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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'

वयं नाम प्र ब्रवाम घृतस्या-

स्मिन्यज्ञे धारयामा नमोभिः ।

उप ब्रह्मा शृणवच्छस्यमानं

चतुः शृंगोऽवमोद्गौर एतत् ॥

1. We praise the name *ghṛta* in this sacrifice, and offer it with salutations. May the four-horned Brahma listen to this praise. May the white god (*gaura*) perfect this sacrifice.¹

Rg-Veda 4.58.2

चत्वारि शृंगा त्रयो अस्य पादा

द्वे शीर्षे सप्त हस्तासो अस्य ।

त्रिधा बद्धो वृषभो रोरवीति

महो देवो मर्त्यं आ विवेश ॥

2. He has four horns, three feet, two heads, seven hands and is bound at three places. He, the bull, roars aloud. He, the great luminous being, has entered mortals everywhere.²

Rg-Veda 4.58.3

* Two more well-known mystical verses of Vāmadeva which remind us of the riddles of Dīrghatamas.

1. The meaning is after Sāyana who says 'Brahma' and the 'white god' refer to Agni identified with Sun. The four horns are the four Vedas. But in his commentary on *Taittirīya Aranyaka* he says *ghṛta* means the self-luminous Reality, *nāma* (name) means Om, and the four horns mean the four sound elements of Om—a, u, m and the unexpressed one. (Cf. *Mahanarayanopanisad*, trans. Swami Vimalananda, Ramakrishna Math, Madras-4, p. 138.)

2. This important verse has many interpretations. Patañjali in his *Mahābhāṣya* links it to speech (*vāk*). Accordingly, grammarians explain the stanza as follows. The four horns—*nāma* (noun), *ākhyāta* (verb), *upasarga* (preposition) and *nipāta* (indeclinable particles). Three feet—*kāla traya* (past, present, future). Two heads—*nitya sabda* (eternal sound) and *anitya sabda* (uttered speech). Seven hands—seven *vibhaktis* (inflexions, case endings). Bound at three places—chest, neck, head. The bull—*sabda brahman*. Sāyana in his *Rg-Veda* commentary says that the verse refers to Agni which may be identified either with Yajña (sacrifice) or with Sūrya (the Sun). Accordingly he offers two different interpretations. Four horns—in the case of sacrifice means the four Vedas (in the case of the Sun, the four cardinal points of the horizon). Three feet—the three daily sacrifices (or, in the case of the Sun, morning, noon and evening). Two heads—two particular sacrifices called *brahmaudans* and *pravargya* (or day and night). Seven hands—the seven metres (or seven rays or six seasons and the year). Three bonds—*mantra*, *kalpa*, *brāhmaṇa* (or earth, air, sky). Vrsabha—one who showers benefits—applies to both sacrifice and the Sun. However, in his commentary on *Mahanarayanopanisad* (see Swami Vimalananda's translation) Sāyana takes the stanza to mean Om metaphorized as a bull.

ABOUT THIS NUMBER

An overview of the Ramakrishna Movement is presented in this month's EDITORIAL.

The inaugural ADDRESS given by Srimat Swami Vireswaranandaji Maharaj at the opening session of the Second Ramakrishna Math and Mission Convention has for its central theme the relevance of the message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in solving the problems facing the world today.

In THROUGH DEATH TO IMMORTALITY Swami Yatiswarananda compares the Christian and Hindu views on immortality. The article, found among the Swami's papers, is the transcript of a talk given at the Vedanta Centre of Philadelphia of which he was the founder-president.

Man encounters Karma at all times everywhere. Karma is impelled by desires which seem to be endless. However, there is a meaning behind all this. The reader will discover this meaning and gain a new light on his spiritual destiny in the luminous article TO ENCOUNTER KARMA by Swami Shraddhananda, head of the Vedanta Society of Sacramento, U.S.A.

The illustrated article EARLY DAYS OF BELUR MATH by Swami Someswarananda of Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, gives you a glimpse into the starting of the Belur Monastery, the daily routine of the monks of those days, and the way the great apostles of Sri Ramakrishna lived and taught the junior monks. The article is based on painstaking research.

The first instalment of PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD by Swami Buddhananda, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi, is a lucid interpretative summary of the teachings of Brother Lawrence.

The MESSAGE OF THE RIVER is a brilliant dramatization of a very important contem-

porary theme : river pollution. Its talented author Swami Sastrananda is the secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chandigarh. When a Hindi version of the play was first enacted as part of an annual fiesta at the Ashrama, it drew hearty appreciation from the audience and the local press.

A thorough analysis of almost every aspect of faith and reason is given in the first instalment of FAITH, REASON AND REALIZATION by Swami Adiswarananda, head of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre, New York.

RECOLLECTION is Swami Jitatmananda's translation of *Smaran* by Mohit Lal Majumdar, one of the finest poetical tributes paid to Swami Vivekananda in the Bengali language.

This month's PROFILE is on Benjamin W. Arnett, a Bishop who spoke for American blacks at the World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893. Its author Dr. Betty Robinson is a devotee from New York.

In this month's FORUM FOR INTER-RELIGIOUS UNDERSTANDING Prof. S. S. Raghavachar, former Head of the Department of Philosophy, Mysore University, shows how the major religions share five common fundamentals.

The open-air shrines on the grounds of the Vedanta Society of Southern California's monastery at Trabuco Canyon serve as a reminder of the importance of world religions and a testimony to the ideal of harmony lived and taught by Sri Ramakrishna. Our readers will find that to walk along this shrine trail with a competent guide like Swami Buddhananda of the Ramakrishna Monastery, Trabuco, California, is indeed a WALK TO GREATER UNDERSTANDING.

THE RAMAKRISHNA MOVEMENT : AN OVERVIEW—I

(EDITORIAL)

Renewal and reform

One of the remarkable phenomena in the history of civilization is the persistence and irrepressible growth of religion. Kings ruled and died, empires rose and fell, institutions grew and decayed, philosophies were propounded and discarded. But, overcoming tremendous obstacles and hostile forces, religions of the world have been growing from strength to strength. The secret of their success lies in a continual process of self-renewal.

According to Lester F. Ward (1841-1913), one of the founders of sociology in America, every culture has a power within it for what he calls 'social telesis' or goal-oriented progress. When the vigour of a culture slackens and its growth gets stunted, autocorrective forces come into operation. A careful study of history reveals that the autocorrective impulse has always come from religion. All the recuperative powers of a culture are stored in religion. Given the proper conditions, religion can rejuvenate a culture again and again. When for any reason this process of self-renewal is stopped, that culture or civilization dies. The ancient civilizations of Egypt, Babylon, Greece and Rome disappeared because the religions supporting these cultures failed to produce the life-giving impulses needed for their survival.

There is an indissoluble connection between religion and culture. Says Christopher Dawson : 'We are just beginning to understand how intimately and profoundly the vitality of any society is bound up in its religion. It is the religious impulse which supplies the cohesive force that unifies the society and the culture. The great civilizations of the world do not produce the great religions as a kind of

cultural by-product ; in a very real sense, the great religions are the foundation on which the great civilizations rest. A society which has lost its religion becomes sooner or later a society which has lost its culture.'¹ If Indian civilization has endured so long, it is only because of the tremendous vitality of the Hindu religion supporting it.

And the vitality of the Hindu religion has been maintained by a continual process of self-renewal. The quickening impulse for the rejuvenation of religion comes from a divine source. When virtue declines and evil prospers, a special manifestation of the Divine known as the Avatar appears and starts the rejuvenation process. The accumulated dirt and debris of outmoded customs and ideas are cleared, hidden sources of power are tapped and a new vitality flows into the old religion.

Occasionally, however, divisive tendencies become manifest in a religion by a process similar to what Ward calls 'cultural mutation'. The result is a reform movement which usually tries to cut itself away from the traditional ethos and build for it new values, doctrines, customs and social norms. If the 'cultural mutation' is too radical, it leads to the formation of a new religion. This was how Buddhism and Sikhism developed from Hinduism, Christianity from Judaism and Protestantism from Catholicism. Otherwise such reform movements soon peter out and are reabsorbed into the parent ethos as a new sect or caste.

The Movement associated with the names of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda aimed at renewal and not reformation of the Hindu religion. Swamiji, who had a

1. Christopher Dawson, *Inquiries into Religion and Culture* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1957), p. 295.

deep knowledge of the past and a clear vision of the future, knew very well the danger of a reform movement ending up as a narrow sect. He was eager to take necessary precautions to avoid such a fate for the Ramakrishna Movement. He did not want to add one more sect to a religion already bristling with innumerable sects and castes. His aim was a total awakening or rejuvenation of the *whole* of Hinduism.

Self-renewal through dialectical complementarity

Self-renewal of religion must be carefully distinguished from reformation. The Ramakrishna Movement fulfils all the criteria of self-renewal. In the first place, self-renewal is an all-inclusive transformation spreading through the whole religion. A reform movement works on the principle of exclusion and affects only a part of religion and society. Another difference is that self-renewal processes are started by divine teachers known as Avatars whose power sustains them for centuries. Reform movements are the work of ordinary individuals and do not last long. A third difference is that a reform movement always harps on the defects of the parent religion. It is very often the collective expression of the repressed rage of a section of people. Whereas self-renewal always stresses the positive and brighter aspects of religion. It is a process of revitalizing the ancient and eternal principles of religion and adapting them to the needs of the age. Lastly, the most important difference is that a reform movement is an attempt to impose certain ideas on society from outside. On the contrary, self-renewal is a natural, free growth of the inherent powers of religion going on within the main body of society. That is why Swamiji said, 'I do not believe in reform. I do not dare to put myself in the position of God and dictate to our society "This way thou shouldst move and not

that."'² 'My ideal is growth, expansion, development on national lines ... I only ask you to go forward and complete the practical realization of the scheme of human progress that has been laid out in the most perfect order by our ancestors.'³ Self-renewal only attempts to remove the obstacles to growth which then takes place naturally. History teaches us that the growth of a culture or society follows a dialectical pattern.

Dialectic is a term used to describe the development of ideas in the mind. There are different views of dialectics. According to Hegel the development of a mature concept takes place in three steps. There first arises in the mind a positive idea in the form of a notion or desire—the thesis. This in turn is opposed by a negative idea—the antithesis. Out of the conflict of these two there emerges the mature, fully developed concept—the synthesis. The great German philosopher believed that human history could be explained on the basis of a similar process going on in the cosmic mind. Historical events are the theses, antitheses and syntheses of the dialectics of history. A modified version of this theory was adopted by Karl Marx.

We need not accept the Hegelian or Marxian concept of dialectics based on conflict, violence and destruction. But we should not ignore the concept of the dialectical process itself, for it does not go against the Indian view of life. The dialectical process is based on three premises. One, the nature of the universe reveals a contradictory structure. This is in accord with the Indian view that the phenomenal universe is full of *dvandva*, polarities or antinomies : knowledge and ignorance, good and evil, happiness and sorrow, etc. Two,

2. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1973), vol. 3, p. 213.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 195-96.

everything in the phenomenal universe is unstable and is constantly undergoing self-transformation. That is, change is inherent in nature and is not produced by an external supernatural force. This idea is in accord with the Indian concept of universal evolution or *pariṇāma*. Three, these changes are not haphazard but take place according to a definite pattern or law.

The Indian view of dialectics is not based on violence and destruction but on the principle of coexistence and complementarity. *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* are entirely different categories, and yet they peacefully coexist together and create the whole universe. The Upaniṣads give several examples to illustrate this principle of dialectical complementarity. Father and mother are different, but not conflicting, characters; they are complementary to each other and give rise to progeny. Similarly the contact of teacher and student gives rise to instruction, the contact of earth and the sky gives rise to air, and so on.⁴ The whole creation is the result of the cooperation of seemingly contradictory forces.

The political history of India is no doubt marked by battles and wars, but the cultural history of the country gives a different picture. Indian culture developed by the continual integration of the opposing forces of history. No shade of religious thought was excluded or suppressed. During the Vedic period a kind of monotheism coexisted with rational enquiry. The union of these two streams of thought produced the Upaniṣads. Soon there appeared the Bhāgavata cult. Śrī Kṛṣṇa united it with the Upaniṣads, and the result was the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. The advent of Buddha and the introduction of new lines of thought by Buddhism created a great ferment in Indian culture and led to the development of a number of schools of philosophy. Then arose the great Śaṅkara who integrated the

best elements of Buddhism into Hinduism and effected an all-round unification of Hindu culture. The invasion of Islam in the eleventh century produced great socio-political changes. The shock was soon absorbed by Hinduism owing to the work of a number of teachers like Rāmānuja, Rāmānanda, Caitanya and others who stressed self-surrender to God and the brotherhood of man. Thus Hinduism has been growing through the centuries by a process of dialectical integration of diverse streams of thought.

The latest and most serious threat to Indian culture came with the political conquest of India by Western powers. The nineteenth century saw India facing two challenges. One was the poverty and backwardness of the masses. The second one was the challenge of Western culture. The encounter with Western culture produced three important effects on Hindu society. It dragged Hindu society into the stream of European culture with its ideals of dignity of labour, work efficiency, organizational discipline, democratic justice and a casteless, open society. Secondly, it broke the Hindu's intellectual isolation and exposed him to Western positivist philosophies, science and technology. Thirdly, it introduced Hinduism to a new dimension of religious consciousness in Christianity with its image of a Saviour who lived and suffered for sinners and the downtrodden. The sight of highly educated, dedicated and organized Christian missionaries working among the poor and opening schools, colleges and hospitals was something new to Hindus accustomed to seeing only selfish, ignorant hereditary priests and world-negating wandering monks of their own religion. This opened their eyes to new possibilities for religion in the field of social service.

These were the challenges that Hinduism faced in the nineteenth century. Regarding the manner of meeting these challenges, the reformers of the period were arrayed in two

4. Cf. *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 1.3.2-4.

groups. One group advocated a wholesale adoption of the Western ethos while the other advocated a return to the idyllic age of the Vedas in total disregard of later historical developments. Swami Vivekananda saw the mistakes of both. He knew very well that it was futile to attempt to put the clock back. The challenge of Western culture had to be met by absorbing the best elements of that culture into Indian culture. Swamiji understood that this absorption was an unavoidable historical process dictated by the law of dialectical complementarity followed by Indian culture. Arnold Toynbee has pointed out that civilizations grow in response to external challenges and by releasing their inner spiritual energies. Swami Vivekananda too saw clearly that India had to meet her new challenges by releasing her spiritual reserves and this process would lead to a rejuvenation of Hinduism. The integration of Indian culture by the rejuvenation of Hinduism was one of the great achievements of Swami Vivekananda. It was the constructive role that Swamiji played at a critical period in Indian history that made C. Rajagopalachari, the first Governor-General of free India, declare: 'Swami Vivekananda saved Hinduism and saved India. But for him we would have lost our religion and would not have gained our freedom. We therefore owe everything to Swami Vivekananda.' It is the work of Swamiji, who stood at one of the great watersheds of history, that has given the Ramakrishna Movement its historic importance.

Swamiji's plan for religious self-renewal

Swami Vivekananda's firsthand knowledge of the masses of India, his deep study of Hindu scriptures and Western thought, his understanding of Sri Ramakrishna's mission on earth and his own prophetic intuition enabled him to arrive at certain

important conclusions regarding the self-renewal and integration of Hinduism.

Swamiji's first conclusion was that if the Ramakrishna Movement was to represent the whole of Hinduism it should accept the common bases of Hinduism as its philosophy.⁵ Swamiji's restatement of the fundamentals of Hinduism (which accepted dualism, qualified monism and nondualism as representing different degrees of realization) is often called 'Neo-Vedānta'. He accepted the Upaniṣads and the *Gītā* as the main scriptures with the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna serving as a commentary on them. It was in accordance with this belief that the early centres of the Ramakrishna Order in the West were named 'Vedanta Centres', and not 'Ramakrishna Ashramas'.

Swamiji's second conclusion was that Vedānta had certain life-giving principles which when applied in practical life could solve the day-to-day problems of individuals and even the social and political problems of the country. For this, the ancient spiritual doctrines had to be re-interpreted in terms of modern thought. The body of these refurbished, revitalized doctrines is sometimes called 'Practical Vedānta'. Its central principle is to bridge the gulf separating the sacred and the secular by converting work into worship and by stressing the potential divinity of the soul. Advaita Vedānta had for too long been identified with Māyā, and become a philosophy of escape. Swamiji played down Māyā (used it sparingly only in defensive polemics) and stressed the omnipresence, power and glory of Brahman.

The third conclusion arrived at by Swami Vivekananda was that renewal and integration of Hinduism was impossible unless the masses were involved. It was imperative that the highest principles of religion were made available to the poorest and the lowest

5. See *Complete Works*, vol. 3, p. 287, and vol. 5 (1973), p. 226.

people. Since the masses were utterly poor and backward, the urgent need was to improve their material condition first. They must be given education, food, clothing, shelter, and medical care. It is strange that this insight had escaped the reformers of the last century who were busy with widow remarriage, abolition of idol worship and other inanities.

Another important conclusion of Swamiji was that religious principles would acquire credibility only when a person actually demonstrated their truth in his own life. The forces of religion need a living focus in the form of an ideal person, otherwise they will lack power and dynamism. Universal principles need a universal Person as its exemplar, one who has directly experienced every dimension of religious consciousness, one who can respond to every form of spiritual aspiration, one who can serve as a link between the ancient and the modern and between the East and the West. Swamiji saw in his master Sri Ramakrishna a living example of such a universal Person.

However, Swamiji was fully aware that one of the major causes of dissent among religious people is the overstressing of the Personality and attempting to derive principles from the Personality. Swamiji therefore put principles before the Personality. He taught the principles of religion without stressing the Avatarhood of his Master who was presented as their best exemplar. People could therefore follow the principles without feeling compelled to worship Sri Ramakrishna as their *iṣṭa* or even as the Avatar of the Age. This freedom in the acceptance of a divine Ideal has given to the Ramakrishna Movement great adaptability and absorbing capacity. The projection of the image of Sri Ramakrishna in such a way as to give it all the integrating power of a cult, at the same time giving it the expansiveness of a universal ideal, is another proof of the wisdom and foresight shown by Swami Vivekananda in formulat-

ing the guiding principles of the Ramakrishna Movement.

Swamiji's fifth conclusion, which he arrived at after a great deal of reflection and hesitation, was that in order to make his ideas work, in order to perpetuate the teachings and mission of his Master, there was the need for a machinery—'a machinery which will bring noble ideas to the door of everybody'—an organization of selfless and dedicated people. It was with this aim that he started the Ramakrishna Mission.

Swamiji's vision of the Ramakrishna Movement

The rejuvenation and integration of Hinduism, however, forms only one of the two aims of the Ramakrishna Movement. Its other aim is the creation of a universal religion for the regeneration of mankind. Even as far back as the end of the nineteenth century Swami Vivekananda had foreseen that Western culture was facing the danger of being destroyed by the newly unleashed forces of science and technology, socio-political ideas and wealth and pleasure. The spiritual ideal had to be reestablished in the hearts of men and their energies had to be directed towards spiritual fulfilment.

The first step necessary for this is the harmony of religions. For the restoration of peace and to contain the forces of ignorance, religions of the world must work in harmony with one another. This becomes possible only when people recognize certain features common to all religions and learn to respect the unique features of every religion.

However, Swamiji understood that the non-Indian religions would not by themselves be able to stem the tide of decadence in the West. The fundamental laws of the spiritual world have not been scientifically formulated in these religions and as such they cannot withstand the onslaught of

scientific materialism. Moreover, their narrow creedal formulas contain seeds of dissension and conflict. The rational and spiritual principles of Vedānta are necessary to ensure harmony among religions and to awaken the spiritual consciousness of mankind. The peaceful coexistence of all religions with Vedānta acting as the unifying and guiding principle: this was what Swamiji meant by Universal Religion, and not the triumph of one religion by the destruction of all the others. The establishment of such a Universal Religion everywhere in the world to inspire and guide all men and women towards the highest spiritual realization is the second aim or ideal of the Ramakrishna Movement.

Swami Vivekananda understood that Western civilization could be saved only by an infusion of Vedāntic spirituality. This meant that Vedānta had to be taken out of the hands of a privileged few and carried to other parts of the world. This was also, Swamiji rightly understood, a historical necessity. For a nation can grow only by sharing its wealth—material and spiritual—with other nations. One of the main causes for the downfall of India was that she narrowed herself and stopped communicating with other nations during the Middle Ages. In other words, the spiritual rejuvenation of India is directly dependent on the spiritual regeneration of the rest of the world.

It is the linking of these two—self-renewal of Hinduism and the spiritual awakening of the West—that is the most important achievement of Swami Vivekananda and his great contribution to world thought and the progress of civilization. Together they form Swamiji's twofold vision of the future of mankind, and his mission on earth. They also form the two great ideals of the Ramakrishna Movement. The Movement has a special significance at the national level and a more general significance at the global level. Swamiji's twofold vision gives the

Movement its depth and width, its social and spiritual dimensions.

The five streams of the Ramakrishna Movement

The word 'movement' is defined by the *Random House Dictionary* as 'a diffusely organized or heterogeneous group of people or organizations tending toward or favouring a generalized common goal.' In other words, a movement is not restricted to one particular institution or organization but involves vast numbers and diverse types of people. It is a wave of new awareness animating the minds of millions of people and changing their beliefs, attitudes, emotions and actions. It is the transformation of human character effected by a movement that distinguishes it from a secular human trend or fashion like the use of Coca-Cola or bluejeans.

A great spiritual movement is something like a mighty tidal wave surging across the world. It is started by a great divine Personality endowed with infinite love, compassion and power. He lives a new ideal suited to that age and by his infallible *samkalpa* or will gives a new turn to world thought. Waves of spiritual power radiate from him in all directions. Whoever is drawn into this circle of spiritual influence finds himself moving forward on the spiritual path without much effort on his part. Says Swami Vivekananda: 'Mere thoughts are like little wavelets; fresh impulses to vibrations come to them simultaneously until at last one great wave seems to stand up and swallow up the rest. These universal thought-waves seem to recur every five hundred years, when invariably the great wave typifies and swallows up the others. It is this which constitutes a prophet. He focuses in his own mind the thought of the age in which he is living and gives it back to mankind in concrete form.'⁶

6. Ibid., vol. 6 (1978), p. 134.

According to Swamiji a new age dawns at intervals of five hundred years.

Every age has its prophet. Sri Ramakrishna is believed to be the prophet of the modern age. Why? Because he is the prototype, herald and exemplar of the spirit of this age. A fuller awareness and manifestation of the potential divinity of man, a search for direct experience of the ultimate Truth, and a spirit of harmony and acceptance—these three constitute the spirit of the modern age. And these three attributes find their best expression in the life of Sri Ramakrishna and his teachings.⁷

Sri Ramakrishna is the prime mover of the Ramakrishna Movement. He is its source of inspiration, its sustaining power and its ultimate goal. He is its supreme ideal, common focus and unifying substratum. From that fountainhead have sprung five streams which together constitute the Ramakrishna Movement.

The main stream consists of the twin institutions, the Ramakrishna Order (Math) and the Ramakrishna Mission. The Ramakrishna Order is a purely monastic organization of unmarried, ordained Hindu sannyasins. Though the Order admits men belonging to different religions, the ordination *ipso facto* makes them Hindu. Strictly speaking, the Ramakrishna Order is only a part and continuation of the Puri

Order of the great Daśanāmi trunk of Hindu monasticism. But it is an autonomous Order with its own traditions and values. Its origin may be traced to 1886 when Sri Ramakrishna himself one day gave ochre robes to a group of his young disciples, and sent them to beg their food.⁸ After his death sixteen of his young disciples formed themselves into a brotherhood which was registered as a religious body in 1901.⁹ The present structure of the Order is essentially a creation of Swami Vivekananda and is based on the rules framed by him. An important point which distinguishes the Order from the Mission, and also from other orthodox Hindu monastic orders, is that it is dedicated to the cult of Sri Ramakrishna.¹⁰ The monks carry on worship and other cultic activities not only as a part of their personal devotional exercises but also as a sacred duty of keeping alive the new *sampradāya* (tradition) of the age and the *paramparā* (lineage) of the Incarnate Teacher for the welfare of humanity. Only an organization of pure and selfless monks can protect and keep in circulation the original inspiration and power of a prophet. It is for this reason that Swami Vivekananda has spoken of the Order as the mystical body of Sri Ramakrishna.

The other institution called the Ramakrishna Mission was founded by Swami Vivekananda in 1897 and registered as a separate institution in 1909.¹¹ It is a purely

7. It is also believed by the followers of Sri Ramakrishna that a universal awakening of the spiritual consciousness of mankind (like the state that prevailed during the Vedic Age) has taken place in the modern age through the prayers and *sādhana* of the Master. Says Mahapurush Shivananda Maharaj: 'Swami Vivekananda once said, "In this age the *Brahma kuṇḍalinī*—the Mother who is responsible for the creation, preservation and destruction of the universe—has been awakened by the fervent prayers of Sri Ramakrishna." No wonder the individual *kuṇḍalinī* will be awakened now! That is why we see symptoms of a great spiritual upsurge everywhere.' *For Seekers of God*, trans. Swami Vividishananda and Swami Gambhirananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1975), pp. 7-8.

8. When Lady Minto, the Vicereine of India, visiting the Belur Math in 1910, remarked that the Ramakrishna Math was a creation of Swami Vivekananda, Mahapurush Maharaj at once corrected her saying, 'We did not found this Order. It was the Master who brought it into being during his illness. At that time he instructed Swamiji and others as to how this Order was to be organized and conducted.' Cf. Swami Gambhirananda, *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1957), p. 7.

9. Ibid., p. 144.

10. Cf. *ibid.*

11. Ibid., p. 184.

philanthropic organization involving the active cooperation of a large number of lay people but controlled by monks. It runs several hospitals, dispensaries, schools, colleges and religious and cultural centres. However, its most important activity which has earned for it unstinted praise from the Government and the public is the extensive relief work carried out by it during times of famine, floods, drought, epidemics and other calamities.

The Ramakrishna Order and Mission with their 117 centres together form the first stream of the Ramakrishna Movement. The second stream of the Movement comprises the Sarada Order (Math) of Hindu nuns and the Ramakrishna-Sarada Mission working mainly for the uplift of women. Though in a broad way these two follow the pattern and principles of the two institutions run by men, the former are completely independent and autonomous bodies entirely managed by women and have Sri Sarada Devi, the divine consort of Sri Ramakrishna, as their ideal. The order for nuns was started only in 1953 and is numerically small, but, promises to become the chief instrument for spreading the message and power of the Holy Mother and bringing about the spiritual awakening of woman-kind.

Lay devotees form the third stream of the Movement. One of the main causes of the success of the Ramakrishna Movement is the perfect understanding, love and trust that exist between the monks and the laity and their mutual cooperation in all undertakings. Two points distinguish the lay devotees of the Ramakrishna Movement from devotees of other traditions and sects. One is that in the Ramakrishna Movement lay devotees are not required to change their original religion or tradition. One can remain a Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, Christian or Muslim and yet be devoted to Sri Ramakrishna and take part in the activities of the Ashramas. Tolerance and acceptance

form the keynote of the Movement which does not aim at proselytism. The second general characteristic of the lay devotees of the Movement is the purity of their lives and their spiritual fervour. True to the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, they try to do their wordly duties in a spirit of detachment and self-surrender to God and try to lead a pure life dedicated to meditation and service. Those who are drawn to the Movement find their character changing spontaneously. This is the only conversion—the real conversion—that the Ramakrishna Movement performs: the conversion of human hearts.

There are a number of ashramas, societies and other institutions which bear the name of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi or Swami Vivekananda but are run on independent lines free of any control by the Ramakrishna Order and Mission. To the extent these institutions remain true to the ideals of these great personalities, they should be regarded as belonging to the Movement, making its fourth stream.

Finally, there are thousands of people, including the students of the Mission's educational institutions, who are influenced by the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna or Swami Vivekananda but who do not feel any personal allegiance to these personalities or their institutions. There are also thousands of people who are seeking the right path or goal but whom the message of the Movement has not yet reached. This diffuse group of persons who remain at the fringes of the Movement should be regarded as representing the fifth stream. The Movement's future lines of expansion lie there.

With these five streams the Ramakrishna Movement functions as a great fellowship of faiths, a vast communion of spiritual souls, a boundless highway to God for spiritual people in the present age. If on this earth a universal religion or a universal church—

the 'Parousia' about which Christianity has been dreaming for two thousand years—is ever possible, it can be established only by following the way of Sri Ramakrishna. There is no other way. *(to be concluded)*

BENEDICTORY ADDRESS

BY SRIMAT SWAMI VIRESWARANANDAJI
MAHARAJ ON THE OCCASION OF THE
INAUGURATION OF THE RAMAKRISHNA
MATH AND RAMAKRISHNA MISSION CON-
VENTION OF 1980*

About fifty-four years back the FIRST CONVENTION of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission was held at this very place under the leadership of Swami Shivanandaji Maharaj, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and the then President of the Order. The Chairman of the Reception Committee of the Convention was another direct disciple of the Master, Swami Saradanandaji Maharaj, who was the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission at that time. The object of the Convention was 'to exchange ideas amongst the members, consolidate their faith in the ideal, and infuse new vigour into its practice, and further to strengthen the tie of fellowship and co-operation amongst themselves.' The aim and object of the present Convention is also the same, i.e. to consolidate the Sangha on these lines. I am using the word 'Sangha' in a wider sense. Generally it is used to denote only the monastic organization. I have used it to include the lay devotees also.

At the time when the First Convention was held, we were under foreign rule and the conditions of life in society were somewhat different, though not very commendable. Now we have been an independent nation for the last thirty-three years, but unfor-

tunately, though in certain respects conditions have improved, yet in many other directions the situation has rather worsened. In every part of the country, in fact in every society, we find the conditions are very low from the standpoint of morals and ethics. I need not describe them in detail; you all know very well. For any honest and upright man it has become very difficult to live in such an environment. The present conditions seem to be unavoidable, for when degeneration and disintegration set in in a civilization, they run their course to the extreme before they come to a halt and we are able to turn the tide. This is the condition not only in India, but all over the world today. It is the result of neglecting religion and following materialism which has become the goal of life in the West and has through it spread all over the world, India not excluded.

If India gives up religion, she will be extinct in no time, for religion has been the main backbone of her cultural life for centuries. It is, therefore, not possible now to change the ideal, nor is it necessary. We often hear that our present decadence is due to our religion, but Swami Vivekananda says quite the opposite. He says our decadence is because of our not following religion in its true sense.

To set things right again, we have to go back to religion in its true sense, and not

* Delivered on 23 December 1980 at Belur Math.

merely follow some superstitions. We must know exactly what religion means. To bring us back to true religion from which we had drifted away, two great spiritual personalities, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, were born in this country in the last century. Sri Ramakrishna preached that the aim of life was to realize God. He firmly declared to a doubting humanity influenced by modern scientific thought that God was a reality and he had realized Him, and that anyone could realize Him by following the right method. This removed all the doubts and objections of the scientific world about the existence of God. According to Sri Ramakrishna, religion meant realization or direct experience of the Ultimate Truth. He pointed out the true meaning of scriptural texts which were forgotten or were wrongly interpreted. He further stated that all religions led to God-realization, and that too through direct experience, which is the only proof that can be convincing to the modern scientific mind. By the extreme spirit of renunciation which made Sri Ramakrishna to look upon gold and clay alike, he showed to the present acquisitive society that all this accumulation of wealth and grabbing of others' lands was 'vanity of vanities'. He also found that the same Ātman existed in all, irrespective of their caste, creed or colour. The same Ātman existed behind the rich and the poor, the high and the low, the ignorant and the educated, and behind every man and woman to whatever race he or she belonged.

These differences are imaginary, man-made. They are like the waves on the surface of the ocean; down below it is all water. Similarly here, these differences are merely superficial; behind all is the same Ātman. From this angle of vision, all humanity is one and there need not be any strife between nations or between races or between classes, which we see today all over the world. As a corollary to this teaching, he said 'serve *jīva* as Śiva', and

that service to *jīva* with this idea would lead to realization. Thus he harmonized the centuries-old contradiction between work and worship; work can become worship, if it is done in the proper spirit.

The universal message of Sri Ramakrishna is meant not only for India, but for the whole world. We must share it with the outside world, because that is the only way by which we can also help ourselves, for 'expansion is life and contraction is death'. 'We have done this several times before, and we have to do it once more in this age,' said Swamiji. That the world is waiting for Sri Ramakrishna's message can be seen from the fact that wherever his message has reached, it has been received with great eagerness.

Swami Vivekananda emphasized one particular teaching of Sri Ramakrishna, namely 'serve *jīva* as Śiva', and placed before the Math and the Mission he organized the ideal of *ātmano mokṣārtham jagaddhitāya ca*—'For the liberation of the Self and the good of the world'—as it was very essential in this age to establish peace in the world. He had wanted the Advaita Vedānta which was till then confined to the forest retreats and monasteries to be brought to the everyday life of the people. To bring this about, he got the keynote in Sri Ramakrishna's teaching, 'serve *jīva* as Śiva'.

Swamiji found that with this ideal he could bring all people to work for the regeneration of the country without disturbing the national ideal of *mokṣa*. To him the first step in this direction was to educate the masses and the women. In fact, he used to say that the neglect of the masses and women were the two main causes of India's downfall: 'I consider that the great national sin is the neglect of the masses, and that is one of the causes of her downfall. No amount of politics would be of any avail until the masses in India are once more well educated, well fed and well cared for ... If we want to regenerate India, we must

work for them.' We have to raise the backward people culturally and not think that it is 'pollution to touch them or sit with them'. This is not the teaching of the Vedānta of which we are so proud. As a result, we have failed to give practical demonstration of our spiritual ideal, and this has ruined the nation. The higher castes and the richer classes have to undo the mischief they have done, the atrocities they have perpetrated on these backward and poor people and make *prāyaścitta* for their sins by serving them, which alone will help us to reconstruct the country. We must give them education and culture, spread our spiritual truths among them, and raise their economic standard by introducing modern methods of agriculture, cottage industries, etc. Considering the modern conditions in India, it is everyone's duty to spread Sri Ramakrishna's universal message to all parts of the country, to all strata of society and to work for the uplift of the less fortunate backward and tribal people, to raise them both culturally and economically, and to bring back into society the moral and ethical principles in life to remove the extreme kind of selfishness which prevails today in the country, especially amongst the few, to the detriment of the whole nation.

Women also should be well educated, so that they may solve their problems themselves without the interference of men. Since independence, we find, some progress has been made in this direction, but more needs to be done. Swamiji said, 'Without Śakti there is no regeneration for the world. ... Mother has been born to revive that wonderful Śakti in India, and making her the nucleus, once more will Gargīs and Maitreyīs be born into the world.' He wanted a few educated women to take to the life of *sannyāsa* and take control of the education of girls, so that they might be trained up as ideal women. He wanted the Sannyāsinīs to carry on this kind of work

from village to village, so that the whole country, specially the backward people, might be benefited. You all know that such an organization as desired by Swamiji has already come into existence and is working independently for the uplift of women in different parts of India.

