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Prabuddha Bharata

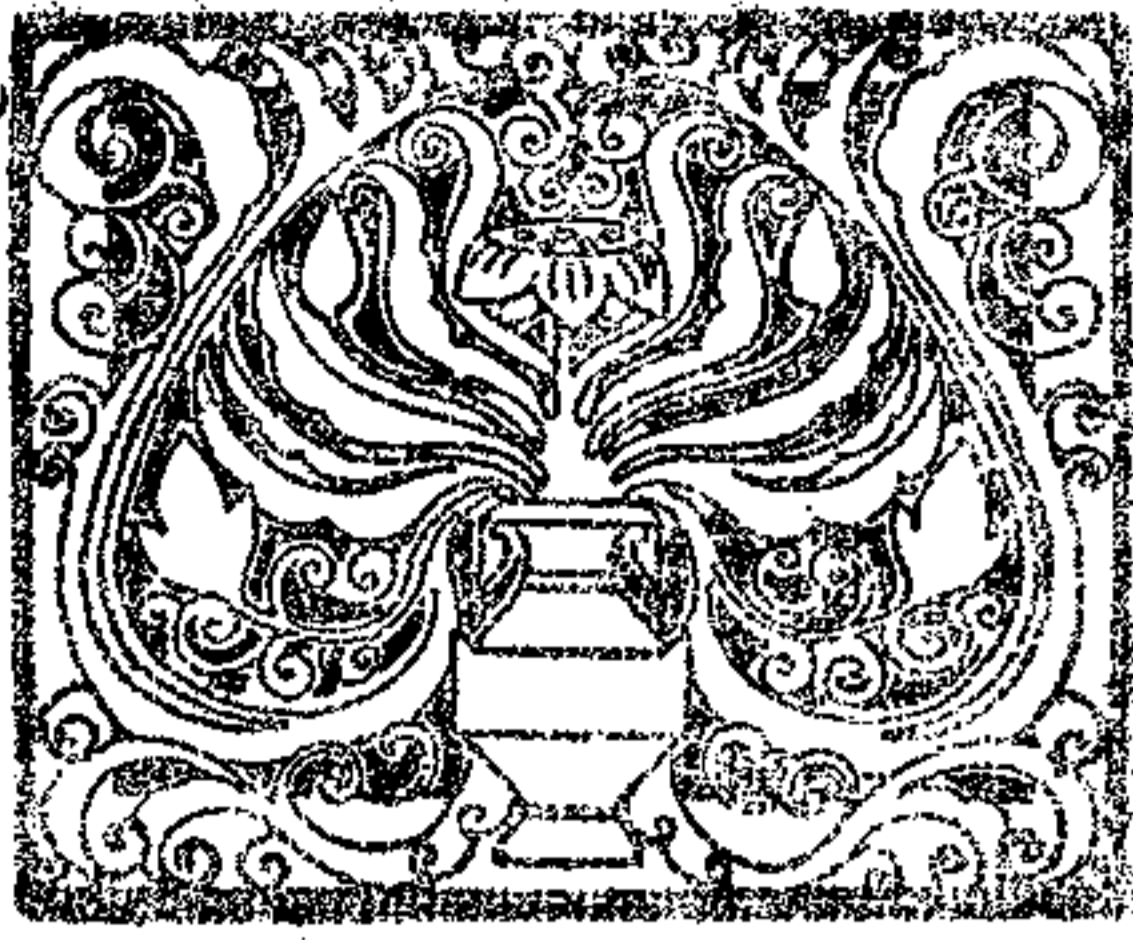
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Prabuddha Bharata

Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

A MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE
RAMAKRISHNA ORDER

DECEMBER 1984

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No. 12

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

INTEGRAL VISION OF VEDIC SEERS*

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

तिरश्चीनो विततो रश्मिरेषाम्
अधः स्वदासीदुपरि स्वदासीत् ।
रेतोधा आसन् महिमान आसन्
स्वधा अवस्तात् प्रयतिः परस्तात् ॥

The rays of these¹ spread out (*vitatah*) across (*tiraścīnah*), above and below.² There were bearers of seed (*retadhā*) and great things (*mahimānah*);³ there was power (*svadhā*) below and impulse (*prayatih*) above.⁴

Rg-Veda 10.129.5

* The *Nāsadiya-sūktam*, Hymn of Creation, is continued here. The meaning of this fifth stanza is obscure, and the translation given here is based on several collated interpretations.

