashananda, *Meditation : Its Process, Practice, and Culmination* (St. Louis : The Vedanta Society of St. Louis, 1976), pp. 69-70.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

In me, the limitless ocean, let the wave of the world rise or vanish of itself. I neither increase nor decrease thereby. In me, the boundless ocean, is the imagination of the universe. I am quite tranquil and formless.

— *Aṣṭāvakra Saṁhitā*.

RAMAKRISHNA

(*A Song*)

DR. NANCY TILDEN

Ramakrishna,

Of all worlds the sun,

Of men last harbour and end,

Ramakrishna,

Do Thou please

Look on me here

Forever undone

At Thy feet ;

Ramakrishna,

My adored One.

Ramakrishna,

Destroyer of fear,

Pure core,

Bliss door,

Ramakrishna,

If what's left be

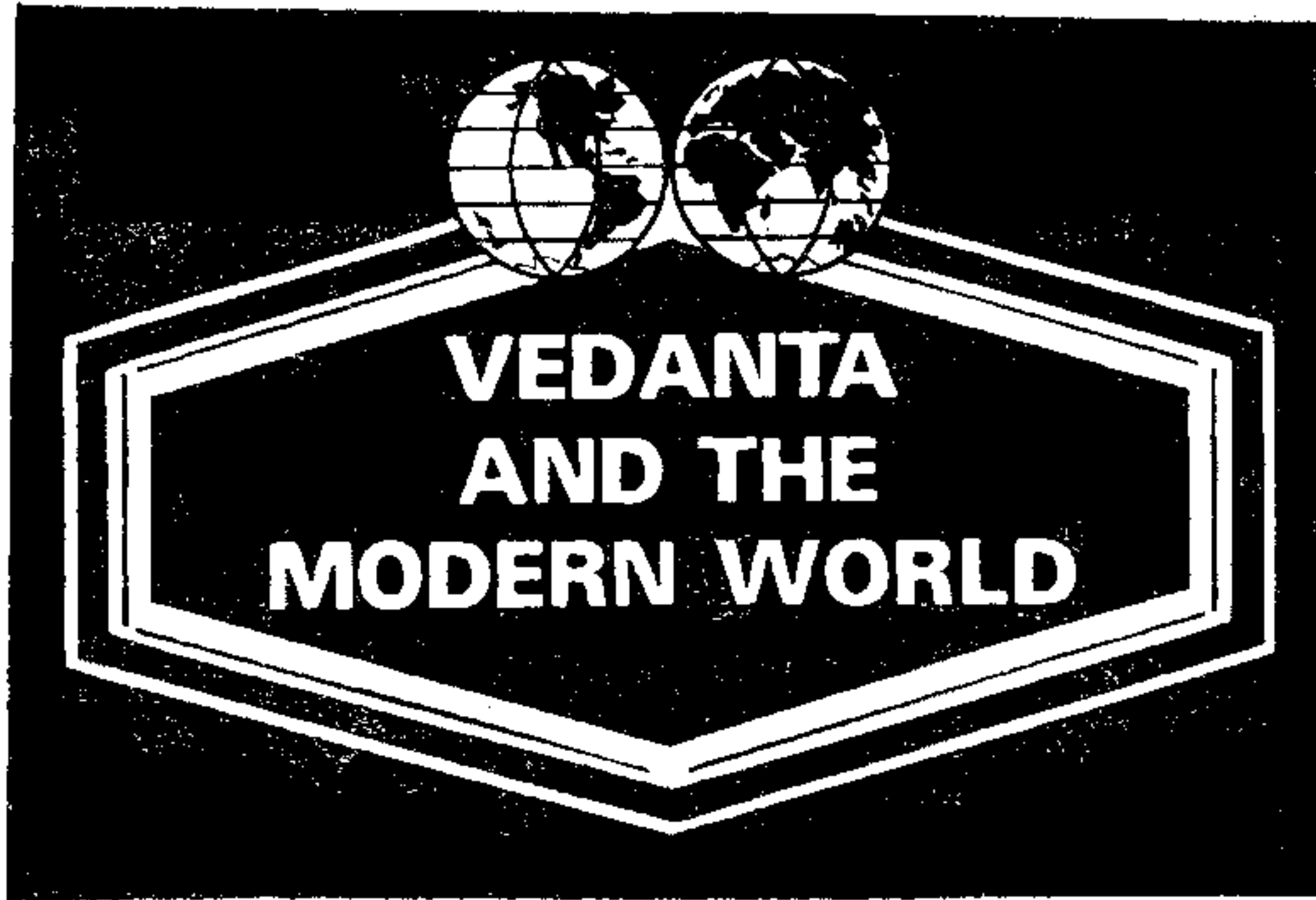
Half of a year

or kalpas in crores,

Do Thou just let me stay near ;

Ramakrishna,

My adored One.



IS VEDANTA A PHILOSOPHY OF ESCAPE ?

DR. VINITA WANCHOO

The psychology of escapism

It is more or less axiomatic that all men seek happiness. 'How to gain, how to keep, how to recover happiness, is in fact for most men at all times the secret motive of all they do, and of all they are willing to endure.'¹ Impelled by many desires, man seeks internal and external objects which will fulfil them. But his attempts are not always successful, as many factors exist in life to thwart the satisfaction he seeks, giving rise to the fear that either he will be totally denied the happiness resulting from such satisfaction, or will at least have to submit to a substantial reduction of that happiness. The first most obviously thwarting factor, which might be termed internal, is his certain knowledge of the inevitable dissolution of the body, which is the instrument through which he enjoys his happiness. There are many external factors in the shape of the whole order of the outer world and his relations with other beings, specially his fellowmen, which threaten his happiness.² Living conditions in every society give rise to the fear of loss of happiness because of inherent natural and

social obstacles. Social obstacles exist in the form of enemies and social relations such as the hostility arising from suppression, injustice, enforced dependence, and the frustration arising from cultural traditions like fear of demons and of violating taboos.³

There are various ways of reacting to this situation. The proper method is to turn the natural desires whose satisfaction is being obstructed into channels and directions which conflict less with the outer world and hence are less liable to frustration; this is termed sublimation in modern psychology. Man may try to overcome his sense of weakness, loneliness and fear by a spontaneous relation of love and activity with the outer world of men, so as to give scope for a true expression of his desires and capacities.⁴ As for the obstructions caused by the unpredictable or destructive forces of nature, the individual may harness these natural forces into more useful channels, making them obey the human will, by the use of scientific knowledge.

Failing these methods, there are other methods by which man, in a bid for happiness, peace and freedom, tries to eliminate the distance between his self and its desires

1. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 77.

2. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, p. 28.

3. Karen Horney, *The Neurotic Personality of Our Times*, p. 25.

4. Erich Fromm, *Fear of Freedom*, p. 120.

on the one hand, and the world—natural and social—on the other. One way is the negative one of reducing suffering and pain by reducing the natural desires for happiness—that is, the pleasure-principle becomes so modified by the reality-principle that the motive of avoidance of pain puts desire for pleasure in the background. Since outer forces prevent satisfaction and since unrestricted gratification of desires brings its own punishment according to the principle of excess, there occurs a voluntary limitation of desire, a withdrawal from others and turning away from the dreaded outer world. Modern psychology terms this process 'escapism'.

According to one classification there are four main ways of escaping the fear arising from frustration of desires by external and internal dangers.⁵ One way is to narcotize the fear—the method of control of the individual organism, rather than the external situation, by intoxicants which help men to slip away from reality; but it is manifestly a very crude, unsatisfactory and self-destructive method. A second way is to rationalize the fear—the method of evasion of responsibility for meeting the concrete life-situation in a poised manner and grappling with it till some solution is reached; the method of defence of irrational postures and mental attitudes by advancing seemingly reasonable explanations and theories.

A third way is to deny the situation and resulting fear altogether—the method of exclusion of it from the individual's very awareness through inhibition or delusion. When the individual ego is unable to cope with the outer world and its activities or to defend itself from the world or to modify it according to its will due to physical incapacity, or when it is unable to judge or

to accept the inevitable in the light of reason due to intellectual incapacity, it seeks to defend itself against the dangers, pains and fears by denial of that reality.⁶ In place of the unbearable reality, agreeable delusions developed by imagination are substituted. Satisfaction is sought through illusion or a life of phantasy having little connection with reality; or the individual may break all connection with the world around him to create a fanciful world more suitable to himself.⁷ Such a method of escapism is of limited value because of the equally pressing need of the ego to critically test and to cope with reality.⁸

A fourth way is to avoid thoughts, feelings, impulses and situations which obstruct desire and arouse a sense of weakness and fear—the method of withdrawal, internal and external, which takes many forms. As remarked before, all such attempts are psychologically prompted, not by desire for pleasure but by need for reassurance against fear of pain. While the third method of escape consists in banishing reality itself out of awareness, in this method the full knowledge of reality remains in consciousness; but instead of perceiving or confronting the painful situation and impression, the individual ego refuses to encounter the dangerous situation at all. It takes to flight and so, in the truest sense of the word, 'avoids' the occasion of pain.⁹ This is a primitive or natural mechanism by which the role of spectator is adopted in the face of difficulty, so that the activity may not need to be compared with that of other people or with any outside standards; it is a method of withdrawal from a painful situation by adopting inactivity and is detrimental to individual development.

(To be continued)

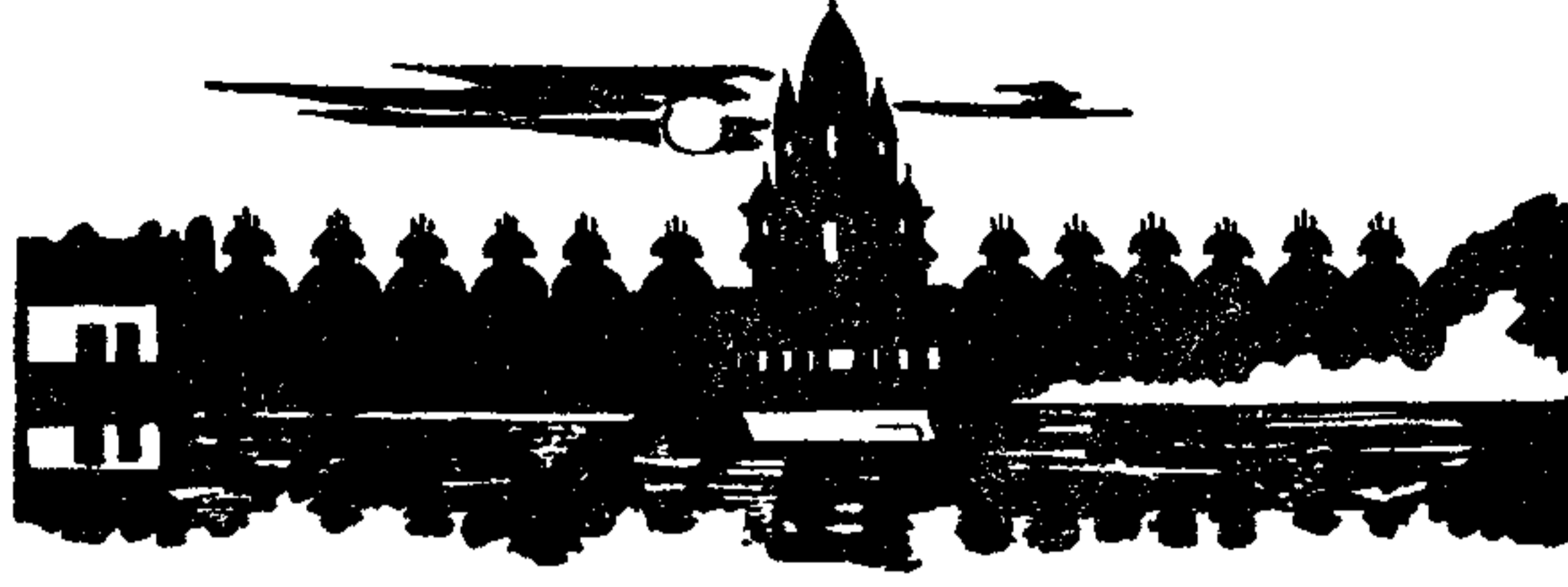
5. Horney, *Neurotic Personality*, pp. 47-48.

6. Anna Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanism of Defence*, p. 74.

7. S. Freud, *Civilization and Discontents*, p. 32.

8. Cf. A. Freud, *Ego and Defence*, pp. 87, 97.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 100.



MAN'S DIALOGICAL NATURE AND THE DIALOGUE OF RELIGIONS*

DR. JOHN B. CHETHIMATTAM

[True to the teachings of its founder, for more than eighty years the Ramakrishna Order has been silently preparing the ground for inter-religious understanding in India and in the Western world. However, for several reasons this spiritually fruitful work did not develop into what is nowadays called inter-religious dialogue. For one thing, the pressing need of society in India was—as it still is—uplift of the poor. And so a major part of the man-power of the Order has been directed to such forms of social service as running hospitals and schools and organizing relief-operations against famine, drought, flood and other calamities. Secondly, times were not favourable for dialogue. Till thirty years ago, India was a subject country and any initiative for dialogue taken by Hindus would have been interpreted differently. Nor was the West ready for such an open dialogue, for the ideas of Paul Tillich and the Second Vatican Council started their leavening action only recently. Thirdly, in spite of all talk about secularism, the social aspect of religion in India after Independence has become very much tied up with political skulduggery which the Order has all along steered clear of. But the most important reason was the Order's basic belief that true inter-religious understanding is possible only at a deeper spiritual level, for it is the Spirit that unites man and man, and not dogmas and doctrines.

Nevertheless, several socio-cultural factors have made religious pluralism a vital issue and dialogue an imperative necessity in recent years. The frequent occurrence of communal riots and display of religious fanaticism and sectarianism, though triggered by economic competition and the machinations of vested interests, have their origin in lack of understanding of one another's religious beliefs and customs. Again, religions of the world have a joint responsibility in containing the forces of atheism, materialism and immorality and in keeping alive the flame of spirituality in the world. Moreover, understanding of other religions is a great help in understanding the weak and strong points of one's own religion and deepening one's faith in the university of divine wisdom.

We are therefore starting with this issue a new feature as a forum for inter-religious understanding. Under it eminent scholars will explain the main doctrines, beliefs and customs of different religions, especially Christianity and Islam. The inaugural article, from the pen of one who is regarded as the doyen of Indian theologians, forms a fitting introduction to the whole serial.—*Ed.*]

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This can be called an era of dialogue. Scientific and technological progress has made our globe rather small and brought men closer together. The communications explosion has made our earth a global village where news even from the remotest corners is communicated all over the world via satellites in a matter of seconds. In such a situation man cannot remain isolated from other men, nor hermetically insulated against their ideas and aspirations. The two great world wars accelerated the progress by throwing peoples for centuries kept apart by geography, religion and culture into the laps of each other during a catastrophic dislocation of normal living. Dialogue among Christian churches in the West started when Catholics were forced by circumstances to accommodate Protestant refugees in their churches, and vice versa Protestants had to show hospitality to Catholic refugees. The long forgotten religions of the East came fully into the picture when nations of the East gained their political independence and asserted their identity in the world body of nations. But this spontaneously growing dialogue among religions only brings out a long-neglected dimension of man: his dialogal psychic structure, which contemporary philosophical thinking and religious experience have brought into focus.