I would like to mention that India will progress only according to her own national genius which she has cultivated for centuries. Nothing will thrive in India unless it has a religious basis. In religion also, anything that goes against the universal ideal of India would be jarring and not acceptable to the country. All that I have said has more or less been practised by us, both by monastic and lay disciples till now. I say lay disciples particularly, not only remembering individuals, but also many institutions that have come into existence under the name of Sri Ramakrishna organized and run by the lay devotees, who have been invited here, so that they may have an opportunity to take the fullest advantage of this Convention and its proceedings. I appeal to all the followers of Sri Ramakrishna to take to the rebuilding of the nation vigorously both individually and by organizing more institutions like these in various parts of the country; for the work done by the monastics, though much in itself, is yet very little indeed compared to the needs of the country. I have in a general way placed before you the needs of the country at present and our responsibility with respect to them. Other speakers in this Convention will explain to you further these ideals and practical methods to work them out in society in an organized way.

Finally, I would like to point out to you that from history we find that each great civilization had at its back a spiritual personality of great magnitude, whose life and message gave the necessary impetus to usher in a new civilization, thus creating a new order of things, a new society. This is true of the Christian civilization, the Islamic civilization, the Buddhist civilization, and

the Hindu civilization as well. The spiritual message of Sri Ramakrishna has a potentiality to usher in a new civilization, the signs of which we are seeing all around in different parts of the world. Many books written by great thinkers have reference to his message and to the Indian way of life. It is, therefore, a great responsibility on us to live up to this ideal and spread his message so that a new civilization, a new order of things, may come into existence as early as possible—a society where there will be no conflict and hatred, but concord and love.

I welcome you all in the name of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother, Swamiji and his brother-disciples to this holy place.

May their blessings be on all of us. I am sure through their grace we will be able to solve all problems that confront us today and to remove any defect that might have crept in during the last fifty-four years, and make the Sangha go more vigorously for our own good and for the good of the world. In conclusion, I pray :

Be you all united in your march towards the Goal ;
Be you all united in speech ; be you all united in mind. . . .

Excellent be the understanding between yourselves ;
United be your hearts ; united be your intentions ;
And may there be perfect unity amongst you.

Om Śāntih ! Śāntih ! Śāntih !

(Adapted from the Samjñāna Sūkta,

Ṛg-Veda, 10.191.2-4)

THROUGH DEATH TO IMMORTALITY*

SWAMI YATISWARANANDA

On this holy Easter morning let us think not of death but of immortality, the possibility of the attainment of immortality by all of us, irrespective of our religions, races and countries. If God's spring comes to all, cannot God's grace also fall on all souls ?

'Our birth made us mortal, our death will make us immortal.' But can mere death of the body make us immortal? No, declare all the illumined teachers. They tell us further that what we need is Self-knowledge, direct experience of the Supreme Spirit, the Soul of our souls. This alone can enable us to attain the true immortality and bliss which is the birthright of all of us.

Let me read to you some passages on immortality from the Upanisads.

This Self, hidden in all beings, reveals Itself not to all. It is seen only by the subtle seers

through the higher mind (*buddhi*) refined and made one-pointed.¹ Having realized That which is without sound, without touch, formless, imperishable, and also without taste and smell, eternal, without beginning or end, and beyond all manifestation, one is liberated from the jaws of death.²

When all the desires that dwell in the heart are destroyed, then the mortal becomes immortal

* An Eastern sermon given at the Vedanta Centre, Philadelphia, U.S.A., probably in 1948.

1. एष सर्वेषु भूतेषु गूढोऽऽत्मा न प्रकाशते ।

. दृश्यते त्वग्रथया बुद्ध्या सूक्ष्मया सूक्ष्मदर्शिभिः ॥

Katha Upaniṣad, 3.12

2. अशब्दमस्पर्शमरूपमव्ययं

तथाऽरसं नित्यमगंधवच्च यत् ।

अनाद्यनंतं महतः परं ध्रुवं

निचाय्य तं मृत्युमुखात्प्रमुच्यते ॥

ibid, 3.15

and here itself attains the infinite Being.³ When all the knots of the heart are rent asunder the mortal becomes immortal. This is the end of all spiritual instruction.⁴

Know that one Self only, by whom heaven, earth, sky, mind and vital powers are permeated. Give up all vain talk. This is the way to immortality.⁵

All that is perceived is verily the one all-pervading Being. Calmly meditate on Him from whom the universe has its origin, in whom it merges, and by whom it is sustained.⁶ The Self alone is all that was and all that will be. Knowing Him, the immortal Lord, one transcends this world.⁷ Knowing That one transcends death; there is no other way to freedom.⁸

Easter is usually observed on the first Sunday following the first full moon after the spring equinox when the sun crosses the equator in spring and brings new life to nature. The name Easter, like the names of the days of the week, comes from old Teutonic mythology. Wednesday, for

instance, is the day of Wodin or Odin, greatest of the Nordic gods. Thursday is the day of Thor, the god of thunder, son of Odin. Friday is named after Freya, goddess of love and beauty. Easter was the spring goddess of the ancient Anglo-Saxons, and the celebration of Easter was the feast of the resurrection of nature after her apparent death in winter. In the northern countries of Europe winter is so severe that the very thought of spring brings joy to all.

Theologians of the Christian Church naturally condemned all the ancient gods and goddesses as demons. But even after their acceptance of Christianity, the Teutons loved their gracious spring goddess so much that they refused to have her degraded to the rank of a demon, and so continued to use her name although their spring festival was given Christian terms and came to be associated with the resurrection of Christ.

Not only the spring festival but the idea of resurrection is much older than Christianity. It was an inherited custom to celebrate Easter day by presenting coloured eggs, the egg being the symbol of the beginning of new life. In the Greek and Roman mystery cults of Mithra, Orpheus and others, the god had become subjected to mortality when he incarnated himself, but on being slain he overcame the powers of death and rose from the dead to die no more. He became immortal. This was not possible in the case of ordinary human beings, but they too could attain immortality by sacramental means, such as partaking of the bread and wine which were symbolical of the body and blood of the incarnate deity.

A living religion is like a stream. As it flows it takes much from the soil through which it passes, and also joins itself with other streams. The ancient Teutonic mythology, practices of Greek mystery cults and Jewish customs, came through the ages to be strangely blended in the Christian religion. The Jewish festival commemorat-

3. यदा सर्वे प्रमुच्यन्ते कामा येऽस्य हृदि श्रिताः ।

अथ मर्त्योऽमृतो भवत्यत्र ब्रह्म समश्नुते ॥

ibid., 6.14

4. यदा सर्वे प्रभिद्यन्ते हृदयस्येह ग्रंथयः ।

अथ मर्त्योऽमृतो भवत्येतावद्धचनुशासनम् ॥

ibid., 6.15

5. यस्मिन्द्यौः पृथिवी चान्तरिक्षमोतं मनः

सह प्राणैश्च सर्वैः ।

तमेवैकं जानथ आत्मानमन्या वाचो

विमुञ्चथामृतस्यैष सेतुः ॥

Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 2.2.5

6. सर्वं खल्विदं ब्रह्म तज्जलानिति शान्त उपासीत ।

Chāndogya Upaniṣad 3.14.1

7. पुरुष एवेदं सर्वं यद् भूतं यच्च भव्यम् ।

उतामृतत्वस्येशानो यदन्नेनातिरोहति ॥

Śvetāsvatara Upaniṣad 3.15

8. तमेव विदित्वाऽतिमृत्युमेति नान्यः पन्था

विद्यतेऽयनाय ॥

ibid., 3.8

ing the exodus of the Jews from Egypt came to be connected with the celebration of Easter. In this festival a paschal lamb was sacrificed, and to the Christians the crucified Christ came to be regarded as the paschal lamb whose blood was believed to purify sinners and make them partakers of immortality. This is the origin of the idea of vicarious atonement and salvation which already existed in the mystery cults of ancient Greece, Rome and other Mediterranean religions.

Christian theologians tried to make Christianity more mysterious than the common mystery religions by remaining silent about the early years in the life of the Messiah, and by stressing the physical resurrection of Christ, his immaculate conception and even sometimes the immaculate conception of the Madonna herself. However this may be, Easter has come to be connected with the resurrection of Christ and also with the renewal of life in all nature. Referring to this great event, a Christian writer observes, 'From a comparison of the various narratives it may be gathered that a tendency was at work to make a mysterious event even more mysterious.'

Christ appeared before his disciples on the third day after crucifixion. The disciples thought at first that the sacred body remained detached from his soul, but later, on the third day, body and soul were believed to become united. Many followers of Christ believed that through a divine miracle the physical body of Christ was transformed into something spiritual, and some theologians hold that in a miraculous way even ordinary souls will have their physical bodies spiritualized and restored before the Day of Judgement.

In India also we have various ideas about the resurrection of the physical body. King Yudhiṣṭhira, the embodiment of right living, is said to have gone to heaven in his physical body, but this was not possible for

his brothers who had to die a natural death first. We have several instances in religious history of illumined souls who could transform the physical element and disappear when their careers on earth were over. Sometimes what remained behind was only a symbol.

A beautiful legend is connected with the death of a Hindu saint called Kabir. This was in 1518; while Hindu and Mohammedan disciples were disputing about the disposal of his body the Master appeared before them and bade them lift the shroud. To their surprise they found that there was no corpse, only a heap of rose petals. Half of these rose petals the Mohammedan disciples buried in a tomb which still exists. The other half Hindu disciples burned and the ashes were scattered upon the waters of the Ganges.

Patañjali, the great teacher of yoga, tells that with the help of certain forms of discipline and concentration it is possible for a man to make his body invisible. We are told by the disciples of Ramakrishna that Bhairavi Brahmani, a woman teacher of Ramakrishna, had another disciple by name Chandra. It is said that Chandra had acquired the power to make his body disappear, but he misused his psychic powers and lost them.⁹ I have mentioned this story to point out the Hindu view. Christ is to be judged, not by his resurrection or any other miracle but by the deep love he expressed for God and by the intensity of his love for his fellow men. It is not the transformation of the body but something far more subtle and spiritual which renders one immortal. Even after the body is burnt away the soul may put on a body similar to the one that walked the earth. This has occurred to many spiritual teachers and illumined souls.

9. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1970), pp. 467-68.

Man's dislike for death or annihilation, his longing for immortality, is a more or less universal phenomenon. This desire for an unobstructed life may arise even in the hearts of scientists who were skeptical about immortality in their younger days. Thomas Huxley, grandfather of Aldous Huxley, toward the end of his life wrote to a friend :

It is a curious thing that I find my dislike to the thought of extinction increasing as I get older and nearer to the goal. It flashes across me at all sorts of times and with a kind of horror that in 1900 I shall probably know no more of what is going on than I did in 1800. I had sooner be in hell, at any rate in one of the upper circles where the climate and the company are not too trying.

There may be various kinds of hell. Sometimes theologians are prepared to send even highly spiritual persons to the condemned regions simply because they do not agree with orthodox beliefs. Huxley was right in thinking that there may be some regions of hell where climate and company are not too trying, may even be inviting compared to our earth. Professor Huxley was prepared to die and even go to hell rather than pass into nothingness. Death comes to us all, but let death lead us to immortality.

There are various kinds of death : biological death or the permanent cessation of the vital functions. A man is born, grows to maturity after the period of development and adult stability ; then comes the end of the cycle in the death of the organism. Then there is civil death which occurs when an individual enters a monastic order and dies to the world, or when he is condemned to prison for committing a crime. There is also legal death when after an unexplained absence of seven years the law declares the absent person dead with regard to inheritance. There is also moral death where a person may be so insensible to moral impulses that he is ethically and morally dead, and as one man put it : 'If

his conscience were removed, like an appendix, it would be only a very minor operation.'

Those who identify their Self with their body may be spiritually dead, ignoring the real nature of the Ātman. Śaṅkara, in his *Crest Jewel of Discrimination* tells us :

Only through God's grace can we obtain these three rarest advantages: human birth, the longing for liberation, and discipleship to an illumined teacher. Nevertheless, there are those who manage somehow to obtain this rare human birth, together with bodily and mental strength and even an understanding of the scriptures, and yet are so deluded that they do not struggle for the attainment of immortality. Such men are suicides who destroy themselves by clinging to the unreal.¹⁰

This destruction is not to be taken literally. The spirit may remain asleep for countless years and then will suddenly awaken, and the erstwhile unillumined one will attain Self-knowledge and immortality.

How can we escape these deaths of the body and the spirit? It is a strange fact that many who do not believe in personal survival after death still long for immortality through their descendants perhaps, or the influence of the work they have done, or of the service they have rendered. But this kind of immortality is temporary, may end at any time with a change of thought or fashion, or ending of a family name. When the link is broken they cease abruptly to be immortal.

According to those who believe in personal immortality, the soul is a created being, born only once with the body. They believe that the individual personal consciousness continues to exist and that true immortality, or 'salvation', is attained through a miracle—the grace of God or a particular Saviour. Others believe that the soul is uncreated, and passes through many births and deaths until it attains personal immortality through self-knowledge. Those

10. *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* 3, 4.

who do not accept a Personal God believe that the soul is a spiritual entity which attains self-knowledge through personal effort. According to them, all power is vested in man himself without relation to any God or Saviour.

The monist believes that all souls are eternal parts of One Supreme Spirit, the supreme consciousness which appears as God, soul and universe, beyond all name and form. He holds that it is only owing to ignorance that human souls pass through births and deaths, and that with the dawn of Self-knowledge they become merged in the Supreme Self. Some monists hold that there are souls who without merging themselves completely in the Supreme Spirit still retain a spiritualized individuality, absorbed in the divine consciousness, and through the Divine Will are born again for the good of mankind.

The Buddhists speak of the attainment of a state beyond existence or non-existence, the overcoming of all selfishness, which they call Nirvāṇa.

Certain Christian theologians speak of a conditional immortality attained by righteous privileged souls, while the wicked whose lives seem to have no value either to themselves or others are punished with everlasting torment or complete annihilation. The believers in annihilation hold that such a termination is more in accord with divine mercy than everlasting torment. Out of nothing they came; let their souls return to nothing.

Hindu teachers oppose this view; they hold that every soul is intrinsically valuable (although short-sighted human beings may not understand in what way). Each soul is potentially divine and all will eventually, early or late, realize their divine nature. The idea of annihilation is to them preposterous. Once a thief broke into the house of a man who practised *ahimsā*, or noninjury, and who could not bear to see people suffer. The boys of the house caught hold of the thief

and were giving him a sound beating when the master called to them: 'Remember boys, do not hurt him, for noninjury is the greatest virtue and the law of my house.' The young men asked what they should do. 'Put him into a bag and throw him into the river,' ordered the master. He wanted to kill the intruder but could not bear to watch him suffer pain. The thief with folded hands ejaculated piously, 'Behold how great is the master's compassion!' The believers in complete annihilation have this kind of compassion.

Nirvāṇa is not annihilation, for Buddha lived forty-five or fifty years after his attainment of this state of selflessness. Everyone knows that his life was dedicated to the good of mankind. Nirvāṇa is a state of superconsciousness, a form of highly spiritualized life. People who prescribe eternal punishment for those who think differently are heartless, but the cruelty of those who support the idea of annihilation knows no bounds. It is unthinkable how theologians can distort the words of the illumined teachers whom they claim to interpret. Let us move always in the direction of the higher life.

Which kind of immortality should we strive to attain? We are free to choose. Surely we want neither eternal torment nor annihilation but liberation for every soul which is immortal by nature, though it may not be conscious of its birthright. With our sense of individuality we want to achieve the union of the soul with the Oversoul, of the Puruṣa with the Puruṣottama or Supreme Spirit, God, Brahman.

According to Hindu custom the body is burnt to ashes, but there are many authenticated cases where, even after burning, a person has appeared again to some devotee. In the case of Ramakrishna, the Master's presence was plainly felt by his divine consort who was about to put on widow's garb. She saw the form of Ramakrishna who held her hand and said gently: 'You need no

widow's dress, for I am not dead. I have simply passed from one room to another.'

In his remarkable book *The Religious Consciousness*, Dr. James B. Pratt, who speaks from personal experience of India and her faiths, points out the contrast between the Christian and the Hindu views of immortality :

In the Christian view, the soul's survival of death is essentially miraculous. The soul is conceived as coming into existence with the birth of the body, and the thing to be expected is that it should perish when the body perishes. This is prevented through the intervention of God who steps in to receive the soul and confer upon it an immortality which, left to itself, it could never attain. In India all this is changed. The soul's immortality has never been thought there to be dependent upon any supernatural interference or miraculous event, nor even upon God. There are atheistic philosophers in India, but they are as thoroughly convinced of the eternal life of the soul as are the monists or the theists. For in India the soul is essentially immortal. Eternity is in its very nature.

If you admit a beginning you take the soul out of the class of eternal things and are forced to hang its future existence upon a miracle. The Hindu spiritual teacher declares : 'The knowing self is not born ; it dies not. From nothing it sprang ; nothing sprang from it. It is birthless, eternal, undecaying and ancient. Though the body be slain the self is not slain.'¹¹

For those who believe in one birth and in the soul's creation with the birth of the body, the soul's survival after death is a miracle, an act of divine grace. According to the Hindu view the soul which is spirit forgets its spiritual nature because of the power of ignorance, and identifies itself with an ego, mind and senses, all of which together form its subtle body. This soul puts on a gross body as one might put on an overcoat. This is its human birth. Because of desire rooted in ignorance the soul lives a selfish life and passes through

rounds of births and deaths before it can attain eternal life.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa says in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* : 'As a man casts off worn-out clothes and puts on others which are new, so the embodied soul casts off worn-out bodies to enter others which are new.'¹² This is the doctrine of reincarnation based on the law of causation. As we sow, so we reap. Our present life is the result of the past. Our future is determined by our present. The law of karma and the doctrine of reincarnation ask us to be reconciled to our lot, put forth fresh effort and improve our present and also our future. Karma can counteract karma.

Through selfless performance of duty, divine worship, prayer and meditation, the soul comes to unfold a new vision which reveals its higher infinite nature. In the *Bhagavad-Gītā* Śrī Kṛṣṇa calls the soul an eternal portion of 'Myself', the Supreme Spirit, the Soul of all souls.¹³ Becoming ever more egocentric and blinded by ignorance, the soul chooses to be born, chooses to die, suffers greatly, and at last wearies of suffering and yearns for freedom and immortality. Ramakrishna gives the analogy of a child going to sleep who says : 'Mother, wake me if I get hungry,' and the mother says, 'My dear, you don't have to worry about that. If you are hungry you will wake up yourself.'

The illumined teachers are those who have always been conscious of their immortal nature. It is they who show men the way to immortality. By observing their instructions and following in their footsteps we too can become illumined, free, immortal.

The difference between Christian and Hindu conceptions of the soul does not much concern us. What is important is that we find many common points between Christian and Hindu conceptions of the

11. *Katha Upaniṣad* 2.18.

12. *Bhagavad-Gītā* 2.22.

13. *Ibid.*, 15.7.

divine Incarnations and their teachings that lead to illumination and immortality. Śrī Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna in the *Gītā* :

Never was there a time when I did not exist, nor you.

Never will there be a time hereafter when any of us shall cease to be.

Many a birth have I passed through, and so have you ; I know them all but you know them not.

All is strung on me as a row of gems is strung on a thread.

Though I am unborn, eternal and the Lord of all beings, yet with the help of Maya I am born as a human being.

I am the Self seated in the hearts of all creatures ; I am the beginning, the middle and the end of all beings.

Come to me alone for shelter and I will deliver you from all sins ; do not grieve ; by my grace will you gain supreme peace and the everlasting abode.¹⁴

In the Christian Gospel the Eternal Christ declares : 'Verily, verily I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am.'¹⁵ Here he speaks as the eternal divine consciousness.

I am the light of the world. He that believeth in me shall not walk in darkness but shall have everlasting life.

I am the vine and ye are the branches.

I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.

I and my Father are one.

I am the Resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, even if he die, shall live ; and every one that liveth and believeth in me shall never die.

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.¹⁶

This is Christ's promise of immortality to spiritual seekers. This promise we find also in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* : 'Whoso knows in the true light my divine birth and action will not be born again. When he leaves his body he will attain me.'¹⁷ With our limited

finite minds we cannot attain the divine consciousness ; but when the illumined ones speak, it is not the individual but the cosmic. The Infinite Spirit through its special divine manifestations shows man the way to illumination. The God in the divine Incarnation, Christ or Kṛṣṇa or Buddha, speaks to the God in man.

If only we could listen to the words the God-men speak we would learn that the way to self-knowledge, the way to peace, is also the way to immortality. But many who take the name of these divine messengers do not heed their teachings so as to transform their lives, and many distort the meaning of words with disastrous results.

As we read in the Upaniṣads, the infinite Self hidden in all beings is seen only by the seers who have purified and made their minds one-pointed. It is gained by him who longs for it with his whole heart. As Christ said : 'Ye shall know the Truth and the Truth will make you free.'¹⁸ He who has realized the eternal truth does not fear death nor injury ; he sees everything in the Self and is at peace.

All great spiritual teachers are manifestations of the same divine principle, and bring us the spiritual light. Let us heed the risen Christ and all the great teachers who are with us in spirit. Only those who attain inner purity will realize the truth. Let us rise above theological limitations and say with Swami Vivekananda :

Our salutations to all the past prophets whose teachings and lives we have inherited, whatever may have been their race or creed ! Our salutations to all those god-like men and women who are working to help humanity, whatever be their birth, colour or race ! Our salutations to those who are coming in the future, living gods, to work unselfishly for our descendants !¹⁹

14. Ibid., 2.12 ; 4.5 ; 7.7 ; 4.6 ; 10.20 ; 18.66.

15. St. John 8.58.

16. St. John 8.12 ; 15.5 ; 14.20 ; 10.30 ; 11.25, and St. Matthew 11.28.

17. *Gītā* 4.9.

18. St. John 8.32.

19. Swamiji's lecture on 'Christ the Messenger' in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1978), vol. 4, p.153.

TO ENCOUNTER KARMA

SWAMI SHRADDHANANDA

The *Bhagavad-Gītā* defines karma as 'giving away for the emergence and growth of beings'.¹ This definition is in accordance with the Vedic idea of *yajña* or sacrifice. Men offer ceremonial oblations to the gods, and the gods thus appeased, grant and sustain the desired objects—progeny, health, prosperity and so on. This idea of karma as sacrifice can be extended to all happenings in life. Any creation and any sustenance need sacrifice—spending of energy.

We begin encountering karma as soon as we are born; a baby has to eat, breathe, move. At every stage of its growth a 'giving away' is involved. As the child ushers into manhood, more and more karma envelops him. Man's whole life is indeed ceaseless action—tiresome but unavoidable. Retired from the waking, he goes to the dream state. As the dream man he encounters dream activities. There too he cannot escape karma. Even when he sleeps, there is karma; he has to take and spend oxygen. What happens to man, happens to all living units—animals, birds, insects, plants. In their own worlds the non-stop bustle of action goes on. So too in the non-living entities—the mountains, the oceans, the stars, planets, galactic systems. The sun, which is responsible for all life, works by spending itself. In the vast processes of nature, animate and inanimate, there is karma—sacrifice, spending away.

The question naturally comes as to what propels karma, this ceaseless chain of action. The answer is desire. We read in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* that creation began from the desire of God—the One without a second—to be many.² Of course there is

a difference between the desire of God and that of man. God instigates karma, manifested in the threefold processes of *śṛṣṭi-sthiti-laya*—creation, preservation and dissolution—but He is above this show, ever unaffected.

Coming to the human level we see that man wants certain things to emerge and grow. In the case of a child, its actions are motivated by unconscious desires, but as a child grows, conscious desires come in and form a part of its mind. If the endless desires are left to themselves, life will be very complicated; so there is the necessity of directing and shaping our desires—this is called education. That is why we begin to teach the child: do it this way, don't jump, don't go there. We direct our desires, we train our desires; otherwise, the mind of man becomes a jumble.

However, the mind continuously brings desires—continuously. Why does man involve himself with endless desires? Why isn't he satisfied even though he knows that maybe one per cent of his desires can be fulfilled? The metaphysical answer, according to Vedānta, is that man's true nature is a total reality, an all comprehensive reality—that is why in his very nature he cannot remain satisfied with little. Man more and more wants totality; the totality of knowledge, of wealth, of health, of happiness. Unconsciously he craves that totality. Vedānta says, when you consciously realize this meaning of desire, you have come to a true spiritual life. You know then that this satisfaction of desires cannot be accomplished effectively by pursuing desires in a piecemeal, fragmented and dispersed way. You have to ask and understand what the totality is. That totality is God or man's true Self.

Man's desires show that man seeks God

¹. भूतभावोद्भवकरो विसर्गः कर्मसंज्ञितः ।

Bhagavad-Gītā, 8.3

². *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 6.2.

all the time but he does not know it. Really speaking, it is the desire for God that impels man to seek what is not God; it is a self-contradiction and that is why it is called *Māyā*, that which cannot be explained even though we see it. The total fulfilment of desires is possible when you have reached God, when you have understood your own spiritual nature. When you have touched your Divine nature, you do not ask little things, just as a multi-millionaire does not run for a few coins. But we cannot all of a sudden understand that impulse of God in us; we have to encounter karma as best we can.

When you are born as a man, you cannot be free from desires; you cannot simply say that you do not want this or that—you cannot. You have to grow and that growing process is important. The question then becomes how we can encounter karma in such a way that we become free of it. Let us not think either that we face only the desires of this lifetime; the Indian spiritual tradition teaches us that man is a traveller—from life to life. In each life he creates numerous desires and the actions performed as a result of these desires leave what is called a reaction, a fruit. Briefly speaking, it is said that good actions (*dharma*) leave good reactions which will bring happiness; bad actions (*adharma*) leave negative reactions which will cause suffering. All the time, then, we are carrying the heavy burden of our stored karma from past and present.

Where is the escape from this vicious circle? For most of us the pattern of life remains on the surface: sometimes we suffer, sometimes achieve success, sometimes we are frustrated, sometimes we laugh, sometimes we cry. But for some of us deeper questions come—what is the meaning of this travelling from life to life? The great spiritual teachers tell us that really speaking there is no meaning in this. Only if you try to understand that there is

something above this travelling can you stop this meaningless encounter with karma. Spiritual knowledge, the discovery of God, the discovery of your own spiritual nature—these are the meaningful objectives above this endless travelling. When we seek the understanding of these spiritual goals, we face and encounter karma in a different way. Any karma is motivated by a desire, and is directed to an objective. The spiritual seeker's karma springs from the desire to know God, and what he wants to attain is God.

Encountering karma in a spiritual way does not mean running away from life but rather becoming more and more conscious of our spiritual destiny. If we can experience God, then we rise to another level where there is real peace because God is above this so-called life bound by the laws of time, space, and causation. Therefore, for a spiritual man, encountering karma becomes the way of transcending karma.

Now there are three ways to encounter karma fruitfully. The first way, the teacher of the *Gītā* says, is to do whatever you do with a spirit of detachment. You are born with desires but you now curtail them because you are a seeker of freedom. Whatever you do, you will do with great responsibility and care but, in simple language, you will not be attached to the fruits of action. If we look into ourselves, we shall see that whenever we do something we spend more energy on thinking of the fruits than doing what is necessary for performing that action. We create dreams—Oh, I am doing this, it will bring this...—and yet there is no certainty of the dreams' becoming true. The spiritual attitude is: a duty has come; I shall do it the way it has to be done, but I shall not dream about it. When it is done, it is done and I shall take up another duty. In this way, the mind undergoes a great training; we grow calm. The restlessness of our mind is not really due to the action but to pondering

the results of the action. If we can stop that, we become more and more ready for spiritual insight. The first insight that will come to us, if we can encounter karma in this spirit of detachment, will be a sense of calmness. We shall begin to feel tangibly that we are doing all these things, but in the background of our mind there is freedom and peace. This is one way; a way for a person who at this stage may not even believe in God.

The second way is when you have faith in God. The *Bhagavad-Gītā* in several verses says that it is God who is really the supreme operator of things. All the activities going on in this universe gain their power from God. In your little life, if you can think that all you are doing through your body, your mind, your ego are really coming from God, your karma becomes a spiritual practice. If you are a painter and have been able to produce a wonderful painting, you as a man of God will remember that it is by God's power that this wonderful work has been done. Whatever a faithful devotee of God does, he says by God's grace he did this, and the fruit and result also come by His grace. In this way he neutralizes the bondage of karma. At the same time, he is careful not to create unnecessary desires because he knows that this world is not his permanent home: he is travelling to God. If he can grow in this identification with his spiritual nature as a spark of the Divine—a child of God—his identity with his little individuality will slowly vanish and his journey will end by sharing the nature of God—no longer bound by karma.

The third way is that of knowledge, the way of a person who has been more conscious of his own nature as the ever-free, pure spirit. He has read that man's Self is not really a fraction of the infinite spirit because that infinite spirit cannot be

fractioned, fragmented. Man's true Self is infinite and as such is eternally unattached. Therefore, a man of knowledge tries to feel that really he is the Witness; he tries by contemplation to separate his actions, his senses, and the instruments of his actions from his true nature. His perspective is that all of the activities in nature do not really affect him because he is the Self. To be sure, he sees, he eats, he dances, he does these things, but all the time he feels it is a show going on to which he is the eternal Witness. Here there is no question of God or offering the fruits of action to God; here he encounters karma by separating himself from Prakṛti—nature—through knowledge, through inquiry. The way of knowledge also neutralizes karma; he has separated himself from karma by witnessing it.

Whatever method we follow to encounter karma spiritually, we must feel a love for our goal or there will not be much intensity in our spiritual practices. We are pilgrims to God and our journey ends only when we reach Him, just as a river emerges from some distant spring and ends its journey only when it meets the ocean. If this spiritual perspective is strong, our life pattern will become different. A natural detachment, a natural indrawnness will be noticed. The manifestations of ignorance, namely our false pride, our cruelty, our jealousy, our intolerance, our untruthfulness, our pettiness will run away; they will be ashamed to show their face because our goal is God—who is all peace, all light, all free, immortal. For the man who sustains this ultimate purpose of life, karma loosens its bonds and allows him to achieve that which our true nature has been seeking—totality. The totality of existence, consciousness and joy is in God from the standpoint of devotion and in our true Self from the viewpoint of knowledge.

EARLY DAYS OF BELUR MATH

SWAMI SOMESWARANANDA

Some eighty-two years ago, a small group of homeless young men acquired a plot of land in a sleepy little village on the bank of the Ganga as a site for a permanent monastic home. The place was remote, jungly, marshy, with no electricity, gas or protected water supply. It was infested with malaria. Other than the river the only access to the place was through a small lane, full of pits and ditches.

Calcutta was only a few miles away. Yet many were afraid to go there even in daytime. Overgrown with jungle and big trees, it was a hide-out for jackals and men of the underworld. Small huts stood here and there inhabited by a few poor villagers.

That was Belur—an unknown village during those days, but now an internationally known pilgrim centre humming with activity. Millions of visitors from all over the world come there, pay their respect to the presiding Deity of the place, and go back with peace of mind, and a feeling of blessedness. Special tourist buses bring everyday hundreds of visitors, both Indian and foreign. Five bus-routes and one steamer-route have included this village in their map. More than thirty local electric trains stop there daily. One finds even a helipad there nowadays.

There is no more the jungle there. Thousands of people now reside in the village; and though there are still some jackals, thugs have vanished. The scene has totally changed. Three colleges, a dozen schools, two engineering institutes, and many other educational institutions have come up, along with many factories.

That small plot of land acquired by the monks is now famous as Belur Math (Belur Monastery), the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission with their 118 branches spread all

over the world. How did this transformation take place? One can find the answer in many books including the monumental work *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission*. But the fascinating story of those early years—the living conditions in the Math, the daily routine of the inmates, how the great direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna lived and taught the younger monks, and similar details—has not been fully told. Here we wish to present the inside story of those early days. By 'early days' we mean only four years—March 1898 to July 1902. Though almost all published books on the subject, including some rare ones, have been consulted, the present article is substantially based on many unpublished documents, specially the personal diaries written by the monks of those days.*

Purchase of the land

Soon after his return to India from the West Swami Vivekananda asked Swamis Niranjanananda and Vijnanananda (then Brahmachari Hariprasanna) to search for a suitable plot of land on the eastern bank of the Ganga river. They saw many plots which were either too small or costly. One day when Swamis Niranjanananda and Vijnanananda were going to the north near the western bank by a boat, they saw a plot of land covered with jungle and with a bungalow. They found a canal near-by where some boats and crafts were tied to

* The author is grateful to Srimat Swami Vireswaranandaji, Swami Abhayanandaji, and Swami Vandananandaji for giving him permission to use the archives of Belur Math. He is obliged to Swami Satyavratanaanda for allowing him to use the archives of the Advaita Ashrama and to several senior monks of the Order for many less-known and unknown facts of those days.

trees. Landing there they at first could not see anyone. Coming to a store made of planks, they found a gentleman there who gave them the name and address of the owner of the land and told them that the owner might sell the land. It belonged to Sri Bhagavat Narayan Singh, a resident of Patna. They met the owner and arrived at an agreement about the sale of the plot.¹ On February 3, 1898, Rs. 1,001 was paid as advance,² and on the fourth of the following month Rs. 38,999 was paid and the land was secured. On March 5, 1898, between 12 noon and 1 p.m. the indenture was presented at Howrah Sub-Registry Office for the registration in the name of Swami Vivekananda.

This plot was one of two which, after a good deal of search, had originally been selected—the other one being at Peneti, north of Dakshineswar. Miss Müller had objected to the Belur land as it was uneven and full of pits and ditches. Swamiji had not liked the Peneti land as it was far away from Calcutta and the devotees would find it very difficult to visit the Math frequently. As no other suitable land was found, the choice ultimately fell to the Belur land.

The nature of the land

The area of the newly acquired land was nearly seven acres.³ There were two entrances—a southern gate opening to Kath-

gola Lane (now renamed Sarat Atta Lane), and a small northern gate near Hem Pal Lane. The land was bounded on the north partly by the garden-house of Sri Haridhan Datta and partly by the land of Sri Shambhu Chandra Pal. Sri Datta's land was later purchased by Belur Math and the house came to be known as Leggett House. On the south the Math area was bounded partly by the land⁴ of Kumar Shrish Chandra Singh and partly by the land⁵ of the above-said vendor. On the east there was the river Ganga, and on the west there was a public road (Kathgola Lane) and the lands of Golam Asraff, Mahendra Lal Das and Beni Madhav Biswas.⁶

The land was almost uninhabitable, though there was a one-storeyed dwelling. A portion of the land had formerly been used as a small dockyard of Hore-Miller Company⁷ for repairing small craft and boats. The existing land between the temples of Holy Mother and Swamiji was used for that purpose, and the three deodar trees still standing there were used for tying the craft and boats.