1. *Eṣām*, 'of these', evidently refers to something in the previous stanza, but what it is is not clear. Griffith suggests that an intervening stanza may, perhaps, has been lost. According to Sāyaṇa, 'these' refers to the created worlds. 'Rays' he interprets as 'like rays'. Macdonell believes *rasmih* means 'cord', the *bandhu* mentioned in the previous stanza, and he quotes *Rg-Veda* 7.25.18 in support of this.

2. According to Sāyaṇa, creation was so sudden like a flash of lightning that though the worlds were actually created one after another (as mentioned in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.1.1), they spread out rapidly like a ray of light and it was therefore difficult to say which one was above and which one below.

3. According to Sāyaṇa, *retah-adhah* 'bearer of seed' means living beings, the enjoyer (*bhoktā*), and *mahimānah*, the non-living objects meant to be enjoyed (*bhogyā*). Macdonell thinks *retadhā* (impregnators) and *mahimānah* (powers) refer to male and female cosmogonic principles.

4. Sāyaṇa interprets *svadhā* as 'food' and *prayatih* as 'the eater of food'; the total meaning being, 'the objective world was created after the subjective world'.

Sāyaṇa's interpretation of the stanza, based on later Vedantic thought, is clear but unconvincing, whereas the interpretations offered by Macdonell, Griffith and other western scholars can only be described as *ignotum per ignotius*.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This month's EDITORIAL discusses some of the basic problems of modern youths.

Swami Ganeshananda, an American monk of our Hollywood centre, describes with characteristic simplicity and humility HOW THE HOLY MOTHER INFLUENCES HER WESTERN DEVOTEES.

Swami Ekatmananda concludes the profile on HARIDAS, a distinguished lay disciple of Swami Vivekananda.

In the second instalment of RELIGION: FOR HARMONY OR DISCORD? Sri Nabaniharan Mukhopadhyay concludes his rejoinder to the critics of the *dharmasamanvaya* ideal.

In KABIR AND NANAK Dr. Sushanta Sen, Reader in the Department of Philosophy and Religion, Visva Bharati University, Santiniketan, briefly discusses the role of these great saints as links between Hinduism and Islam at a crucial period in the history of India.

THE YOUTH IN THE MODERN WORLD

(EDITORIAL)

Emergence of the youth class

Alvin Toffler, the author of the best seller *Future Shock*, once gave some school children small pieces of paper and asked them to write down 'seven events that would happen in the future'. Being intelligent and well-informed, the children produced an incredible list of all possible kinds of technological and political events like the rapprochement between China and Russia in 1987 and the use of computers in class rooms. But Toffler noticed that none of them said what was going to happen to *them*; it was all external, objective. He then gave them fresh sheets of paper and told them, 'Now write seven

things that are going to happen to *you*'. And the children wrote about their future marriage, friends, pets and games. But these personal events had no connection with the events in the outer world that they had earlier predicted so intelligently. They showed no understanding of how their own lives would be influenced by the changes in the world around them. They could not relate themselves meaningfully to the world at large. This is one of the major problems facing the youth today and heightens the need for paying greater attention to youth as a distinct class.

The term 'youth' refers to that period in a person's life which begins with the onset of puberty and ends with his or her

becoming a mature, autonomous, responsible member of society through professional competence and marriage. For practical purposes the period between eighteen and thirty years of age may be regarded as youth. Of this period the first half, which marks the end of adolescence and parental hold, is the most crucial formative period in the life of a person. What he does during this period may determine the whole future course of his life. And yet, this period had received no special attention until recent times.

The reason for this is not far to seek. Till now youth as a whole did not have a distinct identity. Youth was regarded simply as a transitional period in the life of a person. The problem of youth like controlling lower instincts, getting adapted to the world of adults and shouldering responsibilities were regarded as personal problems to be solved by each individual with the help of adults.