Dialogue in antiquity

The word and idea of dialogue have come down to us from classical Greek philosophy. Socrates was one of those who initiated and popularized it, and Plato made it into a real philosophical art. To counteract the baneful influence of the Sophists who claimed to be able to prove anything and confound anyone by their art of oratory, Socrates started engaging people in dialogical conversation to make them see truth by themselves. When people like Protagoras and Gorgias went about giving long harangues, 'like brazen vessels which when

struck continue to sound'¹ and displaying their ability in the art,² Socrates approached people as a humble seeker of truth, interested only 'in bringing the truth to light, not in winning an argument'.³ Socrates came as a prophet among a people that had not even a word to indicate 'inwardness' and 'self-consciousness'. When about to die he stated his mission thus: 'Going about in the world, obedient to the God, I seek and make inquiry into the wisdom of citizens and strangers, whether any one of them appears wise. And when he is not wise, then in vindication of the oracle I show him that he is not wise.'⁴

Socrates', and for that matter Plato's, dialogical principle was that man is basically good, and has in himself all the sound principles, and so has no need to import them from the outside. Education is not like filling pipes and vessels with water, that 'runs from the full to the empty'.⁵ It is rather depth calling to the deep, fulness challenging fulness. People can be made to be their authentic selves by 'bringing the whole discourse back to its basic foundations' in the heart of human consciousness.⁶

When Christian apologist writers took over the dialogical form from the Greeks for their encounters with their religious adversaries, whether Jews, Gnostics or members of other Graeco-Roman religions, Plato's philosophy of dialogue seems to have been somewhat forgotten. It became a simple polemical device to make their adversaries look silly and totally mistaken, as is seen in the dialogues of Justin, Ariston of Pella and Evagrius. Or it was used merely as a mode of dogmatic instruction as seen in the dialogical writings of Augustine, Boetius,

1. *Protagoras*, 329 A.

2. *Euthydemus*, 274 D.

3. *Gorgias*, 457 E

4. *Apology*, 23 B.

5. *Symposium*, 175 D.

6. Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, IV.6.13.

Cyril of Alexandria and Origen, or even as a literary form without any particular significance, as in the Conferences of John Cassian.

Contemporary philosophical thinking on dialogue

But the contemporary philosophical consciousness of man's dialogical make up was in a way forced upon him by a precarious and threatening socio-political situation. In the era of political instability and lack of clear and secure external leadership in continental Europe, Emmanuel Kant and F. W. Hegel gave the basic philosophical insights into dialogue. In the face of an imminent universal threat of scepticism launched by the Empiricists, Kant sought absolute and secure truth in reason's dialogue with itself.⁷ According to his transcendental dialectics, God, soul and world were postulated and posited by the self-questioning subject that needed these as the unifying principles of pure reason, which would be the most secure law of truth. But Kant's dialectics, though it showed the basic need for dialogue, ended in a denial of all true dialogue with the phenomenal world and other men as well.

But Hegel found the need for dialogue in the very world of violence and conflict in which he lived.⁸ According to him, man begins with a personal opinion more or less coherent, which he calls myth. This is the stage of monologue. The idea of truth is not present in this or at least it is not explicit there. But soon opinions clash, myth encounters other myths and the monologues are opposed to each other. In this conflict there is violence when each one tries to

7. *Critique of Pure Reason* 1, part ii, division ii.

8. George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover Publication, 1956), pp. 105 ff. impose his myth on others. But there is a

way out from this monological violence when people start to discuss these opinions. This is the transition from myth to science, from monologue to dialogue, and from barbarity to philosophy. But for Hegel this is also a transition from individuality to universality, from true personal dialogue of discussion to impersonal dialectics. Hence, his philosophy ended up as one of pure essence and universal will, falling far short of the existential situation of human beings in flesh and blood encountering each other as persons in an ever continuous tension between the individual and the universal.

In the contemporary situation, clearer guidelines were given to philosophy to carry out its reflexion. The two world wars were not purely negative in their consequences. They brought man closer to man and set him concrete and definite tasks to achieve. To avoid future world wars, merely the prospect of a nuclear holocaust is not enough. There is need to achieve mutual understanding between individuals and communities. In a situation where secular ideologies are motivating people that tackle world problems, some way must be found to bring about an understanding between them. Since persons from different cultures and backgrounds are coming together today for various purposes more frequently than ever before, greater need is felt to create an understanding between persons, and not merely between belief systems, and also a mode of behaviour both charitable and rational that allows both critical and appreciative approaches.

Besides these human social needs there are also economic pressures that call for sharing among all men, of science, of technology, and of the limited available resources. Besides, men need also critical guidance from each other concerning value judgments in planning and formulating policies. Above all these, today people are

called upon to make contributions to community building, building up morale that will inspire people to work and build up a national perspective with a wider vision, and create an atmosphere and common language of spiritual and religious discourse. All these specific, social, economic, moral and religious needs have made a deeper analysis and closer understanding of human conversation and its inner dynamics really vital.

This is the reason why philosophy has left behind the Greek concern for objective nature, with man as a mere part of it, and has come to concentrate its attention on human consciousness. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, René Descartes made a definite break with the Greek and Medieval philosophical traditions when he came forward with his *cogito*, 'I think', and refocused attention on the human self. With a deeper understanding of the human consciousness today, Western philosophy is affirming its openness not merely to the individual human subject, but to intersubjectivity, the communion of subjects or selves. The focus of philosophical thinking today is the 'we', the realm of dialogue. To reach this point Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and other Phenomenologists had to make an impartial analysis of human consciousness, which is not a mere object nor purely an isolated subject, but openness to other subjects, constantly growing and expanding in a process of continuous experiencing. Gabriel Marcel and other personalist thinkers showed that on the one hand man has to affirm his subjectivity in order to establish the individual in his own right, but on the other, complement it by affirming the universal character of private experience, calling for sharing and dialogue with others. Man's self is essential intersubjective.⁹

⁹ Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Vitator*; *Creative Fidelity*; etc.

Finally, Martin Buber has shifted emphasis from the intersubjective openness of human nature to the existential process of dialogue itself. According to him, man's nature makes him an 'it', a thing among things, but his existence itself is dialogical. One has to go beyond universal human nature and face the other in his concrete existence, accepting him as he is and impart oneself to him as one actually is. The essence of dialogue is to confirm one's partner as this existing being and allow him to partake of his own being.¹⁰

*Psychology of dialogue*¹¹

Psychologically the human self is dialogal, all authentic human activity is dialogue: Poetry is dialogue with the world; love is dialogue with others, and prayer is dialogue with God. But the strange fact is that man has a strong temptation for isolating himself in monologue, to close himself in his own system even in the realm of thought and reject others. This monological tendency is seen in various aspects of human behaviour.

Boredom and monologue: The general phenomenon of being bored is a sign of a person being left to himself with a certain inner emptiness and lack of content in himself. Schopenhauer found in boredom a motive for sociability, since a person can be led by dissatisfaction with himself to enter into dialogue with others. But, in fact, when one starts looking for others out of a personal emptiness, there is a possibility that he may get bored with others as well; true dialogue can come only from interior fullness.

Irony and humour indicate another aspect of monological behaviour. They show an

¹⁰ Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*; *I and Thou*; etc.

¹¹ Cf. Jean Lacroix, *Le sens du dialogue* (Neuchâtel: Edition de la Baconnier, 1965). The whole book is a psychological analysis of dialogue in the philosophical sense.

attitude of disagreement with the world and the others. The ironic holds himself aloof and disdains what he criticizes. The humorist, however, mixes a certain sympathy with his detached criticism and shows some complicity with what he is laughing at. Both may show a certain healthy detachment from the particularity of the world they are facing. But there is need to get beyond the phase of self-isolation, if one should not lose the sense of reality itself. The ironist has no sense of being; he empties the world of all substance.

Pride and vanity : Pride is the principal root of monologue, since it isolates the individual in himself with a sense of self-sufficiency. Vanity, on the other hand, shows a certain openness to others with a concern for their approval and recognition. But this too is self-centred and seeks to instrumentalize others for one's own self-satisfaction. Both vanity and pride seek self-glorification, but pride does this by force, while vanity wants to achieve it by the good opinion and co-operation of others. But both equally hurt true dialogue. The superficial sociability created by vanity is far different from the communion of friendship built upon reason. Vanity rules in a world of imagination, and there the units do not belong together as in the real world, but remain loosely connected as in a dream. Hence, it creates a certain anonymity of individuals. In true friendship, on the other hand, because it is based on truth, reason is a common good that unites closely and firmly those who possess it, without denying the identity and rights of each one. Vanity creates a society of falsehood. The vain man lacks substance, cannot discover himself and cannot be transformed in encountering others. The proud sins by his self-sufficiency, the vain by its lack; the former refuses to be, preferring himself to Being, while the latter seeks to be in the other's opinion, in the

ephemeral world of appearances. Never attaining reality, the vain is in danger of asphyxiating himself. Only the realism of humility can create the openness necessary for dialogue.

Duplicity is yet another block to true dialogue. The basis for duplicity is in man himself, his dual nature of spirit and matter. The very sign of intelligence is that instead of helplessly facing in wishful thinking an object that cannot be directly attained, it can go the roundabout way of temporarily removing oneself from the object and have recourse to appropriate means that will eventually take him to the desired goal. Instinctive nature and rationality create a certain duality in man: instinct which is an expression of man's animality has to wear a mask of noble values to be accepted by reason. In life a person has to play several roles, of the family man, the business executive, friend to his equals and the like. But all these do not by themselves constitute duplicity: it will be the same person conscious of himself that plays all these roles. There is a certain integrity of the person in all the personalities he assumes. But duplicity is when he identifies himself with the role he plays. This duplicity can be purely exterior when he pretends to others that he is not what he really is or that he is what he really is not. This is the case of the spy, the cheat and the villain. Worse still is the duplicity if the person identifies himself also interiorly with his external appearance. For example, the coward who thinks that the obstacles are insurmountable, isolates himself from the real world and constructs a little world of his own with the grapes-are-sour attitude.

True dialogue can take place only in an atmosphere of sincerity with oneself and with others. This requires equality of the participants in dialogue. In situations where this equality does not exist dialogue becomes impossible, and duplicity may be the only

safeguard for personality. All situations of violence and fear foster duplicity. In master-slave and superior-inferior relationships the slave and inferior often take refuge in duplicity. Similarly in a purely spiritualistic morality that contemns man's bodily existence, sexuality seeks liberation through duplicity. Man is not a simple being, but rather the dialectics of being and appearances. An atmosphere of openness to oneself and others can be created only when man's complexity, his multiplicity of roles and appearances, is recognized and in all that his single personal being is accepted.

Person, the basis of dialogue

Openness to other men in dialogue should be based on the wholeness and integrity of the person. Person unifies in himself two complementary tendencies, one directed towards the concentration and mastery of self, and the other to expansion and gift of self to others. Individual and person are not the same, and yet biopsychological individuality and self-identity are essential to personality. Person, in a sense, breaks open the barriers and restrictions of the individual to become more universal, to be more and more what the others are, in order to be more authentically oneself. Self-possession and self-gift constitute the rhythm of personal life.

Here the Western and Eastern emphases are slightly different. In the Western rational and objective thought, self is only the immediate principle of a man's activities and provides a certain unifying point for the diverse factors that constitute his existence. Person appears as a higher comprehensive principle that establishes him as a responsible and free subject over against the others, especially the wholly Other, God.¹² In the

12. Cf. Karl Jaspers, *Way to Wisdom* (Yale, 1960), pp. 45 ff. 'The man who attains true awareness of his freedom gains certainty of God. . . . This I know : in my freedom I am not through myself, but am given to myself. . . . Where I am

Eastern thought, on the other hand, person is only an external façade of man's existence. Its root and ground is in the Atman, the Self; the ultimate Self and ground is God, in whom he should discover himself more authentically. Hence in meeting the others he is not meeting something wholly other, but rather partial manifestations of what he is authentically in himself.¹³

In both conceptions, however, dialogue is the basic dimension of what one is. In both, human psychology is tied to a moral character, a faith to which he can be faithful. This is the source of his strength when he encounters another and communicates what he is to the other. This communication is a witnessing. There was a time in the recent past when witnessing was conceived as not anything more than an external narrative of the event with no personal involvement of the witness. What was expected of him was fidelity to the event, external correspondence between the event and the recital. But today with a deeper understanding of human psychology, the moral character and faith of the witness appear vital in witnessing. What is looked for in witnessing is the personality of the witness. He cannot be merely externally faithful. If the witnessing is authentic, it will engage the whole being of the witness. A fact is an external happening that can be perceived, registered, explained and ascertained as an object. But an experienced event is an act, a personal happening, which can only be comprehended and attested to by the witness. He is so much involved in the event, that to deny the witnessing will be to deny his own self. People meet in dialogue not in the drawing-room style of

authentically myself, I am certain that I am not through myself.'

13. Cf. the great Upanishadic statements : 'Brahman is consciousness'; 'This is one alone without a second'; 'This Self is Brahman'; 'My Self is Brahman'; 'Thou art thou'; etc.

superficial comments on persons and news items, but in a deeper kind of personal witnessing. Hence it cannot be explained in terms of purely the psychological and social nature of man, but only in terms of the participants' relation to a higher reality in which they have faith and to which they owe fidelity.

Meaning of dialogue

Dialogue is conversation. In conversation we discuss certain things or persons. But this discussion has to break away from the Cartesian subjective-objective dichotomy. A friendly conversation is not a study in depth of a particular subject or theme, analysing it, using expository, exegetical, explicatory techniques ending up with evaluative statements.¹⁴ In such an analytic and evaluative discussion emphasis will be on the object of discussion and on the information imparted. In conversation, however, the persons conversing remain the focus. But it is not the communication of subjective reactions and emotive evaluations either. In this case the focus will be the subject that exposes his individual emotions. As regards the objects, the conversation may at best be an 'introduction': the listener already knows something about the matter and wants to know more, and his partner is sharing with him his own knowledge about it. If such sharing becomes too critically analytic or evaluative, conversation itself will be killed.¹⁵

The purpose of dialogue is that men should draw closer to each other. For this, religion, philosophy and culture should be bonds and links enabling people to share experience, ideas and ideals instead of being dividing fences between classes and groups.

14. Cf. Martin G. Plattel, *Social Philosophy* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1965), pp. 64-67.

15. John J. Mood, 'Conversation and Interpretation', *Philosophy Today*, 15(1971); 181-85.

But there are two types of people, essence men and image men. The former seek authenticity in themselves, so that they can find satisfaction in themselves, while the latter are constantly concerned about the impression they make on others and search to create attractive images of themselves for others. Essence men are liable to close themselves in themselves narcissistically, while image men tend to wear masks that hide their identity. Man needs confirmation from his fellowmen for what he is. The difficulty of securing this confirmation makes people hide either within their individuality or within artificial hideouts. Mere individuation cannot bring fulfilment to man. Only a discovery of the meaning of existence can bring him fulfilment. This is the scope and end of dialogue. Only one who is open to truth can find this meaningful fulfilment. Truth judges all men. Plato affirms clearly this basic principle of dialogue when he makes Socrates say in Gorgias: 'I am one of those who are willing to be refuted if I say anything that is not true, and willing to refute anyone else who says what is not true, and quite as ready to be refuted as to refute.'¹⁶

So, dialogue means confirming one's partner as this existing being and legitimizing him over against oneself as a partner. Both are recognized as finite and individual, but the meaning is not found in the individuality itself, but rather in the common situation open to the fullness of truth, to the attainment of which mutual help is needed. An act of genuine fantasy is needed, in the words of Martin Buber, in order to go beyond the offending limitations of the other and make him present as whole and one. Any artist can paint a woman before him. But only a greater artist can visualize in the same picture at the same time the little girl she was as well as the old woman she will be. Only a true artist of the spirit can

16. *Gorgias*, 458 A.

break the tendency towards appearances and arrive at the fullness of reality in dialogue.

Speech is not the most important factor in dialogue.¹⁷ Presence in silence to each other can be an eloquent form of dialogue. Whether one should speak or not depends on the legitimacy of what one has to say. One's effect as a speaker should not outweigh the thought of what one has to say. When several people are engaged in a dialogue, not everyone present has to speak. But one cannot be there as a mere observer. Each one must be ready to share with

others, and have in mind the other or the others in their present and particular being and strive to establish a living and mutual relation between himself and them. It is seeing the other or experiencing the other side. In opposition to this dialogical attitude may be indicated dully tempered disagreeableness, obstinacy or contrariness.