A portion of the land was bounded by brick walls (*shown in the map*) and the area was full of trees. There were three

1. *Udbodhan*, vol. 37, no. 5, p. 237.

2. (Mrs.) Saralabala Sarkar, *Swāmi Vivekānanda O Sri Sri Rāmakrishna Sangha* (Calcutta: Bengal Publishers, 1363 B.S.), p. 111. Hereafter, *Vivekānanda O Sangha*.

3. The exact area is not known. The agreement between Sri Bhagavat Narayan Singh and Swami Vivekananda mentions '22 Bighas more or less', whereas the Indenture (Debottar Deed) by which Swamiji handed over the land to the Trustees on 6 February 1901 reads 'an area of 16 bighas more or less', though no part of the land was sold or purchased in between the said dates.

4. This land was later purchased by Belur Math. It comprises the southern or back portion of the land between the Girish Memorial building and the cremation ground. It is now being used for cultivation.

5. It measured 50 ft. by 44 ft. and was later purchased by the Math. The western part of the Girish Memorial and the nearby servants' quarters were built on it.

6. Golam Asraff's land was later purchased by the Ramakrishna Mission Saradapith, and ultimately by the Math. The Mission's Relief Department and the Math's Arogya-Bhavan are now there. Sri Das and Sri Biswas also sold their lands to the Math, and the existing paddy field stands there.

7. Swami Divyatmananda, *Divyaprasange* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Karyalaya, 1385 B.S.), p. 153.

ponds and a small well. On the southern side of Gol-pukur,⁸ one of the ponds, there were many banana trees. Before the purchase of the land, one day when Holy Mother was passing by in a boat along the river she had a vision of Sri Ramakrishna near that banana grove which stood to the southeast of the present Mission headquarters office building. Some of the coconut trees which were around that pond can be seen even today, indicating the area of the pond on the eastern side of the Mission headquarters building. Another pond, named Padma-pukur,⁹ was on the northern side of the present-day shoe-keeping stand. That pond was full of lotus plants,¹⁰ and the flowers were later used in the shrine. There were some trees around the pond, and two mango trees still stand which can be seen near the present road going from south to north by the western side of the Ramakrishna temple. The third pond, Pachāpukur¹¹ by name, was near the present barbed-wire fence on the western side of the Ramakrishna temple. A Bel (*bilva*) tree stood near the existing Swamiji temple, though the present tree was planted later in the same spot. To the south¹² of that tree there were many others, and that part of the ground was practically a jungle. Another Bel tree worth mentioning was on the eastern side of the present Ramakrishna temple. Nowadays on the Public Celebration Day of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday festival an exhibition pavillion is erected.

8. *Gol* means round and *pukur* is pond in Bengali. It was also called *Gowāl-pukur*, as the *gowāl* (cowshed) of the Math was later built near it.

9. *Padma* means lotus.

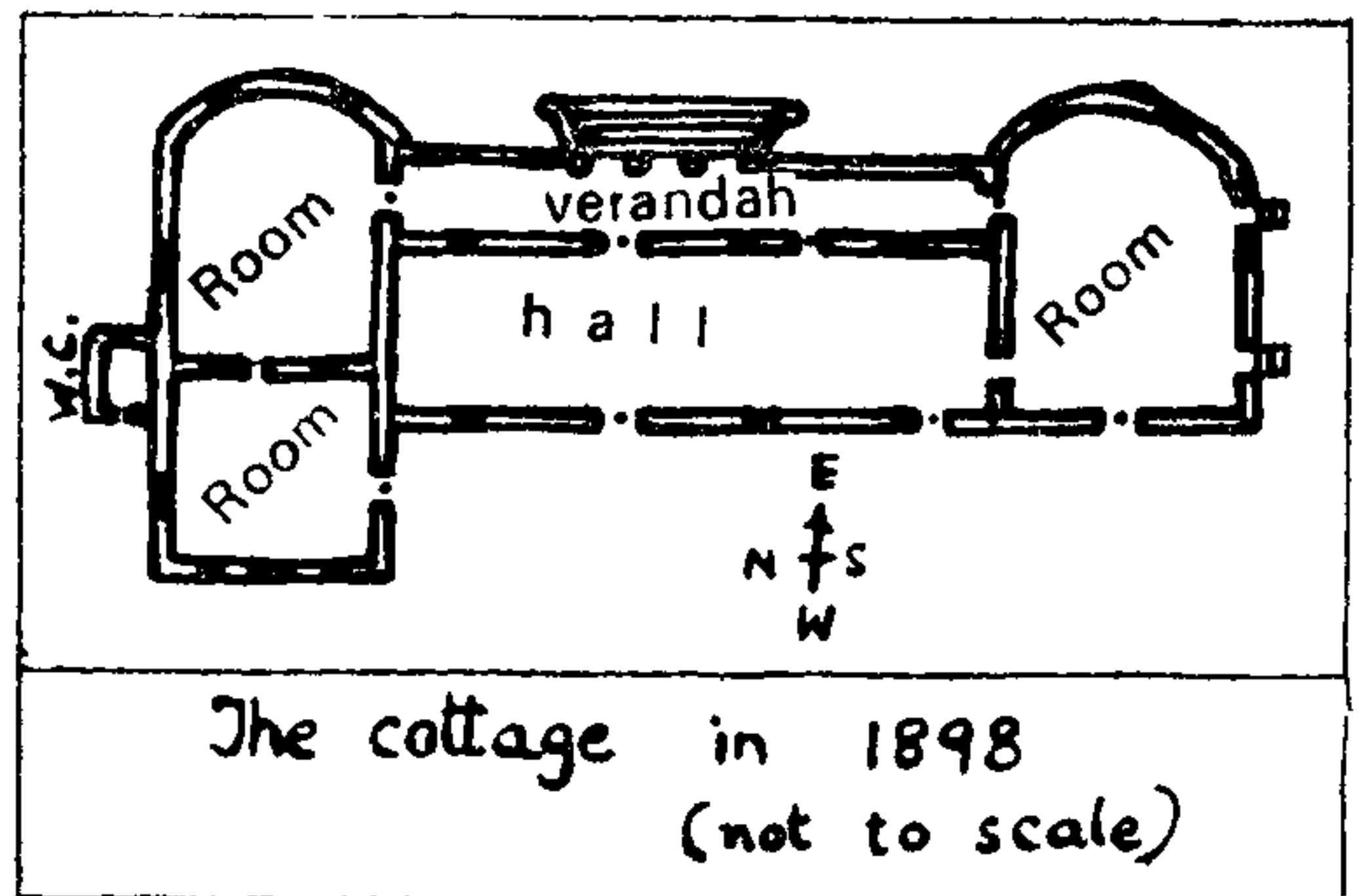
10. Information from Revered Swami Bhutesh-anandaji.

11. *Pachā* means rotten. The name signified that the water of that pond was unfit for drinking purpose.

12. This place is now being used as the cremation ground of the Math.

There, where Sri Ramakrishna's big portrait is kept, stood that Bel tree.

On the east of the Pachā-pukur there were some fruit trees such as mango, palm, nut, etc. A small well was in the courtyard near the present Math building, just to the north of the jack tree now standing to the southwest of the old shrine building. Near the well there were a palm tree, a bryonia tree, and a jack tree. In the courtyard also there were many trees like mango, eucalyptus, etc. When the land was purchased there were only two buildings, both one-storeyed. The bigger one had two rooms on the northern side and another on the southern, connected by a hall and eastern verandah.¹³ For servants there was another building with three small rooms. There was also a small dilapidated room near the main gate.¹⁴



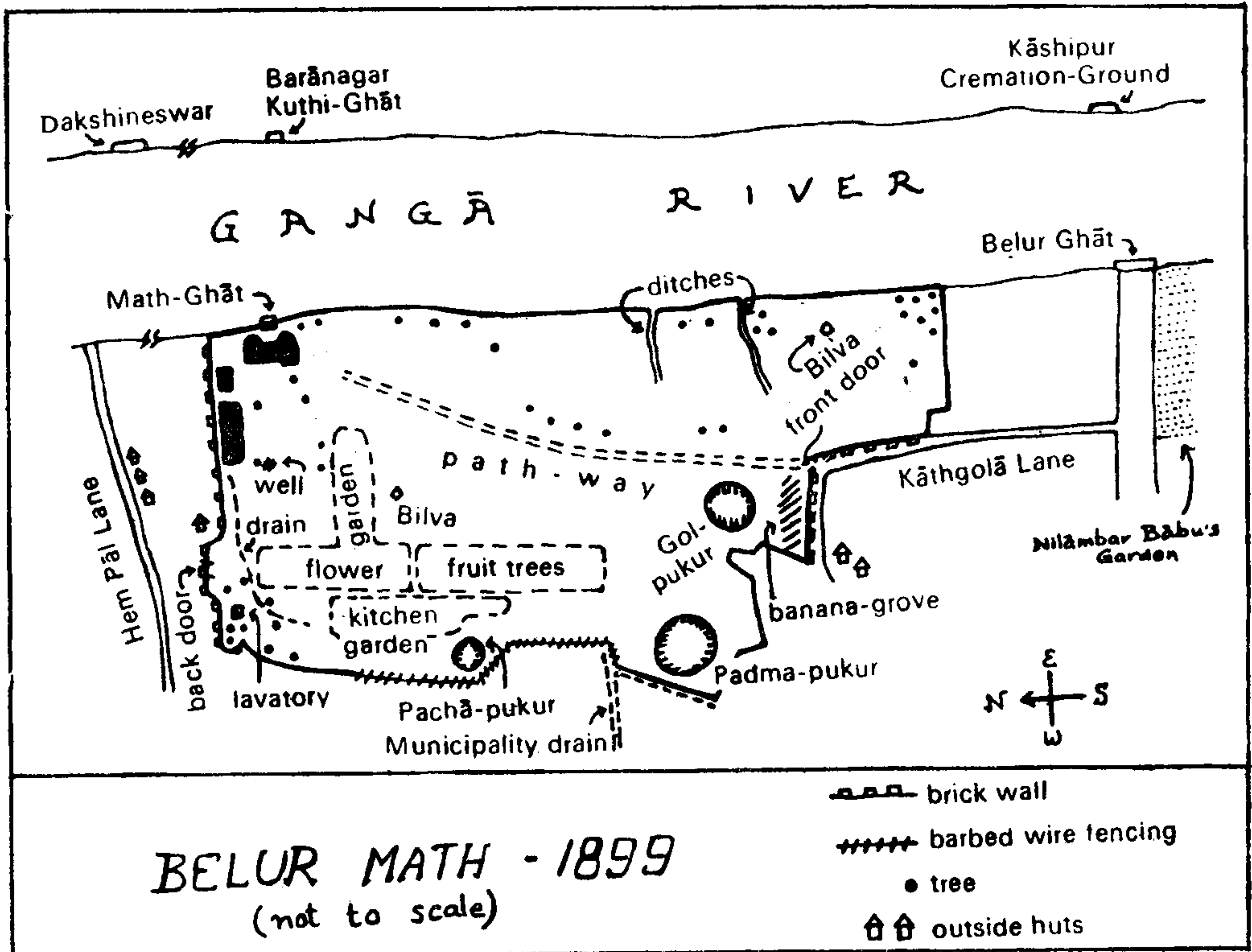
As said earlier, the plot of land was secured on March 4, 1898. In the meantime Miss MacLeod, Mrs. Ole Bull, and later Sister Nivedita (then Miss Margaret E. Noble) had reached India and were living with Miss Müller. Soon the first two ladies came to the Math and, getting permission from Swamiji, started living in the

13. Swami Gambhirananda, *Yuganāyak Vivek-ānanda* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Karyalaya, 1373 B.S. vol. 3, p. 85.

14. Sarkar, *Vivekānanda O Sangha*, p. 112.

larger building of the newly purchased land. The floor of the northern rooms was pitched. They white-washed the rooms and bought old mahogany furniture. Nivedita used to stay in the southern room, Miss MacLeod and Mrs. Bull in the northern room facing the river. The other northern room, which is now Swami Abhayanandaji's office, was used as a drawing room, half

in the house for two months till they left for Kashmir in the first week of May. The Math had been transferred (in February 1898) from Alambazar to Nilambar Mukherji's garden-house which was just a furlong away from the newly purchased land. Swamiji used to come daily to the cottage where his American and English disciples stayed. He would take tea with



of which was furnished in Indian style and the other half in Western style.¹⁵ The hall was used as the dining room. They stayed

them and talk for hours on Indian and world history and culture¹⁶

15. Eastern and Western Admirers, *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1964), p. 239.

16. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Sister Nivedita Girls' School, 1972), pp. 278-79.

Construction

Just after the purchasing of the land Swamiji was eager to prepare it for the permanent Math. He entrusted Swami Vijnanananda (then Brahmachari Hariprasanna) and Swami Advaitananda with the task of levelling the ground, remodelling the cottage and constructing another building to be used as shrine etc. Recollecting those days Swami Vijnanananda later said:¹⁷ 'There you see a large field [to the south] in front of the Math-building; tide-water of the Ganga used to flood this area. There were many pits and ditches. Small ships of the Hore-Miller Company were being repaired there. When the land was purchased, we levelled it with rubble from the near-by brick factory. We had to take a lot of trouble for that work. G. T. Road was covered in jungle. People used to get frightened to walk on that road even in daytime. I had to go from Salkia to Serampore, even up to Konnagar, to do all this work.'

At first the courtyard in front of the cottage was levelled, as a new building was to be constructed there. Work started in the month of April 1898.¹⁸ It was being discussed whether the existing cottage was to be dismantled and a new house constructed on its place or another floor could be erected over the existing cottage. Finally Swami Brahmananda decided to consult a renowned engineer. He came on 14th July and after inspecting the site opined that as the plinth was strong enough, another floor could be constructed on both the sides.¹⁹ Some trees in the courtyard were cut down, work on the foundation for a new building

was started, and a new plan prepared to remodel the existing cottage.

On Sunday, November 12, Holy Mother came to Nilambar Babu's garden near the Math, and from there she went to the new site to worship Sri Ramakrishna. But many do not know the actual spot where the Mother performed the worship. From some senior monks we have come to know that the place where Durga Puja was held for the first time at the Math was possibly the spot where the Mother worshipped Sri Ramakrishna. The spot is now just on the western side of Swami Abhayanandaji's office. This information seems correct, according to the present writer, as the shrine (now called the 'old shrine') was being constructed then just near that place.

Another important event took place on December 9, 1898, when Swamiji consecrated the Math at the new site. He came in a procession carrying the *ātmārāmer kauṭā* (the vessel containing the relics of Sri Ramakrishna) on his shoulder. What was the actual spot where he worshipped it? We earlier mentioned a Bel tree which was on the eastern side of the existing Sri Ramakrishna temple. Swamiji kept the *kauṭā* under that Bel tree,²⁰ worshipped it there and performed *homa*. So, the place is now being used to keep Sri Ramakrishna's big portrait in the exhibition-pavillion on the Public Celebration Day.

Construction work went on at a brisk pace. A platform was built around the Bel tree (now near Swamiji's temple) for the monks to sit on and meditate. Many trees of the southern lawn were cut down as it was decided to hold celebrations there, while many trees around the ponds and near the bank of the river were allowed to stand. The monks along with the labourers worked like machines: the shrine-building

17. Divyatmananda, *Divyaprasange*, pp. 153-54.

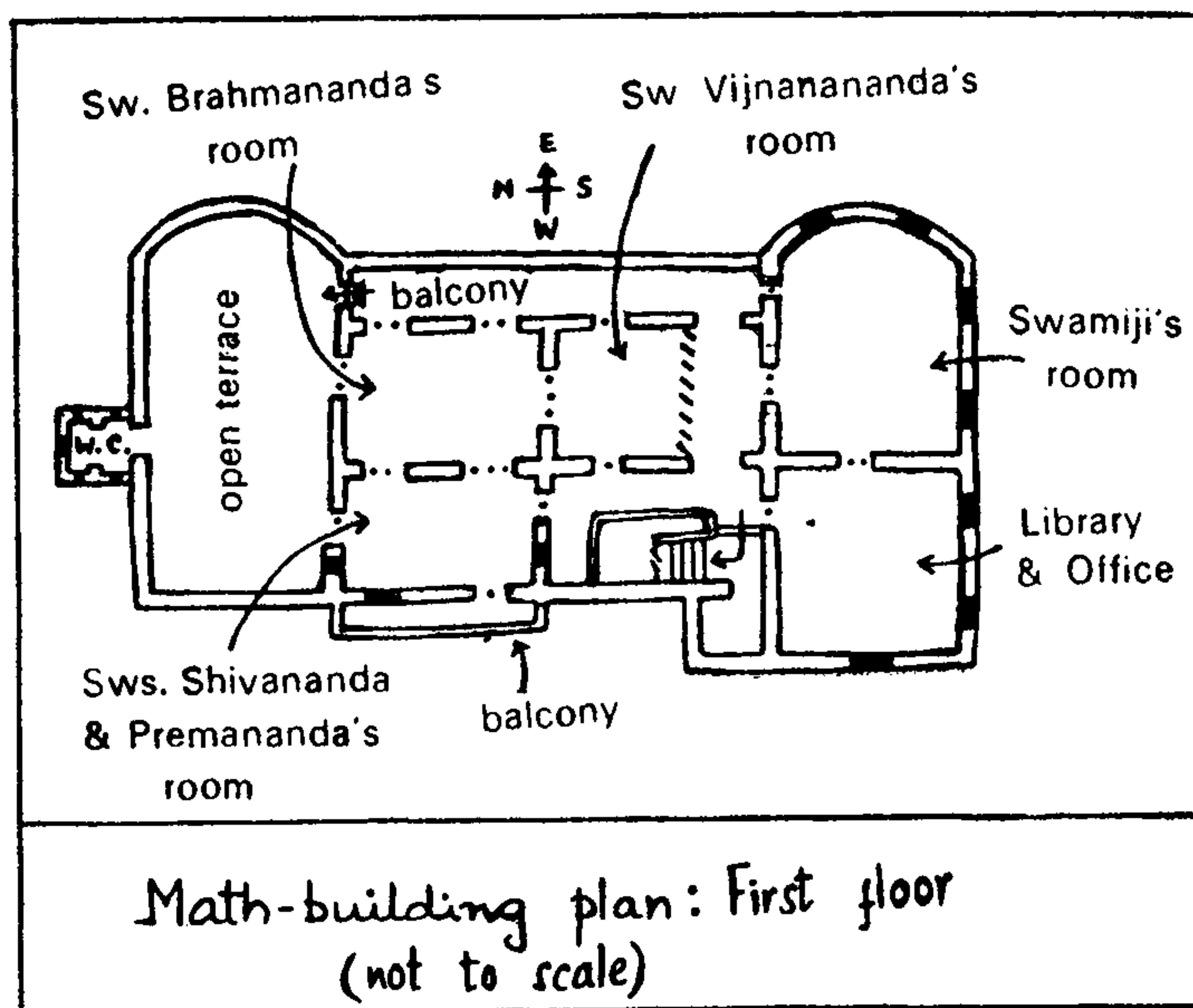
18. Gambhirananda, *Yuganāyak Vivek-ānanda*, vol. 3, p. 174.

19. Belur Math Diary, 14 July 1898 (unpublished).

20. Information from the late Swami Bodhatmanandaji, and Swami Nirvananandaji. Some other senior monks also confirmed this fact.

was constructed in seven months, and remodelling of the Math-building and servants' quarters took less than five months. In a little over eight months (April to December) building construction and remodelling were completed.²¹ The courtyard was levelled, though it was not paved as we find it today. During those days the level of the Math ground was much lower than it is now. It was raised by at least 3 or 3½ feet.²²

side a small urinal was constructed near the drain. The staircase for going to the first floor was made of wooden planks. The top floor, which was completely new, had five rooms, but the northern portion was kept as an open terrace. To its north a toilet was constructed. Facing the river a wide balcony and on the west a small balcony were also added. So in all there were twelve rooms after remodelling the old cottage. The remodelled building became the main



In the old building there were four rooms and the eastern verandah on the ground floor. Swami Vijnanananda divided the hall into two rooms and a small passage. Another room was constructed on the south-west side. A very small room and western verandah were also added. On the northern

monastery or Math. (See the attached plan.)

The servants' quarters was not changed much. There were already three rooms. Only a passage was constructed over it connecting the Math-building with the shrine-building.

The first floor of the shrine-building, though renovated in 1970, remains today as it was in 1899. At first the outside steps were of wooden planks. Later Swami Vijnanananda added the inside staircase

21. Swami Brahmanananda's Diary (unpublished).

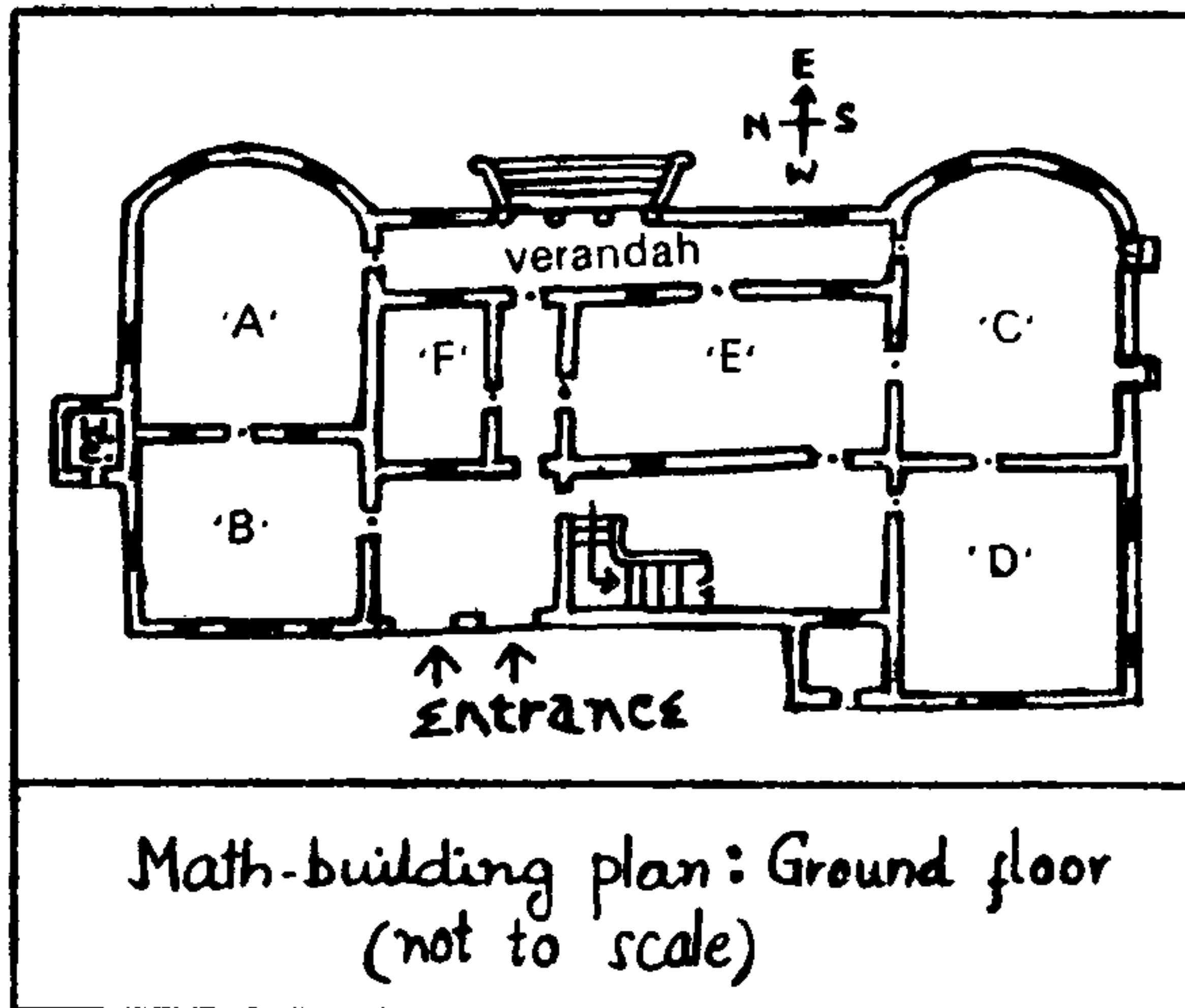
22. Information from Swami Nityaswarup-anandaji.

used for carrying consecrated food. The ground floor was remodelled after many years. Bricks, clay, lime, and *surki* were used in the construction of the buildings as cement was not then available.

Starting of the new Math

On January 2, 1899, the Math was shifted from Nilambar Babu's garden to the present site, though some monks and brahmacharis had started living at the new Math from 9 December 1898, the day of consecration. On January 2 Swamiji was at Deoghar from where he returned in the last week of the month. It is now difficult to say who the monks and brahmacharis were then at the Math in January as many were

Swamiji lived in the southeastern room of the first floor, which is now kept as a memorial. The adjacent room, where Swami Nirvananandaji now stays, was the office and library room. Swami Vijnanananda lived in the small room which is now being used as the pantry of Swami Nirvananandaji. When Swami Vijnanananda left for Allahabad, Swami Subodhananda started staying in that room. The northeastern room, in which Swami Abhayandaji now lives, was Swami Brahmananda's room. Swamis Shivananda and Premananda both lived in the northwestern room. The rooms on the ground floor were used by other inmates. Swami Turiyananda lived in the room marked 'E', whereas Swamis Advaitananda, Nirmalananda and



busy in other centres and also in relief operations outside. But of the following members we may be certain—Swamis Brahmananda, Shivananda, Turiyananda, Saradananda, Advaitananda, Premananda, Sadananda, Virajananda, Vimalananda, Nirmalananda, Prakashananda, Bodhananda, and Brahmacharis Hariprasanna, Sudhir, Suren, Brojen, and Parbat.

others lived in the room marked 'B' (see the plan). In the room marked 'C' Swamis Atmananda, Shuddhananda, Nirbhayananda, Br. Jnan and others lived. Swami Saradananda, Br. Brojen and others were in the room marked 'D', and room 'F' was used as the store. Below the staircase there was arrangement for keeping tobacco, lanterns, etc. The room marked 'A' was used as a

visitors' room and also served as a multi-purpose room: though guests used to stay there, it was also used as a lecture room and music room. Musical instruments like harmonium, pakhwaj, tabla, tanpura, etc., and barbells, dumb-bells and other instruments for physical exercise were kept there. (These instruments for physical exercise are now at the Probationers' Training Centre for the use of the brahmacharis there.) Except the visitors' room, in all other rooms there were cots (bedsteads) for the inmates.²³ Swamiji himself paid twenty rupees to purchase quilts for the brahmacharis.²⁴ Swami Brahmananda used to keep a pair of dumb-bells and a pair of clubs in his room for his daily exercise, which he used to take after morning meditation.²⁵ Swami Saradananda used to exercise in the afternoon.²⁶

As said earlier, the first floor of the shrine-building now exists as it was constructed, though the ground floor has been remodelled. There were three rooms above, of which the southern room was used as the shrine, while the northern one was used as *śayan-ghar* (bedroom) for Sri Ramakrishna, though the clothes and other things used in the shrine were also kept there. The third room was behind these rooms and was used as a meditation room. There were two rooms on the ground floor—the eastern room was used as refectory, and the western one, which is now a part of the Math-office, was the kitchen. In between these two rooms, there was some space (in later years converted into the present Math-office) which was open with some pillars on the

southern side. It was used as a place for dining and also for dressing vegetables.²⁷

The floor of the shrine was paved with decorated tiles, and a hanging chandelier was fixed just in front of the altar.

Describing the trees near the Math-building and the river Swamiji wrote to Miss Christine Greenstidel on July 6, 1901:

We have two huge mango trees, one Panas (jack-fruit), and one Nim (margosa), making a beautiful grove just in front of the monastery building. Under them is my favourite place. Fruits are over. We have eaten several thousand mangoes from these two trees. There are some panases left yet.... Then our shads are coming up the river. As I am writing, the waves are splashing against the house, and beneath me are hundreds of small fishing boats, all seeking to catch shads.... The one thing that is disturbing me is the small steamers continuously going up and down this huge river. They make too much noise.

During those days the river was very near the Math-building. Later the embankment was constructed under the supervision of Swami Vijnanananda, thus driving the river a little further away from the building (*see the photos*). Some years later the river moved further away because the embankment was extended further.

Daily life at the Math

It is interesting to note the daily life of the monks and brahmacharis during those days at the Math.²⁸ An inmate used to ring the rising bell at 4 a.m. After washing, all the inmates had to go to the shrine and meditate till six. From 6 to 6.30 almost all used to go to Swami Brahmananda's room

23. Information from Revered Swami Bhuteshanandaji.

24. Sarkar, *Vivekānanda O Sangha*, p. 189.

25. Brahmachari Akshayachaitanya, *Brahmananda-Līlākathā* (Calcutta: Nababharat Publishers, 1383 B.S.), p. 132.

26. Swami Saradananda's Diary, 17 May 1899 (unpublished).

27. Information from Revered Swamis Vireswaranandaji and Abhayanandaji.

28. These details were obtained from Revered Swamis Vireswaranandaji, Bhuteshanandaji, Abhayanandaji, and some other senior monks like Swami Dharmanandaji, Devanandaji, and Shivaswarupanandaji.

where *bhajans* (devotional songs) and spiritual talks by the Swami were held. At 8.30 they had to go to the dining place where on most days *mudī* (puffed rice) was the only thing for breakfast. Only a few monks used to take tea. Swamiji and one or two senior monks used to sit on a bench in the western verandah of the Math-building to take tea. (That bench is still kept in the same place.) After breakfast all went to attend to their respective duties like office work, dressing vegetables, shrine work, agriculture, etc. The bell for lunch was at twelve noon. Rice, *dāl* (lentil soup), and one vegetable curry constituted the usual fare, though some *capātis* (unleavened wheat bread) were also served. The *prasād* (consecrated food) consisting of rice, vegetable fries and curries, and *pāyas* (milk pudding), was served equally among all—everyone getting a little. For the worship of Sri Ramakrishna half-a-seer of rice was allotted which was offered in the shrine at noon. From 12.30 to 2.30 p.m. many used to take rest, some used to study scriptures in their rooms, and Swamis Premananda and Shivananda used to discuss among themselves the management of the Math. At 2.30 one of the direct disciples took a scripture class for the brahmacharis and junior monks while the others used to go for their own duties. The class continued till 4. There was no provision for evening tea during those days, but those who liked to take a cup of tea could get it. In the afternoon young monks and brahmacharis like Swami Prakashananda and others used to play football in the southern lawn in front of the Math-building.²⁹ In the evening after *ārati* all used to meditate, after which all had to assemble in the visitors' room where *bhajans* and spiritual discussions were held. Swamis Turiyananda, Shivananda, Saradananda and other direct disciples used to answer the questions

raised by other inmates on spiritual and scriptural matters. The supper bell was at 9 p.m. when *capātis*, a vegetable curry, and/or *dāl* were served along with consecrated *pāyas*. After dinner another scripture-class was held in the eastern verandah where one would read till eleven when all retired to sleep.

It was said earlier that there were not many inmates permanently living at the Math, as monks were needed by other centres and relief operations now and then. Even Swamiji's stay at the Math totalled less than eighteen months between 1899 and 1902. Swami Brahmananda also had to stay in Calcutta for a long time as he was then the President of the Calcutta branch. Among the other direct disciples many used to come to the Math and then again go out to other branches for work. Swami Vijnanananda, the main architect, stayed at the Math permanently till 1900. New boys were also coming at that time to join the monastic order. It is therefore difficult now to say who used to do which work at the Math in those days. Yet we present here a general picture of the allotment of duties at the Math.³⁰

Swami Premananda's main duty was in the shrine.³¹ He used to do *pūjā*, assisted by Swamis Atmananda and Nischayananda.³² When he had to go out for some business Swami Shivananda used to substitute for him. Swami Saradananda used to look after official correspondence, keep accounts, take evening classes for the brahmacharis and junior monks. Swami Turiyananda's duty was to teach meditation and take scripture classes. Swamis Advaitananda and Subodhananda worked in the kitchen-garden.

³⁰. Swami Saradananda's Diary and Belur Math Diary (both unpublished).

³¹. Information from Revered Swami Vireswaranandaji.

³². Swami Abjakananda, *Swāmijir Padaprante* (Belur Math Ramakrishna Mission Saradapith, (1964), pp. 151 and 244.

Swami Vijnanananda's duty was general construction. Swami Nirmalananda assisted Swami Saradananda in the office work. Swami Prakashananda was the *bhāṇḍārī* (store-keeper), Swami Bodhananda and some other junior monks worked in the kitchen-garden, whereas Swami Atmananda worked in the shrine—he had to clean and sweep the three rooms and two verandahs of the first floor in the shrine-building. He also helped the *bhāṇḍārī* by making *capāṭis* both in the morning and evening.³³ Swami Nischayananda used to ring the bell at scheduled times, and worked in the shrine. Swami Virajananda had to serve Swamiji and cook for him. When he went to Mayavati, Swami Achalananda (who was then living at the Math but had not yet taken monastic orders; he became a monk in May, 1902) took up Swami Virajananda's duty of attending on Swamiji, which service lasted from morning till ten at night. Swamis Premananda and Shivananda looked after the general management of the Math. Swamiji never interfered in anyone's work. He generally used to take scripture classes in the afternoon and conduct *bhajans* at night after meditation, and also met the visitors. Sister Nivedita, though she was running a school for girls in Calcutta, used to come to the Math twice a week to give talks to the brahmacharis on physiology, botany, the arts (including painting), and the kindergarten system.³⁴ Swamiji used to take classes on the Vedas, Upaniṣads, *Vedānta-Sūtras*, *Gītā*, *Bhāgavata* and other scriptures, and had himself taught for a time Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī* (Sanskrit grammar). Swamis Saradananda and Turiyananda used to take evening question-classes, classes for the study of Sanskrit and of Eastern and Western philosophies. The junior monks

and brahmacharis formed themselves into a body and elected a superintendent from among themselves every month.³⁵ While Swamis Premananda and Shivananda were responsible for seeing that the daily duties were properly carried out and the needs of the Math attended to, Swamis Brahmananda and Saradananda looked after the organization side. Swami Saradananda held that unless the inmates, specially the juniors, were given freedom of decision in their sphere, with responsibilities to shoulder, they would never learn to stand on their own feet. Thus he turned his attention seriously to training the brahmacharis. When Swamiji was preparing to go to the West for the second time, Swami Saradananda wrote in his diary: 'Thinking about the method to be adopted in the Math after S.V.³⁶ goes. Course of study: History-Phil³⁷-Science-language-grammar-exercise and music. One day perfect rest.'³⁸

Helpers at the Math

The monks and brahmacharis used to do almost all the work at the Math. During the early days there were not any paid workers except the cook and the gardener. Sri Haru Thakur was the first cook. After him Sri Prabhakar Thakur was appointed. He was a good soul and spiritually advanced, for which Holy Mother and Swami Brahmananda liked him very much. When any guest came to the Math after lunch-time, Sri Prabhakar Thakur used to offer his meal to the guest, himself being contented with only *ciḍā* (flattened rice). Chakku was the *māli* (gardener), though at night he worked as the gate-keeper also. He was a good wrestler and Swami Brahmananda liked him very much. Sometimes the Swami used to wrestle with him.