The situation is quite different now. The youth have gained a definite identity of their own and have indeed become a distinct social group or class. The problems of the present-day youth are no longer the problems of individuals but are of the whole class. The emergence of this new class has profoundly altered social structure all over the world. There are three aspects of this emergence which need careful consideration.

The first is the economic aspect. In all modern societies there has been a tremendous improvement in economic conditions, and the young have received a generous share of the general prosperity. Till the end of the first half of this century the role of youths in society was mainly as workers and producers. Now their role as consumers has become equally important. Most societies have now to sustain a large leisure class of youngsters not in the labour force but as consumers. In most developed

countries the rising tide of affluence has swept teenagers into prominence as a group well worth the serious attention of manufacturers. There are now a whole variety of goods and articles that are specially designed exclusively for the teenage group alone. The entertainment industry relies heavily on the patronage of the young. The growth of the 'teen-age market', as it is called, has considerably altered the economic priorities of the modern world.

Another aspect of the emergence of the youth as a distinct class is the high degree of cultural uniformity that it has introduced. Young people all over the world tend to wear the same type of clothes (faded blue jeans, for example), follow the same hair style, prefer the same type of music, soft drinks etc. and show similar patterns of behaviour like rejection of traditional values, gregariousness and rebellion against authority. Another significant feature is the reduction of differences in the roles and attitudes of the two sexes. These common characteristics have ironed out much of the social distinctions among the youth resulting in the development of a more or less homogeneous culture unaffected by racial, religious, linguistic, cultural, economic and other differences that stratify and divide the world of adults. There is hardly anything to distinguish the life-style of youths in India from that of their brothers in Pakistan, England, America or even Russia. Indeed, youths of the world constitute an international community.

The third aspect of the emergence of youth as a class is the growth of a new collective power associated with it. In many of the developing countries this has come to have considerable political clout, and politicians often manipulate youth power to further their own ends. In India every political party has its youth wing, and the rivalry among these student unions

is one of the major causes of violence in college campuses.

Two classes of youth

We should, however, be careful in making generalizations about youth especially in developing countries like India. For in these countries society is highly stratified and wide disparities in the culture, attitudes, aspirations and behaviour patterns exist between the two major social classes: the working class and the middle class. In India the majority of the people live in villages, and the working class consists chiefly of agricultural labourers and rural artisans and workers. Youngsters belonging to the working class are usually brought up with less parental and social restrictions and their lives are less inhibited or repressed. They get inured to hardship, insecurity and neglect early in life, seek immediate goals and satisfactions, and are less dependent on cultural factors. In India rural youths of the working class are mostly uneducated and tradition bound like their elders, and are little affected by industrialization and urbanization.

In contrast to them, middle class youngsters grow up in a more disciplined but more comfortable and sophisticated environment. They are required to exercise greater control over their instincts, conform their lives to a number of socially approved mores, customs and etiquette, and organize their lives in terms of long-range goals and deferred satisfactions. Cultural factors play a dominant role in their lives and they tend to give as much importance to expression as to experience.

Problems of working class youths

Clearly, the problems of youths belonging to these two classes are not quite the

same. The problems of working class youngsters are primarily economic. They are more self-reliant and are prepared to do any kind of work. They need only simple technical training, more employment opportunities and better wages. When their primary needs of food, clothing and shelter are satisfied, they lead contented lives. Delinquency among the working class is mostly of a casual kind like thievery and petty crimes. They resort to large-scale violence only when organized and motivated by politicians or labour leaders.

The uplift of the poor is one of the major challenges that all developing countries are facing. The magnitude of the problem may be gauged from the fact that in India at least 250 million people are believed to be below the poverty line. How much harm wrong government policies can cause to the masses of people may be judged from the fact that the 'Great Leap Forward' experiment of Mao in China led to wide-spread famine in which more than 10 million (30 million, according to U.S. experts) people died of starvation between 1959 and 1962.