(To be continued)

17. Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. R. C. Smith (London : Kegan Paul, 1947), p. 14.

PILGRIMAGE TO MOUNT ATHOS

SWAMI GANESHANANDA

For centuries Holy Mount Athos in northern Greece has been a place of Christian pilgrimage. I first learned of it in the introduction to that inspiring little book *The Way of a Pilgrim*, where it is only briefly mentioned. The anonymously written manuscript of the book is said to have been found in a Mount Athos monastery. The book itself is not at all about the Holy Mountain but rather an account of the lonely wanderings and experiences of a Russian peasant and his untiring search for God through the practice of interior prayer of the heart. But the soul-stirring beauty of the story and the conviction it instills that God can be realized by the simple and sincere repetition of His Holy Name have captured the imagination and given hope to many. How the manuscript found its way to a monk's cell on Mount Athos no one knows and perhaps never will. And just what the relationship was between the lives of the lonely Athos monks and the practice of interior prayer failed to be of any great importance to me at the time.

My story, as it took shape for me, begins some years back in southern California at another monastery near the sleepy little village of Trabuco Canyon. It is located at the base of a picturesque mountain, often snow-covered in wintertime, which dominates the countryside twenty miles inland from the Pacific Ocean. The monastery has been peacefully situated there for over thirty years as a branch of the Ramakrishna Order's Hollywood Centre. Although only sixty-five miles from Hollywood and the other bustling cities of the Los Angeles area, it is quite possible for the monks of Trabuco Canyon to feel isolated and far away from the cares of the world.

I can remember enjoying the quiet of one evening beside the open fireplace of our library and discovering a wonderful book about Mount Athos. It was a large book filled with magnificent photographs of castle-like monasteries located on a rugged peninsula in northern Greece, and it told a fascinating story about monks of the Eastern Orthodox Church who continued to live God-centred lives much as they did

centuries ago when the monasteries were first built. So this, I mused, was the place where the manuscript of that other little book was found, and here the monks of Athos had been quietly practising prayer of the heart for hundreds of years. From that moment on, the desire to someday go to Mount Athos was kindled in me, though at the time I considered it only a fireside dream. When the years passed and the opportunity presented itself to travel to India, that old dream burst into flame again. Surely, the journey could be routed so that Greece somehow or other fell in the pathway of my going or coming. And so it was that on my departure from India last July I was able, by the Lord's grace, to fulfil an old dream and become a pilgrim to Holy Mount Athos.

How often it is that romantic dreams seldom include the hard realities and tedious details necessary to make them come true! Mount Athos is not an easy place to visit. This became evident the moment I arrived in the Greek capital of Athens. Introducing the procession of redtape was a trip to the American Embassy where I learned that I needed a special clearance and letter of recommendation to the Greek Ministry of Education and Foreign Affairs. From that office I had to obtain another letter introducing me to the officials on Mount Athos who would finally issue me the all-important diamonitirion or special passport allowing me only four days to visit the monasteries. My head began to reel and I was glad to postpone all of this in order to fulfil a more immediate part of the programme.

Before leaving California some close devotees had arranged for me to have a letter of introduction from a Greek doctor friend. He had urged me to go first to the small island of Patmos where the abbot of the famous monastery of St. John the Theologian could provide me with a truly

helpful letter that would make all of this other redtape much easier. I am very glad that I did this.

The side trip to Patmos was an adventure in itself, and going there gave me some understanding of why the Athonite monasteries, as well as all of Christendom, hold this tiny island in such reverence and respect. In the year 95 A.D. St. John the Divine, or Theologian as he is also called, was exiled there. While living under austere privation as a hermit in a cave he had the great vision that was later recorded as the Book of Revelations, the last New Testament book of the Holy Bible. 'I, John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that was called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, what thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches ...' (Revelations 1.9-11). The cave where this vision traditionally happened has been preserved as a place of holy pilgrimage, and on the hill above it the Monastery of St. John the Theologian was erected in the year 1088. Through the centuries it has survived the vicissitudes of history—wars between the surrounding powers and incessant harassment by pirates. Today it remains one of the finest examples of a medieval fortified monastery. Within its austere walls is a beautiful church, numerous chapels, a library and a treasury preserving nine centuries of worship and art—truly a keeper of Byzantine tradition and a treasury of Orthodox Christianity.

Looking up from the small port town of Skala, the monastery rises like a graystone monument towering protectively over the whitewashed houses that huddle around its base on the top of the hill. Inside the

massive walls the central courtyard seems surprisingly small. Nothing is quite square and it is easy to see that the early masons made many concessions to the irregular rocky mountaintop on which the monastery was built. In contrast to the somber outer walls, everything inside is freshly white-washed. Intriguing passage-ways lead off from the main courtyard in every direction. From the courtyard I walked through an arched arcade into the dimly lighted church and occupied a wooden stall along the back wall. As my eyes became accustomed to the light I could see two elderly monks praying quietly, the black wool rosaries slipping silently through gnarled fingers. Incense from the early morning service still filled the air.

The quiet sanctuary and the treasury provided some fruitful hours and helped fill a few gaps in my scanty knowledge of Orthodoxy. On one occasion I was able to quietly join the ranks of a specially guided tour. The leader was a lady who had specialized in Byzantine art and who later very kindly helped me. No one noticed me, an outsider, as we proceeded from one fascinating part of the monastery to another. Smaller chapels, the large refectory with fresco-adorned walls designed to inspire the monks as they took their meals, kitchens, grain cellars and huge jars for olive oil. Then past rows of individual small cells formerly used as quarters by monks of the twelfth century. Most of the following hour, however, was spent in the monastery's famous treasury, where one of the few but definitely modern innovations had been introduced: all of the rare manuscripts, early printed books and embroidered cloth vestments were kept in airtight glass cases for protection against humidity and insects. Such a wonderful reverence and respect for their sacred treasures was catching, and conversation became subdued and hushed as it had been

inside the church.

After the formal tour a short time was given before all were expected back on their bus for a hurried departure. Here was my chance to solve the ever-present language problem. After expressing appreciation for her excellent lecture, I explained to the guide my hopes to go to Mount Athos, and showed her the introductory letter from my Greek doctor friend in California. 'Oh, this is fine,' she exclaimed, 'it will be a big help. Come! there is just time to introduce you to Father Sidros, the abbot.' In a flash she was off through another passage-way into a smaller courtyard, up an outside stairway crowded with potted geraniums, and into a small reception room. After an animated and hurried flow of Greek words, my story and my need was expressed to those present, and I shook hands with a very affable Father Sidros. He was pleased by the letter, and it was agreed that I should come back the following morning. That would give him time to prepare a proper letter for the Athos monasteries.

Phyllis, as the lady guide was called by the rest of her group, offered me a bus-ride down to the village. I declined and thanked her again for all her help. 'I'm very happy to do it,' she said, but her smile seemed a little sad. 'Perhaps I get some vicarious satisfaction from helping someone go to Mount Athos. I'd give anything to go myself, but it will never happen.' The bus drove off and I realized how she must have felt. No woman has set foot on Mount Athos for over a thousand years.

Back in Athens, armed with my Patmos letter, the redtape did move more smoothly. A helpful secretary at the American Embassy, while filling out a form, looked up from her typewriter after coming to the query, 'Occupation?' and its answer, 'Hindu monk of the Ramakrishna Order of India'. 'I think,' she said, 'that it might be better if you simply put "Student of

theology”.’ Then as a way of softening what she thought might be a blow to me, she added, ‘I’m sure that Hindu monk is quite a creditable occupation, but I’m not sure that the Holy Fathers on Mount Athos would understand. They would most probably ask for some written statement from your Order and the whole thing would take months.’ So I suddenly became, at least on paper, a student of theology. Not exactly a title my close friends would have given me. Everything somehow got completed in one very busy day and the next morning I was on a northbound train moving out of the city of Athens.

Along the northern coast of Greece is a prominent peninsula that juts southward into the Aegean Sea. The southern end is divided into three fingers, each about fifty kilometres long. The eastern most of these three is mountainous and heavily forested, terminating at its end in the dramatic, pyramid-shaped mountain called Athos. The entire peninsula is referred to as Mount Athos, and on it exists a unique monastic state, an independent part of the Greek nation.

Today there are twenty major monasteries of the Eastern Church on the peninsula. Seventeen are Greek, one is Russian, one is Serbian, and another is Bulgarian. The earliest were built in the tenth century and financed by kings, noblemen and other wealthy patrons. Throughout the centuries there have been times of active growth and heavy monastic population reflecting both religious zeal as well as economics and even politics. Likewise, there have been periods of decline such as the post-World War II era when monasteries that formerly housed hundreds of monks dwindled to just a few dozen. At present there are hopeful signs that the pendulum is swinging back again, indicating a revival of religious interest. Almost all of the monasteries have been destroyed at least once in the past by fire

or pirates, and their castle-like fortified architecture shows an attempt at defence against the latter. Even with these past losses the libraries, treasuries and richly appointed churches constitute a great wealth of Eastern Orthodox Christianity.

The twenty monasteries are not all organized in the same manner. Some follow the older and more strict cenobitic pattern that is based on the Studite Rule as passed on by Saint Athanasios the Athonite (ca 920-1003). Among other things, this means that the monks live and take their meals together, that all property is shared commonly, and that the monastery is ruled by an abbot who is elected for life. Towards the end of the fourteenth century the idiorhythmic system developed, becoming more prevalent in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Here, except on certain feast days, the monks prepare and take their own meals separately, that is, follow their ‘own (*idios*) rhythm’. They can own a certain amount of private property and even earn money, and the monastery is governed by a periodically elected group of seniors. Presently there are eleven cenobitic and nine idiorhythmic monasteries.

Each of these systems allows for smaller monastic dependencies called sketes. A cenobitic skete looks like a monastery and is housed in a single building having within it a church, refectory and living quarters, etc. ; while an idiorhythmic skete can look like a tiny village. There are also kellia, small monastic establishments consisting of a building with a chapel in it and some surrounding arable land. Kellia usually consist of three monks and are dependent on a larger monastery. Lastly, there are the hermitages where provision is made for the lonely ascetic life. All of this was not completely clear to me either before or while I was on pilgrimage, and the confusion of ignorance plus the language-handicap of not knowing Greek was cause for a slight

undercurrent of anxiety that I could not shake off. I was forced to confess to myself that I had come to Athos primarily on a romantic whim, and had I done a little more homework beforehand it would have certainly enriched the experience. These, of course, are after-thoughts. What I did know, and assuredly a big part of my reason for coming, was some fundamental similarities between the monks of Mount Athos and my brother-monks in India. The Jesus prayer 'Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me', with its continual repetition, is a holy *mantra*. The attempt to strengthen and deepen such a *mantra* to a prayer of the heart is not new to Hinduism. The belief in and reliance on an adept spiritual teacher is the same as the Hindu Guru-disciple relationship. Most important of all is the shared belief that the goal of life is God-realization—direct and total identification with God. It was this shared foundation that I hoped to somehow feel and get close to on Mount Athos.

At the narrow neck of the Athos peninsula are two small seaport villages, Erissos on the northeast coast and Ouranopolis on the southwest. Both are jumping-off places with small-boat service to coastal monasteries around the edge of the peninsula. The relatively few inland monasteries all have access to boat landings as the sea is the main supply-route. A network of pack-animal- and footpaths criss cross the peninsula in all directions. There are only a few kilometres of motorable road, mostly connecting the inland capital of Karyes with either coast. I boarded an early morning motor launch from Ouranopolis along with an assortment of other passengers and freight. There were laymen who operate shops or work at various construction and specialized jobs, a policeman probably returning to Karyes after visiting his family, about a dozen pilgrims, and, of course, a number of black-robed monks, many of

them quite elderly and all with the traditional full beard.

Aside from the picturesque rocky shoreline and the soaring marble peak of Mount Athos, the most noticeable feature of the peninsula is the dense vegetation. This is in direct contrast to much of the rest of northern Greece which has been deforested for centuries. Along with the aesthetic beauty, the present-day monasteries also benefit from the export of timber as well as hazelnuts, walnuts and laurel oil. Today, this has become an important source of income since the wartime loss of revenues from property and the nonexistence today of wealthy patrons. The boat made several stops after passing the boundary wall that separates the upper part of the Athos peninsula from the sacred territory, and arrived at the village of Daphne in about two hours. No monks live in Daphne, but there are a customs house, a postoffice, a church and a few shops. Most of us boarded a dusty bus and prepared for the bumpy twelve-kilometre ride to Karyes.

Karyes is by far the largest settlement on the peninsula and is the seat of the monastic government. There are also quarters for civilian police who are under the direction of a civil governor appointed by the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Each of the twenty monasteries has an annually elected representative who lives in Karyes. They assemble regularly every week except during Lent or on other special religious days. The system of government is democratically arranged on the basis of elected representatives, and governing duties are distributed evenly on a rotational basis among all the monasteries. In all spiritual and ecclesiastical matters the Holy Mountain is directly subject to the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople (now Istanbul).

Upon arriving in Karyes one is first impressed by the solemn silence that pre-

vails. There are no automobiles on the cleanly swept streets; no radios, phonographs or musical instruments are heard, no women at their tasks or children at play, no dogs to bark. Loud noises like singing, whistling, and shouting are forbidden, and only a few laymen are seen smoking. This condition prevails throughout all the Athos communities and has been the tradition for centuries.

In many ways Karyes is like a ghost town and, like all present-day Athos communities, reflects the depleted population relative to days gone by. I'm sure all of us dozen pilgrims felt this strange quietness as we made our way for registration at the police station. There I met a smiling young officer named Costas. Costas knew a little 'American' as he called it. Formerly he had worked on Greek ships that had touched American ports and his brother lived and worked in Houston, Texas. 'Do you know Houston?' he eagerly asked. 'Yes, I've been there,' I confessed. 'Do you know my brother Nicolas?' 'Well,' I stammered, 'I'm not sure. Maybe I saw him....' It didn't matter. Costas was destined to be my friend and was later to help me very much.

From the police station we walked across an open square to the new building of the Holy Community where government meetings are held and all official business takes place. Here we were issued an official passport called the diamonitirion; and because of my special letter from Patmos, I was granted permission to stay seven days rather than the usual four. There was also the option to extend it later.

Just outside this new building and only a few steps away is a contrastingly very old building—the Church of the Protaton. It is considered the most important church on Athos, and belongs jointly to all the Athonite monasteries. Although it dates from 965, the present building was constructed in the thirteenth century after the

Pope's crusaders destroyed the original one. Architecturally it differs from all the other main churches, being a basilica, but perhaps its most noteworthy feature is the magnificent frescos painted on the inside walls. From my earlier tutoring by Phyllis in the monastery of St. John the Theologian on Patmos, I had become increasingly interested in Byzantine painting, and she had commented on the famous frescos in this very church. They were painted in the fourteenth century by an extraordinary man named Manuel Panselinos, perhaps the greatest master of Byzantine iconography. It is always difficult to convey with words the feeling and emotions captured and expressed by great art. When I first walked into this church and viewed its frescos my mind was not at all thinking of descriptive adjectives. Rather I was overwhelmed by their spiritual grandeur. The frescos are representations of sacred persons and incidents from their lives. They are neither naturalistic nor are they just products of an artist's arbitrary imagination. Panselinos was a man of high spiritual development as well as a talented artist, and he was able to portray these saintly personages as truly transfigured people because he himself had succeeded in rising above the realm of nature or of imagination to that of the spirit. He showed this spiritual depth by postures, gestures and facial expressions in a striking way. Colours are beautiful but not loud. Sometimes they show complete disregard for nature, exemplified in the common use of a greenish hue on the faces and other exposed bodily parts. The figures express great seriousness of character and freedom from all pretence and servility. One has the feeling that one is not merely in the presence of paintings, but of beings far more real than persons he meets in everyday life. They exhibit a strong sense of self-mastery and a freedom from all things petty, impatient and weak. Everything

about them gives a feeling of calmness and strong inner power. Standing in their presence one cannot help but feel a great reverence and a hope to somehow emulate them.