35. Belur Math Diary (unpublished).

36. S. V. means Swami Vivekananda.

37. Philosophy.

38. Swami Saradananda's Diary, 26 May 1899 (unpublished).

33. Ibid., p. 151.

34. *Udbodhan*, vol. 1, no. 3; see the article captioned *Ramakrishna Mission*.

Later two more workers were appointed—Sri Ananta Bagdi, who was a helper in many ways, and Sri Rakhal Das, who was a washerman. They both lived outside the Math with their families. Sri Das used to wash clothes in the pond which is now to the north of the Show Room of the Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha. His son, who later became a doctor, asked his father to give up the job of a washerman, but he did not agree. He said to his son, “Swamiji asked me to do this job. So, I must do it till I die.”

In the attached map a flower garden is shown in the courtyard of the shrine- and Math-buildings. That garden was under the special care and supervision of Swami Brahmananda who planted there many rose plants. The size of the roses was so big that Swamiji, seeing them, once exclaimed, ‘What a job Raja has done!’³⁹ On the eastern side of the Pachā-pukur there was a kitchen-garden where vegetables were grown. Near it there were a number of fruit trees, many of which Swami Brahmananda planted himself.⁴⁰ The names of those trees still surviving were mentioned by us earlier. The Swami planted there two mango trees—Alphonso and *bhuto-bombāi*—and five *bātābi lebu* (Pomelo) plants in a row. Doctors had advised Swamiji to take pomelo juice, so some saplings were brought and planted there. Swami Brahmananda planted four more trees on the bank of the river. Those trees—Sweta Chandan (sandal), Pun-nag, Nagalingam, and Thonga-bat (Banyan)—exist even now between the Math-building and Swami Brahmananda temple. The Swami also planted some magnolias at the Math.

Monastic members and branch centres

It is difficult to mention the names of all the monks and brahmacharis of the Rama-

krishna Order of those days. The *Udbodhan*, the Bengali journal of the Order, wrote in 1899 : ‘There were 18-19 youths in the dilapidated house at Baranagar who were waiting for the proper time, having firm faith in God. The number has doubled by now.’⁴¹ This means that there were more than thirty-five members in 1899. By 1902 the number might have reached fifty. At that time there were all the direct disciples, except Swami Yogananda who passed away in 1899. Besides, Swamis Sadananda, Shuddhananda, Virajananda, Vimalananda, Nirmalananda, Swarupananda, Prakash-ananda, Bodhananda, Atmananda, Kalyan-ananda, Nischayananda, Paramananda, Nirbhayananda, Satchidananda (senior), Satchidananda (junior), Dhirananda, Satyakamananda, Sureswarananda, Nityananda, Somananda and others were in the Order. Among the brahmacharis there were Jnan, Nandalal, Brojen, Harendranath (Nadu) and many others. Sister Nivedita was also in the Order.

By July 4, 1902, there were eight branches of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, though the two foreign branches can also be included in the list. Two in Calcutta and one each in Madras, Varanasi, Mayavati, Kankhal, Sargachi, Dacca, New York and California—these ten and the Belur Math, in all eleven centres were in full swing during that time. In Calcutta weekly meetings of the Mission were being held at 57 Ramkanta Basu Street where Swami Saradananda used to go for lectures.⁴² When Holy Mother came to Calcutta she would live in a house at Bosepara Lane. Swami Yogananda assisted by Swami Satchidananda (senior) and Br. Krishnalal (later Swami Dhirananda) served her. The girls’ school run by Sister Nivedita was also considered a non-official branch of the Ramakrishna Mission. Swami Ramakrishnananda was in

³⁹. Akshayachaitanya, *Brahmānanda-Lilākathā*, p. 155.

⁴⁰. Ibid., p. 154.

⁴¹. *Udbodhan*, vol. 1, no. 3.

⁴². Ibid., vol. 1, nos. 1 and 4.

charge of the Madras branch. Swamis Sadananda and Paramananda assisted him at different times till 1902. At Varanasi Swami Shivananda started the Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama on July 4, 1902. The Ramakrishna Home of Service at Varanasi, though in close contact with Belur Math, was not a branch of either the Math or the Mission then. The Kankhal branch was started in June 1901 by Swami Kalyanananda, later assisted by Prakashananda. Swami Akhandananda started the Sargachi Ashrama in 1897. Later Swamis Nityananda and Sureswarananda went there to assist him. At Mayavati there were Swamis Swarupananda, Virajananda, Vimalananda and others. The Dacca branch, though started by Swamis Virajananda and Prakashananda in 1899, had no monastic members and was then being run by the local devotees. Swami Abhedananda was running the branch in New York and Swami Turiyananda in San Francisco (California). Like the Ramakrishna Home of Service at Varanasi, the Brahmavadin Club in Allahabad, the Vedanta Society at Ulsoor (near Bangalore) and some other organizations were in close touch with the monks of the Ramakrishna Order till Swamiji's passing away.

The names of the Monks and brahmacharis at Belur Math in January 1899 were mentioned earlier. It was also said that all of them did not stay there permanently as they had to go for relief work and to other centres frequently. But some of them stayed almost permanently till Swamiji's passing away. Among them we may name Swamis Premananda, Advaitananda, Saradananda, Atmananda, Bodhananda, Nischayananda, Nirmalananda, and Brahmacharis Nandalal, Brojen and Harendranath.

From 1899 to 1900 large-scale relief operations were conducted in six places, though small-scale relief was a regular feature.⁴³ In 1899 flood-relief was con-

ducted at Ghogra (Bihar), land-slide relief in Darjeeling (Bengal), plague relief in Calcutta, and famine-relief at Kishengarh (Rajputana). Next year famine-relief was conducted at Kishengarh (Rajputana) and Khandwa (Central Provinces), flood-relief at Behala-Bishnupur (Bengal) and plague-relief in Calcutta. (In 1897 Swamis Akhandananda, Trigunatitananda, Virajananda, and Prakashananda had conducted famine-relief operations at Murshidabad, Dinajpur, Deoghar and Dakshineswar respectively.) In 1899-1900 Swamis Kalyanananda, Atmananda, Nirmalananda, and Br. Brojen worked at Kishengarh, which ultimately gave birth to an orphanage accommodating fifty boys and twenty girls. Swamis Sureswarananda (then Br. Suren) and Nityananda were sent by Swamiji to Murshidabad to help Swami Akhandananda. In the plague-relief work in Calcutta Swamis Shivananda, Sadananda, Nityananda, Atmananda, and Sister Nivedita performed a miracle. It may be mentioned here that Sri Yatindra Nath Mukherji, who later became a revolutionary and died of the injuries incurred while challenging the British soldiers in a gun-battle in Orissa, was also a member of the volunteer party in that plague-relief, and thus became well-known to Sister Nivedita and Swamiji. (Sri Mukherji, then a young boy, was famous as 'Bāghā Jatin' as he had killed a tiger in a direct fight open-handed.)

These frequent relief operations, extensive preaching, and the branches of the Belur Math needed many monks and brahmacharis. For this reason there were not many members staying permanently at the Math, which sometimes caused difficulties in running the Math efficiently. Moreover, during those days the Belur village was malarial, and many inmates used to fall ill frequently.

(to be continued)

Mission, publication year not mentioned (Belur Math archives).

43. First General Report of the Ramakrishna

PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

SWAMI BUDHANANDA

The 'Practice of the Presence of God' is considered to be 'the best rule of a holy life', one of the easiest yet most effective of spiritual disciplines.

These well-known words 'Practice of the Presence of God', were introduced into Christendom in the latter part of the seventeenth century by a Carmelite monk, Brother Lawrence by name. Through practice of this discipline Brother Lawrence, a very lowly person, became an illumined soul, a saint.

The central purpose of this discipline is to cultivate the habit of quickening the soul into the sense of an abiding Divine Presence and growing therein. How is this done? Brother Lawrence uttered a simple saying before he died at the age of eighty. In those few simple but memorable words he summed up the methodology of this discipline:

If in 'this' life we would know the serene peace of paradise, we must school ourselves in familiar, humble and loving converse with God.¹

This discipline is a form of Bhakti-yoga. Any worshipper of a personal God, anywhere in the world, no matter what his concept of God, can practise this discipline with great benefit. The characteristic feature of it is utter *simplicity* and *directness*. Brother Lawrence once said:

Men invent means and methods of coming to God's love. They learn rules and set up devices to remind them of that love, and it seems like a world of trouble to bring oneself into the consciousness of God's presence. Yet it might be so simple.... There is need of neither art nor science. *We go as we are to Him, unpretending, single hearted.*²

The teachings of Brother Lawrence are collected in that small but great book called *Practice of the Presence of God*, or sometimes simply *Brother Lawrence*, which has undergone innumerable editions and has exerted an influence on Christian spiritual life beyond all proportions to its size for about three centuries. The book contains four conversations and fifteen letters, which make less than fifty pages of reading material.

The life of Brother Lawrence offers us a great spiritual hope and inspiration, for he is a shining example of how a late beginner, without pronounced gifts, can rise from the humblest position in life to great heights of spiritual illumination.

The premonastic name of Brother Lawrence was Nicholas Herman. Born of humble parents in 1611, he was a native of Lorraine in France. At the age of eighteen, when Nicholas was in the army, a revelation of God came to him. And it came in a very casual way through a common sight. One day in mid winter he was looking at a leafless tree in a meadow. As he was gazing at the trunk and the branches of the tree, in which life had been put to sleep, 'he experienced a vision of the tree as it would be in summer, garbed in countless thousands of leaves and flowers, then fruits. In that vision he felt a sense of God's power and bountifulness that never left him. As he reflected on God's way with the tree, *he was at once converted.*'³

He felt that he had been specially favoured in the revelation, and he took it as a call from above and thenceforth he tried to loosen his worldly ties.

Many years later he said that the leafless

1. Br. Lawrence, *Practice of the Presence of God*, 15th letter. All further references are to this book, unless otherwise stated.

2. Third conversation.

3. First conversation.

tree had '*first flashed in my soul,*'⁴ *the fact of God.* And this kindled in his heart such fullness of love for God that it did not have to increase all his life. When he was thus convinced about the fact of God, and His wisdom, power and goodness, 'he had no other care but to reject scrupulously every other thought in order that he might perform each act for the love of God.'⁵

Nicholas was severely wounded while working in the army; and after that, all his life he walked with a pronounced limp. In the years following his discharge from the army he worked as a footman in an establishment in Paris. It would appear that he had a certain fitness for that menial job. For, as he himself described, 'he was a great awkward fellow who broke everything !'⁶

About 1666, at the age of fifty-five, he entered the Paris monastery of the Discalced (barefooted) Carmelites. Though he had this great spiritual experience before joining the monastery, he suffered for ten long years from various doubts, tribulations and temptations. He had difficulties in schooling the mind to reject desires and vacillation. And he had his doubts about salvation also. But through all his trials and tribulations, doubts and vacillations, he stuck to one idea, which he would reason out this way:

I have entered the spiritual life purely for the love of God, attempting to act only in accordance with His will; whatever shall become of me, whether I be lost or saved, I will continue always in the path of God's love and will. At least there will be this to my credit: until death I had put my every effort into loving and serving Him.⁷

The spiritual discipline he took upon himself was *to fix the mind on God and do every work given him from His sake in all*

love and dedication. Having given himself up wholly to God, he renounced for love of God all that was not He. As he himself said: 'I began to live as if there was *no one save God and me in the world.*'⁸

As often as he could, he placed himself as a worshipper before God, fixing his mind in His holy presence, recalling it when found wandering away from Him. This proved to be a painful exercise, but he persisted through all difficulties.

Unlike many of us, he was very conscious of his own faults; but he refused to be too discouraged over them. He would take every care of omission directly to God and confess before Him, but he did not ask for forgiveness. After confessing before God he went back in peace to his accustomed love and adoration of God. As his struggles continued, he also came to have a feeling of sadness when he thought of his unworthiness and the bounty of God's grace. 'Often I fell,' he said, 'but presently I rose again.'⁹

When this sort of inner struggle continued for years on end, he was almost resigned to the idea that perhaps his life would pass only in struggle. Then, suddenly one day he had a second illumination. About this experience he said:

My soul escaping tiresome discussions attained a profound inner peace, as if it had come to its own home and place for rest. Since that day I walk before God simply, humbly, in faith and lovingly, nor do I do anything that may be apart from His design.¹⁰

At about this time he once tried living a solitary life in the manner of the hermits of the East. But he did not find peace in a life of complete withdrawal.

In the monastery, Brother Lawrence, as Nicholas was now known, *did not practise*

4. Ibid.

5. Third conversation.

6. First conversation.

7. Second conversation.

8. First letter; in some editions, twelfth letter.

9. Second letter; in some editions, fifth letter.

10. Ibid.

the usual devotions but laboured to convince himself that he was always in the presence of God. This created misunderstanding among others. But his devotions continued all the same in their own way. Soon he had the vivid feeling of God's nearness, and he continually sought to be in His presence.

The superior in the monastery assigned him work in the kitchen. In that kitchen he worked for fifteen years. At first the work did not appear congenial. But by his spirit of devotion he was soon able to lift himself to the presence of God in the midst of pots and pans and the clatter of dishes, as he could in the silence of the chapel.

One of his most memorable passages gives us an inkling of the height of spiritual excellence he reached while doing his allotted work in the kitchen. He said:

With me my time of labour is no longer different from the time of prayer. Amid the clatter and confusion of my kitchen, when numerous people are calling various orders, I hold to God, and with as great tranquillity as though I were on my knees at the blessed sacrament.... In His service I turn the cake that is on the pan before me. When that service is done I kneel down in submission before Him, for it is through His grace I have work to do. Then I rise happier than a king. For me it is enough that I pick up a straw from the ground for the love of Him.¹¹

Here it is difficult to say whether he attained greater excellence in Bhakti-yoga or in Karma-yoga. In him both these attained-excellences became a single stream of a superior spiritual power, which does not manifest itself on dotted lines but in spontaneous expression of inexpressible and constant movement towards God.

The methods Brother Lawrence used for his devotions were so personal and original that a complaint was lodged against him with the superior. The charges were his inactivity in prayer, his self-reliance and his delusion. An enquiry was made. Brother

Lawrence explained how he had trained himself to live continuously in God's presence and how he accomplished his work of a scullion or a cook without losing communion with Him. Even more than his explanation, his very countenance was effective by reflecting 'a winning inward sweetness and calm'.¹²

From the age of seventy-eight through the last two years of his life Brother Lawrence suffered from physical infirmities. What he wrote from a sick-bed to the Mother Superior of a Convent will be found full of solace and inspiration by those who are in a similar situation:

Lift up your heart to Him; the best little thought of Him will be acceptable. You need not cry very loud. He is nearer to us than we know.¹³ They are happy who suffer with Him.... Worldly people find sickness a thing of pain, grief and distress, not a favour from God. Those who can think of it as His doing, a part of His mercy and means for our salvation, they find in it sweetness and salvation.¹⁴

As his end came nearer, his vision became clearer. He said:

In a little while I must go to Him. What a comfort I find in faith! By so much is my sight clear that I can say, no more do I believe but I see.¹⁵

A few days before his death he said:

I do not know how God will use me. But I am continuously happy. All the world knows distress and pain; but I, undeserving, am filled with joy so great that I can hardly contain it.¹⁶

He passed away on February 12, 1691, painless and in peace, to a new phase of

12. Ibid.

13. Seventh letter; in some editions fourth letter.

14. Eleventh letter

15. Ibid.

16. Twelfth letter; in some editions thirteenth letter.

11. Fourth conversation (additional matter).

companionship with God, leaving behind him a spiritual legacy of great value.

2

Brother Lawrence never said: this is my message. 'All his life he took pains not to come into the stare of men.' He was no preacher or teacher. All his teachings were collected from a few short writings, letters and conversations. From these we may gather these main tenets of his teachings:

(1) In spiritual life the most important fundamental and yet the simplest of things to do is to *practise the presence of God always and everywhere*. 'There is not in the world a manner of life more delightful and rewarding than this.'¹⁷

(2) 'For the right practice of this discipline, one must empty the heart of all else, to permit God its sole possession.'¹⁸ And as God must possess it *wholly*, so He must be free to dispose of everything as He pleases, and to employ the heart as He wills, through our utter surrender.

(3) From this it follows that 'we must make unreserved renunciation of everything which we are sensible does not lead to God.'¹⁹

(4) 'Then we need only recognize Him intimately present with us; address our intention to Him over and over; entreat His assistance in knowing how best to discharge those duties, offering every act to Him before we undertake it, and rendering thanks for His aid when we have finished.'²⁰

(5) Brother Lawrence was of the view that the most effective way of going to God is that of doing one's common business without any purpose of pleasing men but purely for love of Him.

(6) Another most important teaching of Brother Lawrence is that 'one deludes one-

self in believing that times of prayer should be considered different from other times.'²¹ As he puts it, 'action has its responsibilities to God, as prayer has its.'

(7) The main thing is to place once for all our unreserved trust in God, completely surrendering ourselves to Him, and to rest assured that He will not fail us.

These, in a general way, are what Brother Lawrence believed to be the important facts of spiritual life.

For those who would like to practise the presence of God, Brother Lawrence suggested four specific steps:

(1) *The first is great purity of life*. One should guard oneself fully lest one do, say or think a thing displeasing to God. In case of failure one should immediately repent in all sincerity and humility and entreat for forgiveness.

(2) *The second step is a positive faithfulness in the practice of His presence*. One has to keep the soul's eye upon God, calmly, trustfully, humbly, with a love that leaves no room for care or doubt.

(3) *The third step is to look to God when taking up any common task*. A prayer should be offered in the beginning; there should be a reliance during the discharge of the task; and when the task is completed thanks should be given again.

(4) *The fourth step, which in a sense is an esoteric or a personal one, is to make an offering up of words of love in silence*. In a hidden manner, as it were (because it should not be known that this converse is passing between the devotee and the Lord), such words should be addressed to the Lord: "O Lord, I am wholly thine," and, "O God, make my heart even as thine," or such other words of loving trust as may rise out of the occasion. One must be heedful that the mind may not wander in worldly objects; let it be steadfast to God.'²²

17. Fifth letter; in some editions second letter.

18. Ibid.

19. Fourth conversation.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. From the *Spiritual Maxims* of Br. Lawrence.

These are the four steps advocated by Brother Lawrence for the practice of the presence of God. *But he warns that one should expect difficulties in the beginning,* and yet, if one goes on practising these disciplines faithfully, it leads to the most marvellous effect on the soul, drawing down God's grace abundantly. Insensibly the soul becomes illumined and contains the con-

stant vision of God, loving and loved.

This is the holiest, most real, and most inspiring of all manners of devotion.

Such are the wonderfully simple life and teachings of Brother Lawrence, from which we can certainly draw *inspiration for the enrichment of our own personal approach to God.*

(to be continued)

THE MESSAGE OF THE RIVER

(A Musically Supported Narration)

SWAMI SASTRANANDA

[One of the most disturbing, if not frightening, trends of modern civilization has been man's callousness towards, and misuse or abuse of, the most precious gifts of God and nature—namely human life itself, water, air, vegetation and the life. The vital value of water, which in a way constitutes the very basic support and essence of life and civilization, has been insufficiently understood; and both in the East and the West, including India, the great sources and streams of water have been recklessly wasted and callously polluted. Unless the trend is urgently reversed, not merely through the utilitarian outlook of economics and scientific technology, but also through the reverential approach of religion and culture, man is bound to land himself soon in a disastrous situation. To bring home this truth as far as possible to our people, the feature 'The Message of the River' was presented as the opening programme of the Combined Birthday Celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna. Holy Mother Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, at the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chandigarh, on 15 November 1980, by students—boys and girls—of college and school levels. The narration was in Hindi. Its English version is presented here for a wider circle of interested lovers of nature and culture.—*Author.*]

Opening group chant

ॐ आपो हि ष्ठा मयो भुवस्ता न ऊर्जे दधातन । महे
रणाय चक्षसे । यो वः शिवतमो रसस्तस्य भाज-
यतेऽह नः । उशतीरिव मातरः । तस्मा अरं
गमाम वो यस्य क्षयाय जिन्वथ । आपो जनयथा
च नः ।

First narrator

O waters, you are verily the sources of bliss. Grant us nourishment, beautiful minds and vision. Like affectionate mothers, feed us with

your own most auspicious essence. Raise us to your celestial abode; and on earth, generate for us waters of life and bliss.¹

ॐ मधुवाता ऋतायते मधुक्षरन्ति सिन्धवः ।
माध्वीर्नः सन्त्वोषधीः ॥ मधु नक्तमुतोषसि मधुमत्-
पार्थिवग्ं रजः । मधुद्यौरस्तु नः पिता ॥ मधुमान्नो
वनस्पतिर्मधुमाग्ं अस्तु सूर्यः । माध्वीर्गावो भवन्तु नः ॥
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

1. *Taittirīya Samhitā*, 4.1.5.

Group song

[*Elaborating the substance of the Peace-chant, which runs as follows:*]

May the winds blow gently, bringing to us sweet breezes ;
 May the rivers flow sweetly with their waters cool and clear ;
 May the herbs become sweetly healing and beneficial ;
 May days and nights be sweetly salubrious ;
 May the very particles of mother earth become charged with sweetness ;
 May the heavenly regions give us sweet shelter ;
 May the trees provide us with their sweet produce ;
 May the sun shine on us with sweet radiance ;
 May cattle and kine nourish us with their nectarine milk.²

With what joy and reverence is Mother Nature looked upon in these Vedic prayers, specially the rivers and their waters !

Water to the ancients was 'god' and 'goddess'; divinity itself—pure and purifying, potent generator and nourisher of life—and the granter of final, restful refuge as well.

Water was also the means of purification and worship. It was water which was used for various sacred purposes—holy bath, sprinkling, consecratory offering and sipping, worship and completion of a holy act.

To them, water certainly was not merely a physical or chemical substance, cheaply available for any use or misuse. In fact, they considered it a sin to pollute the waters. That is why there was the injunction :

नाप्सु मूत्रपुराषं कुर्यात्, न निष्ठीवेत्, न विवसनः
 स्नायात् ।

Don't answer calls of nature in the waters, don't spit in them—no, don't even proceed to bathe in them in vulgar nakedness.³

It is, therefore, not to be wondered that rivers were treated as veritable goddesses,

treated as objects of pilgrimage and worshipped, and their names adopted by human beings as their own, as a sign of auspiciousness and blessing.

First narrator

This, their devotion and culture, culminated in the one glorious object, with the magical name GANGA—a name, the very utterance of which evokes sentiments of holiness, purity and reverence in pious, cultured minds—even to this day ;

GANGA, which along with Gāyatrī, Gītā and Guru, forms the four pillars of Hindu religious tradition ;

GANGA, which the Vedas and the Upanisads, Gītā and Purāṇas, sages and saints extol in their lofty *mantras* and soul-stirring hymns ;

GANGA, which is considered as having her source in the lofty, heavenly regions, issuing from the blessed feet of the Supreme Being Viṣṇu and through the matted locks of the Great God, Mahādeva Śiva ;

GANGA, whose very touch could confer not only absolution from sins and impurities but even *mukti* or Liberation itself.

Second narrator

Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa extols Gaṅgā as his own manifestation among the waters.
 स्रोतसामस्मि जाह्नवी ।⁴

Even the great Jñāni, the Advaitin-hero Śrī Śaṅkarācārya bursts out into an ecstatic prayer to Mother Gaṅga :

देवि सुरेश्वरि भगवति गङ्गे,
 त्रिभुवन-तारिणि तरल-तरङ्गे ।
 शंकरमौलिविहारिणि विमले,
 मम मतिरास्तां तव पदकमले ॥

2. Ibid., 4.2.9.

3. *Taittirīya Aranyaka*, 1.26.7.

4. *Bhagavad-Gītā*, 10.31.

हरिपदपाद्य-तरंगिणि गंगे, ।
 हिमविधुमुक्ता-धवल तरंगे ।
 दूरीकुरु मम दुष्कृति-भारं
 कुरु कृपया भव-सागर-पारम् ॥
 तव जलम्-अमलं येन निपीतं,
 परमपदं खलु तेन गृहीतम् ।
 मातर्गंगे त्वयि यो भक्तः,
 किल तं द्रष्टुं न यमः शक्तः ॥
 पतितोद्धारिणी जाह्नवि गंगे,
 खण्डित-गिरिवर-मण्डित-भंगे ।
 भीष्मजननि हे मुनिवर-कन्ये,
 पतित-निवारिणि त्रिभुवन-धन्ये ॥

Glorious Goddess Gangā! Saviour of the three worlds, sporting amid Lord Śiva's matted locks! O pure one, may my mind ever dwell at your holy feet. Holy stream, issuing from Lord Hari's blessed feet, spotlessly pure, destroy all my sins and take me across the ocean of worldliness. Those who drink your holy waters, for them is open the gateway to highest destiny; to those who are your devotees, Death dare not even approach near. Saviour of the fallen, issuing forth down the Himalayas, Mother of the great hero Bhīṣma, blessed you are in all the worlds.

Third narrator

Coming to modern times, we see the same veneration and devotion in Sri Ramakrishna.

He used to call the water of the Gangā, Brah-mavāri, that is, Brahman in the form of water. He said, 'Any person living on either bank of the Gangā has his heart changed into one like that of gods, and virtues manifest there of themselves. The wind filled with the sacred particles of the water of the Gangā purifies the land on both sides as far as it blows. By the grace of the Bhāgīrathī, the daughter of the great mountain, goodness, austerity, generosity, devotion to God, and spiritual steadfastness are always manifest in the lives of the people living in those parts of the land.' If anybody talked of worldly things for a long time or mixed with worldly people, the Master would ask him to drink a little of the water of the Gangā. If a man, averse to God and attached to worldliness, sat in any part of the sacred abode of the Divine Mother and polluted

it by worldly thoughts, he would sprinkle there the water of the Gangā. He felt much pained if he saw anybody cleaning himself with that water after answering the calls of nature.⁵

Fourth narrator

And what was the attitude and experience of the modern, rational, scientific-minded Swami Vivekananda? Let him speak in his own words:

The *Gītā* and the sacred waters of the Gangā constitute the Hinduism of the Hindus. Last time I went to the West, I also took a little of it with me, fearing it might be needed, and whenever opportunities occurred, I used to drink a few drops of it. And every time I drank, in the midst of the stream of humanity, amid the bustle of civilization, that hurry of frenzied footsteps of millions of men and women in the West, the mind at once became calm and still, as it were. That stream of men, that intense activity of the West, that clash and competition at every step, those seats of luxury and celestial opulence—Paris, London, New York, Berlin, Rome—all would disappear and I used to hear that wonderful sound of 'Hara, Hara,' to see that lonely forest on the sides of Himalayas, and feel the murmuring heavenly river coursing through the heart and brain and every artery of the body and thundering forth, 'Hara, Hara, Hara.'⁶

First narrator

Then again, there is a remarkable incident in the life of Swami Turiyananda, another disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, whom the Master described as the 'yogi mentioned in the *Gītā*'. He was by nature a *tapasvi*. At one time while staying in some lonely area of Uttar Pradesh, his body became subjected to some severe illness, but he refused to move into the village or receive any extra service or attention. He wanted to be free, independent. Brahmachari Gangaram, later

5. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1970), II.4.17.

6. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1972), vol. 7, p. 301.

Swami Gangananda, who was to look after him as his attendant, protested: 'Sir, you should not stay in this forest here. You must move into a village.' The Swami refused. 'But how can you get medical assistance here in the forest?' Gangaram protested. In reply the Swami repeated, in a ringing voice, the Sanskrit phrase, औषधो जाह्नवी तोयं वैद्यो नारायणो हरिः । —'The waters of Gangā are my medicine and the Lord Hari is my physician.' Gangaram had no further answer!

Second narrator

Yes, Mother Gaṅgā is the chief representative of all our rivers, whose very remembrance is considered holy; and so their names are invoked by the pious Hindu at the time of his purification and bathing:

गङ्गे च यमुने चैव गोदावरि सरस्वति ।

नर्मदे सिन्धु कावेरि जलेऽस्मिन् सन्निधिं कुरु ॥

May Gangā, Yamunā, Godāvarī, Sarasvatī, Narmadā, Sindhu and Kāverī sanctify this water by their presence.

Remover of all impurities, physical and mental—great indeed is her purifying power. But apparently the even greater polluting power of the present-day population was not earlier taken into account—the polluting power of the hordes of crude, selfish, greedy, ignorant yet arrogant creatures who pass under the name of 'modern world'—those who apparently know only how to grab, selfishly use, exploit and discard, desecrate, degrade and destroy the precious gifts of Mother Nature.

Third narrator

No, even this was anticipated. In fact, according to our legends, none was more alive to this danger than Mother Gaṅgā herself—of what could happen to her if she came down to this region of men.

Listen to her own story as related in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*:⁷

[Enter Gangā and Yamunā]

Mother Gangā

Yes—for the performance of his Aśva-medha Yāga, King Sagara sent out the sacrificial horse which, however, became lost. His sons came wandering to North-east India in search of it and eventually found it in a deep valley grazing at the Kapilāśrama; there they found also the great sage Kapila sitting absorbed in meditation. Without understanding his greatness or anything of his meditation, they started interrogating him crudely, abusing and taunting him as a 'horse-thief, pretending to be a yogi'—and even manhandled him. They instantly reaped the fruits of their atrocious misdeed, and were burnt to ashes.

Now, their brother Amśumān came in search of the missing horse and brothers, and found the horse there as before, though not the brothers. Only he was duly respectful to the sage, who naturally responded with great kindness. 'Take the horse and duly perform the sacrifice,' he said. Asked later about the fate of his burnt-up brothers, Kapila indicated, 'The only way to obtain salvation for these unfortunates is to get them purified by the touch of Mother Gangā, no other.'

For bringing me down from the Devaloka (Celestial Regions), both Amśumān and his son did a long term of *tapas*, but could not succeed. It was left to the grandson Bhagīratha, who by his unparalleled *tapas*—which later became famous as *Bhagīratha Prayatna*—accomplished the task.

I had to appear before him and agree to come down to earth. But I was troubled on two counts. First, who or what on earth

7. Skandha 9, chapters 8 and 9.

could bear my irresistible force as I came down. And even more than that, I was very much afraid of the human race. So many among them—great criminals and sinners—would come and wash off their sins into me and I would have to receive all that poison. What then would happen to me? How was I to save myself?

Wise and earnest Bhagīratha assured me on both counts. Firstly, the Lord Śiva would bear my force. Bhagīratha later actually proceeded to propitiate Mahādeva, the Lord of infinite wisdom, austerity, renunciation and compassion, who took me on his head as I descended from the blessed Viṣṇu-pāda—and released me as a smooth stream for the welfare of the world.

The same Bhagīratha further assured me: 'Mother, there is a way out of the other apprehension also. True, many sinners will come to wash off their sins into you; but great and noble sages and saints, holy god-men who can purify the world by their very presence will also come to you; and by bathing in your waters they will purify you as well. In their hearts ever dwells Hari, the Supreme Being, the unfailing source of purity and purifying power.'⁸

साधवो न्यासिनः शान्ता ब्रह्मिष्ठा लोकपावनाः ।
हरन्त्यघं तेऽङ्गसङ्गात् तेष्वस्ते ह्यघभिद्हरिः ॥

I took him at his word and came to earth in good faith. For centuries I have fulfilled my promise. As expected, many sinners, of all types and of all levels, came and washed off their sins into me. But the great holy ones also came, time and again, and in turn restored my original purity. This went on for centuries—till recently. . . .

But now, the number of sinners—and of all and every description—has increased beyond all limits while the number and frequency of holy souls who can purify me has come down sharply. As a result, I feel

often choked, as it were, with pollution—and sometimes I begin to wonder if I am still the same purifying goddess as of old.

Yes, my divine potency seems to have become neutralized. Side by side, your stupid and avaricious populace just go on dumping all kinds of filth into my waters. Your so-called 'intellectuals' only go on pitying my fate but do nothing to relieve my difficulties. And there are also those wonderful admirers who try vainly to glorify me by saying, 'Nothing can ever pollute our Mother Gaṅgā!'—and all the while they too go on polluting me. Save me from such wonderful progeny !

Oh ! the agony of it ! All your endless governments and countless population only talk and talk, and can do nothing worthwhile to save the situation. Oh ! the lack of genuinely pure and holy souls !

The Lord alone must help, and that too, soon. Else I will have perhaps no other alternative except to return to my heavenly abode. What will then be left behind on earth will only be a dead and stinking stream—even though people may still call it 'Gaṅgā', it will have no purifying or saving power whatsoever.

Beware ! Mother Gangā, too, though ever-pure in her heavenly abode, can yet be polluted and ruined on this earth of yours.

And no less is the agony of my sisters, too. Why not listen to Yamunā and get her account as well?

Yamunā

As I look back and remember the glorious days of old, I now tremble and wonder if they can ever come back.

Oh, those golden days, when the Lord Himself sported on my banks, as the incomparable Kṛṣṇa ! Many are the God-intoxicated souls who have blessed me by their residence on my banks and bathing in my waters. But nothing to compare with those days when Mādhava sported in the

8. *Srimad Bhāgavatam*, 9.9.6.

company of innocent cowherd boys and girls—and most of all, of the paragons of devotion, the Gopīs. Those days when the Bliss-Incarnate Lord and the sweet strains of His charming flute attracted one and all, including even animals, like a veritable divine magnet !

[Song]
 चलो मन गंगा यमुना तीर ॥
 गंगा यमुना निरमल पानी ।
 सीतल होत सरीर ॥
 बनसी बजावत

O mind, let us go to the banks of Gangā-Yamunā, whose pure waters cool our bodies and calm our minds; where Śrī Kṛṣṇa, with his brother Balarāma, plays his charming flute and sings . . .⁹

Even in those days surely we had troubles and there were great sinners, evil-doers full of passion, greed, wrath and pride. There was, for instance, Kālīya himself who tried to invade my waters and make his home there. Everything became poisoned—not only water but even the air. But then, there was Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa also to take care of the aggressor and remedy the situation—the all-wise, all-powerful and compassionate Lord, who subdued and drove away Kālīya. For thousands of years I was thus saved; but *today*, it seems not one but hundreds of Kālīyas—‘black monsters’, more poisonous than ever in the form of human beings, vehicles and factories—have come, fouling up my waters and the atmosphere with all kinds of deadly poisons, physical and mental. Only, alas, there is no Kṛṣṇa to save us !