In India the problem of the uplift of the poor is made difficult by two factors. One is the rise of the middle class. The creation of an ever-expanding middle class is the overall achievement of the economic policies pursued by India after its independence. In capitalist countries power is controlled by the upper rich class, and in socialist countries power remains with the working class or the proletariat (at least theoretically); but in countries like India, which try to combine both capitalism and socialism, power gets concentrated in the middle class. In these countries capital and entrepreneurship are provided by the upper rich class or by the government, and labour is supplied by the working class, but it is the middle class which reaps the benefits. Wedged in between the upper and

the lower classes, the middle class acts as a huge filter preventing the fruits of prosperity from reaching the poor masses. This explains the paradox that though India is a major industrial power and produces enough food for export, about forty per cent of its population still continues to be below the poverty line.

The exclusion of poor people from the wealth of their country is economic alienation. In India this is compounded with caste alienation. A major portion of the working class consists of people who are outside the caste hierarchy, denied the integrating and elevating power of the great stream of Hindu culture. Till fifty years ago some of their forefathers could escape to Fiji and the West Indies, but now they have to live and lie in their own mother country (it is the middle class intellectuals who emigrate now).

These two—economic alienation and caste alienation—are the main problems of working class youths in India. The fact that this situation still persists in spite of parliamentary democracy, independent judiciary, free press and highfalutin political ideologies shows that the problems of poor people—young and old alike—cannot be easily solved by educational and cultural means alone. It calls for, apart from the development of an indigenous national philosophy of life and a strong undivided political will, the reconstruction of the nation's economy at the grass roots level and the gearing of the entire political machinery to this supremely important task.

Problems of middle class youths

We are chiefly concerned with the problems of the middle class youth. These problems are not primarily economic and so do not call for massive political strategies. The problems of middle class youths are

chiefly existential and cultural. Though these are the creations of modern social conditions, they can be tackled to a great extent through individual and institutional counselling in colleges, hostels, youth clubs, youth camps, churches and Ashramas. These existential problems are mainly three: social adolescence, search for meaning and alienation.

Social adolescence

In primitive communities youth is not regarded as a transitional phase and a social liability but as the very peak of an individual's power and career. Marriage takes place quite early in life and the activities of the community are controlled by the younger members. The situation is vastly different in civilized societies. In the first place, there is a long gap in time between puberty and marriage. Though the legal age of consent in most countries is 18 and 21 for girls and boys, marriages usually take place long after this. This, however, is not a new phenomenon and human society has through centuries of growth developed several social safeguards to keep this critical period tension free. But in the so-called permissive society of modern times these safeguards are either wilfully broken or are no longer applicable. On the one hand the youngsters are exposed to a variety of stimulations and temptations and are allowed greater freedom, leisure and wealth for indulgence and, on the other hand, the moral, legal and institutional constraints of traditional society are persisting. This social situation produces moral ambivalence, feelings of guilt and conflicts in the minds of youngsters.

Secondly, the advancement of human knowledge, the need for specialized skill in engineering, medical and other professions, and the sophistication of business and

technology have increased so much that young people are required to go through quite a long period of education, training, apprenticeship and research before they gain professional competence and social status. This means that modern youths are deprived of the type of social power that the youths of primitive societies enjoy.

Delayed marriage and economic dependence on parents or society extend adolescence far beyond the age of physical maturity. This artificially extended psychological adolescence is called social adolescence. Much of the uncontrollable behaviour at home, campus pranks, teacher baiting, eye teasing, rowdyism, organized violence and other forms of abnormal behaviour exhibited by modern college students are only the atavistic expression of the frustration of their primitive urges caused by social adolescence.

Social adolescence may be an important, unavoidable socialization process. But it is made all the more difficult by two other factors: success and competition. The Darwinian theory of struggle for existence is, no doubt, true at the animal level. But modern technology has advanced so much that human society can now provide all its members enough food, clothing and shelter without the need for competition. And yet, people go on competing with one another. Not only that; the spirit of competition is inculcated even in childhood with so much emphasis that it has become the chief motive power relentlessly driving children and youths through their studies and games. Unceasing competition produces a deep sense of insecurity in young people. Alfred Adler (a former disciple of Freud) believed this to be one of the chief causes of neurosis. The well-known contemporary psychologist Rollo May observes: "The weight placed upon the value of competitive success is so great in our culture, and the anxiety occasioned by the possibility of

failure to achieve this goal is so frequent, that there is reason for assuming that individual competitive success is both the dominant goal in our culture and the most pervasive occasion for anxiety."¹