The bodily form of the aged figures differs markedly from that of the younger ones. For example, the face and body of Christ and other young figures are full, whereas the faces of the older saints, especially the Athonite hermits, are very thin with sunken cheeks and the bodies are slender to the point of emaciation. However, all the figures are large enough so that even those on the uppermost of the four strips of frescos that cover the walls can be seen easily. It is clear that their purpose was not merely decorative but also instructive. Panselinos intended that they be clearly seen, and certainly must have hoped that their presence would evoke man's highest sentiments. In 1954 the frescos were cleaned during general restoration work on the church. A praiseworthy and justified compliment was paid by the artist restorer who avoided any retouching or repainting, feeling himself unequal to match the work of Panselinos. A beam of sunlight slanting through one of the lower windows reminded me of the time. I left the church and walked out into the late afternoon sunshine.

That first night I stayed in Karyes at one of the two dingy hotels. Most of the other pilgrims arriving that day spoke Greek and had confidently departed on various pathways to nearby monasteries. The only other hotel guest was an Italian from Rome, about my age, who also spoke no Greek. We had supper together and I was interested to find out that he was a Catholic priest whose diamonitirion showed him registered also as a student of theology.

Next morning after an early breakfast of the same food served for supper, I shouldered a light rucksack and started for the north-east coast and the holy monastery of Stavronikita. It was a downhill walk of

five kilometres to a dramatic location on the steep, rocky coast. A square, fortified tower makes the monastery look like a medieval castle. From the footpath the first views of Stavronikita showed its backside with vineyards, fruit trees and a few monks working in the large vegetable gardens. Two other pilgrims waiting at the guestmaster's quarters by the main gate was, at first, a little discouraging, but soon a monk came with the traditional welcoming glass of cold water and a tiny cup of Greek coffee. In sign language and a few commonly shared words I caught the idea that it would be a little while before we could be shown to our rooms and have lunch.

The day had grown hot and time began to hang heavy. The two pilgrims, one a young Frenchman, the other a Greek, had both stretched out in the shade for a nap. From the grape arbor, under which I was sitting, a portion of a pathway could be seen that seemed to lead down to the beach or boat-landing. I decided to chance a few minutes absence for the sake of exploration. Lunch would not be for an hour yet. A short distance down the path was a small stone chapel and a little plot of flat ground that was obviously the monastery's graveyard. A relatively recent grave had a simple wooden cross on which had been hung the monk's black, woollen rosary. I was standing, looking, thinking about what his life must have been like when I heard footsteps coming up the trail. It was a monk with a snow white beard. As he approached I felt a surprising compulsion to greet him in the traditional, respectful manner, and reaching forward to grasp his right hand, I bent to kiss it. I had never even contemplated this act before, and yet it felt quite proper and natural. He greeted me in perfect English, without any accent that I could place, and then introduced himself as a pilgrim from one of the southern islands. While being very careful

about revealing my full identity, I felt that for this man it would make no difference. Never had I seen a face with such quiet composure and kindness. We talked for a few minutes. I told him briefly of my recent four-month visit to India and why I had come to Athos. He never pressed me with a single question. Then holding my hand like a friend, he said, 'So, you are interested in prayer of the heart. Why don't you join my small party and we can visit some of these fine monasteries for a few days?' We walked quietly back to the monastery. I didn't know what to say, and, not trusting my emotions, felt that silence was the safest course. Out of great respect I will not use his proper name. He was an important bishop from one of the larger Greek islands and my meeting with him changed the course of the pilgrimage on Mount Athos, and also the next few months of my life.

The providential meeting with a kind bishop who invited me to join his small group greatly changed and enriched the atmosphere of the pilgrimage to Mount Athos. During the following days I was to see many things and to learn to what extent this gentle man was revered and respected. Because he was such an honoured guest, and pampered accordingly, there was not much opportunity to talk with him during the time we were at any particular monastery; but on the footpaths while travelling between monasteries we had a chance to exchange ideas.

The Holy Monastery of Stavronikita follows the cenobitic system, so all the monks take their meals together in the large refectory. The pilgrims ate at a separate table, while the visiting bishop joined the monastery's abbot at the head table. The food was simple but wholesome, being wholewheat bread, Greek cheese, olives, a green salad, and vegetables cooked with oil. I noticed a bowl of hard-boiled eggs for those who felt the need. In some monas-

teries fish is taken, while others are strictly vegetarian. During the meal one of the young monks reads loudly and clearly from the scriptures while those eating listen in silence. After sufficient time the abbot strikes a small gong signifying the end of the meal, and all rise. An interesting tradition is that the reader, the cook and the monk in charge of the refectory prostrate themselves at the door and ask the abbot to forgive them for any deficiencies. It is clearly a lesson in humility, not only for the three monks who ask for forgiveness but for those who witness this practice.

Most pilgrims stay for only twenty-four hours at each place; and where the foot-trails are easy or the monasteries are relatively close together, two may be visited in a day. In keeping with the custom of hospitality, no monetary remuneration is expected. The bishop's plan was to leave Stavronikita after breakfast the next day, returning to Karyes in time to catch the bus to the port of Daphne and the boat-service along the southwest coast of the peninsula. I lay awake most of the night listening to the waves crashing against the rocky shore and marvelling at my good fortune in meeting this holy man.

After the early-morning church service and a light breakfast, the monastery loaned us a mule to carry our luggage and a young monk to guide us. There are so many winding footpaths, especially in the vicinity of Karyes, that it is easy to get lost. On the way we stopped briefly at the Kellion of St. Nicolas Burazeri and enjoyed some light refreshments and a visit with a few of the monks. During the conversation the bishop whispered to me in English, 'Charles, in this monastery the monks are seriously practising interior prayer of the heart. You must try to return before you leave Athos.' To assure myself that I could find the way back, I carefully arranged small piles of stones at every important trail junction. Silly as it seemed while doing this, these

private path-markers did, in fact, later guide me back to what turned out to be a wonderful experience.

In Karyes we left the mule and our young guide at Stavronikita's headquarters. Each of the twenty major Athonite monasteries has such an establishment in the capital village so that monks elected to represent them at weekly council meetings will have a place to stay. The midday bus took us the rest of the way to Daphne where we caught the daily motor launch that provides service to the monasteries located along the southwest coast of the peninsula. We stayed aboard for only one short leg of its daily journey, disembarking at the *arsanas* of the Holy Monastery of Grigoriou. Someone ran ahead up the pathway to inform the monks that a bishop was arriving. In no time all the church bells were pealing forth the announcement and the huge, iron, pirate-proof gates were opened wide in welcome. Our bishop was handed the ever-ready staff of authority and someone put a colourful vestment over his shoulders appropriate to his exalted office. As the crowd that had gathered proceeded to the reception chambers, I began to realize with what veneration this humble man was regarded.

Grigoriou is considered the strictest and most austere of the cenobitic monasteries on Athos, but their hospitality was lavish. Young serving monks were quick to bring hot coffee and sweets from the kitchen and the bishop was plied with polite questions about his home diocese on Crete. At one point he changed the conversation to English and somewhat embarrassed me with an overly generous introduction. 'You didn't know we were talking about you,' he said with a mischievous twinkle in his eye. Later on, after the evening vesper service, His Grace arranged for me to meet an English-speaking monk. The young man was affectionately called Papas, a term often applied to monks who

are trained to be priests and who can officiate in the church services. Papas and I sat under an olive tree in a quiet courtyard overlooking the sea and talked long into the night. So open and intimate did our conversation become that I took the chance of revealing my true identity. I told him that I had just come from a five months' visit in India and that I had been a monastic of the Ramakrishna Order in a California monastery for many years. To this he not only showed much interest but was honestly sympathetic, cautioning at the same time that some of his brother monks might not be. What truly amazed him was that I had monastic brothers in India that not only knew about Eastern Orthodox Christianity, but were eager to learn about Mount Athos.

Then he told me about himself. He had grown up in a wealthy Greek family that had emigrated to far-off Lima, Peru. As a part of his education he had wandered about Europe searching for something in life with real meaning. His pious and deeply understanding mother had written to him not to come home until he had found what he was looking for, knowing full well that should he find it he might never return. 'I pray for her every night,' Papas said, 'that the freedom her great love provided for me should be rewarded. I believe the Lord has assured her that she did the right thing.' He had been at Grigoriou for over ten years.

St. Gregory's Monastery was founded in the thirteenth or fourteenth century. In 1500 it was destroyed and many of its monks killed by pirates. In 1761 it was severely damaged by fire, but like many Athonite monasteries suffering similar calamities, it bounced back with the financial aid of wealthy noblemen and rulers. Also, over the centuries its number of monastic inmates has fluctuated, reflecting the religious tendencies of the times, politics, and local or global wars. Presently it has

about thirty-five monks and half a dozen novices.

After the following morning's church service and before our departure, Papas quietly approached and presented me with a little cedar-wood crucifix and two coloured pictures of his monastery. 'Keep one for yourself,' he smiled, 'and send the other to a brother monk in India who loves Mount Athos.' Then he confessed that during his travels he also had visited India, but had never heard of Sri Ramakrishna.

Our trek planned for the day, this time with two mules, three monks from Grigoriou, and several pilgrims who tagged along, was a short one. It followed the rocky coastline for a couple of kilometres and then proceeded very steeply up to the dramatically located monastery of Simonopetra. In the thirteenth century a hermit named Simon living there in a cave had an amazing vision of a great star commanding him to build a monastery on a craggy rock to the glorification of God and edification of men. Simon got financial help from three noblemen in Thessaloniki who also became monks. A few years later a Serbian king enlarged and enriched the monastery as a token of gratitude for St. Simon's having healed his daughter. Perched high on St. Simon's Rock, the seven-storeyed building is the most daring and spectacular edifice on Mount Athos. It has been destroyed completely three times by fires and consequently does not have many books or relics. Only small portions of the original frescoes remain on the domes of the church.

The monks' welcome for the bishop was equally warm as that at Grigoriou. After refreshments we went to the church, all the bells ringing as we entered. The monks had lighted every candle including the chandeliers and those on the brass coronas encircling them. All was in motion, swinging from the long chains fastened to the dark-domed ceilings above. Chandeliers swept in slow, graceful circles while coronas

moved first clockwise, then counter-clockwise. Light and shadows danced across the frescoed walls and sparkled off brass and gilded surfaces. Beautiful chanting and incense completed the scene. It was a spiritually elevating atmosphere of grandeur and solemnity never to be forgotten. Close by the terraced vegetable gardens on the uphill side of the monastery, we visited St. Simon's cave. It was as architecturally austere as his monastery was grand. Among the few relics saved from Simonopetra's disastrous fires is the left hand of Mary Magdalene, whose name the monastery honours highly.

The following day and night was to be a strenuous time for our bishop. We were to journey by boat around the southern tip of the peninsula and join pilgrims and monks from all the scattered monasteries at the Grand Monastery of Lavra or Megistis Lavra. This is the oldest and one of the largest Athonite monasteries and was founded in 963 by St. Athanasios the Athonite. The occasion was the annual celebration of its founding, and the bishop was the honoured dignitary who would preside. On the way he confided to us that he was a little worried. Most Athonite services are long, the morning orthros and liturgy which I had attended being three and a half to four hours. I had also heard of the all night vigils, but this service was to last over fifteen hours! For such untrained ones as myself this smacked of being unrealistically long. How could such an apparently physical endurance test be spiritually meaningful?

During the service I was forced to retreat for two rather substantial naps in a dormitory bed provided by the guest-master; and picking my way in the darkness to and from the church, I had to step over many napping pilgrims that were not lucky enough to have an assigned bed. I prayed that the Lord would give our bishop

strength to endure. However, just as true meditation refreshes the Hindu sage, this long service seemed to give the bishop new life and inner strength. Well after sunrise the next morning he blessed all who attended by sprinkling each with holy water from a large phiale or sacred fountain just outside the front of the church. In his right hand he held a golden cross and in his left a small bunch of herbs which he dipped repeatedly into the water. The ceremony was concluded by a huge feast that required two sittings of about four hundred each in the monastery's refectory. This large room is only used on special occasions as the Monastery of Lavra follows the idiorhythmic system. The daily procedure is for its monks to prepare and eat their own food separately.

The church has never been burned and the frescos on its walls are still in a remarkable state of preservation. They were painted in the sixteenth century by the Cretan, Theophanes, and his two sons, all three of whom were monks.

After a few hours rest the monks in charge of the monastery's library and treasure room took us on a tour and the bishop acted as interpreter for my sake. These are housed in a three-room stone building behind the main church, the first room containing an important collection of printed books. The middle room is for manuscripts, 2,200 of them, making the largest and best collection on the Mountain. The oldest manuscripts date back to the fourth century A.D. In the third room we were shown a fascinating collection of treasures including an imperial crown, mitres of archbishops, gold and silver staffs and crosses, and two huge books of the New Testament Gospels—one written in Greek and the other, larger one in Russian weighing over sixty pounds. Both were adorned with heavy amounts of gold. The bishop's eye caught a cruel-looking, iron-chain vest, the hand-forged links of which fitted so

tightly that it could be stood on a shelf, clearly showing its form as something that might be worn by a man. Our guide confirmed this and said that some hermits used to wear them under their robes. Perhaps the bishop sensed the aversion I was feeling and softened it with his usual thoughtful comment. 'We all must accept some sort of austerity for the purification of our minds and hearts. When we do it willingly with that goal in mind, what may seem a horrible or senseless austerity to one person might be a joy to another.' I was glad that I had kept silent, and I marvelled at the composure in the face of this man who had willingly and easily withstood the physical rigours of a fifteen-hour night time service while those of us who did not understand so well were taking naps.

The Monastery of Lavra probably has more dependencies under its domain than any of the other twenty major monasteries. These are scattered mainly at the southern end of the peninsula and include a number of isolated hermitages. We had seen a few from the boat while coming to Lavra the day before, and I meant to have a more careful look on the return journey. The bishop and another monk pointed them out and made comments. The dwellings were mostly tiny wooden huts perched precariously on the precipitous cliffs that plunge almost vertically into the sea at the southern end of the peninsula. Monks are not encouraged to live the severe hermit life unless they have proven themselves under normal monastic conditions and shown a strong desire as well as the necessary physical and mental aptitude to succeed in this lonely approach to God. However, there always seems to be a waiting list, and when an old hermit passes away there is someone ready to occupy his quarters. Simple food is brought to them, often being lowered in a basket from the top of a cliff or pulled up from a boat. The dramatic place we were passing was called Karoulia which,

the bishop explained, was a Greek word meaning the 'place of the pulleys'. The food is almost never cooked and there is no fuel for heating purposes. To keep warm in cold weather the hermits increase the number of prostrations to the Lord (genuflections is the term used) or put on more warm clothing. They spend their time in prayer and study of the scriptures, and some engage themselves in simple handicrafts such as the carving of wooden crucifixes or the making of shell or woollen rosaries. The woollen rosaries are particularly interesting and are preferred by many monks because they are silent. That is to say, there is no clicking of beads as the rosary is manipulated through the fingers. Each black or blue knot is lovingly constructed by making seven twisted wraps of the material. They are strong and very practical. Traditionally, when counting his prayers a monk holds the rosary in his left hand, the idea being that the right hand remains free to do some other work for the Lord.

Unfortunately there was no chance to see or talk with a hermit; and as could be expected, they don't encourage visits from pilgrims and outsiders. Some, however, have lived scholarly lives and many, because of their spiritually advanced state, are consulted by younger monks and revered as spiritual advisors.

We stayed on the boat as it proceeded up the southwest coast, enjoying the views of many monasteries including Grigoriou and Simonopetra. Our destination for the night was the Holy Monastery of Xenophontos. Xenophontos was built on a small area of flat land at sea level and has a nice beach. Its main church is relatively new, having been built between 1809 and 1819 to supersede the old Katholicon which was then too small for the expanding monastery. It has very few wall paintings, and these are modern and devoid of deep religious expression and artistic merit. However, the

welcome extended by its pious abbot was genuine and warm, and he was interested to hear about the celebration at the Monastery of Lavra.