Well, perhaps if we have still to survive in this land, maybe we too have to adopt means appropriate to the times. . . . We too may have to behave roughly, protest and fight back, just like our brother Brahmaputra !

Mother Gaṅgā

Where are the Bhagīrathas who can again reassure us and also work for a way out? When will the stream of holy souls start coming back and relieve us of our agony? Let sinners be saved, by all means; let humanity benefit, of course; but let us, too—I and my sisters, too—be saved !

[*Exit Gaṅgā and Yamunā*]

[*Enter some modern youths, of different temperaments and ways of thinking.*]

First youth

Did you hear all this? And what is its impact on your mind? What should we make out of all this ‘legend’—we of the modern, intelligent, scientific generation?

Second youth

We may be of the modern generation, votaries of reason and science. True, we may not believe in any baseless superstitions and all kinds of cock-and-bull stories. But we are also supposed to be ‘intelligent’ persons and must be able to find out and grasp truth or wisdom wherever it is, though buried deep inside. Being intelligent does not necessarily mean being without feeling and imagination. Following ‘reason’ does not mean discarding the ‘heart’.

Third youth

We should see with eyes of reason, but that is not enough. The vision of ‘reason’ is limited. We should, therefore, also see through the eyes of ‘feeling’. It is said that you can truly understand a thing or a person in depth only through the intensity of love. And what reason cannot see or grasp, imagination can. Reason is like a mere

9. A Hindi song of Mira.

pedestrian ; it can only plod, but imagination can leap and fly. When both work together in harmony, then comes into life a new dimension and a marvellous synthesis.

Second youth

That which can see behind and beyond both the heart and the intellect, that 'eye of eyes'—is called the 'divine eye' or 'yogic vision'. True sages and saints possess it and they can understand and appreciate the whole total truth as neither the merely intellectual nor the merely imaginative can grasp.

First youth

Then how are we to look at these things? For example, do you ever believe that people who take their bath in the river Gaṅgā get purified, and they get *mokṣa* or liberation? What nonsense! The Gaṅgā in Kashi, for example, is so dirty ; why, I for one would certainly not take bath there—thereby I might even get dirtier !

And as regards removal of sins, we see so many taking bath every day, and yet remaining the same old—or even worse—rascals and scoundrels. All this may sound good for goody-goody, superstitious and old people, but certainly not for intelligent and young moderns like us. What shall we believe—the ancient unbelievable claims of tradition, or our own eyes and findings of science?

Third youth

You have to believe whatever is a fact of experience. It is a fact that there are people having reverent faith who definitely feel pure when they even touch the waters of Gaṅgā. It is true also that there are many of questionable virtue, who take a dip in it and come out no better.

Sri Ramakrishna, who was both a man of faith and reason, has harmonized this apparent contradiction in his own inimitable and humorous way. He would say: when people go to take their bath in the Gaṅgā—during that period, their sins do leave them. Mother Gaṅgā purifies them indeed, but the sins go and perch on the trees on the banks of the river, waiting. As soon as these people come out of the waters, they again jump on them ; and so these people go back the same old sinners !

Second youth

The fact is, there are two levels of purification—physical and mental. Those who are simple and innocent at heart and have a deep and positive faith in the purifying powers of either Gaṅgā or of holy places, in the touch of saints or in the Divine Name, do get mentally purified thereby—but not the clever, crooked and cunning, or the half-hearted, doubting persons.

So far as physical cleanliness is concerned, certainly one becomes cleaner only by bathing in clear and pure waters and not that which is dirty and polluted, whether called by the name of 'Gaṅga' or 'Yamunā'.

Third youth

And remember, what come to us as gifts of Mother Nature are, by and large, clean and clear. It is man, greedy and stupid man, who proceeds to befoul them. If such avarice, stupidity, arrogance and destructive tendencies of his are not 'sins', what else are they? See how he cuts down ruthlessly and shamelessly trees and forests ... the very trees which benefit him in a million ways: trees which clean up the atmosphere, provide shade, shelter, food and natural beauty. See how in the name of industry, commerce and comfortable living, he even exhausts Mother Earth and cuts up mountains.

Second youth

And goes on destroying, without knowing that thereby he is digging his own grave. It is the senseless cutting down of trees, the denuding of forests and cutting up of mountains, etc. that invite uncontrollable floods.... And when floods inevitably occur, then the very same man curses the 'fury' of nature and blames God as 'cruel'—the same man who has really no reverence for either! The only gods he knows are lust and lucre—*kāma* and *kāñcana*. For all his violations and sins, he certainly deserves to be thrown out from the face of Mother Earth!

Third youth

And again, due to his lack of self-control, and his slavery to physical lusts, the human population has so much proliferated that it is literally becoming a burden to earth. Men want the water of the rivers, but they don't allow them even sufficient space to flow! They try to extend their habitations everywhere—even in river beds; and when floods come, there is endless shouting and weeping all round.

First youth

But then, what is to be done?... Is it enough just to believe in the Purāṇas, and some hypothetical God somewhere, and sit down wringing our hands and go on suffering?

Third youth

Who says that? Try to assimilate and profit from the wisdom and inspiration of the past, and use it appropriately now. Utilize modern science and technology wisely, for good and worthy ends. Think deeply, work hard, be humble and reverent and work for the welfare of others also—not just for yourself. Then you will see how solutions come up for our problems.

Second youth

And look at the tragedy which has befallen us, mainly because of our own mistakes. Most of our problems in India are of our own making. We are sinking in the 'well dug out by our own hands'—specially since the advent of political independence. Earlier we used to put all the blame—for everything—on the British. They are gone now, and we can't have them to blame all the time. And what did we do after their departure? We only became more and more lazy, selfish and greedy, and short-sighted, blind even to our own self-interest. Look at the fun! On the one hand, we complain of scarcity of water, of drought and famines. Again, the *same* we complain also of too much rains, and floods! What nature or God gives us in plenty, we don't know how to conserve, preserve and use for our own good. We make no real efforts at all to this end but just go on shouting and wailing. Water, specially, is a veritable divine gift—*amṛta* indeed! To get good water other countries, specially in West Asia, are prepared to spend crores and crores of rupees, even transporting icebergs from the polar regions! And we—who have so much of it, we sixty to seventy crores of people, during thirty-three years of 'independence', what have we done? We have spent our time in vain talk, shouting at and pulling down each other, while most of the precious water has gone waste to the seas, even taking with it huge quantities of valuable top-soil.

Third youth

And what is still left, we go on polluting with all kinds of excreta—human and animal, city garbage, industrial pollutants and now even the deadly nuclear wastes. Look at the scene elsewhere. Even the oceans are not spared. Every accident to a super tanker—perhaps bringing crude oil to India

itself—means pollution of thousands of square miles of the seas and destruction of millions of aquatic creatures. Such is modern man !

Second youth

Something is to be done about this tragic paradox of water—water, so much water, yet creatures dying of thirst and drought ! Somehow we have to find out ways and means of rightly conserving these precious 'God-given' resources and use them for the general good. We have to reverse the present deadly trend of misuse and pollution towards conservation and regeneration.

Fourth youth (a thoughtful and serious girl student)

Until and unless man—that is *we*—become wiser, humbler, more reverent, more self-controlled and less greedy—and that means unless we become truly religious and spiritual—we shall never be able to solve our problems. When there will be a large number of such persons—men and women—to work for the cause, the way to our national salvation will readily open up. And that way, we may even be giving a right lead to the world in the matter.

This is the special responsibility of *us*, *the young people*. There is no point in simply blaming the elders—blameworthy as they are—and boasting of 'youth-power'. Let our youth manifest and yoke their 'power' in the true interest of the nation and not just for extracting from society a few petty, paltry and temporary concessions and advantages for themselves.

Second youth

Our salvation lies in our youth inbibing on the one hand the ancient character-virtues, retaining faith in a Higher Power and in the higher values of life ; having regard for the past, yet at the same time

utilizing with discrimination the benefits of modern science and technology. Let us talk less and work more, having regard also to the long-range interests of the nation. Let us have faith in ourselves and our fellow men too. And with the courage born of that faith, let us dedicate ourselves to the good of the country also, along with our own. *Ātmano mokṣartham jagad hitāya ca*—'For one's own salvation and for the good of the world'—in terms of Swami Vivekananda's exhortation. Then we shall see, in one generation, how we shall save the precious waters, and how floods will cease to be a terror, how the land will begin to smile again with green vegetation, and an era of real prosperity too will begin to dawn.

Fourth youth (girl student)

Then, surely, mother Gaṅgā and her sisters, Yamunā and others, will not despair and wish to go away from earth, but will stay on happily and thankfully, purifying and blessing us all the time.

And let us become true sons and daughters of the Mother Gaṅgā, *gaṅgā-santāna*, like the incomparable, invincible Bhīṣma, of terrific resolve, utter self-control and self-sacrifice, a hero who for the sake of his pledged word and for the welfare of the nation sacrificed all his own personal pleasures and preferences, faced all foes and obstacles, ever intent on holy duty only. Bhīṣma—who remained ever pure and chaste in body and mind, the great lifelong celibate, *naiṣṭhika brahmacāri*, looking upon all women as his mother ; brave in life, brave in death, ever upright, yet full of reverent devotion and humility towards the Guru and God. Ah ! What an inspiring example to emulate !

Second youth

Let a few Bhīṣmas arise in our land which has today become an ocean of self-seeking

opportunists sensual and greedy exploiters, vain talkers and shameless creatures who are ready to sell their own mothers and motherland for a bit of pleasure and money, *kāma* and *kāñcana*; for what to them is 'power' and 'position'. Let Bhīṣmas arise in the field of education and scientific research, conservation of natural resources and community service, with an intensely and truly human sympathy, persons who while having no physical progeny of their own yet devote themselves to the loving service of so many others—'others' who become to them more than their own children, brothers or sisters.

Fourth youth (girl student)

And let us realize before it is too late, to what extent our life, individual and social, has been polluted by lack of moral and spiritual values, by lack of suitable education and training, specially in homes and schools. Outer pollution is, after all, the result of inner pollution. So, let our young men and women resolve to forge a new *Bhīṣma-sena*, a new *Bhagīratha-sena*, who by their life's action and example—and not by just loud words and angry slogans—bring back into our national life the holy stream of character and purity, hope and cheer, a new '*Śīla-Gaṅgā*', and new *Āśā-Gaṅgā*'.

And when such intelligent, competent, pure and creative young Bhīṣmas spring up in our midst, our country will rise again, nature will smile, trees and vegetation—in short, all nature—will be rejuvenated; the atmosphere and waters will become clean and clear once more and even the sun will shine better. And when such 'holy' people go and bathe in the rivers, Mother Gaṅgā and her sisters will feel happy and joyous, relieved and uplifted.

[*Enter Gaṅgā and Yamunā*]

Mother Gaṅgā

Yes this is the new race of purifying saints we are looking for, to spring up from

all sections of society—men and women, from cities and countryside, from East and West, North and South. Then it will be a pleasure for us to continue on earth. Our waters will then again certainly become most auspicious—*śivatamo rasa*.

Yamunā

And when there are enough such pure, selfless, shining souls, it will be no wonder that the Lord who came as Śrī Kṛṣṇa may come again to lead the nation and clear the country of all '*Kāliyaṣ*'—venomous cobras who are now poisoning the life of the nation at all levels, physical, mental and moral.

[*Exit Gaṅgā and Yamunā*]

First youth

If this is the true reading and meaning of our legends, and the spirit of our ancient culture, then I have no hesitation at all in not only accepting it but also working for it and even recommending it to others as well.

Second youth

Let us therefore wish, will, strive and pray for the new generation of such national purifiers; and if we have faith, our earnest hopes are bound to materialize. Let us on the one hand abide by our scientific laws and healthy social rules for maintaining our bodily purity and a clean environment and faithfully adopt moral and spiritual values to have a shining internal purity as well.

Fourth youth (girl student)

Let us pray to the source of all purity, the Lord Himself, and seek refuge in the holy ones like Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, who together constitute a veritable spiritual triple stream—a '*Trivenī*'—who are human embodiments of that purity. Let us

thereby recharge our individual and national life with a new energy and enthusiasm for the good of India and the world. Let our land and water, air and skies, trees and herbs, men and animals—all become rejuvenated and shower sweet nectar on us.

[Ends with song and chant]

ॐ मधुवाता ऋतायते . . . ॐ मधु, ॐ मधु,

ॐ मधु ॥

FAITH, REASON AND REALIZATION

SWAMI ADISWARANANDA

The growth of science and technology has given rise to new thoughts and concepts which challenge the very foundation of all religious beliefs. Adherence to theological precepts is slowly giving way to the acceptance of the laws of physical science, the appeal of myths and legends to the reality of facts and data, and the concern for 'hereafter' to that of 'here and now'. The concepts of an extracosmic God, vicarious atonement, and eternal life in heaven after death are often considered as consolatory imaginations rather than proven facts.

While religious theologies condemn doubt as moral obliquity and call for unquestioning belief, the spirit of science asks for a rational justification for any belief and considers blind belief as an intellectual sin. That which is true is rational and universal and the validity of such a truth rests not on faith but on experimentation, verification, and demonstration. Therefore, anything that is claimed as special or exclusive, private or arbitrary, is suspect because such a claim goes against the very grain of rational justification. The religious traditions that lean heavily on the infallibility of their dogmas and creeds denounce this new spirit as an exotic and supercilious adventure which feeds itself on pessimism and doubt and seeks to undermine the very

foundation of moral and spiritual aspirations. Thus the new thought-current has stirred up a controversy that divides the religious-minded into two camps: the upholders of faith and the believers in reason.

IN SUPPORT OF FAITH

The traditionalists look upon faith as the final authority in deciding the validity of any spiritual truth and put forward the following arguments in support of their view:

Faith is proof of existence

The validity of a spiritual teaching rests solely on faith and never on reason. The reality of God is self-revealing and self-evident and is not dependent upon any denial or acceptance of the human mind. The proof of the existence of anything is the faith that it exists. As is one's faith, so are one's perceptions and cognitions. Believers in matter call the ultimate Reality 'matter', while believers in time call it 'time', and believers in void call it 'void'.

Faith comes before reason

In any walk of life reason follows faith. We perceive a thing and then reason about it. This is also the process in the realm of religion. That which is envisioned by faith

is systematized by reason as philosophy for the understanding of the average mind. The prophets and God-men of different religions speak from faith. They are never guided by reason. They perceive Reality directly and speak about It with childlike simplicity. Philosophical thoughts develop later to systematize what the prophets and God-men realized through faith. Myths and rituals are attempts to concretize what has been mystically experienced and philosophically systematized. One reasons and argues about a thing as long as one has not developed faith in the existence of that thing, or one is doubtful about its existence. Faith is, therefore, the mature form of reason.

Conviction is born of faith

Reason is guided by the appearance of things and not by their content. It is dialectic in its approach and discursive in its temper. It gives only diagrams of Reality but not a comprehensive picture of It. It reduces all things—even living beings—to ideas in order to understand them better. Faith, on the other hand, is concerned primarily with the content of a thing and not merely with its appearance. It is an appeal to the heart and not to the head. The essence of every religion is love of God, or love of that which is ultimately Real, and love is a function of faith and not of reason. Loving is being and not knowing. In order to love a person one does not need to know the physiology and biochemistry of that person. In order to attain love of God one does not need to reason about His existence. The ultimate proof of the existence of God, or of that which is absolutely Real, depends on faith and not on reason. Faith makes everything living. The concept of God becomes a living Reality when it is inspired by faith. The power of a saint or a prophet or a God-man is not his

philosophy but his conviction about the presence of God, born of his unwavering faith. The difference between a saint and an ordinary person is the difference in the degree of this conviction.

Reason begins with doubt and also ends in doubt, and such doubt springs from another kind of faith—faith in perverted reasoning. The cure for doubt is, therefore, not reason but faith. One who continuously doubts and reasons gradually develops a taste for such doubting and reasoning and, in course of time, such a habit becomes the means of sophisticated intellectual pleasures.

Reason is never conclusive

In the words of Plotinus, reason is a lame man's crutch. It is never able to establish beyond doubt the validity of any spiritual truth. The movement of reason is from 'general' to 'particular'. It seeks to make finite representations of the Infinite, an attempt which is frustrating to reason itself. Reason, as it refutes a hypothesis, implicitly suggests a new one, which in turn can be refuted by another reason. Thus it is like a game of solitaire which is never finished, for where speculation is both the goal and the means to attain the goal, there is no end of it. A person who waits for decisive proof about the efficacy of a spiritual path in order to commit himself to it can never do so, because each doubt resolved reveals a new one requiring another solution.

Reason can never inspire faith

Reason can never be a perfect instrument of knowledge because the tools of reason are inference, analogy, assumption, and so forth, none of which can give any direct glimpse of Truth. Furthermore, a perverted mind can resort to perverted arguments. There is no use reasoning about the validity

of a perception when the perception itself is vitiated by the penumbra of the perceiver's mind.

The goal of religion is not to form an opinion about Truth but to achieve a vision of It. A seeker of God does not seek knowledge of God but God Himself. Such an attainment is possible only through faith and not through reason. For, in order to reason about a thing, one has to create a distance, and the more one reasons, the more distance one creates. On the other hand, faith creates a nearness to the object of faith.

Faith is the very life-breath of religion

Faith is a kind of superior reason that teaches us that man, the individual, is organically related to God, the totality. Any reasoning that takes away the individual from the totality is a form of self-love, the root-cause of all the sufferings of life. Self-love is motivated by the motto of 'having and possessing', while love of God is guided by 'being and self-surrender'. Self-love springs from an egotism that lives with a sense of puerile self-sufficiency. Faith is that reason which focuses our attention on the smallness of the ego and the folly of self-love and urges us to love God, the centre of our inmost being. Faith is the very essence of one's commitment to a spiritual goal. An aspirant who is devoid of faith is only meandering aimlessly.

The universe of reason is made of dead concepts and dry categories. One who depends upon reason for the vision of Truth is like one who is searching for the living among the dead. The message of reason is always fragile and vacillating. It can never inspire faith in God or in matters spiritual. Belief of a person in the infallibility of reason is a form of weakness. It is weakness not because he believes in reason but because he believes only in reason. Such reason can give consistency but never truth.

The process of reasoning follows the triple method of experimentation, verification, and demonstration. That which is true and authentic is universally true irrespective of time and place. Such truth is experimental, verifiable, and demonstrable. Verification of a truth depends on experimentation and experimentation requires involvement. But spiritual truth cannot be verified unless it is experimented upon by living it in one's own life, and to live it, one must have faith in it.

The spiritual quest, therefore, begins with faith, it is sustained by faith, and also, it attains its culmination through faith. Faith matures into conviction and conviction reaches its fullness in realization.

The theology of reason is based on doubt

The doubting mind is a victim of cynicism that scoffs at things and phenomena that it does not understand. Such a mind doubts the validity of the scriptures but believes in the infallibility of a newspaper report. It is skeptical about the holiness of a saint but is prone to accept the meanness of the evil-minded. The person who is guided solely by reason is forced by his own intellectual rigidity to live in a universe filled with concepts and categories that constantly challenge his basic philosophy of life and make him feel most insecure and unhappy. His intellectual obviousness is really a form of fanaticism that intends to evaluate everything in the light of its own creed. Because of his compulsion to reason he cannot accept that which is easily acceptable and is haunted by a passion for doubting. When such a person finally arrives at a conclusion he has no time to appreciate what he knows.

One who lives only by reason is guided by the philosophy of necessity and utility. He must have a reason for everything he does or says or thinks. His doubting intellect

dominates everything. All his feelings and actions, perceptions and volitions, are dictated by reason. He is like a machine, automatic and meticulous in every respect, but devoid of the sense of value. As a result he becomes possessed by a sense of determinism that makes even the trivialities of life appear unduly significant. Such determinism cripples every movement of life because he is looking for an explanation and justification for everything, whether or not these are necessary. He must find a cause for everything. The man of reason lives in the future because his present is made up of uncertainties and probabilities. His doubts and determinism follow from his inner devaluation, and his devalued personality is always pessimistic, projecting its pessimism on everything.

In the realm of religion when reason becomes the sole pathfinder, everything becomes dark and dry because the intellect becomes the victim of its own reasoning. It creates problems which it cannot solve, and raises questions which it cannot answer. That which is Infinite cannot be grasped by the finite mind. All our finite perceptions of Truth and Reality are not exhaustive but suggestive.

Spiritual truth can only be felt and never defined and measured. Feeling is seeing and not seeking. Seeing is subjective experience, not descriptive fact. Seeking separates the subject from the object, while seeing brings them together and finally merges them into one. Seeing requires total commitment of the whole personality to the object of faith. It is a form of revelation.

The philosophy of life based on reason reduces everything to nothingness. Such a philosophy looks upon the processes of Nature as meaningless and trusts only in the dignity of man, but fails to explain how an unintelligent, absurd Nature can produce a man of dignity. Therefore, reason is too fragile an instrument to be depended upon

in the realm of the spiritual because, by nature, reason is vacillating and self-doubting. It is said that even Darwin had doubts about the judgement of the human mind since, according to him, it is after all the evolved form of the animal mind. The reasoning that refuses to see anything but absurdity in the processes of Nature or in the functioning of faith is itself absurd and leads only to absurd postulations.

IN SUPPORT OF REASON

The advocates of reason repudiate the authority of faith and argue that it is not faith but reason that can decisively validate any truth. The following are the arguments they give in support of reason :

The so-called faith is unfounded belief

What the religious traditions emphasize as faith is, really speaking, an unquestioning belief in the authority of the scriptures or the doctrines of theology. Such belief has no foundation of its own. It is believing in the beliefs of others. Belief is an assumption which turns into conviction only through conscious reasoning about what one believes in. One cannot really believe in something for which one does not find a logical rationale.

Reason separates the real from the imaginary

Belief is a form of imagination—the making of images and concepts, dogmas and creeds, which are substitutions for Truth. These are thoughts about Truth and not Truth Itself. One may believe something to be true even though such belief has little or no relation to the truth of that thing. Truth is known only when we have risen above all beliefs and imaginings, and this is possible only through reason. That

which distinguishes the real from the imaginary is reason and not belief.

Divorced from reason, religious traditions and beliefs lapse into various forms of perversion, such as futurism, pseudo-mysticism, psychism, super-naturalism, and occultism. To disbelieve in the efficacy of reason is to make the validity of spiritual truth contingent upon so-called mystical experiences, which are always personal and private, and can be the results of auto-suggestion, hallucination, or mental degeneration. The skeptical mind looks upon such experiences as symptoms of nervous weakness and inner depression. An individual may see visions and hear voices which can very well be the echoes of his own mind, such experiences often being occasioned by bereavement, worldly disappointment, or disease. Or these may be different forms of animism and excitement and, as such, are always temporary or momentary. When the validity of a spiritual truth becomes dependent solely on the private and personal realizations of an individual there is no end of uncertainty and self-deception. Furthermore, a spiritual experience may be borrowed or stumbled into, or may be a form of sentimentalism, and can never be accepted as the authentic testimony of a spiritual truth.

Truth becomes suspect when it is not amenable to reason. A spiritual seeker who does not cultivate reason always depends on chance for his right choice when he confronts rival creeds and dogmas. That which is true for one person under certain conditions must prove itself true for all persons under similar conditions, and that which is spiritually true is also universally true, irrespective of time, place and historical conditions. Reason, therefore, liberates spiritual truth from the bounds of dogmatic supernaturalism and false mysticism, self-hypnotism and occultism. To the seeker of Truth reason is the most infallible guide

in the realm of religion, which so often remains clouded by make-believe prophecies, creedal puzzles, and conflicting traditions. True spiritual adventure is possible only when the seeker is guided by reason and not by so-called faith or any hearsay. The alternative to reason is blind faith, which robs a spiritual individual of his manliness and dignity of independent thinking and reduces him to a mere nonentity.

Dependence on faith makes one dogmatic

Blind belief in things which are unproved by reason can be unfortunate and, when combined with the frenzy of emotion, eventually leads to fanaticism. A dogmatic person is always a fanatic because of the unsteady foundation of his belief. He is not yet convinced about what he believes and is rigid in his views because he refuses to see the truth. Allowing no scope for self-doubt or for tolerance of others who do not share his beliefs, yet not being satisfied with his own views, he exhibits excessive tension and anxiety. He often claims that his religion is best and his method is the most superior. His claim of superiority over others is a form of defense, and the more he raises walls of defense and exclusiveness, the more fanatical he becomes in his views.

The dogmatist is devoid of spiritual identity and individuality and therefore shuns self-criticism and self-effort. Incapable of taking upon himself the responsibility of his own spiritual quest, he looks instead for a means of passively satisfying his desire for certainty. His is a search not for real Truth, which requires honest efforts, but for a vicarious truth which can be given to him.

Psychologically speaking, a dogmatist is an immature person. The sign of maturity is growth. A mature person never thinks that he is infallible or a finished product. He is always anxious to enrich his fund of

knowledge by learning from others. A dogmatist, on the other hand, believes he is infallible and has nothing to learn from others. Oliver Cromwell is once said to have told a dogmatist, 'I beseech you, by the bowels of Christ, to admit that even once in your lifetime you may be wrong.'

A mature spiritual seeker has a definite spiritual identity, a distinct and individual spiritual inner disposition, a decisive commitment toward the goal, and an implicit conviction of his spiritual potentiality. He has reason for what he believes, and conviction for what he follows. He exhibits tension and honest doubt. In contrast the immature person in the realm of religion is guided by a basic mistrust for teachings other than his own, suffers from a sense of insecurity, believes in isolation and rigidity, and substitutes moralism and convention for inner conviction of spiritual truth. Often he fails to distinguish that which is authentic from that which is imitation, or that which is essential from that which is incidental or accidental. He is guided by sacramentalism and emotionalism. He does not use the faculties of reasoning and thinking and therefore is governed by collective thinking and remains drowned in the opinions of a group or community.

Historically speaking, whenever reason becomes divorced from faith there arise oppressive religious traditions and heartless rites. The rewards of religion become the privilege of the selected few. Myths and legends, which are meant to provide concrete representations of abstract Truth, often prove to be impenetrable encrustations around It. The mystery of God's grace gives way to fatalism and supernaturalism, and blind conformity to convention and ritual comes to be regarded as the mark of spiritual living. The history of Europe and Asia is

replete with instances where the sublime teachings of the holy scriptures have been invoked by religious fanatics to justify their bitter religious intolerance and hatred towards those who differed from them. Devout religious people have often become most cruel and inhuman, justifying their cruel and inhuman behaviour in the name of religion. Having been divorced from reason, religious traditions have promoted the cause of narrow nationalism and sectarianism. They have provided the inspiration for religious war, inquisition, and religious persecution. The religious wars in sixteenth-century France and seventeenth-century Germany and the persecution of hundreds and thousands of people during the period of the Inquisition are examples in illustration. The brutal barbarism in the name of religion during the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries has few parallels in history.

Thus the faith of the so-called 'Faithful' is nothing but blind belief that evokes only temporary sentiments but fails to transform the life. Such transformation is possible only through a perception of the inner Truth based on the conviction of reason, which calls for the cultivation of manliness and individual spiritual responsibility. Manliness alone can ensure the attainment of Godliness.

The arguments in support of faith and those in support of reason do not establish the superiority of one over the other, and therefore do not resolve the controversy. What, then, should be the way? Can spiritual quest and scientific outlook go together? Must one discard reason altogether in order to have faith? Would the faith that suppresses honest doubt be considered sincere? Or should one cultivate skepticism in order to be spiritual?

(To be concluded)

RECOLLECTION*

(on Swami Vivekananda)

MOHIT LAL MAJUMDAR

Is the dark night drawing to an end?
The first light of the long-awaited dawn
Breaks in the Eastern horizon.
Who sat with unblinking eyes
On the bedside of the dying nation
Spelling out in her ears
The incantation of life in repeated tunes?
It is thou—the unaging youth,
Thou, the master of service, knowledge and love,
The ever-unattached, the lover universal
Who art a friend to man, here and hereafter.
The most valiant leader in crisis and war,
Thou, the self-controlled one, the knower of Brahman,
Enlightened with thy life and fearlessness
Men at their penultimate hours
When they fell frightened with the fear of death.

Thee I recollect like the poor pilgrim
Who, returning home, his pilgrimage over,
Remembers with awe from the corner of his hut
The mountain peak towering out in far distance
Where dwell the gods, and the crescent moon
Rises on the forehead of its snow-white brow ;
Far down at its feet flows the stream of life ;
Far, far above rises the peak clustered around
By the chain of stars, silent for ever ;
There at its heart strike the thunders
In futile force to crush into empty dust.
The pilgrim mourns he will see the peak nevermore in life,
And yet he knows he has seen the Immutable One.

* A translation by Swami Jitatmananda. of the Bengali poem *Smaran*



BISHOP BENJAMIN W. ARNETT, D. D.

A BLACK AMERICAN AT THE PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS WORLD'S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION, CHICAGO 1893

DR. BETTY ROBINSON

It is well known that Swami Vivekananda's appearance at the Chicago Parliament of Religions contributed to his influence as a religious teacher in America and India. An examination of the role others had at that historic meeting gives added insight into the intellectual climate of the time, race relations, the purpose of the convention and the reasons America was receptive to Vedantic ideas.¹ A delegate who also 'did his race and country proud' was B. W. Arnett of the African Methodist Episcopal Church which was the oldest and the largest church organized among the American Negro. Bishop Arnett had been selected, as he himself remarked, 'to give colour to this vast Parliament', but was happy to observe that 'it is very well coloured itself,' in fact that 'the colour is in the majority this time.'²

It is difficult for anyone outside the culture to understand the position of the Negro race in 1893. Much can be learned about that position and about the aspirations of Black Americans from the addresses of Bishop Arnett at the convention. Since he spoke several times from the same platform as Vivekananda, it is certain that the Swami heard him, even though there is no mention of Arnett in the *Complete Works*. He must have been impressed by a delegate from a race recently liberated from slavery who spoke so eloquently and with so much pride.

Benjamin Arnett had been born March 6, 1838, in Brownsville, Pennsylvania. Laws for the gradual abolishment of slavery had been passed in Pennsylvania as early as 1780, and by 1840 the census lists only 386 slaves in the state, so it is unlikely that he was born a slave. He was converted to the African Methodist Church in 1856, was elected seventeenth bishop of the church in 1888 and was chosen as a delegate to the Chicago convention in 1893. Arnett gave

1. United States Information Agency, 'The American Intellectual Climate in Vivekananda's Time', *Vedanta and the West* (The Vedanta Society of Southern California), no. 172, March-April 1965, pp. 16-21 gives a detailed account of intellectual forces at work in America in the nineteenth century.

2. Rev. John H. Barrows, ed., *The World's*

Parliament of Religions, 2 vols. (Chicago: The Parliament Pub. Co., 1893), 1:107.

the concluding address on September 11th, the opening day of the convention, soon after Vivekananda first spoke to the audience of about 4,000. The Committee of Arrangements had asked him to accept the Parliament's welcome to the Africans and to give an address of welcome on behalf of the Africans in Africa and the Africans in America. He accepted the welcome of the African continent 'with its millions of acres and millions of inhabitants, with its mighty forests, with its great beasts, and with its great men, and its great possibilities.' He said that he believed that although every foot of land and every foot of water in Africa had been appropriated by the governments of Europe, yet the country would gain freedom through providence as his own country had gained freedom from the same European powers. Africa would bring forth a Jefferson, a *Declaration of Independence*, a Washington, 'Or, if it please God, he may raise up not a Washington but another Toussaint L'Ouverture,'³ who would lead his people to freedom and equality, forming a republican government whose cornerstone would be religion, morality, education and temperance. The Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule would be the guide of life in the 'great republic of redeemed Africa.'

After expressing his dream for Africa, he accepted the welcome of the Parliament to the Negroes of the American continent. In turn, he welcomed to America the representatives of other countries who had come so far to meet 'us here, and "us" in this case means me, too.' He said, 'I welcome these brethren to the shores of America on behalf of seventy-four hundred thousand negroes on this continent, who, by the providence of God ... have been liberated

from slavery. There is not a slave among us today, and we are glad you did not come while we were in chains, because, in that case, we could not have got here ourselves.'⁴

Arnett next spoke at the third session on September 13th on 'The Model Man'. He was full of praise for the discussion of that day and said he had learned from the speakers that the foundation of the model man was love of God and love of his fellow man and that there was no colour in the model man because there was no colour in character or in virtue. 'If you are a good man you are a good man and if you are a bad man you are a bad man,' he said, adding, 'It is worth a lifetime to me to have learned that one thing.' The three days of the convention he had lived in the happiest home he had ever lived in in his life because it was the home of toleration and common respect for all religious faiths and beliefs.⁵

On September 15th he presided at the convention; and on September 22nd, the twelfth day of the Parliament he spoke twice. His morning speech was 'Christianity and the Negro'. It was a proud speech but also a sad one because the position of the black man in America had been a sad history. But Arnett spoke with hope: "We do fervently pray and earnestly hope that the meeting held this day will start a wave of influences that will change some of the Christians of this land and the brotherhood of man and from this time forward they will accord to us that which we receive in every land except this 'land of the free and home of the brave'."⁶ All the Negro wanted, he said, was the right of an American citizen, the right to life, liberty and happiness, the rights and privileges that belong to every citizen in a 'Christian

3. The Negro slave who led the rebellion for independence and helped establish the government of the Republic of Haiti.

4. Barrows, *Parliament of Religions*, pp. 108-09.

5. Ibid., p. 155.

6. The quotation refers to the last line of the American national anthem.

commonwealth'. As he put it, 'It is not pity we ask for, but justice, it is not help, but a fair chance; we ask not to be carried, but to be given an opportunity to walk, run, or stand alone in our own strength or to fall in our own weakness; we are not begging for bread, but for an opportunity to earn bread for our wives and children; treat us not as wards of a nation nor as objects of pity, but treat us as American citizens, as Christian men and women; do not chain your doors and bar your windows and deny us a place in society, but give us the place that our intelligence, our virtue, our industry, and our courage entitle us to. "But admit none but the worthy and well qualified."'

He mentioned the danger of using religion to do injustice. Negroes had been stolen from their native land in the name of religion, chained as captives and brought to America in the name of liberty of the gospel and sold as slaves to teach the principles of religion. As he explained, 'Pious prayers were offered from those who chained our fathers, who stole our mothers, who sold our brothers for paltry gold, all in the name of Christianity, to save our poor souls.' He concluded gratefully acknowledging that Christianity always had some strong friends for the blacks in the South and in the North; men who stood by him in all circumstances.⁷

The evening of September 22nd Bishop Arnett had the opportunity to thank some of the friends who had stood by the blackmen. That evening the Parliament celebrated the thirty-first anniversary of President Abraham Lincoln's Proclamation of Emancipation, which did not free all the slaves in America, but which is taken as a symbol of that freedom. In describing the 'sad and joyful' scene in 1862, Arnett told

how millions of people were made free but without a foot of land to stand upon, without a house or home to protect them and with only the garments that they had worn in bondage on their backs. They were nameless because they had borne the names of their masters; and having no masters each family had to choose a new name of freedom, and many named their children after the generals, the majors, the colonels and captains of the Union army.