What do people compete for? The usual answer given is: for success. On this point the American social psychologist Abraham Kardiner makes this important observation: "The anxieties of Western man are therefore concerned with success as a form of self-realization in the same way that salvation was in the Middle Ages."² For a poor man success means getting enough food and clothing and a good partner in life. For a spiritual man success means God realization and salvation. What do the others, especially those who belong to the middle and upper classes of society, mean by success? Having a big bank balance? Trying to keep up with the Joneses? Getting promotion? Worldly success is an insatiable goal which always eludes one's grasp. To struggle and compete for one does not know what³ makes human life meaningless. This takes us to the second problem facing the modern youth.

Search for meaning

The phrase 'search for meaning' was popularized in the fifties by Viktor Frankl

1. Rollo May, *The Meaning of Anxiety* (New York: Ronald Press Co. 1950) p. 153. Rollo May further indicates in this book that competitive success emerged as a goal during the Renaissance in Europe. As Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* shows, the idea of competitive success is Protestant Christianity's legacy to western culture.

2. Abraham Kardiner, *The Psychological Frontiers of Society* (Columbia University Press, 1945) p. 412

3. or, in William Faulkner's telling phrase, 'the same frantic steeplechase toward nothing'.

whose experiences in Nazi concentration camps had convinced him that the basic quest of mankind is to find out the meaning of life. What is meaning? Meaning is the establishment of a relation between an object or concept with the self. Any activity, knowledge or object which has no bearing on his self appears meaningless to the person. The search for meaning is only a part of man's larger quest for Self-realization. Youth is the period when this quest begins, and even a slight distortion of perspective at this stage can make meaningless a whole life of promise.

There are several factors in the modern way of life which cause meaninglessness in young people. First of all comes the fact that much of the knowledge gained in schools and colleges are of very little use in solving the problems of life. It does not give them the strength, courage or wisdom to deal with their inner urges, to shoulder responsibilities, to face critical situations. Very often education proves to have no relevance to the profession that a person is compelled to follow, as happens, for instance, when a graduate in biology ends up as a bank clerk or a M. Sc. in physics becomes a superintendent of police.

Then comes the shocking realization of the contradictory nature of human life. Young people soon find out that many of their hopes and aspirations will not be fulfilled, that the visions of truth, beauty and goodness that they had conjured up are mirages, that there exists a great gulf between appearance and reality, between the talk and action of people. Traumatic experiences of childhood, disruption of family life, and futile wars like the Vietnam war undermine the sense of security and permanence in young people and leave them in a meaningless vacuum.

There is of course a positive factor in modern life which stimulates the search for meaning. Science is extending the frontiers

of human knowledge and revealing new dimensions of reality. The exciting discoveries of astrophysics, atomic physics, molecular biology and other branches of science are luring the souls of young people into new vistas of beauty and mystery. But the contact with the new dimensions of reality, unless its connection with one's own individual life is clearly grasped, can lead to a sense of meaninglessness. On the one hand science has eroded the faith of young people in the traditional concepts of reality and values developed by religion. On the other hand, science points to an unknown reality, which seems to be too distant and mysterious to become the goal of life, and does not provide a new set of satisfying values in the place of the old set. Without an attainable goal and elevating values life becomes meaningless.

Alienation

While the search for meaning is leading some young people towards higher reality, another social process is leading many other youngsters away from reality. The latter process, known as alienation, is becoming a major youth problem in industrialized societies. We have already mentioned the economic alienation and caste alienation of poor people in India. This kind of exclusion of a whole class or community (which one perceptive writer termed 'internal colonialism'⁴) is not what sociologists generally mean by the term alienation. They use it to refer to the sense of estrangement from oneself or from society that an individual feels. It is this individual form of alienation that plagues middle class and upper class youths.

4. See, Sahasrabudhey, 'On Alien Political Categories' in *Gandhi Marg* (New Delhi) No. 47, February 1983.

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spiritual destiny and gets alienated from the ultimate Reality.