This was to be my last night with the bishop's party as they planned to return to Crete the next day. Before the morning boat arrived, His Grace called me to a small guestroom and we sat on a balcony overlooking the sea. It was my last chance to thank him for all his kindness. This he made light of by saying that all was through the hand of God. Certainly I had felt especially blessed. How different the pilgrimage would have been without him! Then he added a surprising benediction to our new friendship by extending an open invitation for me to come any time to his quiet monastery on Crete and continue the search for God.

On a lonely hike through abandoned olive groves to the next monastery, my mind was filled with thoughts about this amazing man and the few ideas we had quietly shared. Perhaps I had benefited most just from his presence and saintly behaviour.

We had viewed from the boat the previous day the huge Russian monastery of St. Panteleimon, the original founding and exact location of which is not clearly recorded. In 1765 the present site was occupied and a few buildings constructed. As the number of Russian monks increased, the first Russian abbot was elected in 1875 and large new living quarters were built. By 1895 there were 1,000 Russian monks, and later the number more than doubled. In 1968 three quarters of the monastery was destroyed by fire, and today there are barely over a dozen Russians along with a few Rumanians and Greeks. The bright green onion-shaped spires and red roofs recall more prosperous days. Most of the monks are quite old, but traditional Russian vitality still sparks the atmosphere. The choral singing in the church is performed in four-part harmony, quite different from the older

type of chanting done in the predominantly Greek monasteries. Some criticize this as a divergence from the purer form of music, but I found it very beautiful. An old Russian priest who spoke English befriended me. He had only recently come to Athos for a few weeks' vacation, leaving a church he had headed for years in London. He was hoping the spiritual atmosphere of Athos would ease the grief of his wife's recent death.¹ Very proudly he showed me the main church and other chapels, all dazzlingly decorated inside. Church services are performed simultaneously in Slavonic and Greek in two different chapels. Panteleimon also boasts an impressive bell tower with the biggest bell on Mount Athos, weighing over ten tons.

Weeks later, after the pilgrimage was completed, I read an interesting interview in a book about Mount Athos. The interview was with a scholarly monk named Photios who was living at Panteleimon at the time the book was published in 1959. 'He has widely read not only Orthodox writings, but also religious works of the Far East. Referring to modern religious writers of the Far East, he singled out Sri Ramakrishna and recommended the Sayings of this Hindu. "Ramakrishna", he remarked, "followed the Path of Love (agape), and in a way was a Christian."² It was frustrating to conjecture that Photios might still have been living there, for I would have given anything to have met and talked with him.

Because of the letter of introduction I had got from the abbot of the Monastery of St. John the Theologian on Patmos Island, I had been granted a special Athos

passport good for seven days. This was now due to be renewed in Karyes if I wanted to remain longer on the peninsula. So the next day I made my way to the capital village and asked permission for an extension. The way had previously been paved for this by the bishop, who had requested the Civil Governor and Secretary of Police to grant me this privilege. Both men had attended the celebration at the Monastery of Lavra, and the bishop had introduced me to them.

All that I now had on my mind was to return to the Kellion of St. Nicolas Burazeri, which the bishop had so strongly urged me to do. By starting at the headquarters of Stavronikita in Karyes where we had left their mule some days earlier, I was able to pick up our old trail. No doubt someone could have directed me, but without the bishop my chances for communicating in any language were greatly reduced. Besides, it gave me a great sense of achievement to follow the little piles of rocks I had carefully placed to guide me through that maze of trails. In half an hour I was there. The monks remembered me and let me stay with them. One young man was particularly friendly and said that it did his heart good to talk again with a fellow American. He had grown up of Greek parents in a wild part of New York City and had fought in the senseless war of Vietnam. Later he had been a wandering hippie artist in Europe but had grown tired of the meaningless life. Fortunately, he could resort to his earlier upbringing in a pious Orthodox family, and eventually it led him to Mount Athos. He had been at this poor kellion, a dependency of a larger monastery, for seven years.

Father Euthymius, as he introduced himself, was a painter of ikons, and he invited me to sit with him and another brother as they worked in their studio. We talked for hours, but I was careful not to reveal too much of my background. As I had been

1. In the Eastern Orthodox Church, married men are allowed to become priests; but after taking priestly orders, an unmarried man is no longer allowed to marry. And only celibate priests are eligible for the office of bishop.

2. Constantine Cavarinos, *Anchored in God* (Athens: Astir Publishing Company; 1959), p. 91.

warned, many Athos monks regard with suspicion any religious approach outside the pale of Orthodoxy. I professed a searching interest in the religions of the Far East and told him I had just come from a long visit to India. This apparently was enough to start him preaching on the virtues of Orthodoxy—just what I wanted—and it was very instructive. I chose not to confront him with argument but just to listen to his point of view. Although quite dogmatic, he was a totally dedicated man, and I'm sure that this rigid conviction provided the strength to survive those difficult early years of monastic life. There was a slight tinge of self-pride in his voice when he confirmed my guess that many young novices would not be able to endure the Mount Athos brand of monasticism. Although he was a number of years my junior, Father Euthymius assumed an almost motherly attitude toward me, and I could not help but like him. He showed me every nook and cranny of the kellion, which has several large buildings and considerable land under cultivation. I was also introduced to most of the thirty-odd monks who range in age from twenty-year-old novices to old men over eighty.

The daily schedule was somewhat different at St. Nicolas than in other monastic communities I had visited. For convenience I have so far referred to clock times using our Western reference; all but two of the main Athos monasteries, however, follow an old Byzantine system in which 12 a.m. or the beginning of the day starts at sunset when the last rays of sunset disappear from the peak of Mount Athos. This method obviously involves clock-shifting to fit the seasons but has the advantage of keeping pace with the rhythm of nature. Father Euthymius translated a sign on the gate I had first entered. It told pilgrims that no visitors were allowed after mid afternoon. This was because the monks have their main meal about 4 p.m. Western time, after

which they sleep for six hours. Then they get up and practice the Jesus prayer in their cells for four hours. About 4 a.m. there is a two hour church service followed by two hours of private prayer. At 8 a.m. they have a light breakfast. During the daylight hours they all work very hard at assigned tasks such as building maintenance, gardening, etc., and at the same time try to practise continuous prayer and recollection of God. I joined their schedule as much as I could. In the early morning hours I could faintly hear young novices in their cells close by mine, chanting slowly and with great feeling the Jesus prayer: 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.' They practise it audibly during the first years so that, as Father Euthymius explained, the ears also may benefit. Then, when the time is ready, and with the guidance of a spiritually advanced Father, the prayer is moved silently to the heart where it becomes automatic and continuous.

Sitting in my dark cell that night and hearing this private, sincere chanting moved me greatly, and made me reflect on the whole pilgrimage to Mount Athos and what it had meant to me. I was filled with the conviction that I should return to India and more fully utilize what remaining time I could stay there. The previous months' tour had given me a wonderful opportunity to visit briefly many Ashramas, to meet many of our monks, and to learn a little of how the Ramakrishna Order functions. However, there had not been time to really plumb the depths of it all. I would try to go back and spend more time in just a few choice place.

Back in Karyes I located my young police officer friend Costas whose small knowledge of English might help me send a telegram. I worded it very carefully, printing each English letter clearly in its capital form. Then together we went to find the telegraph operator who probably hadn't

sent a cable, especially an English one, in a very long time. There was considerable vagueness as to when it actually would be sent, and I put my faith in Costas' smile and his continual assurance, 'Me like American guys. My brother live in Houston, Texas.' The next day was Sunday, with no hope of telegraph activity; but just the same I checked with him a couple of times hoping for a miracle. The repeated answer was another big smile and 'Everything okay.'

Monday morning, much to my dismay, the words Costas picked from his limited English vocabulary left me feeling doubtful if the telegram had even been sent—some trouble with the electric generator. Adding to the frustration was the fact that this garbled conversation was also accompanied by the big smile. I sat down on the rough stone steps of the entrance to the old building that housed the police station, my head in my hands. Adding to the urgency of an answer was the fact that I had almost run out of Greek money, and Athos had no place to cash travellers cheques. Then the miracle happened. Two men approached

their heads bent together in argument as they scrutinized a piece of paper held between them. In a great effort at phonetic pronunciation one of them was saying, 'SWA-MI-GAN-ESH ...' 'Hey! That's me,' I blurted out in the unintelligible language. Costas was right. Everything was okay. My telegram had been sent and the answer from my home monastery in Hollywood had returned. It opened with the sweet words, 'SWAHANANDA SENDS PERMISSION AND BLESSINGS ...' I could return to India.

For me the value of the pilgrimage to Mount Athos was in the comparison of two different religious approaches—Ramakrishna Vedanta and Eastern Orthodox Christianity—in which I found a surprising number of similarities. Most important was the lesson that if the people involved in any religious approach are really serious and sincere and are truly seeking God, then theological differences are inconsequential. As Vedantists we know and often voice this knowledge intellectually, but to experience it in the vital presence of another religious atmosphere is the strengthening reminder we all need.

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

THE UPANISHADS : BREATH OF THE ETERNAL : TRANSLATED BY SWAMI PRABHAVANANDA AND FREDERICK MANCHESTER. Published by Ramakrishna Math, 11 Ramakrishna Math Road, Madras-600 004. 1979 (first Indian edition). Pp. xxii+210. Rs. 9/-.

The late Swami Prabhavananda wrote and translated a number of books which have enjoyed widespread and long-lasting popularity. One need only mention such titles as *The Eternal Companion*, *The Sermon on the Mount According to Vedanta*, and *The Song of God* to remember what vast and beneficial influence he has had on the Vedanta movement in both East and West. His books may be found in bookstores all across the USA; and there are many Westerners who first 'stumbled into' Vedanta when

they chanced upon his books while browsing in bookstores.

The Upanishads, one of his last literary works, has also found great popularity in the West; and one need not look far for the reason. Though there is no dearth of scholarly translations of the Upanishads, there are very few which are readable. Swami Prabhavananda's translation, however, is not merely readable—it is a pleasure to read. Pundits will point out a lack of accuracy in parts of the translation; but in translating between two languages as dissimilar as Sanskrit and English, one must choose to strive after either literalness or literary grace. And luckily for the non-pundit lover of Indian wisdom, the Swami chose the latter alternative. Again, every translation involves a certain amount of interpretation, and Swami Prabhavananda was pre-eminently fit by his vast knowledge and ex-

perience to give a reliable interpretation. He has not hesitated to add words, to omit words, or to paraphrase passages when that seemed necessary to give a clear meaning in simple English. Thereby the Swami, while capturing the sense of the original, has at the same time retained something of that wonderful naivety and simplicity of language characteristic of the Sanskrit original, which scholarly translations lose altogether in their adherence to literal accuracy.

With minor exceptions, the translation has been rendered in prose, though the original Sanskrit texts are mostly in verse. This also was a wise choice, for the difficulties of translating Sanskrit verse into English verse are great, and most attempts at it are at best disappointing.

The book contains selected passages from the ten principal Upanishads, and from the Svetasvatara and Kaivalya Upanishads. Only the shortest Upanishads, such as *Isha*, are given in full. Preceding each is a short statement of its dominant theme. This is a very useful aid, especially to one who is approaching the Upanishads for the first time, because these statements serve as threads of understanding by which one may bind together the diverse passages; for much of the Upanishadic imagery may appear strange to the new student.

This new edition will make Swami Prabhavananda's *The Upanishads* readily available to the Indian audience. It is hoped that it will serve as useful a function here as it already has in America.

SWAMI ATMARUPANANDA
Mayavati

PSYCHOLOGY FOR LAYMEN : BY DR. K. G. DESAI. Published by Somaiya Publications, 172 Mumbai Marathi Grantha Sangrahalaya Marg, Dadar, Bombay-400 014. 1977. Pp. 215. Rs. 30/-.

The impact of science and technology has made human life more complex and man's mind more difficult to comprehend. While there are a number of books which describe man and his outer world, the books revealing the inner activities of man are comparatively few. The present book is one among these. It studies the human mind and its relationship with the outside world. The author is a learned professor at Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Bombay, and his rich experience both in teaching and consultancy assignments has made the present volume precious. The author has eschewed

psychological jargon and has arranged this book for general readers. There is a right emphasis on the practical significance of various psychological concepts.

The subject has been dealt with in three broad sections : (1) Basic Concepts, (2) Problems in Different Stages of Life, (3) Some Social Problems.

The basic concepts in psychology such as emotion, perception, learning, memory, intelligence, etc. have been elaborated in the first section. When the reader comes to the end of this section, he finds himself equipped with tools wherewith he may analyse any life-situation and solve the problems involved therein.

The second section is divided into five chapters under the heads (1) Understanding Children, (2) Understanding Adolescents, (3) Marriage and Divorce, (4) The Work Life, and (5) Aging. This is the most rewarding section in the book, as it serves as a key to the understanding of complex life-situations. The author has very lucidly explained the landmarks in childhood and adolescence. He has also described the factors which are essential for a satisfactory work life. Readers beyond sixty years of age would appreciate the author's tips to the aged for a peaceful life.

The last section of fifteen pages is rather an appendix to the book containing an analysis of two social problems : one of the mentally ill and the other of group prejudices. The study of this section may enable the reader to investigate fruitfully a few more social problems independently.

The book, as its name indicates, is an excellent manual for the common man. It is written in a lucid and matter-of-fact style. Somaiya Publications deserves compliments for bringing out this useful volume in a pleasing format. It does kindle the interest of a lay reader in psychology.

DR. NARENDRANATH B. PATIL, M.A., LL.B., PH.D.
Jt. Director of Languages, Bombay

THE QUINTESSENCE OF YOGAVASISHTHA : BY PROF. B. KUPPUŚWAMY. Published by C. S. Gupta, Satsangha Seva Samiti, Gandhi Bazar, Bangalore-4. 1978. Pp. 174. Rs. 5/-.

The *Yogavāsishtha* is unique for its rare combination of philosophy and mysticism, the spiritual and the occult. Its manner of telling is its own : profound knowledge and wisdom is communicated through fascinating stories within stories. Professor Kuppaswamy gives the reader a panoramic survey of the entire work, leaving no part of the teaching untouched.

The original treatise, called *Bṛhad Yogavāsiṣṭha*, is said to contain 32,000 verses. There is also an abridgement, the *Laghu Yogavāsiṣṭha*, by Gauḍa Abhinandana, in six thousand verses. Both the original and the abridgement have six *prakaraṇas* : 'Vairāgya', giving the setting for the whole exposition—Rāma wanting to give up the world as a result of a psychological trauma and Vasiṣṭha being called by Dasaratha to enlighten the prince; 'Mumukṣu Vyavahāra', giving an analysis of the conduct of the aspirant to knowledge and enlightenment; 'Utpatti', dealing with the origin of the world and the selves; 'Sthiti', the continuance of the world; 'Upasama', describing the ways to calm the mind; and 'Nirvāṇa Prakaraṇa', in two parts, dealing with the cessation of existence.

The central theme is the analysis of the state of bondage, the means of liberation and the description of the liberated man, who 'is *mahā-kartā*, the great doer. He acts as the occasion demands without any anxiety or egoistic feeling; he is also a *mahābhoktā*, the great enjoyer. He enjoys all that comes his way. He is calm, he looks upon all activities as an impartial witness. He is free from both *rāga*, attachment, and *dveṣa*, aversion.'

Important themes come form discussion. The author points out how Vasiṣṭha underlines the necessity of *pauruṣa*, personal effort, if karma and *daiva*, results of past action and destiny, are to be overcome.

Four are the gatekeepers, *dvārapālas*, of the gates of liberation : *sama* (tranquillity), *vicāra* (inquiry), *santoṣa* (contentment), and *sadhusaṅgama* (company of the good and the wise) (p. 32).