Bishop Arnett presented to the Honourable J. M. Ashley, a white congressman from Ohio, a copy of Mr. Ashley's speeches on behalf of the Afro-American League of Tennessee, 'to honour one to whom honour is due, and let him and his friends know that we are not unmindful of the workmen of the past.' He told Representative Ashley that in 1865 he had sat in the gallery of the House of Representatives and witnessed the Congressional battle for the Thirteenth Amendment.⁸ He was there when the speaker announced that the amendment had passed and joined in the song 'My Country 'Tis of Thee'. 'The bells of the city shouted the joy, the paper we published was happy as I am tonight,' he said. Then he proceeded to review what the Negro had done with his thirty years of freedom in government service, education, the church and the professions. He especially praised the women who 'had to leave many things behind that they desired to bring with them and brought with them many things that they ought to have left behind.' Still, thirty years had made a wonderful change.

The influence of music on black culture was explained: 'Our fathers in their bondage crystallized their sorrows and their woes into *songs* and *hymns*, and when freedom came, and they marched out of their prison into the sunlight of liberty, the songs

7. *The World's Congress of Religions*, with an Introduction by Rev. Minot J. Savage (Boston: Arena Pub. Co., 1893), pp. 381-84.

8. The Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution officially freed all slaves in the country.

of the night were blended with the songs of the day, and the music of the freedman became the hymns of liberty.' Black groups often used those gospel-songs of deep feeling to earn money for educational institutions. The Fisk Jubilee Singers sang all over America and in Europe for Fisk University; the Wilberforce Concert Company supported Wilberforce College; and the Tennesseans sang for Tennessee College. Arnett concluded his speech by telling the audience that he hoped to show the world that the black men were not a race of ingrates, nor forgetful of blessings received, when recording the wrongs 'suffered in this land of freedom.'⁹

The final address by Bishop Arnett was given on September 27th, the last day of the Parliament. It was a warm and moving speech reflecting what he felt was the result of the convention which had been organized to show how important were the fundamental principles on which all religions agreed and how unimportant were the superficial differences of creed. The convention had taught Christians, he said, that while they have truth on their side, they did not have all the truth, and the strongest criticism was not of Christian doctrines or methods but of practice not being in harmony with teaching or doctrines. He thought the convention would do good not only to the dominant race but be a godsend to the race he represented because from the meeting a sentiment would go forth that would 'right a great many of our wrongs' and assist in giving the black men in America what they were denied—the common privileges of humanity.' This would be done because in the Parliament the majority of the people represented were 'of the darker races' which would teach the American people that colour is not the

standard of excellence or of degradation. He concluded as proudly as he had begun :

And now, to my brothers and friends of foreign lands, as I bade you welcome, I now bid you good-by, and I assure you that your coming and your staying has been a benediction to us. And I trust that you will feel that your long travel has been fully repaid by the hospitality of the American people and what you have witnessed of the progress of our Christian civilization. As you return to your homes, be assured that loving hearts will follow you with their prayers, that you may enjoy the blessings that belong to mankind; and should we never meet again (which we never will any more), may each of us so live and so conduct ourselves that our last end may be one of peace and joy. I bid you, in the name of those I represent, a long and affectionate farewell.¹⁰

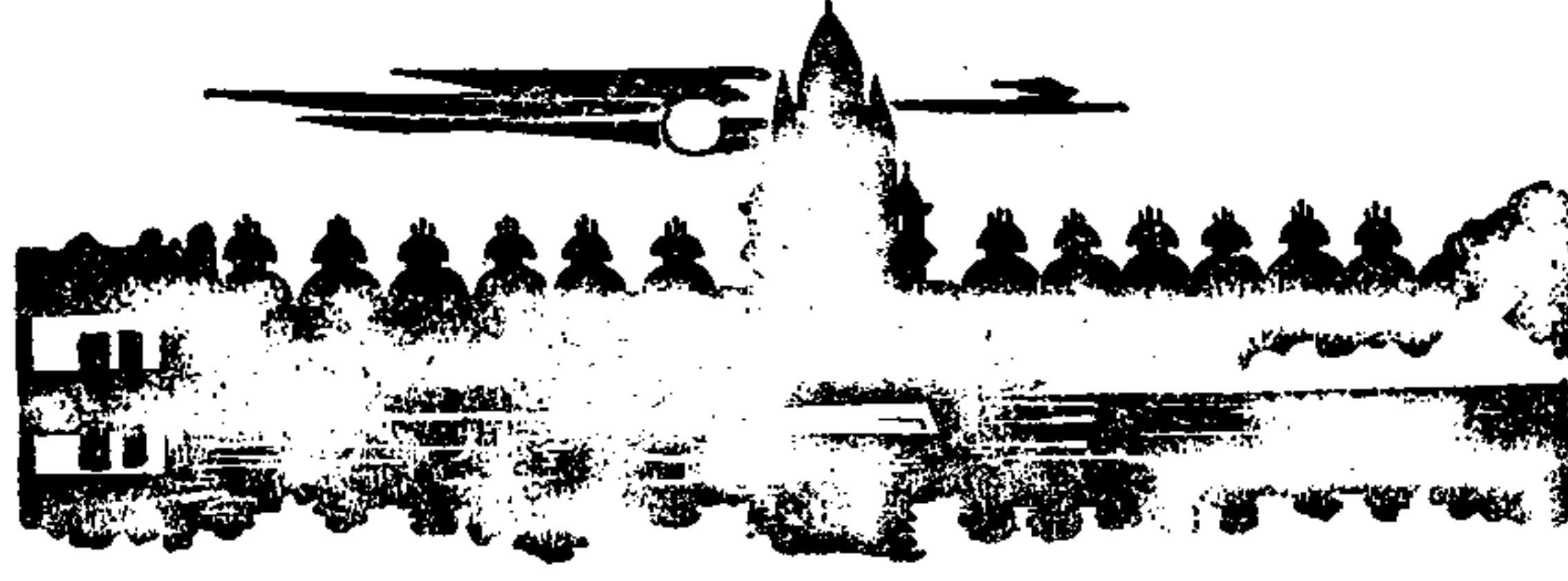
Bishop Arnett's statements reflect the general hope, energy and confidence of his time. The period 1876-1917 is often called the 'American Renaissance'.¹¹ It was a time of intense physical and social change which sought stability by trying to establish national identity. Three strong strands are important in this identification: rampant nationalism, a belief in idealism and progress, and the increasing attraction of foreign cultures, or cosmopolitanism. The idealistic nature of the 'American Renaissance' with its search for beauty, morality and 'the best that had been thought and said in the world,' adopted the concept of the Renaissance as the guiding principle

(Continued on page 145)

10. Ibid., pp. 859-60; *The World's Congress of Religions*, pp. 423-24.

11. *The American Renaissance, 1876-1917*, text by Richard Guy Wilson, published for the exhibition 'The American Renaissance: 1876-1917' (New York: The Brooklyn Museum, 1979). Renaissance is a debated term among historians. Many consider the time of Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman to be the real 'American Renaissance' or 'Flowering of America'. Both periods paved the way for acceptance of ideas outside the Western tradition.

9. Barrows, *Parliament of Religions*, pp. 1101-03.



THE COMMON FUNDAMENTALS OF THE GREAT RELIGIONS

PROF. S. S. RAGHAVACHAR

The study of comparative religion has dispelled a number of longstanding errors. The most pernicious of them is the belief in the exclusive and sole validity of some one of the living religions. The great living religions like Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism stand or fall together. There is so much of conscious and unconscious affinity and identity of content in them that to repudiate any one of them without damaging the substance of the others is a sheer impossibility. To vindicate one is to furnish grounds for the vindication of others. To discard the Hinduism of the Upaniṣads in a radical fashion would rob Jainism and Buddhism of the doctrine of karma which is fundamental to them. Where would Christianity and Islam be with Judaism completely refuted? Can Vedānta be true and infallible if Taoism is proved a wholly worthless creed? Illustrations of the basic coherence of the great religions can be endlessly multiplied. Therefore the philosophy of religion is compelled to focus itself on the common fundamentals of the mature religions for purposes of elucidation and criticism. A religion adored exclusively too often conceals its kernel from its devotees. With this preamble one may proceed to enumerate the essentials of the great religions.

1

The first constituent of the great religions is the ethical element. In all of them the principle of self-culture involving a regulation and curtailment of animal impulse is inculcated. No religion has advocated worldliness and hedonism. An element of *tapasya* is an invariable factor in all. Even the most earthbound religion, with only faint notions of the supernatural and the otherworldly, has prescribed emancipation from the slavery to irrational impulses. The good is distinguished from the pleasant, and that fulness of life is impossible without self-mastery is a universal maxim of all religions. Along with this principle of self-control, the ideal of compassion and humanity is inculcated. The concept of the brotherhood of man is a specific contribution of religious consciousness. There is no important religion which has not laid down the maxim of treating one's neighbour as oneself. The definition of the 'neighbour' may be undergoing continual expansion, but the maxim itself has been once for all laid down. The moral progress of mankind lies in the progressive expansion of the scope of this rule of life. The rule itself is a bequest of the religious inspiration of the prophets.

One has only to compare the ethical commandments of the Semitic religions with Indian thought on the matter to see the unanimity of religions. The Mosaic rules :

- Do not kill
- Do not steal
- Do not commit adultery
- Do not swear
- Do not covet

correspond with literal accuracy to the five great vows or *mahāvratas* of Jainism. They are *ahiṃsā*, *satya*, *asteya*, *brahmacarya* and *aparigraha*. These again are the five points of good conduct (*śīla*) specified in Buddhism. They are the *yamas* of Hinduism. The correspondence is perfect. The ruling principles of these commandments are self-control and humanity. That the religions are the sources of the great ethical ideals of humanity needs to be recognized when a final valuation of religion is undertaken. While morality is possible without religion, religion is impossible without morality. It may be more than morality but never less than it. In the inclusive substance of religion, individual and social ethics forms an integral part.

2

The next fundamental contention of religions is that they contain supreme knowledge. There is no religion without a 'noetic' claim. Mere conduct, however holy, is not the whole of the meaning of religion. A certain fundamental understanding or insight into the nature of reality is claimed in all the great religions. This insight is not supposed to be laboriously won through human effort. Man's experience of mundane realities and his research and scientific investigation are not held to be the sources of religious knowledge. A mode

of knowing transcending empirical methods and even reason and capable of discovering the fundamental realities is posited. All the great religions are committed to a doctrine of mystic revelation. Moses receiving from God the ten commandments, Jesus receiving the approval of the Father in Heaven after his baptism, St. Paul encountering Jesus on his way to Damascus, Mohammed being lifted to prophethood by the transfiguring messages of the Divine, the Buddha gaining the absolute 'awakening' under the Bodhi tree, and Lord Kṛṣṇa revealing the supreme truth to the despondent Arjuna on the battlefield are the recorded phenomena of mystic revelation in the history of the great religions. They claim knowledge of absolute truth and claim to have received it through divine self-communication. This conception of infallible knowledge through self-revelation of the Supreme is enshrined in the heart of all religions. 'Mere teaching, intelligence and learning of many scriptures do not enable one to gain access to the Supreme. It is attained only by one whom it chooses as a fit recipient of its self-revelation.'¹ This is how the Upaniṣads state this cardinal principle of religion.

In short, religions claim a mode of direct knowledge other than the normal human ways of perception and inference. This knowledge is supposed to cover a vaster realm of being than even inference, and to be more direct and immediate than even sense-perception. This epistemological contention is one of the constituents of all the great religions.

3

In their conception of reality, all mature religions affirm a transcendent order of being. The higher order may be conceived

1. *Katha Upaniṣad*, 1.2.23 ; *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, 3.2.3.

as a law, an impersonal principle, or a personal God. There are minor differences proceeding from the anxiety to do justice to the varied aspects of the central verity. But all of them assert that there is a Supreme Entity transcending the mundane actualities of nature and humanity. It is held to be self-existent. As such it is unconditioned reality. It is unchanging, for what changes has the roots of its actuality in something beyond itself. It is one. The Buddhistic principle of Cosmic Law, the impersonal Brahman of the Upaniṣads and the Father in Heaven of Jesus admit of these characterizations of self-existence, eternity and unity. It is self-affirming spirit at once surpassing inorganic nature and the finite mind. Buddhism outgrew its naturalistic terminology of the earlier days and boldly championed an idealistic monism in its culminating period of maturity. Confucius never denied the existence of God and did always feel the irresistible fascination of the Tao.

The basic motive in all the assertions in favour of a personal God, whether in Christianity or Islam, is the acknowledgement of the spiritual character of the transcendent. The Upaniṣads identify the ultimate with Infinite Consciousness. The religions ascribe absolute perfection and qualitative infinitude to this principle. That is the significance of naming it 'Pūrṇa', 'Ānanda' and 'Bhūman' in the Upaniṣads. 'Be ye perfect, as your Father in Heaven is perfect.' The transcendent is spiritual and perfect. It is all that ought to be.

The transcendence of the principle is one half of the truth. It is also immanent. God is the ground of the being of the world. His unity is the source of its orderliness. His supreme wisdom is the source of the light of human thought. It is His perfection that is partly mirrored in the earthly values of truth, beauty and goodness. All else derives its being and worth from the supreme being

and perfection of God.

All religions have affirmed with one voice the equal truth of divine transcendence and of divine immanence. They have always resented shallow pantheism and an equally shallow Deism. This is the crucial paradox or mystery of the Divine. It fills the universe and goes beyond it, reducing it to an infinitesimal dimension of its own limitless being. This is the significance of the passage in the *Gītā* which says that all beings dwell in God yet He does not dwell in them.² This is the reason why the Upaniṣads adopt both the negative theology of '*neti, neti*' and the positive one of '*sarvaṁ khalvidam brahma*' ('all this is Brahman'). Thus all the mature religions affirm a Supreme Reality, indivisibly one, unconditioned, spiritual and perfect which is at once beyond and within the world. If one overlooks the minor historically occasioned differences of stress, all the religions are found to converge in their their conception of the Supreme Being. An unfettered submission to the great documents of the principal religions produces an irresistible conviction of their philosophical unity.

4

In the highest altitudes of religious consciousness as embodied in the greatest saints and prophets, and as treasured in the great scriptures, there is a certain view of the supreme value or purpose of life. God-vision is held to be the final goal of human endeavour. Just as in pure science truth is sought for its own sake, in high morality goodness is valued for its own sake, in great art beauty is enjoyed and produced for its own sake, in religion at its highest the finding of God is valued for its own sake. It is no instrumen-

². *Bhagavad-Gītā*, 9.4.

tal value. In fact it includes within itself all the other supposedly intrinsic values like Truth, Beauty and Goodness. It is the supreme and all-inclusive value. All the great religions are characterized by the possession of an idea of salvation. Salvation is no maximization of earthly happiness. Nor is it merely a relief from the frustrations of the mundane life. It is an abundance of life achieved through adaptation to and integration with the Supreme Reality.

The cardinal vice for all religions is the life of isolation from the Divine. This isolation may take the form of self-love, or or self-will, or the non-cognition of the Supreme. These are all forms of repudiation and are instances of that false freedom which in reality is pure bondage. In opposition to this all the religions have preached the gospel of self-perfection through union with the divine ground of all being and value. We truly live to the full measure of our being when we live in and for the Divine. Abundance of life is the fruition of dedication. In such union with the Supreme is the true freedom that passeth all understanding. It is peace and joy eternal and boundless. The great parables of Jesus on the Kingdom of God bring out the various implications of this unitive life. The Buddha spoke of it as Nirvāṇa, meaning the extinction of all that is trivial and corrupt in us. The Upaniṣads glorify it as 'becoming Brahman.' The *Gītā* combines the two concepts in its oft-repeated term of 'Brahma-Nirvāṇa'. The other religions are also unanimous in indicating that the destination of the soul's journey is the life in God. The ideal may be theistically taken or monistically interpreted as the recovery of identity with the Absolute Being through enlightenment. But whatever the minor differences of interpretation the basic idea is that of oneness with the Deity. This idea of *oneness as the ultimate purpose of life* is an essential constituent of all religions.

5

All the religions contain the teaching of a 'way' to final self-realization. As the *Gītā* brings out, the way involves the practical, emotional and contemplative factors. There is no great religion that neglects any of the three paths of Karma, Bhakti and Jñāna. On this question of the coordination of all the resources of our nature in the quest for God, the *Gītā* represents the clearest formulation. But what it formulates is illustrated in all the great religions and prophets.

There is another very significant element in all the teachings of the way. This also seems to be a fundamental constituent of all religions. It is held that the final fulfilment is no achievement by self-effort on the part of man. It is a gift of divine grace. It flows from the life-imparting abundance of God. But grace issues only when man learns to depend only upon grace. Renunciation of the reliance on all else including one's own exertions and absolute dependence on divine grace are the two conditions that seem to draw out and actuate divine grace. God's grace acts according to the limitless bounty of His nature only when we shed the illusion that we can get 'saved' if rewarded according to our worth. God's grace is limited to the measure of our worth as long as we attach efficacy to our worth. The moment we renounce all claim to worth and wholly look to God's saving power, God begins to act as befits His unlimited grace. It must be vividly realized by us that grace ought not to be in proportion to our worth but must be in proportion to the magnificence of divine love. The renunciation of the feeling of one's own worth and the sole reliance on God's nature together constitute what is called 'surrender' in mystical literature.

The Buddhist formula of taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Saṅgha symbolizes

this act of surrender. 'Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done ... deliver us from evil' is a record of the mood of surrender. The Upaniṣadic seer praying to be led 'from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to Light and from death to Immortality' is not presenting a claim. He is surrendering his soul with all its aspirations to the Most High and praying to be led. It is an attitude of supplication, waiting for the initiative of the Supreme. This is the inactivity mysteriously spoken of by Lao Tze. The final exhortation of the *Gītā* to Arjuna is that he should abandon all other resources and surrender himself to God alone in all faith and wholeness of soul. He is assured of redemption. The holy Koran opens with a glorious Sura which is considered to contain the quintessence of Islam. In fact, the very term 'Islam' signifies submission to God.

Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds !
The compassionate, the merciful !
The king on the day of reckoning,
Thee only we worship and *to thee do we cry for help. Guide thou us on the straight path, the*

path of those to whom thou hast been gracious, with whom thou art not angry, who go not astray.

This idea of surrender pervades all the higher religions and marks the last words of prayer in the lives of the greatest in the field of religion. To offer one's ego at the altar of God is the highest act of the religious spirit.

We may now sum up the common fundamentals of the great religions. In all great religions we have :

1. A solid ethical basis inculcating self-control and humanity.
2. A claim to a super-normal access to Reality.
3. An affirmation of a Supreme Reality.
4. The view that the highest purpose of life is integration with the Divine.
5. The idea that the way to perfection lies through surrender.

The writer would feel grateful if these enunciations call forth criticism and amplification. That way a fuller understanding of the phenomenon of Religion may truly arise.

(Continued from page 140)

for the future of America. There was an attempt to take selected elements of American and European history and recombine them in new ways for the creation of a great civilization for the future.¹² The concept of the Renaissance as the guiding principle for America fitted very well with other trends and forces at work in the country : the revulsion against evil

effects of industrialism, the perennial search for spiritual values, and a confrontation of orthodox 'fundamentalist' Christianity with a liberal and more tolerant kind of religion. In the nineteenth century there had been an increasing interest in comparative religion and a growth in scholarly activity in Sanskrit and related subjects. It was the preexisting attitude of acceptance of the best of other peoples and cultures illustrated by Bishop Arnett and most delegates of the World's Columbian Exposition which prepared the way for Vivekananda.

¹². *The Brooklyn Museum Bulletin*, issued for the exhibit 'The American Renaissance' from October 13-December 30, 1979 ; n.p. ; Wilson *The American Renaissance 1876-1917*, p. 28.

A WALK TO GREATER UNDERSTANDING : TRABUCO MONASTERY SHRINE TRAIL

SWAMI BUDDHANANDA

In 1973 a Swami from the Vedanta Society of Southern California was visiting the Vedanta Society at Sacramento. While walking through the grounds with the Swami in charge of the Society, he was impressed by the various shrines and thought that the concept could be instrumented at the Ramakrishna Monastery in Trabuco Canyon, Southern California. The primary motivation behind his thinking was that it would give tangible representation to the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, though there were other considerations also.

On returning to Hollywood, the Swami presented his idea to Swami Prabhavananda and the Board of Directors of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, and they were enthusiastic about it. The monks of the Ramakrishna Monastery in Trabuco Canyon were asked to proceed with locations and designs. A real spirit of creative service was awakened, as the monks felt this would be an opportunity to express their feelings about other faiths.

The tone set in the design of these outdoor shrines was one of naturalness. We decided to use raw materials from the land wherever possible, and to have the shrines blend in with nature rather than stand out as traditionally would be expected. The challenge was exciting and all put their backs to the task with enthusiasm. (In America where labour is very costly, the monks implement their ideas with their own muscle and so must be convinced that a project is worthwhile before undertaking it.) Construction of the shrines took two months and all were pleased with the outcome, including the tax assessors, who granted us the exemption we had hoped for.

The use of the trail is twofold. It serves as a place where devotees can spend some time in solitude when on retreat, affording a chance to experience nature away from the city and to be reminded of the ideals of the world's great religions. Secondly, the trail tour is a helpful visual aid for the monks when taking school classes and other visitors around for a brief session in comparative religions. The response from most students is quite positive. We invite you, our friends from around the world, to take a walk with us.

We begin the mile-long trail on a hillside that is similar to the hills in Arabia. This spot was selected for our monument to Islam. The crescent moon and star is not the official symbol of Islam; the statement 'There is no God but God and Mohammed is His messenger,' written in Arabic, is the true logos. Most people in the Western world, however, have the visual association of the moon and star with this religion; it is graphically more interesting on a monument, and so we have used it. The small stone wall that is straight with a half-circle indentation in the middle symbolizes a Mosque in an area which does not have one.

Although the fundamental moral and ethical principles of all religions have much in common, and the conditions for the attainment of perfection are in accord, an individual religion is best understood by studying its time and place in history. Moral and ethical conditions at the time of its inception, and the degree to which the prevailing religions have become corrupt, usually indicate the type of reform imposed by one of God's especially chosen messengers or representatives. At the time of Mohammed in Arabia, the conditions were

quite brutish. Superstition was rampant, slavery and the abuse of young girls and women were common. Mohammed came with a clear and simple message of one God, Allah, and a system of spiritual brotherhood and equality. He did not emphasize the highest planes of mystical experience, rather he introduced a practical, working sort of religion. Unfortunately, his followers became fanatical at times, suppressing and converting by force practitioners of other religious systems. When the Sufi mystics emerged, they were not introducing a newer and higher set of truths, but reintroducing the great mystical concepts of a much earlier tradition, one that had its roots in the Indus Valley civilizations (the Persians at that time were predominantly Aryan).

For the most part, however, it is to this day on an interesting and effective monotheistic dualism. That is to say, God is, man is separate, and man must worship the one God in order to attain heaven. Islam stresses a strong brotherhood and a strict adherence to moral and ethical laws.

Historically, it is interesting to note that King Richard the Lionhearted learned a great lesson in 'Christian principles' from observing the very humane way the Mussalmans treated their prisoners of war. They were far more charitable and attentive to the needs of their prisoners than were the Christians. The respect shown to enemies was most commendable.

The problems the Islamic nations face today are similar to those of other countries whose political and social practices are in conflict with the religious principles professed by the mass citizenry. Even when enforced, the religious laws are more often to the letter and not the spirit. However, it is not the religion that deteriorates, it is society. The teachings remain true and we must respect the initial inspiration with which all of the great religions were

founded. The outstanding virtues of Islam are singularity of purpose, regularity in prayer, and brotherhood.

After a short downhill walk through a small ravine, we come to a lovely oak tree with a circular wooden platform around its base. This shrine commemorates the Panchavati where Sri Ramakrishna practised his many austerities at Dakshineswar. Unfortunately, the five trees that are associated with a true Panchavati will not grow in Southern California.

We constructed the circle in the design of a sunburst. The use of a circle to represent the Universal Principle is common the world over, and the sun has always been the symbol of the Supreme God in heaven, the creative power, giving life to our world. The practice of meditating under a tree is as old as man himself, as we can see by referring to the Vedas and to the famous Bodhi tree of Gautama Buddha. How appropriate then to use this very special symbol for Sri Ramakrishna, the most universal of the world's great Masters.

Some of the students sit on the platform as we talk, and we encourage them to question us at this time. We refer to Sri Ramakrishna's teaching about the necessity for individuals to retire to the forest in solitude to practise meditation and *japa*. We discuss spiritual discrimination and life priorities. In the West at this time there is tremendous emphasis on what a person is to *do* in life. Education is aimed at preparing a student to *do* something successful at any cost. There is very little emphasis on the moral and ethical qualities that build character in our present system. The ideas that we try to 'seed' at this time are brought out by asking what kind of person you wish to be, and what profession you can pursue that will allow you to become that kind of person. We also discuss the necessity for the students to develop discrimination and to realize that there is a price to pay for

whatever they want from the world. We ask them how much energy they wish to spend accumulating possessions of relatively little lasting value, and propose that they think about giving more time to the life of the spirit.

A surprising number of the visiting students have had little exposure to spiritual or philosophical teachings, and we can only hope that with our 'shotgun' technique a few points will hit home. If we stimulate a few to even consider the merits of spiritual dedication, then our time is not wasted.

We relate the many disciplines practised by Sri Ramakrishna as well as his spiritual realizations. The young people often respond with awe when we tell them of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual experience with Christ, as most of them have a Christian background. During the past few years we have noticed a greater acceptance of the universal principles that Sri Ramakrishna demonstrated and taught. Many are beginning to feel that recognizing the validity of all faiths is somehow more just and in keeping with the definition of God as the Father of all creation.

Because of the importance of Kali worship in Sri Ramakrishna's life, we introduce the concept of the Divine Mother. Most Americans are not familiar with Mother worship in any form, with the exception of the Catholics who venerate Mary, Mother of Jesus, and even this is not worship in the same sense as worship of the Shakti Principle in other traditions. We briefly discuss the psychological effects that come from ignoring the Female Principle in life, causing whole nations to become overly materialistic and excessively competitive. In our own society we have neglected the intuitive and compassionate side of our nature, leaving the young to feel emotionally insecure, a deprivation that affects their entire lives. Many of the students can relate to these thoughts and respond with

sensitivity and intelligence. The young women especially are enthusiastic over the concept of Shakti being on an equal footing with that of Shiva. The respect that Sri Ramakrishna paid to all women in deference to the sacredness of motherhood is also appreciated. With Sri Ramakrishna, the virtues of purity, renunciation and universality stand supreme.

After we leave the Panchavati, we walk through the hills to an oak grove where on a small knoll between the trees stands a wooden cross symbolizing Christianity. We take this opportunity to expand on the more important points of Christ's teaching. The stress in the West has always been on the personality of Christ and too little on his teachings. Each great Master gives glory to a particular virtue for which he is most remembered. With Jesus it is sacrifice as demonstrated to his followers by his willingness to suffer on the cross for the good of all and to convince them of life after death.

We point out that the teachings of Christ are very pure and in accord with all of the great mystical traditions. Humility, non-attachment and self-surrender are the conditions set down by the great sages and spiritual giants of every tradition. The way to attain these virtues is through wholehearted dedication to their ideals and by renewing the mind through constant recollectedness of God. There is no compromise in spiritual life.

At the base of the cross is a brick sunburst design, a symbol which came into Christianity from an earlier Mithraic influence. Mithraism itself is not at all unlike pure Vedanta. The teachings of Christ, according to some authorities, are actually more closely related to the Vedas than to the Old Testament. The community of Essenes, where Christ most probably lived during his years of preparation, was fashioned after the Indus Valley religious

communities ; and the Teacher of Righteousness who founded these centres was, from all indications, steeped in Eastern philosophy as well as Greek Mysticism. This great teacher's writings reveal that he was the author of the Beatitudes which had previously been accorded to Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount. It is also worthy of note that the work division in the Essene communities was the same as that set down by the Vedic Aryans. The Teacher of Righteousness lived about one hundred years prior to Jesus and also died on the cross, an interesting coincidence.

With all living religions, the original purity and simplicity changes with the passage of time. The absorption of local customs occurs where conversion takes place. One of the most interesting periods in Christian history and one that would be of interest to Hindus, is the medieval period. In Europe the Benedictine monks established abbeys and churches on sites where the Celtic Druids had worshipped the Divine Mother, or the Great Earth Mother. They installed Black Virgins, deities built to the exact sacred measure of the Egyptian goddess Isis. These extraordinary madonnas combine all of the qualities of Mary with those of the Universal Mother. She is depicted with majesty and power and given the title of Our Lady, which establishes her equality with Our Lord. These great shrines are centres of real devotion. Even today it is an inspiring experience to witness the millions of pilgrims kneeling in prayer and devotion to these awakened deities.

Many of us brought up in the Christian tradition have found it difficult to reconcile the teachings of Christ with the behaviour, throughout history, of those professing Christian faith. The rank materialism and exploitation that is the dominant characteristic of Western civilization today has nothing whatever to do with the teachings of Jesus. Enlightened poverty, service to the

poor, impeccable moral and ethical behaviour and willingness to sacrifice one's self are the essentials Jesus taught. He gave no concessions when he said, 'If you believe in me and do what I say, you will have salvation ; but if you say you believe in me and do not do what I say, then you do not really believe in me.'

We try to get the point across that religion is much more than words and loud shoutings of professions of faith. Words must be followed with action. There is no easy way. One must struggle and have a wholehearted dedication if he is to pursue a life of the spirit and become perfect, 'even as the Father in heaven is perfect.'

The next part of the trail leads through one of the most scenic areas of all. We descend down log steps, through a grove of Eucalyptus trees, down more log steps and through a small ravine, climb up and around an oak-covered hill, and cross a small plank bridge where we ascend through the trees onto an open hillside with a view of the monastery buildings high above. Nearby we come to the lovely, large oak tree where we have placed our shrine to Gautama Buddha beneath its low hanging limbs. The design of this shrine is rather Japanese in feeling and creates a mood of serenity. We have used four wooden pillars to represent the Four Noble Truths. The dharma wheel, in the centre, is the device which is traditionally used to designate the Eightfold Path to perfection.

The golden virtues that we associate with Buddha are renunciation and compassion. The facts of his early life have almost a fairytale ring to them, and the students are fascinated by these stories. Born a prince, he lived in splendid isolation from the harsh realities of the world in a beautiful palace and gardens. His father had been told by a seer that his son would renounce the world if he ever came in contact with suffering and pain. To prevent this he built

a high wall around the entire spacious compound and kept his son royally entertained and, when the time came, married him to a beautiful girl. Gautama had a son by this union. One day he managed to escape from his paradise prison in disguise and for the first time saw old age, disease and death. True to prophecy, he renounced his heritage in order to seek a way out of these conditions.

At first Buddha undertook extreme austerities, which included fasting and self-abnegation, and thus seriously undermined his health after some years. From this experience he learned moderation and began to follow the 'middle path' as it came to be known. After a seemingly futile period of wandering and seeking, Buddha sat at the base of a great Bodhi tree and determined to remain there until death if necessary until he should find the Truth. He then experienced Nirvana, the highest state of awareness, a state of pure being beyond description. He formulated his teachings and began his life's work of helping others to become free from the wheel of birth and death.

Buddhism has been one of the most difficult religions for the Western mind to grasp. Because Buddha refused to name God or try to define or describe that great source which is the substratum of all existence, Westerners tend to classify Buddha as an atheist and his teachings as life-negating. This thinking is conditioned by the fact that our traditions stress theistic dualism while the nondualistic portions of both the Old and New Testaments are ignored for the most part. No one, however, can read the principles of Buddhist ethics and dismiss them as irreligious. It is rather preposterous to consider that millions of dedicated Buddhists throughout history sacrificed their lives in selfless service and austerity for no purpose.

We like to stress to our visitors that the

rules for leading a moral and ethical life are stated in a positive way in Eastern philosophy, whereas the Western or Semitic tradition is heavy with 'thou shalt not's'. The Westerner frequently develops a resentment for the overly authoritarian Father-God of the Old Testament, and many disassociate themselves from religion altogether rather than suffer the guilt syndromes that accompany this concept. It is difficult for a thinking person to cope with a schizophrenic deity who is described one moment as being all loving and compassionate and the next as jealous and vengeful.

Generally, the students respond favourably to the positive approach set down by Buddha: Right Understanding (free from superstition and delusion); Right Thought (high and worthy of the intelligent); Right Speech (kindly, open and truthful); Right Actions (peaceful, honest and pure); Right Livelihood (bringing no hurt or danger to any living being); Right Effort (in training and self-control); Right Mindfulness (the active, watchful mind); Right Concentration (in deep meditation on the realities of life).

Although the precepts of Buddha include the same general rules as the Ten Commandments, they are not accompanied by threats of eternal damnation. Quite simply, if we wish to be released from the wheel of birth and death and attain liberation, we must adhere to these spiritual disciplines. Each individual is given the responsibility for his own actions. No soul is ever lost, only detained.

Leaving the Buddhist shrine, we stroll to another hillock where we have installed the symbols of Judaism—a Star of David mounted on a granite boulder representing the Altar of Abraham. The Star is not the official logos of this faith; the Torah is. But we use the Star because the sacred scrolls would not be appropriately displayed out of doors. The Star is actually two triangles which overlap to form a *yantra* or

mandala. The triangle pointing up represents man's effort to reach God through prayer. The one pointing down represents the Flame of God coming down to purify and lift mankind to Himself.

The prophet Moses introduced the monotheistic concept of God to the Jews. Moses faced a condition similar to that which Mohammed was to contend with many centuries later. The laws that God sent Moses to enforce were very strong and seem to us unnecessarily harsh, until we read the statement in Exodus where God tells Moses that the people he has to govern are 'thick-necked' and will require a heavy hand. Law plays an important part in Jewish scriptures, and to this day the Talmudic scholars are renowned for their erudition.

The esoteric teachings, as in other traditions of the ancients, were kept for the elite initiates. The Arc of the Covenant was the holy repository of the great mysteries for the Jewish people. One of the findings contained therein was a diagram for the seven principles of creation, which correspond identically with those mentioned in ancient Hinduism. The design and materials used in the Arc actually created a battery which would deliver a shock to any unknowing person crass enough to try to touch this Holy of Holies. Science and religion belonged to the priest caste in those days, and the Jews trained with the Egyptians who were advanced in both areas from an early time.