The third school is represented by the existentialist philosophers. Like Hegel they too believe that alienation is an inherent property of human life, and not something forced upon man by the changing social conditions. But according to Sartre and others, life is essentially meaningless, the absurdity of existence is the real truth, and self-estrangement is a natural state of affairs. To be 'authentic' is to have a lucid consciousness that life is indeed meaningless and yet commit oneself through active choice (eg, choosing to resist Nazi rule). Soren Kierkegaard, stressing the importance of subjective experience over objective knowledge, held the attaining of an adequate sense of self in a world dominated by purposelessness and despair to be the central problem of alienation.

Freud and his followers may be said to have worked out the inner psychological processes involved in alienation. According to Freud, the human psyche is structurally divided into the unconscious and the conscious or, looked at from another angle, into the id, ego and superego. The unconscious is the seat of primordial psychic energy and creativity, and alienation is the separation of the conscious mind from his source.

All these different theories of alienation boil down to this inescapable fact that the modern individual's life is out of harmony with the rhythms of universal life. This is so partly because his self has not realized its real spiritual source and partly because the self is caught in the trammels of the external world. Alienation has always been with mankind, but in modern times the self of man has been so much enslaved by materialistic conditions that most people have neither the knowledge nor the capacity to find out its real

source. There is not only meaninglessness but powerlessness in modern man. Many sociologists and psychologists have pointed out *powerlessness* as the chief characteristic of alienation. Modern man has the power to annihilate a whole population with nuclear bombs, he has the power to rocket to the moon, but he does not have the power to deal with himself, to solve his own problems, to realize his own immortal source of peace and bliss.

Nowhere else is the sense of powerlessness more clearly manifested than in the present-day youth. And there is nothing more that the young people now need than a message of strength. This shows the indispensable relevance of Swami Vivekananda, the prophet of spiritual strength, in the modern world and the importance of spreading his message particularly among the youth.

Counter-culture and cultural evolution

We have seen that the youth all over the world have some problems in common. This does not, however, mean that the mode of expression of the problems or the possible solutions to them are the same everywhere. These depend upon the history, culture and prevailing political system of the country. In the East where family ties are quite strong and the youth do not enjoy much financial independence, their problems can still be dealt with at the individual level. But in many countries of the West the life-styles of alienated youths have already developed into a subculture which, because of its unconventional nature, has been termed 'counter-culture'.

Counter-culture movements began in the 1950s in a somewhat elegant way with the British Teddy boys, the San Francisco Beatniks, and the German leather-jacketed Halbstarcken. Even the Soviet Union had

its Stilyagi. Within a decade or two it took bizarre forms with the appearance of the American anarchist Yippies (Youth International Party), Hippies, British Skinheads and various types of dropouts in other countries. Most of these youths belonged to middle and upper classes and had keen sensibilities. A good number of them were clearly pathological cases. But many others took to unconventional ways of life either as a form of protest or in an attempt to live a more 'authentic' and meaningful life. In spite of the persistence of drug addiction and promiscuity, counter-culture has been taking more sober and sedate forms under the influence of eastern mystical traditions, especially Zen and Yoga. At present many young people are experimenting with communes in which cooperation, holistic health and spiritual values are stressed.

One of the chief characteristics of counter-culture is anti-intellectualism or anti-scientism. The attitudes and ways of thinking of these young men were given the status of a new social philosophy by Theodore Roszak in his book *The Making of a Counter-culture* which remained a best seller in the early 1970s. In his later work *Where the Wasteland Ends* he criticizes the West's bleak 'mindscape of scientific rationality' and pleads for a return of submerged religious sensitivities. According to Roszak, science's alleged objectivity and its attendant evils have denatured man's personal experience and taken the mystery and sacredness out of his life. In his eyes reason is a limited human skill, only one among many. Insisting on the truth of 'spiritual knowledge and power' Roszak adds, 'Here is a range of experience that we are screening out of our experience in the name of what we call knowledge'. In other words, an incipient spiritual urge is the basic motive force behind counter-culture.