The seeker is called upon to reject the Śāstra if it goes against reason. and accept even a state-

ment of a child if it stands to reason (2.18). *Pratyakṣa* (direct perception) and *anubhava* (experience) are preferred to subjective states.

The seven stages leading to self-realization are described in the section on 'Utpatti'. They are: to be conscious that one is ignorant and be seized with a desire to know the truth; rational investigation to ascertain the truth; non-attachment to the objects of sense; learning to abide in the self; detachment to a fine degree; realization of things of the world as not ultimately true; overcoming of all divisions and being in a state of oneness in the Self.

In an interesting passage the text describes two kinds of yoga for calming the mind : *ātmajñāna* or self-knowledge, and *prāṇa-samrodha* or control of breath.

Professor Kuppaswamy discusses last the relevance of this ancient thought to contemporary life. In an engaging analysis he draws attention to its emphasis on rationalism; its theory of vibration (*spanda*); emphasis on personal effort; special treatment of the doctrine of karma, insisting upon man's capability of transcending the past karma; its theory of *vāsanās*, past impressions, which can be negated by creating opposite *vāsanās*, and last, the social implications of the disciplines commended for liberation; for example, overcoming of preoccupation with sensepleasures, elimination of egoism, cultivation of *maitrī* and *karuṇā*, friendliness and compassion.

This little book whets one's appetite for the main work, *Yogavāsiṣṭha*.

M. P. PANDIT

Sri Aurobindo Ashrama
Pandicherry

NEWS AND REPORTS

RAMAKRISHNA MISSION SEVA PRATISHTHAN, CALCUTTA

REPORT FOR APRIL 1977 TO MARCH 1978

General Hospital : The hospital's bed-strength is 510, and it has the following departments : Medicine, General Surgery, Obstetrics, Gynaecology, Paediatric Medicine, Paediatric Surgery, Orthopaedics, Urology, Ophthalmology, E.N.T. Surgery, Dentistry and Dermatology. There are special clinics for Anaesthesiology, Heart,

Diabetes, Psychiatry, Hearing and Speech Therapy, Physiotherapy and Family Welfare. The special needs of the departments are met by the departments of Radiology and Radiotherapy, Blood Bank, Pathology, Bio-chemistry, Human Genetics and Anaesthesiology. The Public Health Unit conducts clinics for both urban and rural patients.

All the departments are well equipped. Worth mentioning are the hospital's nine air-conditioned operation theatres, seven X-ray plants, a deep

X-ray unit, an image intensifier, two cardiac monitors, five E.C.G. machines, one pacemaker, one defibrillator, three baby incubators, an oxygen tent, a Bird Mark 8 respirator, a cardioscope and a Zeiss surgery microscope. It also has an electrically operated hospital laundry.

The total number of patients treated in the different departments of the hospital during the year was : indoor, 15,848 (excluding 5,215 live births); outdoor, 1,02,584 (new) and 1,02,427 (old); operations, 2,20,859 (outdoor) and 6,302 (indoor). In the outdoor department, all patients were given free consultation facilities and a large number of them also got free treatment. In the indoor department free treatment was given to 23% and partly free to 22% of the patients.

School of Nursing : This institution has facilities for training 225 nurses. Candidates for the General Nursing-Midwifery course must have passed the school examination or its equivalent and must be between 17 and 25 years of age. The course lasts for three years and six months, and each student gets a stipend. After a course of three months an examination is held, and successful candidates take part in an impressive 'capping ceremony' at which they are given the nursing cap and take vows, composed in lucid Sanskrit, of lifelong dedicated service to the sick and the suffering.

The Auxiliary Nursing-Midwifery course was continued during the year, enabling a person not sufficiently qualified for the general course to pass through an approved condensed course. Candidates were required to have passed class VIII of the secondary school course. The course lasted for two years. Pupils were selected through the same procedure as in the general course, and there was also a capping ceremony at the end of the first three months. (Since December 1978 the auxiliary course has been replaced by the Mutipurpose Health Workers' course. This course is similar to the previous auxiliary course, but it lasts for eighteen months, and the minimum educational requirement is a pass in the madhyamik or an equivalent public examination.)

Vivekananda Institute of Medical Sciences : This service-oriented Institute is recognized by

the University of Calcutta for postgraduate teaching and research. Courses are given for the M.D., M.S., M.O., D.C.H., D.G.O., D.O., D.L.O., and D.Ortho. degrees. The Medical Council of India has recognized the Institute for the purpose of compulsory rotating internship of fresh medical graduates. Moreover, senior doctors in various departments also conduct research in different branches of medical science and the results are published in recognized Indian and foreign journals. The Institute now has a half-yearly journal of its own.

Development Scheme : To meet the increasing demands of the public and to render more efficient service to the patients, it is urgently necessary to undertake the following additional construction work : (i) a multi-storeyed building for the Vivekananda Institute of Medical Sciences; (ii) a paediatric hospital of 150 beds; (iii) an emergency ward of 20 beds; (iv) an intensive care unit of 12 beds; (v) a post-operative ward of 10 beds; (vi) an isolation ward of 10 beds; (vii) a plastic surgery-cum-burn unit of 15 beds; (viii) a physiotherapy department; and (ix) a building for the school of nursing. The entire project is expected to cost nearly 4 crores of rupees, including Rs. 30 lakhs for acquisition of requisite land. On the completion of this project, the number of beds will go over 700 and the number of outdoor patients will also increase considerably.

Donations : The generous public is requested to donate liberally for the following needs : (i) Endowment for maintaining a bed throughout the year, for six months in the year, or for three months in the year : Rs. 1,00,000; Rs. 50,000; or Rs. 25,000 respectively. (ii) Any item mentioned under 'Development Scheme' above.

Cheques may be drawn in favour of 'Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan'; for the Vivekananda Institute of Medical Sciences, cheques should be drawn in favour of 'Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, A/c V.I.M.S.' All donations may be sent to : The Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, 99 Sarat Bose Road, Calcutta-700 026.

LAST PAGE : COMMENTS

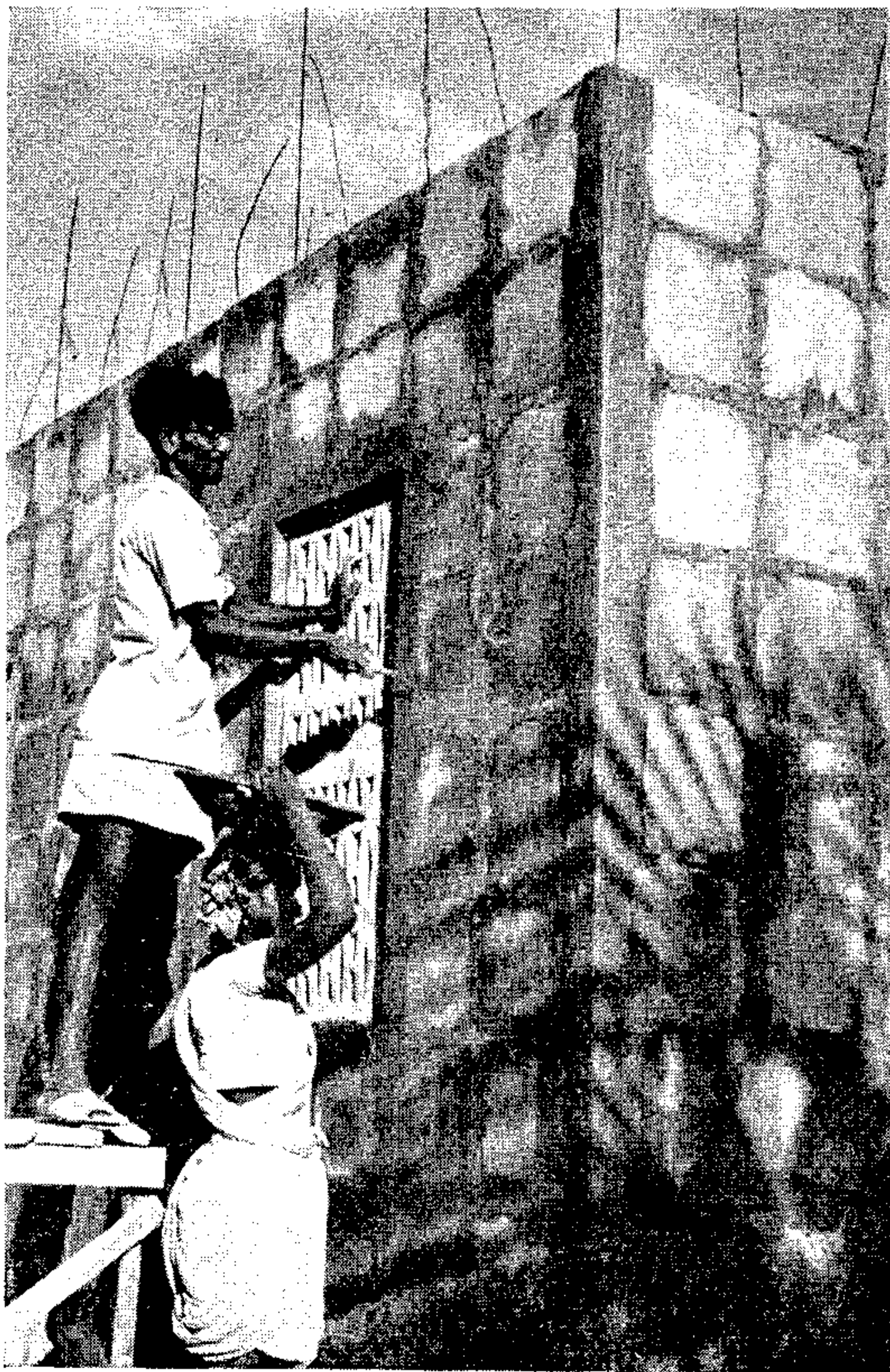
Democracy in India

Even though more than half of India's population are poor and illiterate, any lingering illusion that they could easily be taken for a ride has been dispelled by the two parliamentary elections in recent times. The poor masses seem to have an uncanny intuition about the truth behind political masks. The two elections should convince Indian politicians that the age of tall talk and slogan shouting is over and the people are awake to the needs of their country. Though communalism and personality cult are still prevailing, the tide of public opinion can no longer be swayed by stump oratory. During the last three decades after Independence the question being asked about political parties was, 'What can they do?' Now people are asking, 'What have they done?'

However, though the poor masses can choose, the choice itself is provided by the middle class from which most of the politicians of the country are drawn. The problem here is not democracy, for the indications are that democracy has come to stay in this land. The vast size of the population and the deeply entrenched diversities of culture, language and religion, and the very spirit of the people make dictatorship impossible. The real problem facing India now is the absence of a viable socio-economic philosophy as the foundation of democracy. Leadership is also, of course, important; but we should remember that it is ideas and ideologies that create great leaders.

One of the mistakes that Indian leaders committed after Independence was to underrate the importance of ideology in national reconstruction. It was thought that importing Western technology and building dams, factories, schools and hospitals alone would solve the problems of the country. It was for this reason that Gandhian economics and way of life were abandoned. Socialism was for a time tried. But in the absence of a basic view of life and reality, this word has only remained as a nebulous slogan. The truth is, there is a philosophical vacuum in non-communist developing countries. These countries have evolved no philosophy of life capable of successfully competing with the powerful, integrated socio-politico-economic philosophy of Marxism. This is one of the reasons why in many Islamic countries Muslim fundamentalists are trying to reinstate the *sharia*.

What India now needs is a socio-economic philosophy of life which is based on the Vedantic doctrines of freedom and potential divinity of the soul and the spiritual oneness of the world, and which at the same time abolishes all forms of social inequality, exploitation and immorality, harmonizes the diverse creeds and dogmas of mankind, accommodates science and technology, gives strength and courage to people in facing the challenges of life, and induces people to seek individual and collective prosperity and spiritual fulfilment through service, love and knowledge. Such a comprehensive philosophy alone can make democracy meaningful.



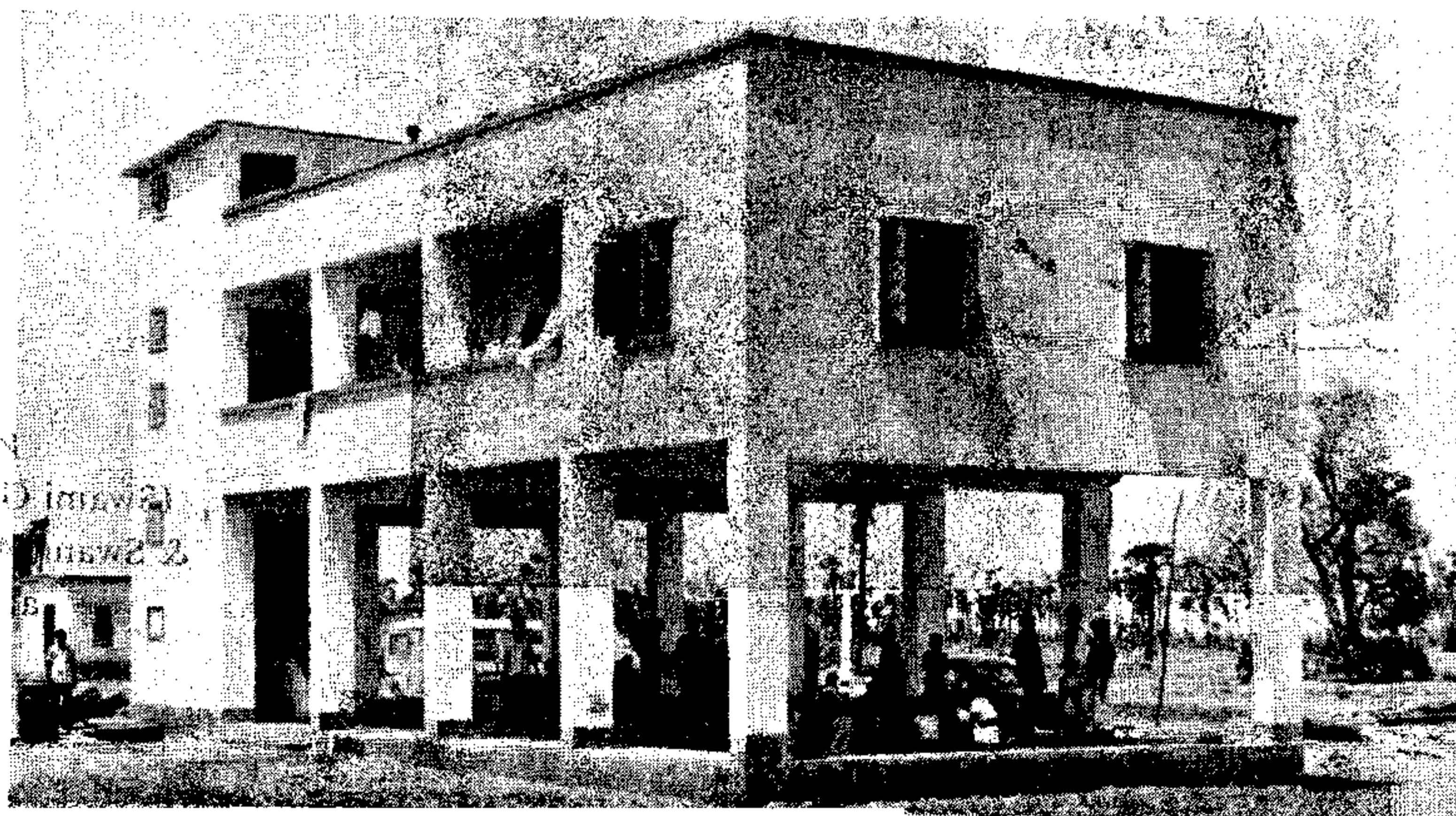
A dream in stones
(Second stage of
construction)

Valley of the gods
(Swami Gambhiranandaji
& Swami Atmasthanandaji
at Kodurn village)