If one wishes to delve into some of the deeper aspects of Judaism, one may study Philo of Alexandria who was a contemporary of Jesus and a great authority on the spiritual meanings of the early scriptures. There is presently a new wave of interest in these matters as archeologists find new evidence of practices not specifically mentioned in the traditionally accepted text of the Old Testament. Some of these

practices are hinted at, and one who is familiar with symbolism can readily pick them out, but a clear description of something as tangible as Mother worship and the place it held in early Judaism remains shrouded in mystery as far as the accepted text goes.

The history of the Jews has been one of great hardship and persecution. It is through faith that they have not only survived, but many times in history have distinguished themselves by their contributions to science, art and scholarly research, not to mention their genius in the field of finance. Perhaps because of the hardships a great bond of loyalty has been nurtured through the centuries, and one must surely respect this virtue in the Jewish people.

There are today many branches of Judaism ranging from the very orthodox to the liberal and also activist groups such as the Zionists. In all fairness it must be said that this division existed in ancient times also and probably reflects the differences in temperament that are inherent in all of us. The Hasidic are today among the most traditional and struggle to retain the purity of a religious lifestyle that is increasingly difficult in a society which expects more conformity than it cares to admit. The quality of learning and the moral and ethical practices of such minority groups far exceed the standards set by the public school system.

The success of the Jewish community lies in their willingness to help each other. There is great pride shown in an entire larger family unit when one of their children excels in any given field, and the more successful members are expected to help the others along wherever possible. We point out that the great virtues of Judaism are respect for the laws of God and loyalty.

The trail from Judaism to Vedanta is all uphill, by way of a fine stand of oaks.

The last ascent is steep, and many students have to pause now and then for breath. We begin our comments on Vedanta by describing the meaning of the Aum symbol which we have displayed in a tall gate against the sky. We mention that this is mankind's oldest known symbol for the Word of God. As a matter of fact, the Word, or Logos, which is mentioned in the Upanishads and paralleled very closely in the New Testament, actually came to St. John by way of Philo of Alexandria, who was conversant with Eastern mysticism. 'In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God and verily the Word was God.' Apropos of this, a Benedictine Ashrama in India is using the Aum symbol on the cross and according it the same interpretation. These Catholic monks also study the Vedas and Upanishads.

The introduction to the very existence of scriptures that are older than the Bible is startling to many students. They have been taught that nothing could be older because the Bible contains the creation story. They are unaware that the books of Genesis and Job are from earlier Sumerian texts relating historical events far to the east.

The basic truths of Vedanta are then introduced in their most essential form : God is, He can be known . . . that is the purpose of human birth. Next we explain that Vedanta today teaches various methods for attaining this goal. We try to emphasize the fact that the different methods are not contradictory but are simply a variety of paths which allow the individual to follow his own best way to reach the ultimate goal. We talk about the four yogas and how they apply to persons of different temperaments, and about the balance that can be reached with the practice of all four in varying degrees according to individual tendencies. Meditation and contemplation are discussed, and we define the difference between the monastic approach and that of the house-

holder. As you can surmise, there is a heavy condensing of philosophy, and we take a lot for granted in assuming that the students will be able to digest this very rich meal.

Because we feel that Vedanta is the 'grandfather' of all religions, we demonstrate this with historical and archaeological facts that support the premise. A study of the civilizations during the Bronze Age reveals some startling facts. The Vedic Aryans, accomplished seamen, along with Sumerians and some Semitic groups comprised a professional ruling class for their whole known world. The study of languages and their roots attests to this and reveals much as to how customs and ideas travelled. It is a fact that Sanskrit in an early form was the root language of all the Indo-European languages. Basque and Tamil are exceptions and are still considered a mystery. These two languages are considered by many experts to be Dravidian, but even the scholars cannot agree.

If we go to extreme coasts from India to England and study the remaining evidence of early forms of worship, we find the concepts of Shiva-Shakti expressed graphically and also the use of the sun as a symbol for the Supreme God in Heaven. Some evolutionists would have us believe that the worship was of the sun itself, and this was perhaps so among the common masses ; but there is every evidence that the higher concept of Brahman also existed among the initiates in these far-reaching societies.

The earliest Egyptian kingships were founded by two great men. One is described as being of Semitic origin and the other as an Aryan with red hair. The monotheistic idea was established early, although subject to complication and deterioration due to deifying royalty and other practices. The Sumerians played a big part in Egypt also. It would not be out of line to say that Egyptian religious beliefs came from earlier

influences and that these carried for centuries and influenced many other societies. The Jews of Moses' time for example were exposed to these ancient truths by way of Moses who trained as an Egyptian priest. Later on, the Greeks were influenced by Egyptian thought as well as by some direct contact with Indus Valley philosophers. Summarily, cultural and religious diffusion in ancient times is a fact that can no longer be refuted. Vedanta is accorded the earliest position and finally its rightful rank among the thinking people of the world.

The great virtue of Vedanta is Truth. 'Truth is One; Sages call It by various names.' How profound! How encompassing!

Not too far from the Vedanta shrine, on a hilltop with an expansive view in every direction, is our Vision Quest circle. This is an auspicious location for the Native American shrine that we have placed here. The Native Americans are as diverse in racial background, custom and tribal tradition as the Hindus, with even more language differences to their credit. It would be impossible to represent them all with one shrine, and so we picked the one that is most suitable for the area and which reflects a Red Indian nation that is immediately recognizable throughout the world; the colourful Plains, Indians with their marvellous feather bonnets, their tepees and their renowned horsemanship.

The use of this circle is related to one of the seven sacred ceremonies connected with the sacred pipe. The pipe itself symbolizes many profound spiritual concepts, and the rituals that accompany it are inclusive of a very complete and thought-out system which spiritualizes all aspects of life and prepares one to die fearlessly. Here again, the students have not had exposure to the lofty religious ideals of the Native Americans and are jolted by the reality that the conquerors of the world are not

necessarily the only ones favoured by God. These students have not been taught that the Native Americans are a profoundly religious people. Of course the Indians themselves, of necessity, kept their practices under wraps to protect them from the misunderstanding and ridicule of their supposedly superior Christian conquerors.

The use of the circle is primarily for a rite of passage from adolescence to manhood, although many return in later years to seek new inspiration and direction. The use of sweat-lodge purification in advance of all ceremonies of spiritual significance is also vital. After purification, a youth is taken to a sacred mountain where he is left alone in the circle for a few days of intense prayer and lamentation. He prays to the supreme Wanka Tanka (fully understood, the same as what we understand by Nirguna Brahman), to grant him a vision that will guide his life and let him understand his dharma. The centre pole represents the Supreme and the other four poles, the powers of the different directions. The stone circle is a representation of the manifest universe. The youth is instructed to be aware of everything that happens to him, waking or sleeping, as even small things might be signs of divine direction. Each pole has its special power and gift, and the ideal is to combine the special gifts so that one might become whole and fit to receive the highest knowledge. The gift from the north is intellect; the gift from the west is introspection; the gift from the south is compassion, and the gifts from the east are farsightedness and illumination. You may note the fine polarity involved and also the purity of the concept.

At the end of his stay, the youth is met by the medicine (holy) man and his father, and he generally gives them his most valuable possessions as gifts for guiding him through this important ritual. His experiences are interpreted and he is given

a new name and instructions as to how he is to conduct himself henceforth. Gift giving among the Native Americans is no small thing, and the virtues practised with this must include generosity and sacrifice. The Native Americans, if one has the privilege of getting to know them on home ground, are noted for their generosity and hospitality.

The tradition of warriors who were also holy men reminds one of the great traditions in India where Krishna and Rama took to the battlefield. The Plains Indians produced some great men of this ilk—Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse and Black Elk to name a few. The golden age of their culture is now long gone, but they left behind a legacy that they can be proud of, and it is this memory that is rekindling the Native Americans to rise again like the Phoenix of legend.

The Hopis are the most ancient of the Native Americans and their culture has been least affected by outside interference, although not without a price. (The paternalistic Bureau of Indian Affairs harass them continually and presumptuously try to tell them how to manage their affairs and

their land. Imagine, a people who have survived with a refined culture for more than two thousand years, on a very inhospitable land, needing a big brother to tell them how to run their lives!) The religious cosmology of the Hopis is as elaborate as any in the world and includes knowledge of the Kundalini, meditation and realization.

If we are to list the virtues most prominent in these remarkable people, we will have to include truth, courage, generosity and a reverence for life that made them the greatest ecologists the world has ever known. They have never lost sight of the fact that the world itself is holy and that we are only visitors here, along with all other forms of life.

We end our presentation at the Native American shrine and walk our guests back to the monastery. Many students return at later times with friends or relatives with whom they wish to share their experience. Others have become associated with us and come regularly for dialogue and sometimes for counseling. We hope some of you will also have the opportunity to visit our monastery and share this experience with us.

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

JNANESWARI: BY SRI JNANADEVA. TRANSLATED FROM THE MARATHI BY SRI R. K. BHAGAWAT. Published by Samata Books, 10 Congress Buildings, Madras 600 006. 1979 (second edition). Pp. xxxiii+689. Rs. 96.

The great saint Śrī Jñānadeva (1275-96 A.D.) gave a detailed exposition of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* in Marathi and named it the *Bhāvārtha Dīpikā*. Sri R. K. Bhagwat published his English translation in two volumes in 1952 and 1954. These are now made available in a single volume. It contains a foreword by Prof. R. D. Ranade, an Introduction by the translator, and an analysis of the background by Sri N. K. Bhagwat. Thanks to the labours of the translator and publisher, a

veritable mine of spiritual and mystic lore is now open to all of us.

Śrī Jñāneswara's exposition differs considerably from the other commentaries, though the framework of Advaita Vedanta is preserved with great diligence. It is of course not easy to bring out of this ocean of knowledge all the precious riches, but a brief attempt is made here to focus the attention of the readers on some major points of interest, points that are not generally found in other commentaries.

Śrī Jñāneswara and his elder brother and preceptor Śrī Nivṛttinātha belonged to the Nātha tradition which sought to harmonize the Samayācāra with Advaita, the major emphasis

falling on Kuṇḍalinī-yoga. The aim of this yoga is to lead the Kuṇḍalinī to the seventeenth *kalā* or phase of the moon (p. 142). Normally people speak of sixteen *kalās* (*ṣoḍaśa kalā*) of the moon. But evidently following the *Tripura Tāpini Upaniṣad*, this saint speaks of the seventeenth. As this Śruti refers to *trijyotiṣam*, so does the *Gītā* (11.19; 15.12). Hence it is said that 'first and foremost, spiritual vision is the theme of this dialogue' (p. 84). In *sahasrāra* we have Śiva and 'the very birthplace of *omkāra*' (p. 144) and of the seventeenth phase of the moon (p. 330). To realize this one needs to practise the yogic exercises known as the *bandhas* (Vajra, Uḍḍiyāna, and Jālandhara) as the Kuṇḍalinī rises from Adhāra and passes to Maṇipūra, and Visuddha Cakras or Padmas (p. 375).

The *Bhagavad-Gītā* is described as an *Upaniṣad*, a text on Brahmanvidyā, and an exposition of Yoga-sāstra. This threefold nature of the text is well brought out here. It offers 'the highest wisdom of realization of the Self' (p. 3). That the text presents the Upaniṣadic ideas is well known. What about the work being a Yoga-sāstra? Śrī Kṛṣṇa is described in the text as Yogesvara (11.4, 9; 18.75, 78); and he is an adept in Atmayoga (11.47). He speaks of *yogavittamāh* (12.1), *ātma-vinigraha* (13.7). According to Jñānesvara, yoga is a method of Brahman-realization. It is described in detail by him in terms of Kuṇḍalinī-yoga (6.11-15). Breath-control (*prāṇayama*), the rising of the Kuṇḍalinī from Mūlādhāra to Brahmarandhra, the *bandhas* like Jālandhara and Uḍḍiyāna and other minute details are explained in a systematic way. We are told that the 'yoga discipline is the secret path of the Nātha sect' (p. 145). This yogic discipline is referred to at many places. Some of these appear in the commentary on 8.4, 10, and 12 also. While explaining the yogic discipline, Śrī Jñānesvara makes use of the theories of *avaccheda* (delimitation) and *pratibimba* (reflection) (pp. 204ff). Yogic practices need a proper Guru. Arjuna had one, while Śrī Jñānesvara had Śrī Nivṛttinātha. Frequently we find the author stating that he owes everything to his teacher. The goal of this discipline is to see that the mind is completely blended with the Supreme Spirit (p. 375).

Incidentally Śrī Jñānesvara asks us not to run after many gods but to worship with full faith any one deity. Inability to fix the attention on one deity alone is said to be the mark of nescience, *ajñāna* (p. 393). The symptoms of *ajñāna* are explained fully (pp. 382-395). True knowledge, on the other hand, 'cannot be firmly impressed

unless there is asceticism' (p. 449). Even in the performance of actions, the important thing is to follow the *sāstra-vidhi* (scriptural injunction). The author explains this elaborately in his commentary on chapters 16 and 17.

Did Śrī Kṛṣṇa preach the text on the battlefield? The context in the *Mahābhārata* makes it clear that Arjuna had only a beatific vision which was explained by Sañjaya. Śrī Jñānesvara writes: 'The narrative is preached without words, is experienced even before the senses come to know of it; its subtle truths are grasped even before its words actually fall into the ears' (pp. 4-5). Arjuna had Brahmanubhava when he had the vision of the Supreme, given in the eleventh chapter. The importance of Brahman-realization stressed by the *Gītā* brings the text in line with the Upaniṣadic teaching. As we go through Śrī Jñānesvara's commentary, we gain the conviction that the *Gītā* is an Upaniṣad. There are many similarities between *Kathopaniṣad* and the *Gītā*.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa is called Kirīti in the *Gītā* (11.46). Śrī Jñānesvara makes the Lord address Arjuna as Kirīti (pp. 182, 247, 334, 355, 361, 369, etc.). This is because, as he puts it, 'To me both of them (Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna) appear to be one and the same in essence' (p. 84). Arjuna is also the 'deity of the eighth kind of worship named Sakhya' (p. 134). The author makes the Lord inform Arjuna that 'we both are one and the same soul in two bodies' (p. 268). This is a remarkable insight.

The introductions to the different chapters and the concluding remarks at the end of each chapter are profound. Jñānesvara probes into the subconscious of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Sañjaya and explores Arjuna's state of mind in these places with rare skill. Our attention is focussed on the need to cultivate an 'intellectual passion for God which has no other goal but that of reaching God Almighty' (p. 45). The observations on some of the chapters are valuable and they compel us to pay the greatest attention to the *Gītā*. Chapter Six, he says, 'displays the grand theme of superb beauty, for therein one sees the abiding essence of truth, extracted and fixed beyond doubt... [It] is the very refined extract of the Philosophy contained in *Gītā* (p. 124). Dhyāna-yoga does indeed open our intellects and hearts. It is here that the appellation 'Yoga-sāstra' is justified.

Śrī Jñānesvara does not follow the traditional division of the text into Karma, Jñāna, and Bhakti yogas. Instead he treats the text as having only two parts. The first covers the first nine

chapters. This 'Pūrva Khaṇḍa' is interlinked (pp. 245-6), culminating in the ninth chapter whose glory is unutterable. The 'Uttara Khaṇḍa' begins with the tenth chapter dealing with *vibhūti*s or special divine manifestations. The eleventh chapter fuses the two sentiments of the serene and the miraculous—*sānta* and *adbhuta*. It is like the conjunction of the sun and the moon, of Gangā and Yamunā, while the *Gītā* is the Sarasvatī (pp. 272-3).

The introduction to the eighteenth chapter is one of the best in *Bhāvārtha Dīpikā*. This chapter, says the saint, 'is the very pinnacle constructed of *cintāmani* stones in the form of interpretations of the *Gītā*-temple, studded with gems which will guide you to have direct vision of the *Gītā*-teachings.... The reading of this chapter alone brings within purview the entire *Gītā*-teachings' (p. 552). The previous chapters are the various layers raised one over the other, and the pinnacle is reached here. All the chapters are related to one another as cause and effect (p. 554). 'The eighteenth is not a chapter, but it is the entire *Gītā* condensed in one chapter' (p. 555). The distinction between *sannāyasa* and *tyāga* (18.2ff) is well established. With the help of dialectical reasoning we are led to the conclusion that the ultimate Self is above monism and duality (p. 631).

Śrī Jñānesvara cogently argues that the *Gītā* is the origin or source of the Vedas (pp. 646-48). We are advised to hold fast to verse 18.78 in order to conquer nescience (pp. 662-63). Particular notice should be taken of the interpretation of Asvattha (p. 453) and *daivāsura-sampat* (pp. 486-90).

A few remarks on some points will not be out of place. Dr. Belvalkar wrongly translates 'yoga-kṣemam' (9.22) as 'earning and saving'. The expression means 'spiritual and empirical well-being'. In verse 10.31 the word 'Rāma' is interpreted by Śrī Jñānesvara as Śrī Rāma of Valmiki (p. 265) and not as Parasurāma. This needs to be thought over. The 'stone from the river Gaṇḍakī' (p. 365) is the Sālagrāma.

Jñānesvari is also a literary masterpiece even in the translation. Many figurative devices are beautifully employed. It is a light illuminating the import of the teaching of the *Gītā*. Śrī Jñānesvara wrote his commentary in a spirit of universal consciousness. He democratized the eternal, universal Vedantic religion and opened the doors of Immortality to all without any distinction of caste, creed, or sex. Here is the best exposition

of Universal Religion. The book has to be read over and over again. Words fail to praise the excellence of this great work.

The publisher is to be congratulated for bringing out this superbly got-up volume.

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MEDITATION AND SPIRITUAL LIFE: BY SWAMI YATISWARANANDA. Published by Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bull Temple Road, Bangalore 560 019. 1979. Pp. 686. Rs. 40.

It is difficult to review the book on hand. Its appearance is superb and content fascinating. It is the work of a great Saint-Sage of the Ramakrishna Order who truly lived the message he propagated in three continents in the course of his rich life. He was one of the choicest disciples of Swami Brahmananda, who represented the spiritual aspect of Sri Ramakrishna at its best. The work, as the publishers explain, is a systematic compilation from the writings, lecture-notes and correspondence of the Swamiji. The scope of the work is indicated well in the title. It is a book of directions to spiritual aspirants. With this end in view, it mobilizes all the relevant material from the world's spiritual heritage, the religio-philosophical culture of India, the basic elements of modern thought, and builds its structure of wisdom in both its sweep and practical details within the framework set up by the divine life of Sri Ramakrishna. Thus it is truly monumental in its authenticity, depth and universality.

The author was very compassionate and understanding in his life and naturally the writing is humanely lucid and faces all problems with the requisite thoroughness. It reads like an amplification of what we have in the *Spiritual Teachings of Swami Brahmananda*.

The editor has marshalled the enormous and priceless bequest at his disposal into three major parts in the book. The first sets forth the doctrine of the Divine Reality and the spiritual core of the human personality. In other words, its metaphysical standpoint is idealistic, in that it affirms the supremacy of spirit. This clarification at once marks it off from the naturalistic outlook, scientific and otherwise, and generates the concept of man's destiny as spiritual or divine. The second part elaborately maps out the pathway leading to the realization of this end. The preparatory disciplines and the central and final line

of progression correctly designated as meditation are laid down carefully and in minute detail. This practically is the central concern of the book and it was so in the author's teaching. The third part outlines the fruition of human endeavour in this direction and indicates the spiritual experiences that reward the earnest aspirant. We are given an account of some of the major saints of the world, and their realizations are brought out in their essentials. A large number of pithy points of spiritual wisdom are brought together in the chapter named 'Spiritual Titbits' which forms the fourth part of the book.

It may be remarked at once that all the great religions have taught concerning the way to God is incorporated here, not mechanically but as organically following from the Divine Life of Sri Ramakrishna. Some of the conflicts within religious thought such as the one between the idea of God as personal and the concept of an impersonal Absolute, between world-affirmation and world-negation, between ethical striving and spiritual perfection, and between the individualistic and collectivistic notions of salvation are smoothly resolved from a large perspective. The Indian trinity of pathways—Jñāna, Karma and Bhakti—along with Rāja-yoga stand integrated without any narrow exclusiveness. If one takes spirituality seriously, he finds herein the sanest and profoundest guidance. The Note by the editor on Jñāna and Vijñāna adds a very helpful elucidation (pp. 551-61).

The Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama at Bangalore has entered the field of publication with a work of surpassing quality, magnitude and value.

There seems to be a speciality in the work. Reading it, one imperceptibly passes from the stage of a study into that of a communion with the author in whom there is a rare combination of light and sweetness. He almost speaks to us in his firm yet gentle words.

'Divine Grace comes in the form of self-effort' (p. 99). 'It is dangerous to practise concentration before attaining minimum purity' (p. 123). 'We should be angry with our anger' (p. 147). 'Before you can become a spiritual man, you must become a gentleman' (p. 350). 'A dualist with real spiritual experience is infinitely better than a monist without experience' (p. 420). 'When you get a shock pass it on to the Divine... the Infinite becomes our shock-absorber' (p. 452). 'Some aspirants in their spiritual fervour often suppress useful and noble aspirations... love and compassion and higher intellectual joys' (p. 496). 'A man wise in his own conceit is

bound to end in a personal tragedy' (p. 521). 'Those who say that they have seen Sri Ramakrishna but have not imbibed something of his purity, renunciation and devotion, might as well have seen a monkey' (p. 531).

Such points of light come to us in hundreds from the preceptor all through this priceless communion. The preceptor himself seems to stand incognito and enthrones Swami Brahmananda before us. In the brief autobiographical opening he speaks very little of himself but presents the august personality of his Guru, who in his turn constitutes a medium for the revelation of Sri Ramakrishna. The two together furnish an access, direct and immediate, to Him and His glories. It is something of a paradox that the approach to the Sanctum Sanctorum is rendered shortest by virtue of this double mediation.

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POWER IN TEMPLES : A NEW LOOK
THROUGH MODERN SCIENCE : BY SRIKANT.
Published by Integral Books, 144 Big Street,
Triplicane, Madras 600 005. 1979. Pp. 48. Rs. 4.

Nuclear fission opened a new vista to the world; men came to understand what tremendous energy was hidden in a tiny atom. Similarly, analysing the human mind the Indian *ṛsis* showed what super-energy was hidden in it and how when harnessed and applied for practical purposes the mind could show marvellous powers. That energy of the mind which was unknown to the material scientists came to the limelight with the dawn of the present century. Experiments in para-psychology which revealed extra-sensory perception (ESP) and psycho-kinesis (PK) are changing the outlook of modern scientists and thinkers. The author of the book under review has highlighted these facts and shown how they tally with the insights of the Indian *ṛsis*. He has cited the views of many scientists and, side by side, discussed Quantum Theory, Kirlian photography, Mikhailova-experiments, etc. to justify his standpoint.

The author's view is that temples are the repositories of powerful spiritual vibrations which have an effect on the human mind, and the idols, structure and shape of the temples are so designed as to elevate the mind. Recent renewed interest in pyramids after the researches of Karel Drbal leads the author to think that there exists a hidden significance in the construction of temples. He quotes Robert Pavlita, a Czechoslovakian

scientist, Dr. Nikolai Kozynev, a Russian astrophysicist, and others to explain that the idols and temples are so constructed as to emit certain radiations of energy which have an affinity with the phenomenon of consciousness. Religious-minded people will find this a stimulating book.

In a note the publisher says: 'With a modern approach we shall do research on the various fields they [Indian rsis] covered and present you their knowledge in well-produced books.' We hail this laudable venture and eagerly await the coming books. Though there are some minor printing mistakes, the get-up and printing as a whole reveal the fine taste of the publisher

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HINDI

KANT KA NITI-DARSAN: BY DR. (MISS) CHHAYA RAI. Published by Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, 1 U.B. Bungalow Road, Jawahar-nagar, Delhi 110 007. 1977. Pp. 20+139. Rs. 15.

Issues in moral philosophy are perennial involvements for a rational mind. Thinkers of the East and the West have applied their reason to unravel the various strands of this discipline. The well-known German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) is one of the foremost names in this field who struggled hard to formulate a theory of morality that could, probably, be sustained for long. For Kant, a good man is one who acts on the supposition that there is an unconditioned and objective moral standard holding for all men in virtue of their rationality as human beings. In his short writing on the *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (pub. 1785) he aims at establishing the supreme principle of morality. This principle of 'Good Will' finds its applications in his later work *Metaphysics of Morals* (pub. 1797). The earlier work, however, remains a classic.

Kant's original work in German expects much from the readers. Even German-speaking students of his philosophy find it not easy to grasp the

intentions of the writer. The English rendering of the work by Professor H. J. Paton of Oxford was published in 1948 under the title *The Moral Law* and successfully provided a readable account of Kantian theory.

For the benefit of the present generation of Indian students who prefer to receive their instruction in Indian languages the translations of standard works into various regional languages are an imperative necessity. How far any three-generation translation (e.g. German-English-Hindi) is desirable is in itself an important issue of the translation-discipline. But the need of the hour is that students must get hold of the texts in their own language.

The work of Dr. Rai is a commendable one in so far as it presents the *Groundwork* in lucid Hindi without being much overburdened by the usual limitations and hurdles of a translation. Although an improvement upon any such work is always possible by the author or someone else, the effort itself remains a formidable achievement. The overall presentation of the author is a praiseworthy service to the subject and to the language.

A striking point where the translator of the book under review seems to have done injustice to Kant and to the subject is the rendering of the Preface by the original author. Kant classifies philosophy into three main branches, viz. logic, physics and ethics. Dr. Rai has rendered the statement as 'the classification of ancient Greek philosophy'. As a student of Greek philosophy and also of Kant the reviewer finds it hard to reconcile the two versions. It is hoped that the next edition of the work will clarify the distinctions. The work, nonetheless, is an evidence of sincere effort to understand Kant and also to convey the same to others through a language of our own land. It is useful for students of philosophy.

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NEWS AND REPORTS

SRI RAMAKRISHNA ASHRAMA, BANGALORE

Founded by Swami Ramakrishnananda, the Ashrama started functioning in its own home declared open in 1909 by Swami Brahmananda.

The place was sanctified in March 1911 by the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. In 1959 a new temple was built in the place of the old one. Other buildings were later on added, and the Ashrama, has been steadily growing over the

years. Among the activities of the Ashrama the most noteworthy are a cultural and recreational centre for boys known as the Vivekananda Balaka Sangha which has become a model institution of its kind, the daily evening Bhajan which attracts hundreds of devotees, and a hostel for college students.

The want of a commodious building to meet the needs of the rapidly growing Ashrama activities was keenly felt, and in 1963 it was decided to erect a Vivekananda Centenary memorial building to commemorate the birth centenary of Swamiji. As a part of the Centenary celebration the foundation stone for the new building was laid by Swami Yatiswaranandaji, the then president of the Bangalore Ashrama and Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. In 1968 the main building, forming the first part of the project, was declared open by Srimat Swami Gambhiranandaji Maharaj.

The second part of the project was an auditorium. The rapid increase in the number of devotees attending the weekly discourses made it an imperative necessity. But work on it could be begun only in 1978. In about a year and a half a beautiful, well-designed, modern auditorium with up-to-date acoustics and furnishings came into existence. It was declared open on 7 September 1980 by Srimat Swami Vireswaranandaji Maharaj, President-General of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. The solemn inaugural function was presided over by Sri Govind Narain, Governor of Karnataka, and was attended by over four thousand devotees. Closed-circuit T.V. enabled those who remained outside to witness the function which took place within the auditorium. The inauguration was followed by daily, weekly discourses in the new auditorium given by senior monks of the Order and eminent lay people. Thousands of people were benefited by these discourses, and the three-week long programme was concluded on 30 September 1980.

In the course of his presidential address, Sri Govind Narain referred to the good work that the Ashrama was doing in Bangalore for nearly eighty years and said that the auditorium was a fitting memorial to Swami Vivekananda, the great prophet of Practical Vedanta. About Swamiji, the Governor said: 'Swamiji did not like to use the word "tolerance" in respect of other religions but used the word "acceptance". He devoted himself not only to the propagation of religion as such, but to the propagation of religion with a

practical orientation. It was his ambition to combine, to use his own words, the spirituality of the Hindus, the mercifulness of Buddha, the activity of Christians and the brotherhood of Mohammedans in practice. He felt that in this age as on one hand man had to be immensely practical, so on the other hand he had to acquire deep spiritual knowledge. Religion for Swamiji meant realization, being and becoming. Mere theorizing and talk did not interest him, without earnest practice. Sri Ramakrishna says: Jiva is Shiva; the service of Jiva is therefore worship of Shiva. Swamiji declared that he would not believe in a God or a religion which would not wipe the widow's tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan's mouth.'

The Governor then mentioned Swamiji's views on socialism, caste and education. He pointed out that Swami Vivekananda applied the *parivrajaka* concept to propagating secular education, becoming in the process something of a pioneer in respect of the modern informal or audio-visual education. He then referred to Swamiji's stress on the importance of organization and the national ideals of renunciation and service. The Governor concluded his speech by offering his profound respects to Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda.

RAMAKRISHNA MISSION PALLIMANGAL MOBILE DISPENSARY INAUGURATED

On the occasion of the 119th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, 17 January 1981, a mobile Medical Dispensary was inaugurated for the benefit of Kamarpukur, Jayrambati and Bali-Dewanganj blocks. This urgently needed rural facility cost Rs. 2.5 lakhs, which was donated by some benevolent friends and devotees. The Mobile Van is suitably equipped with facilities for immediate diagnosis and free treatment. On the first day itself, over 300 patients were attended to, and many more could not be taken care of for want of light.

It is calculated that for the maintenance of this essential rural service, about Rs. 75,000 will be necessary annually. Pallimangal appeals to big houses of industry in particular and the large-hearted public is general for immediate liberal contributions. This is a project approved under 35CCA of the Indian Income Tax Act giving 100 per cent exemption to donors.

LAST PAGE : COMMENTS

Planning for a Better World

As Gunnar Myrdal in his famous work *Asian Drama* points out, planning in developed countries is a consequence of industrialization and comes after achieving considerable economic prosperity. But in underdeveloped countries planning is attempted before industrialization and in order to create prosperity. It should be remembered that Western societies have achieved their material prosperity independent of their governments through free enterprise and industrialization. Most of them have several centuries of experience in democracy going back to the Magna Carta and the French Revolution. The underdeveloped countries lack these advantages. In them economic development is a State responsibility and planning is a political issue.

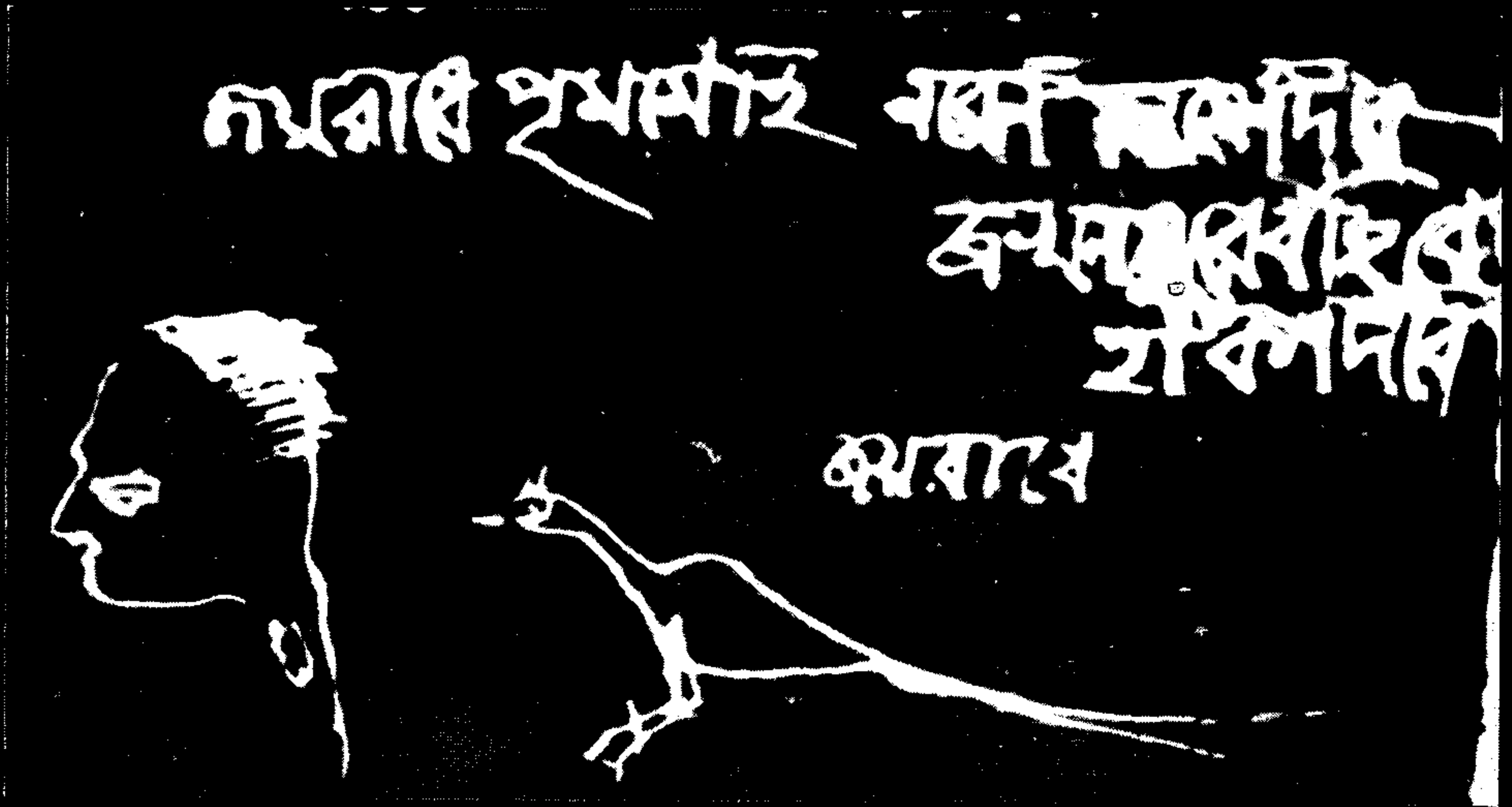
Economic planning is usually done by trained economists, and India has an army of them. And yet as experience has shown, planning in India has not given material prosperity to the masses nor created an infrastructure to ensure this in the near future. What has gone wrong? Programmed national planning to become successful must be supported by three conditions: an ideology or national philosophy of life which is rooted in the country's culture, constructive involvement of the people, and selfless leadership.

Planning in India chiefly depends on bureaucratic efficiency for its success. It does not motivate the masses, and without mass motivation planning lacks power. A nation needs an ideological drive to energize the collective will of the people. With the liquidation of the colonial power structure, linguistic, religious, racial and regional diversities have emerged as disintegrating forces. Half the energies of the nation is being spent in containing them. A nation needs a common ideological or cultural pattern to achieve integration.