This spiritual urge is still too vague, in the form of a Weltschmerz, but many thinkers believe that the counterculturists are the avant-garde of a spiritual renaissance that has already begun. Some of them like Theodore Roszak hold that the present-day youth culture and 'New Age' communities prefigure the future civilization of mankind. Some others are of the opinion that counterculturists represent an atavistic aberration, a regression into primitive life, whereas the real renaissance is taking place among the normal, intellectual, creative members of society. To this group belong Charles Reich, Fritjof Capra, Alvin Toffler, and other up-and-coming thinkers.

According to these thinkers, the collective consciousness of mankind has already reached a new critical level and humanity is ready for a leap in evolution. Reich calls the new social dimension Consciousness III.⁸ Capra has shown the social implications of science and holds Galilean reductionism responsible for the present crisis in society. According to him, with the development of quantum physics and General Systems Philosophy (developed by Bertalanfly, Needham, Fries and others), humanity has reached a turning point.⁹ Toffler speaks of three waves of human culture. The first wave was agriculture with its primitive technology and feudal society. The second wave was industry with its mechanized technology and its capitalist-worker social framework. Now the third wave is sweeping through the world. At the core of this new wave is the electronics revolution which has given us the computer and the communications

8. Charles A. Reich, *The Greening of America* (New York: Random House, 1970)

9. Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point* (London: Flamingo, 1983). For 'systems' view see, Ervin Laszlo, *Introduction to Systems Philosophy* (New York: Harper Torch Books, 1973)

media.¹⁰ According to him the industrialized society is 'at the end of its tether' and the new society that is emerging is a *technological* society, not an industrial society. Toffler gives considerable importance to the need for educating children and youths to prepare themselves for 'the next stage of liberation'.

Whether we believe in counter-culture or cultural 'third wave', it is clear that western society is undergoing a rapid transformation. Eastern societies cannot remain unaffected, and Japan has already begun adapting itself to the new situation. What are the options before India? For sheer survival in the world India has to catch up with the West in industry and technology. In these days of awakened humanism, wide economic and social disparities among the different classes are an anachronism and must go. There is, however, one thing which India has to retain and contribute to other cultures. It is spirituality. In an insightful article published ten years ago in a Japanese magazine the famous historian Arnold

10. Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981)

Toynbee identified four principles of existence which the West should learn from the East: contemplation, harmony with nature, integration of evil and suffering into life, and survival of life after death.¹¹ All these principles are based on the science of consciousness developed in India.

It was the firm conviction of Swami Vivekananda that by applying the basic doctrines of Vedanta, contained in the science of consciousness, in day-to-day life the whole human society could be transformed. Though the modalities of Swamiji's 'Practical Vedanta', as he called it, are yet to be fully worked out, the new awakening that is sweeping through western countries shows that Swamiji's theory of the spiritual transformation of society is right and is the need of the hour. If the right type of spiritual awareness is created in the minds of the youth of the West and the East, they can play a great constructive role in the reconstruction of humanity. After all, the future is theirs.

11. cf. Arnold Toynbee, 'What does the West Have to Learn from the East' in *PHP* (Tokyo) August 1974.

HOW THE HOLY MOTHER INFLUENCES HER WESTERN DEVOTEES*

SWAMI GANESHANANDA

If you want peace of mind do not look into others' faults. Rather look into your own. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger, my child. The whole world is your own.

These are the last recorded words of

* A talk given at a public meeting held in Belur Math to celebrate the birth anniversary of Sri Sarada Devi on 26 December 1983.

Sri Sarada Devi whom we all call, in a loving and reverent way, the Holy Mother. They were spoken by her to a weeping, world-weary lady disciple who had come to see her at Udbodhan House a few days before she left her mortal body. These now immortalized parting words epitomize the life and teachings of the Holy Mother. They were addressed not merely to that mind-troubled devotee near her bedside,

but to all of us—women and men, the old and the young, the virtuous and the non-virtuous—to all of us the world over. And they were uttered with the authority born of living certitude, for the Mother had in her own blessed life made the whole world her very own. And, as she herself stated, she knew nothing but peace. Sister Nivedita found Mother's life 'one long stillness of prayer'.