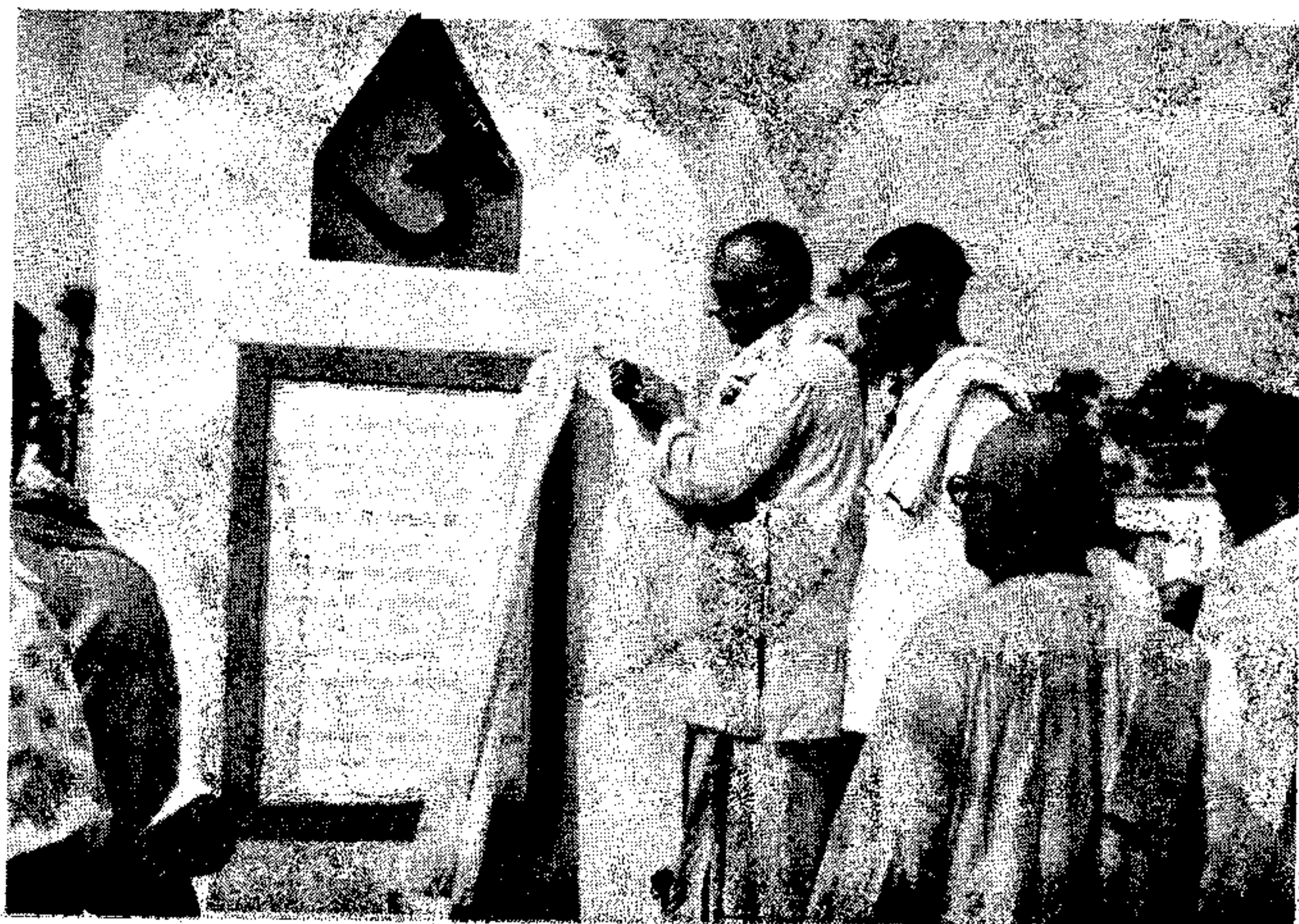




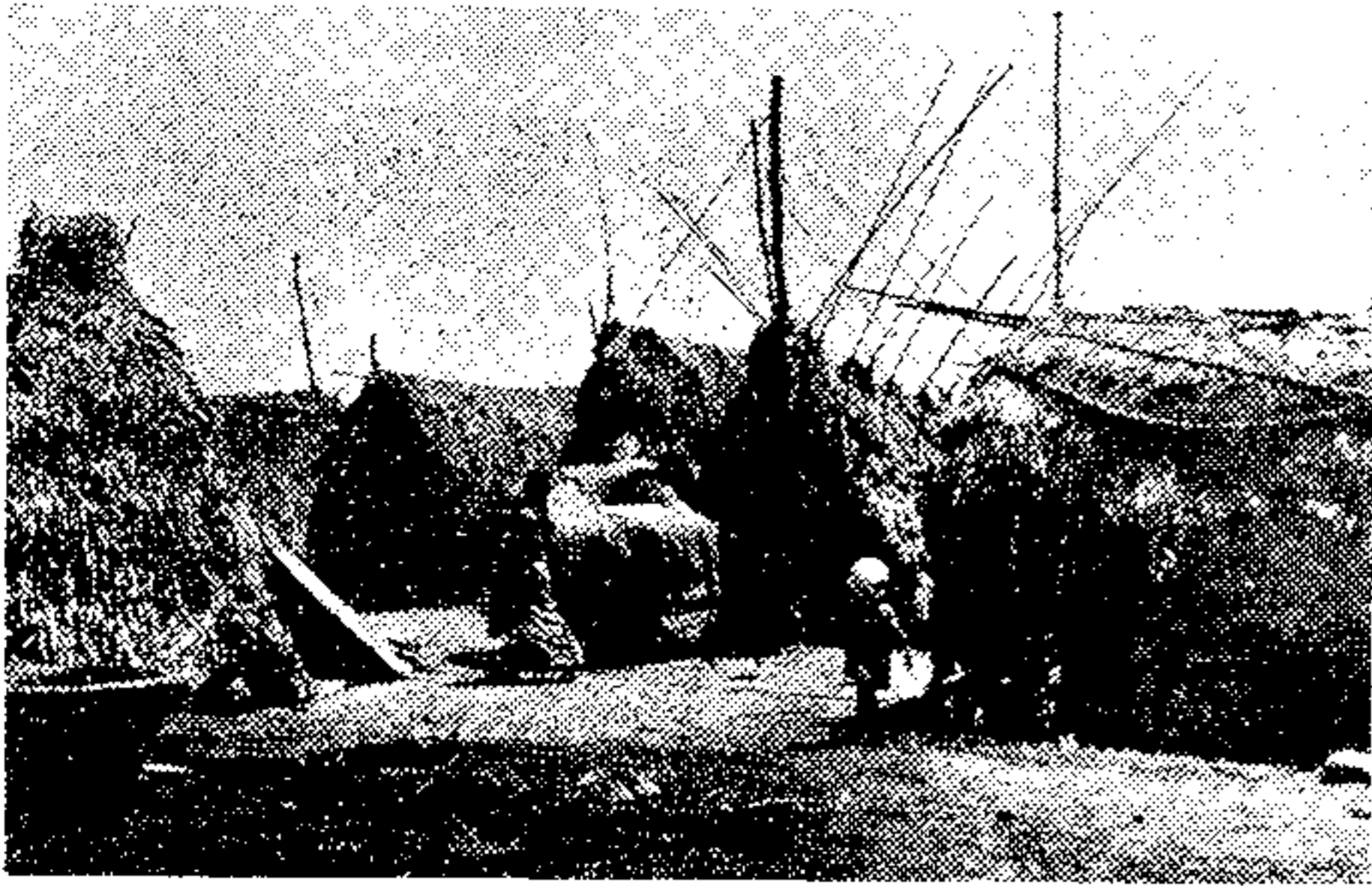
*In the name of Holy Mother
(Swami Vireswaranandaji
Maharaj dedicating the
newly constructed houses
to the villagers of Sarada
Puram)*



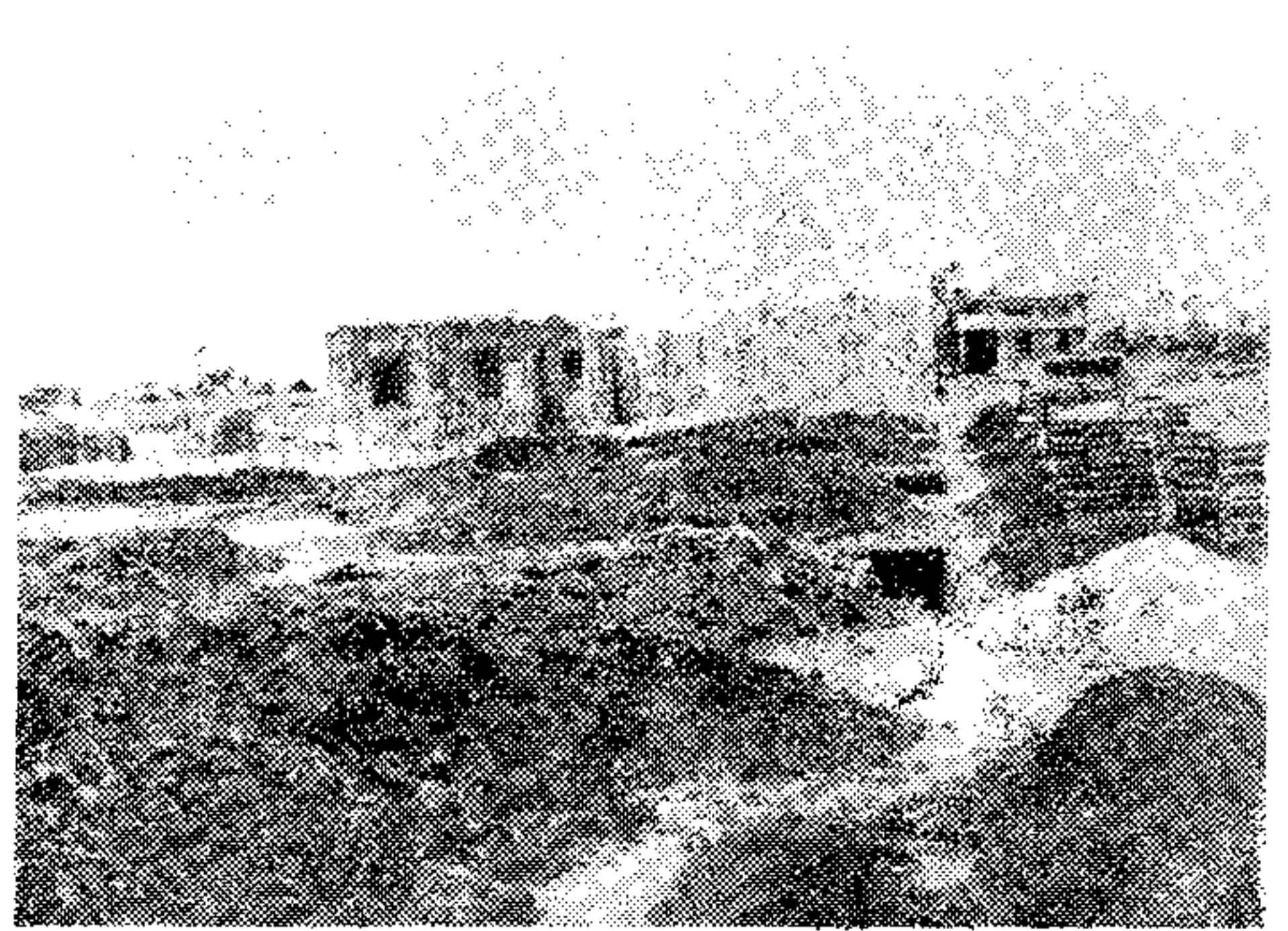
*We meet here
(Community hall-
cum-shelter at
Vivekananda
Puram)*



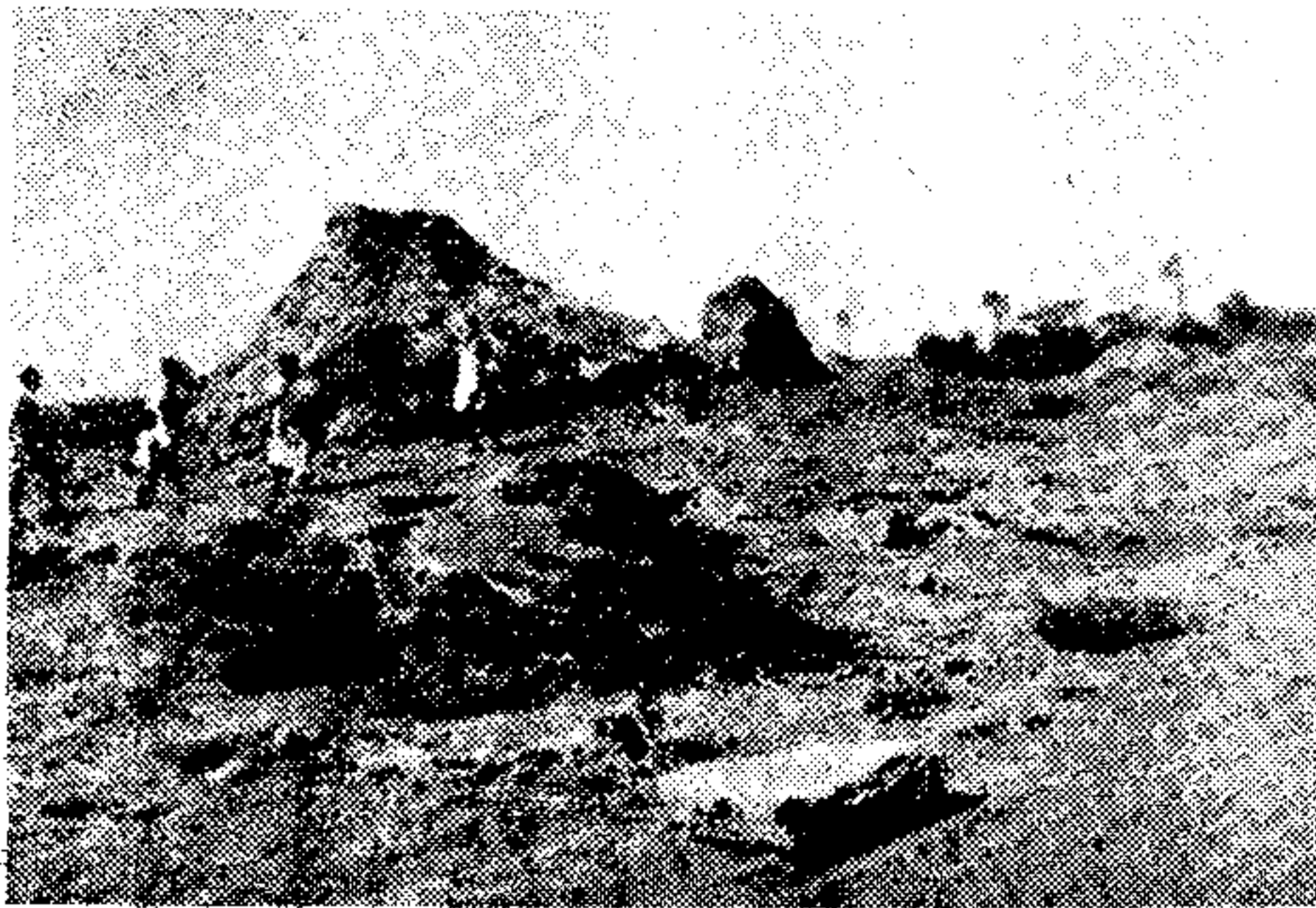
*I pay homage to the living gods
(Swami Vandananandaji
dedicating the newly
constructed houses to the
villagers of Basavanapalem)*