In all underdeveloped countries there is now considerable political dynamism and India is no exception. This is clear from the endless number of agitations, strikes, demonstrations and riots. But all these are destructive in their nature, and any political machinery fuelled only by these cannot ensure stability. Involvement of the masses in constructive, nation-building activities must be given an important place in national planning.

No amount of planning can help underdeveloped countries unless there are unselfish leaders with charisma. The ancient philosophy of selfless action known as Karma-yoga is the discipline that political leaders need most. It was by applying it at the national level that Mahatma Gandhi enabled India to attain freedom. It is only by converting the whole political activity of the country into a great collective Karma-yoga of the nation that India can attain all-round prosperity. The ideal of Yoga must decisively influence political thinking and planning in India and must be made a way of life.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA COMMISSIONS NAREN

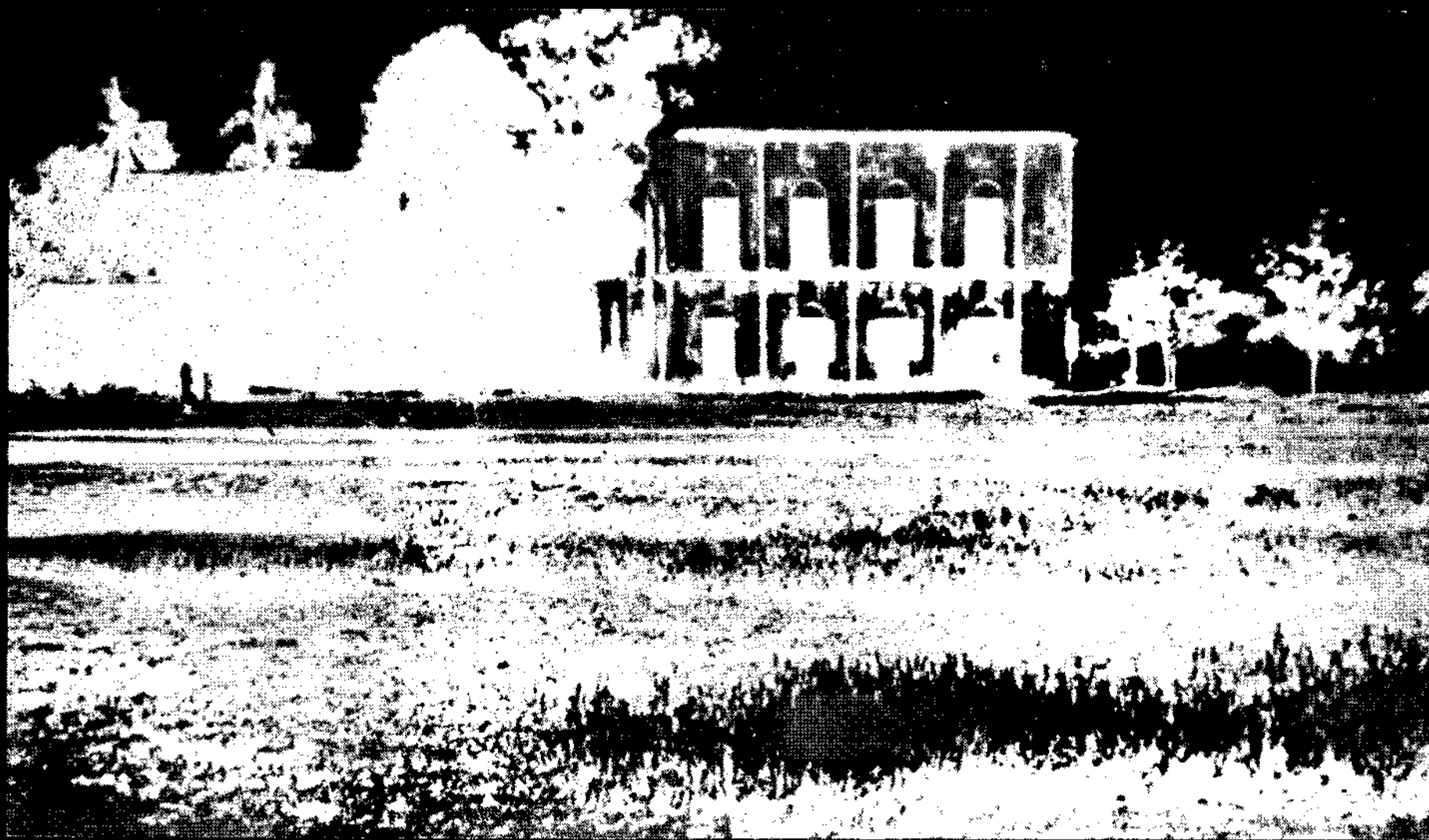


Towards the end of his earthly existence at Cossipore, Sri Ramakrishna called Naren (Later Swami Vivekananda) to his side one day. Suffering as he was from cancer of the throat, he could scarcely speak. The Master wrote on a piece of paper : 'Naren will teach others.' Naren hasitated and said : 'I won't do that.' The Master replied : 'You shall have to do it. ...My *siddhis* (power) will manifest through you in time.' The picture here reproduces what the Master himself wrote, and reads : *Jaya Rādhe Premamayi. Naren shikshe dibe yakhan ghare bāhire hāk dibe. Jaya Rādhe* (Victory to Rādhā, Love personified. Naren will teach [others] when [he] will call out inside and outside [India]. Victory to Rādhā). The human head, drawn by Sri Ramakrishna, at left corner, is supposed to be the Master himself (with a sore throat) and the peacock behind is said to be Naren.



One day, when Swami Niranjanananda and Brahmachari Hariprasanna (later Swami Vijnanananda) were going north along the western bank in a boat, in search of a suitable land for the new monastery, they saw a plot of land covered with jungles and full of pits and ditches. They landed there. ...Ultimately that plot of land was secured and a new monastery, Belur Math, came up.

THE BANK IN THOSE DAYS



BELUR MATH IN 1899

Tide water of the Ganga used to flood this area. Young monks and brahmacharis used to play football in the southern lawn in front of the Math building. Once an athletes' meet was held here and Sister Nivedita distributed the prizes.



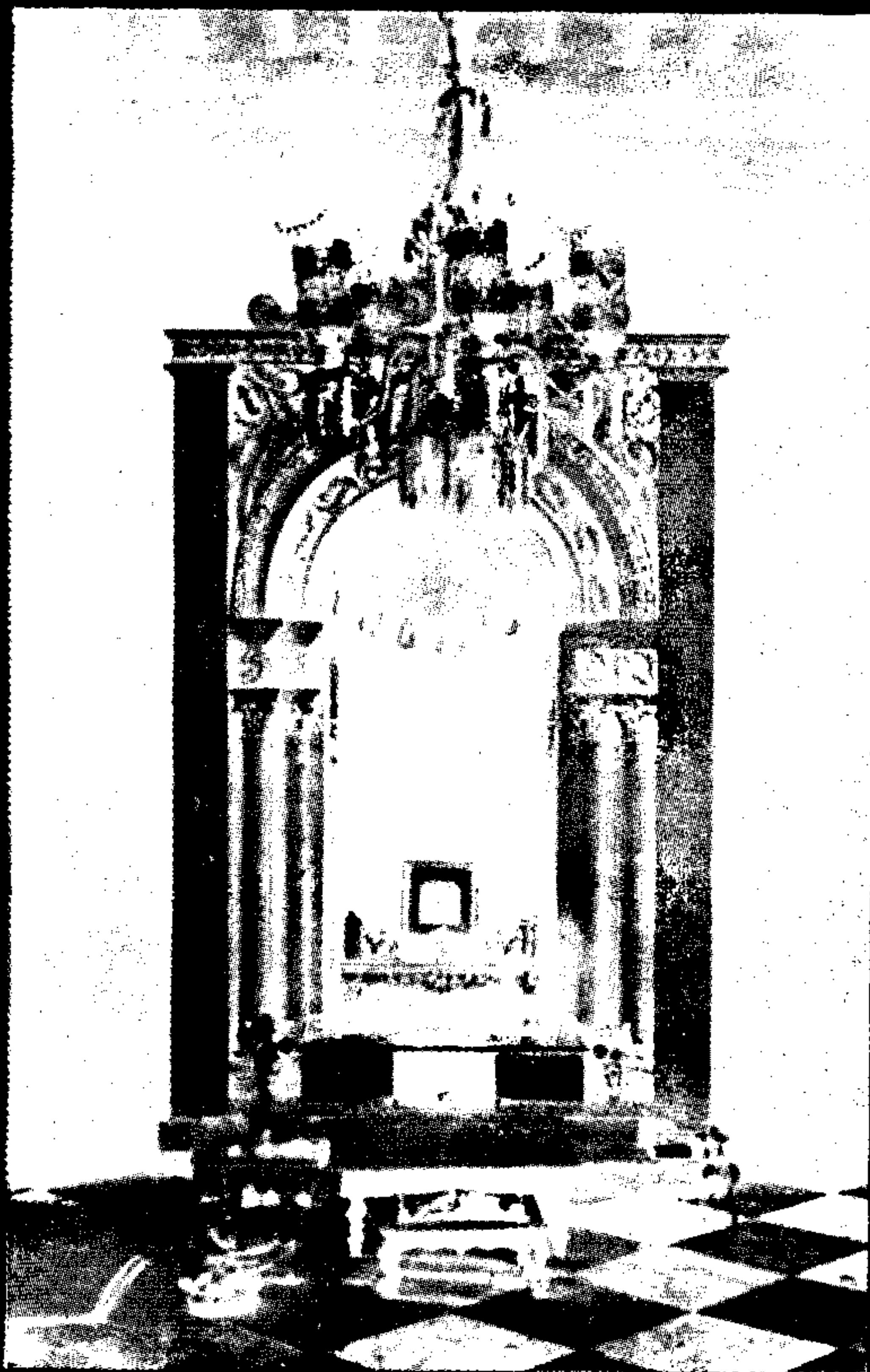
EASTERN SIDE OF THE MATH BUILDING

During those days the river was very near the Math building. Note the steps to the Ganga.



THE SHRINE BUILDING

On the ground floor the right end room was the refectory and at the left end was the kitchen; in between, the large space was used for dining and also for dressing vegetables.



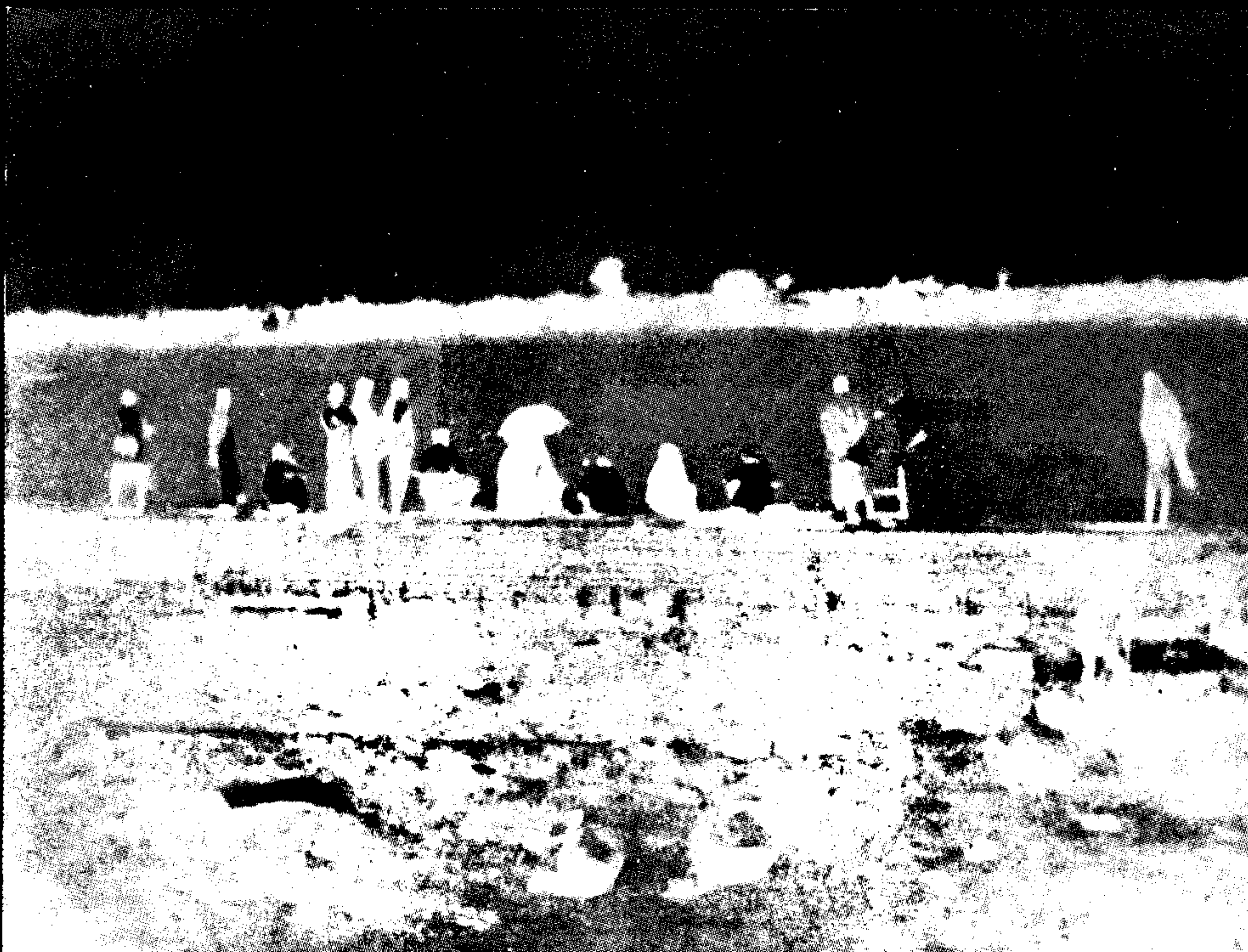
THE SHRINE IN 1900

The floor of the shrine was paved with decorated marble slabs and a hanging chandelier was fixed just in front of the altar.



ISHWAR CHANDRA CHAKRAVARTI

He was the *tantra-dharaka*, chief guide, to the priest Br. Krishnalāl, during the first Durgā Pujā held at Belur Math. He was strongly built, and was the father of Swami Ramakrishnananda. Swami Saradananda practised *tantra-sadhana* under his guidance.



Swami Vijnanananda took up the work at Belur Math, on the foundation of the river embankment on March 30, 1902. Here Swami Vivekananda (with umbrella) is seen watching the progress of work. On his left is Swami Saradananda.

Along with some
dogs, swans, goats,
cranes, and deer
there were many
**COWS AT THE
MATH.**



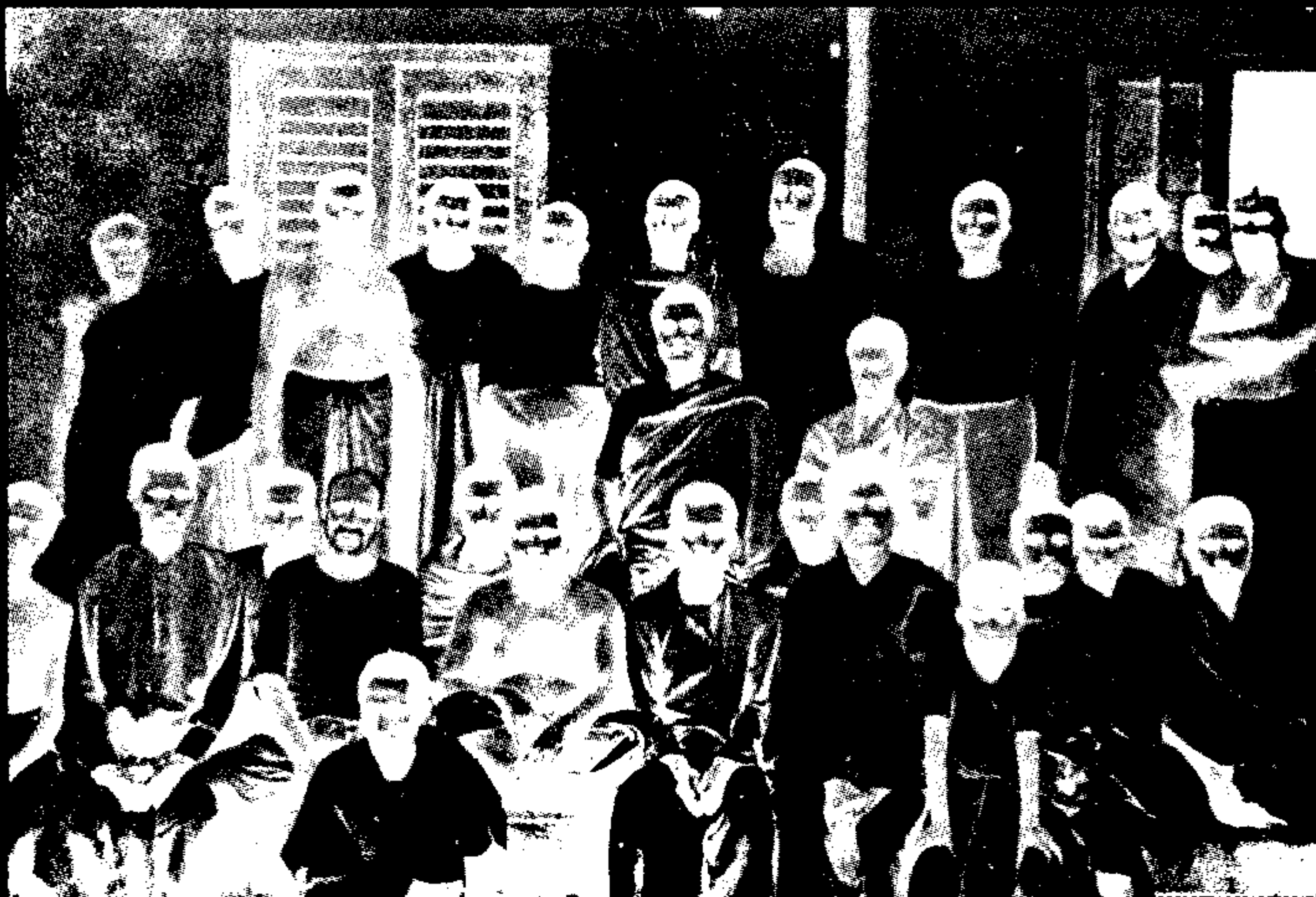


PHOTO TAKEN ON
JUNE 19, 1899, AT
THE MATH

Standing (l. to r.): Devendranath Majumdar, Swamis Nirmalananda, Virajananda, Shivananda, Turiyananda, Akhandananda, Vijnanananda, Saradananda, Satchidananda (senior), Mahendranath Dutta, and Upen Deb.

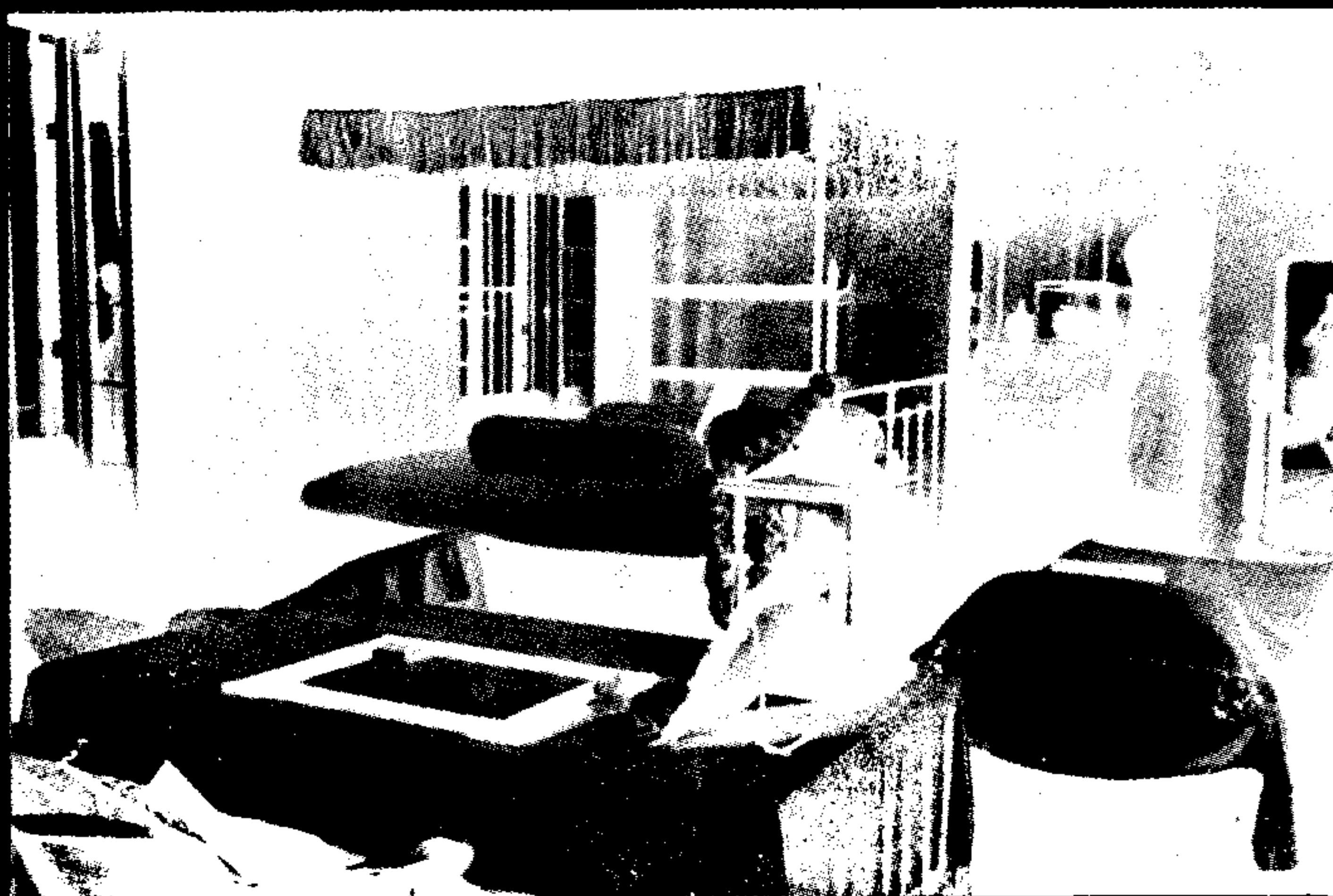
Middle : Swami Vivekananda and Nadu.

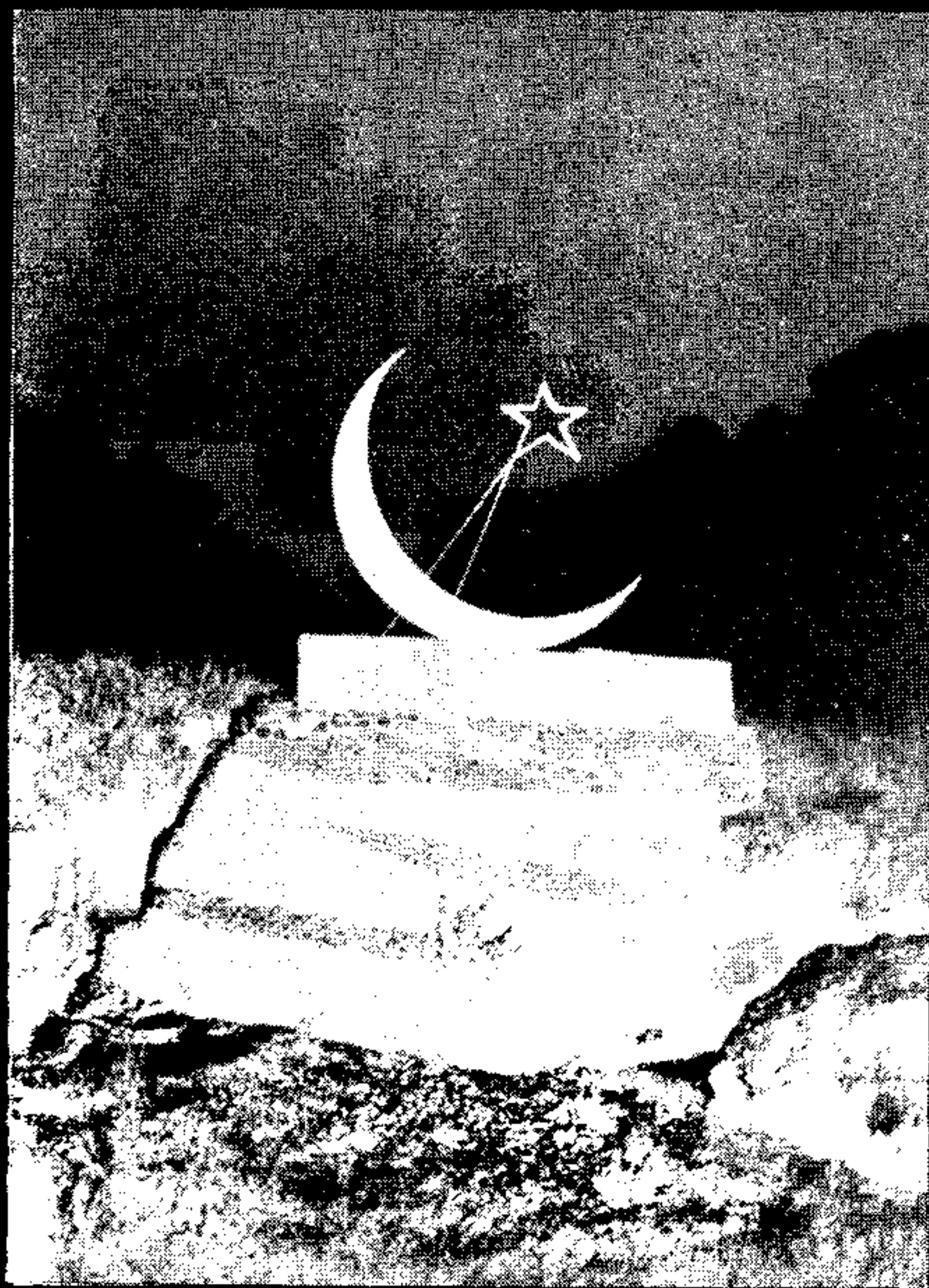
Sitting : Br. Krishnalal, Swamis Somananda, Kalyanananda, Advaitananda, Atmananda, Sadananda, Sureshwarananda, Bodhananda, Br. Nandalal, Kheda, Sw. Prakashananda, Br. Brajen, and Sw. Shuddhananda.

Front : probably Haru Thakur.

SWAMIJI'S ROOM

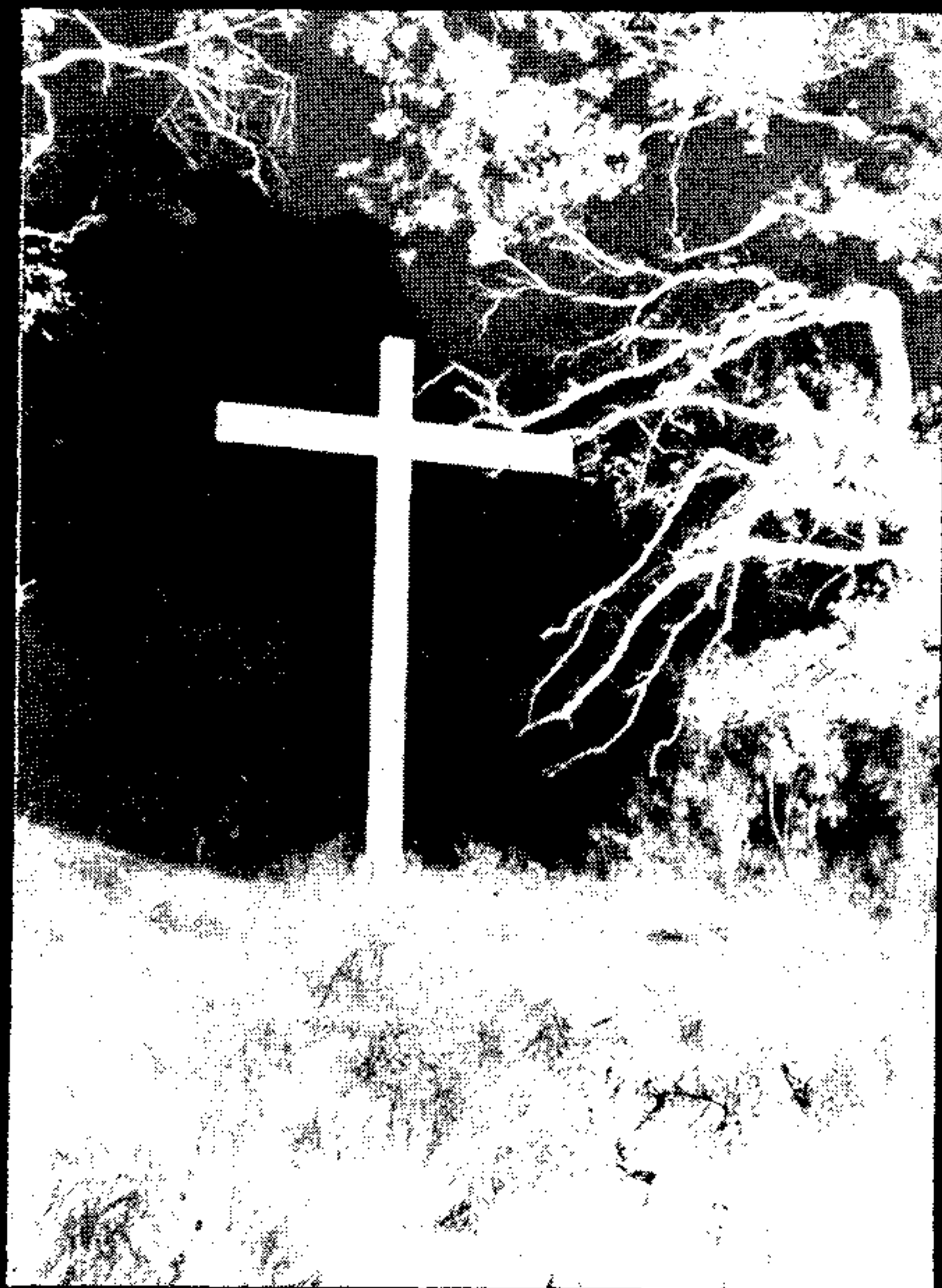
In the corner to the right of the entrance door there was a big mirror, and then a rack for clothes. Near the eastern wall was an iron bedstead. In the middle of the room there was a knee-hole writing-table with pen, ink, etc. and also a small mounted photo of Sri Ramakrishna. The camp-cot, seen here, was used by him to sit in the courtyard under the mango-tree, still existing.





Panchavati: Sri Ramakrishna

Star and Crescent: Islam



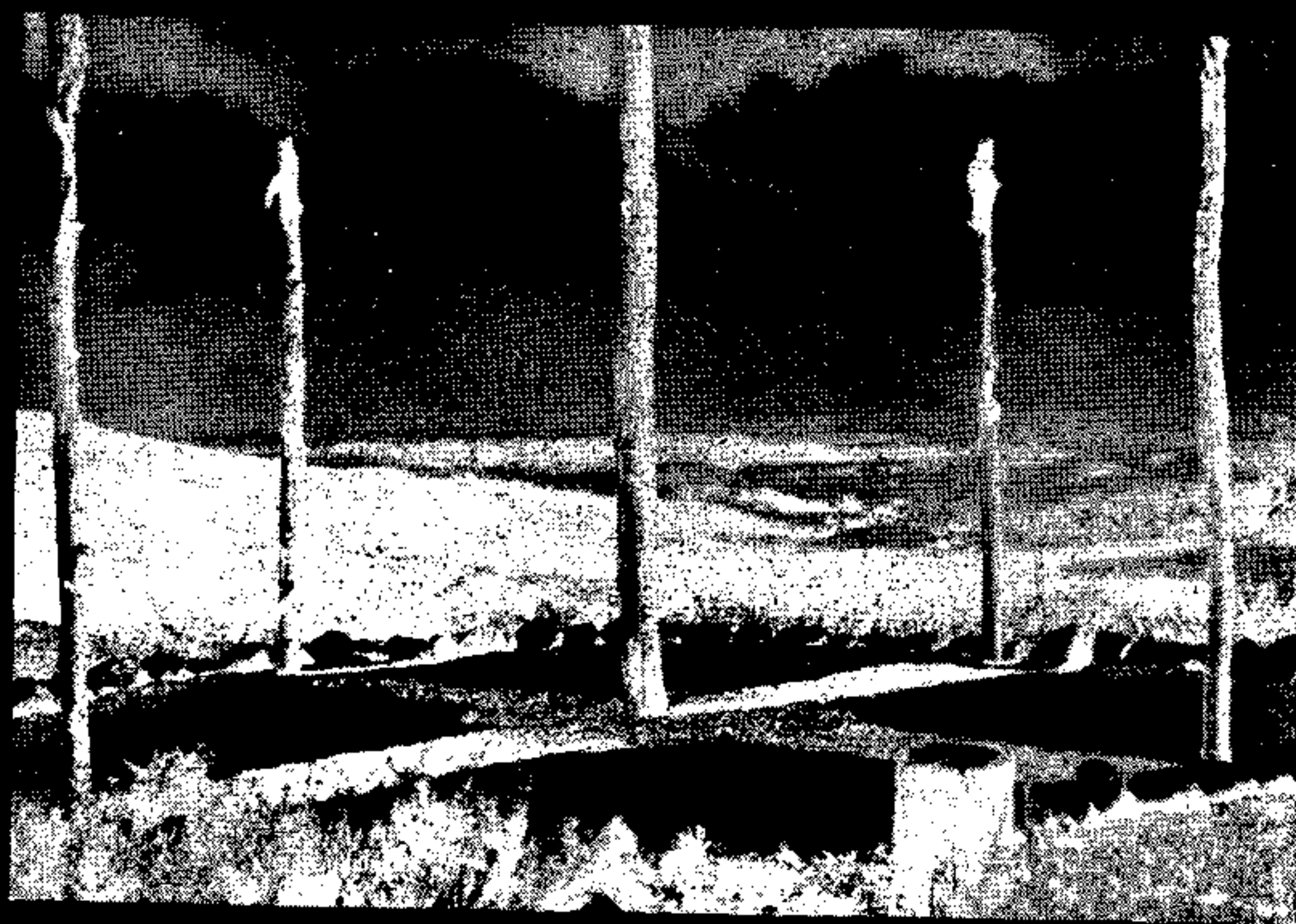
Buddha, Dharma Wheel and
Four Noble Truths: Buddhism

Cross: Christianity



Omkaara: Vedanta

Buddha and Dharma Wheel: a Close-up



Vision Quest Circle: Red Indian

Star of David: Judaism