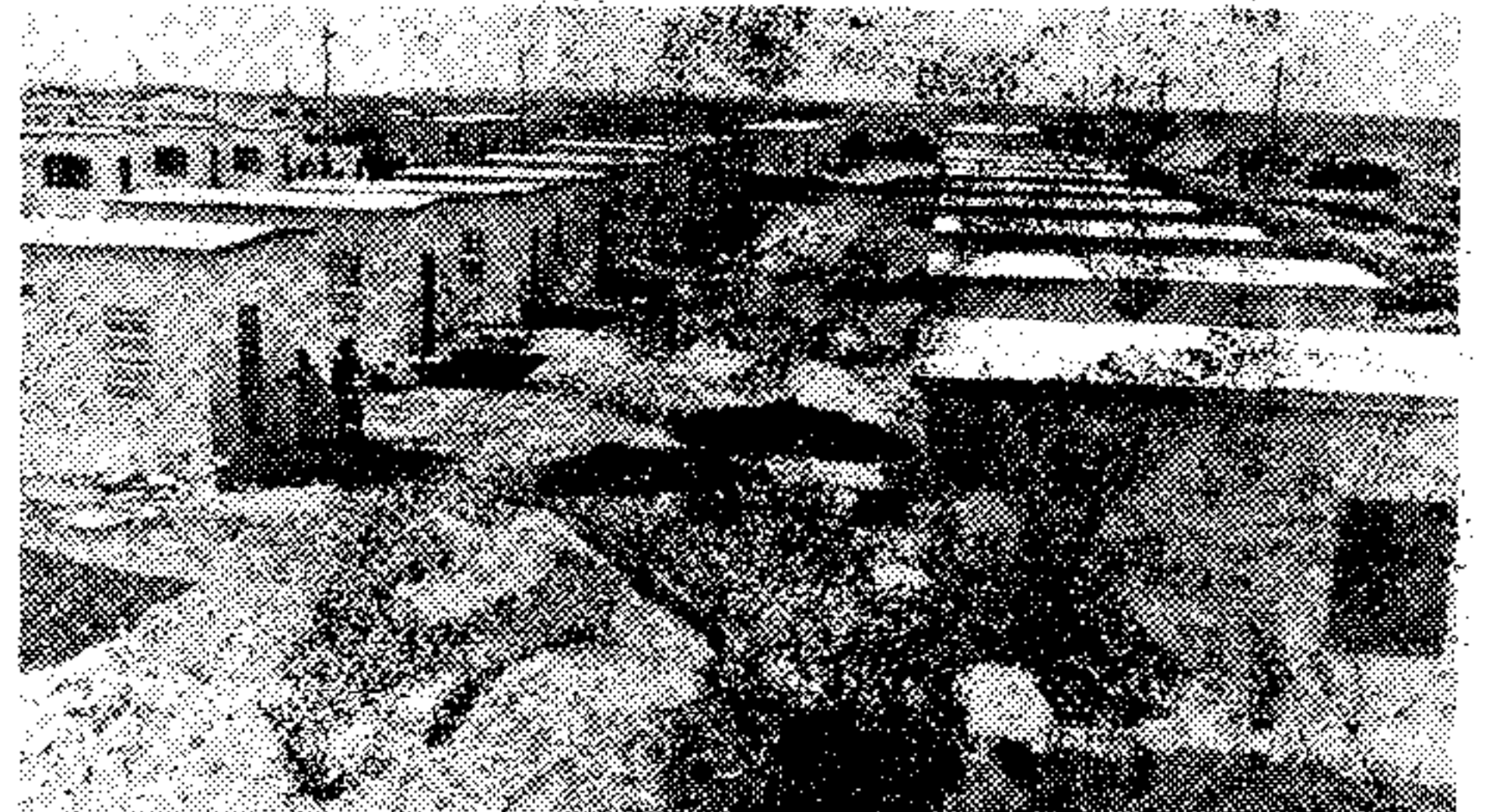
1. *Here Kutty lived*
(A village before the flood)



3. *For a bright future*
(At the first stage of construction of the cyclone-proof houses)



2. *Not the same earth*
(One of the washed-out villages)



4. *The dream comes true*
(Ramakrishna-Puram—a new village)



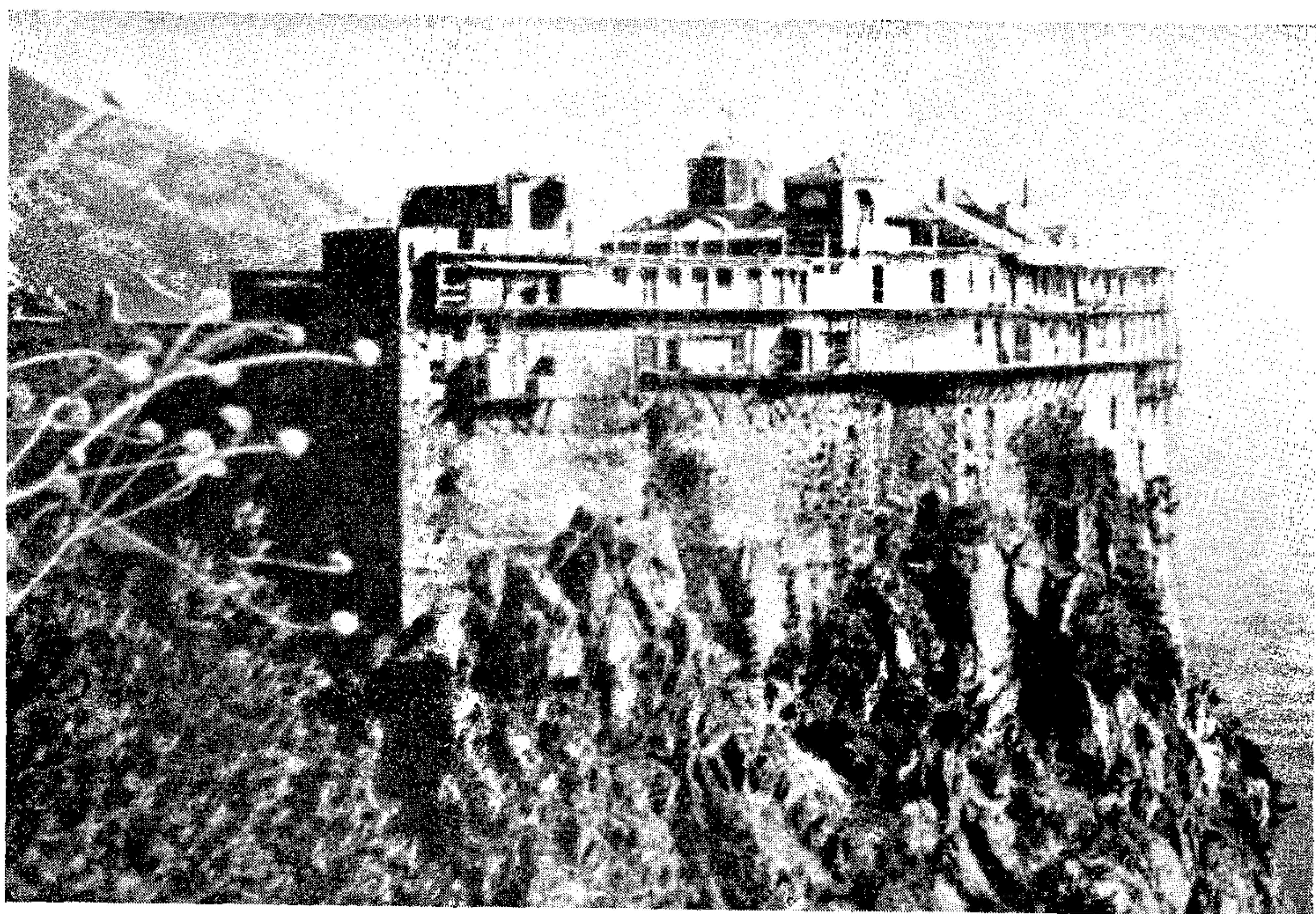
And courage never to submit or yield
(Swami Ranganathanandaji among the flood-victims)



To march on
(Ramakrishna Mission constructed temporary huts to provide the victims with immediate shelter)



Monastery of Stavronikita



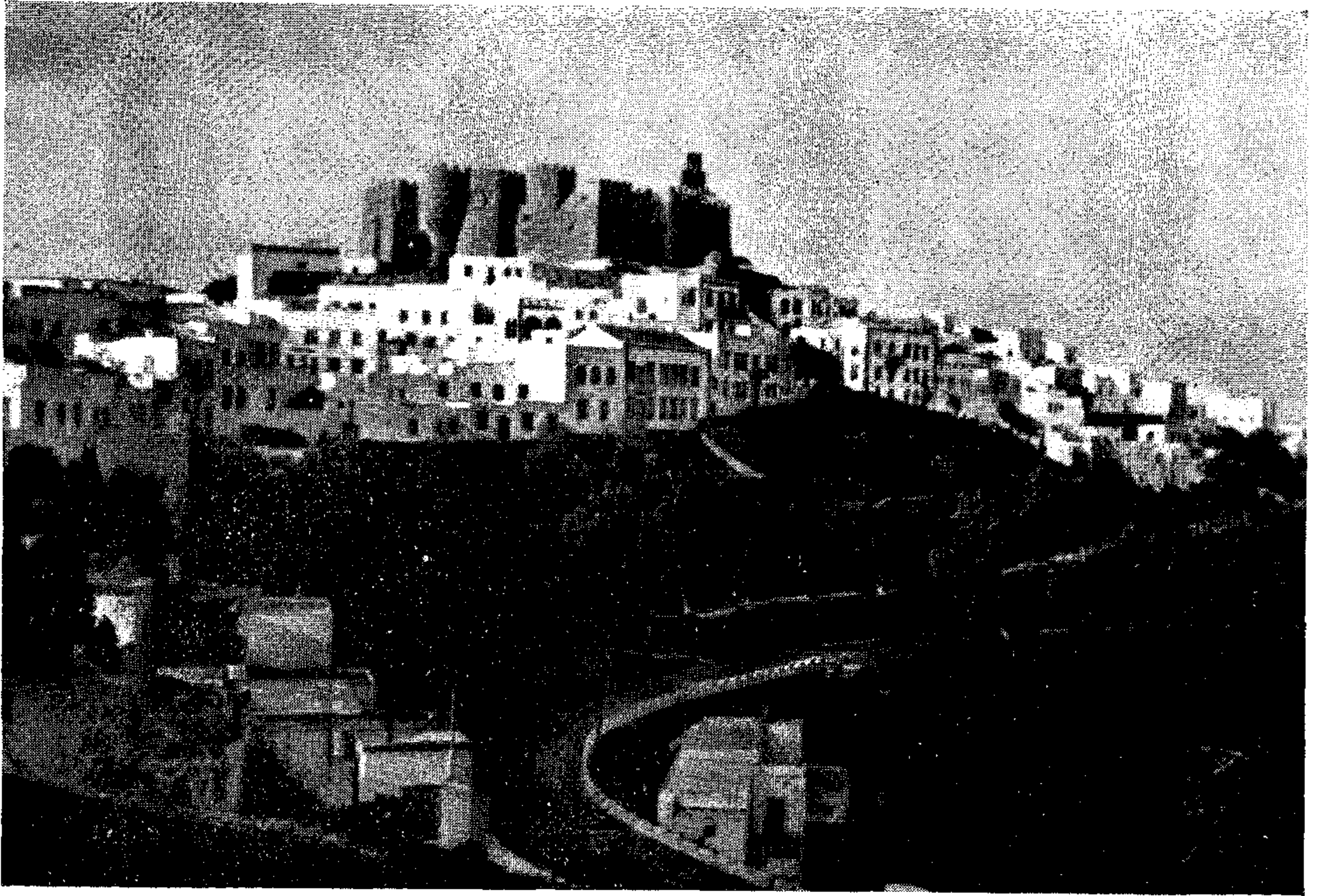
Monastery of Simonopetra



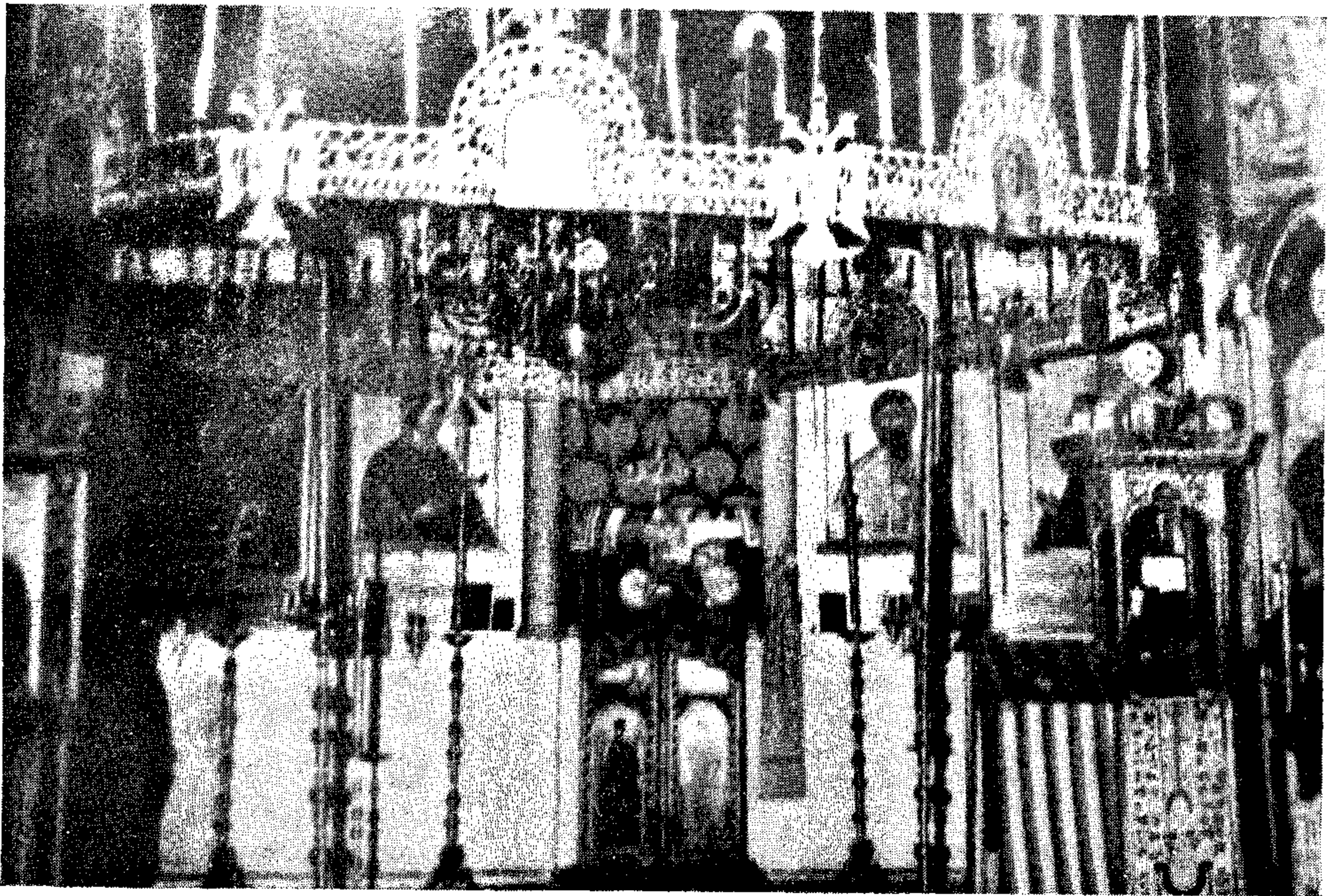
Monastery of Grigoriou



Monastery of Xenophontos



Monastery of St. John the Theologian
Island of Patmos



Interior of the Church of the Protaton, Karyes, showing chandelier
encircled by a large brass corona



14th century fresco of Jesus Christ by Emmanuel Panselinos, Church of the Protaton, Karyes

Icon of the Madonna Monastery of St. Nicolas Berazeri



Holy Mountain of Athos
Monastery of Stavronikita in the foreground