I don't think it is necessary here to give a biographical account of the Holy Mother's life, or even to try to delve into the subtle spiritual meaning of the things she said or did. Most of you are familiar with her life which has been so admirably recorded by her close disciples. I am just a beginning student still trying to understand the deeper spiritual meaning of her life. The desire to understand it better is one of the main reasons I have come back to India—to learn in whatever way I possibly can.

And so perhaps it might be more fitting for me to touch on one particular aspect or significance of her life, and that is its impact on the western devotees and sympathizers of the Ramakrishna movement. Impact is probably not the correct or the best word. It carries with it the idea of a jolt or shock or at least some drastic or dramatic change. The influence of the Holy Mother is certainly dramatic, but it is more a gentle influence—one that comes through an expression of love, compassion, tenderness, and acceptance of one and all. I think it is these gentle qualities that first and foremost attract westerners—especially her acceptance of one and all, no matter how unfit and worldly they might be.

Western people are not totally unaware of their shortcomings. Many of us have run the gamut of the materialistic so-called 'advantages' in life. We have worked hard to gain them, often at the expense of other

peoples. And we have found that the affluence and so-called technological advantages, which we were brought up to believe would solve all life's problems and quite naturally give us peace of mind, have not done so. Many have found that it was all a hollow dream, or just plain delusion.

This is why the West is looking for a meaningful life with a promise that will hold true with a goal that will really give peace of mind. If you look for a reflection of this longing for an inner spiritual life in western newspapers, television, movies, and politics, you are not likely to find it there. Of course, this negative expression of the media is what still comes to us even here in India so loudly. There are unfortunately still plenty of greedy people in the West who have not run the full gamut of experience and who still hold on to the insatiable materialistic goal. Negative noise is always louder than positive noise. You may, on the other hand, find the true echo of that more positive, quieter voice of the western man's soul in our poetry, art, and humanitarian institutions and social service schemes. This seldom makes newspaper headlines or sells movies or fulfils the power craze of politicians. This more positive but subtle expression you will find mostly in the hearts of quiet individuals. Unfortunately here in India you see only a few of these sincere seekers who come all the way to the East overcoming difficult cultural barriers. There are countless more who have to stay at home in their glittering cities, but who have learned the truth of that old saying: 'All that glitters is not gold'.

More and more of these Americans are coming into touch with the religious philosophy of the East and finding in it meaning, hope and lasting promise. Naturally, I am most familiar with our Ramakrishna centres in the West and although they are relatively small in

number compared to other more flamboyant eastern religious groups, our centres are by and large a good index of what is happening in the West. In a great way it is a fulfilment of Swamiji's prophecy that the West will grow spiritually through the subtle influence of Vedanta as interpreted and energized by Sri Ramakrishna. Certainly Swami Vivekananda gave the best years of his life to sowing the seed of this spiritual revival in the West.

One of the more understandable shortcomings of us American devotees is what I call a spiritual inferiority complex. Sri Ramakrishna to us, of course, epitomizes the goal. His life and teaching, brought to us at the turn of the century by Swamiji who also was a living example, are what we look up to. They give us our first inspiration. They give all those great principles of Vedanta which could transform our lives: harmony of religion, synthesis of the four main yogas, the ultimate oneness of Reality, and the certitude of direct spiritual experience. The West has been hungering for these life-giving principles for ages. The West is now suffering from spiritual malnutrition. But after the initial jolt of finding out all of this, comes the difficulty of trying to put it into practice. Meditation—I mean the deeper illuminating real meditation—eludes many of us. This often makes us feel unworthy and impure. Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji appear to be so high above our reach that we hardly know what to do. This is what I mean by the spiritual inferiority complex that many westerners have. Of course it should not be this way. In theory we are all the Atman, ever pure, ever free, ever perfect. But as you all know, there is a great difference between theory and actual practice. And this is where the Holy Mother comes in.

As I mentioned earlier, aside from her strong but gentle influence, which is full

of tenderness, love and compassion, there is the wonderful attraction for us Americans: her acceptance of all. She said, 'I am the mother to the wicked, as I am the mother of the virtuous. Whenever you are in distress, just say to yourself "I have a mother"'. What a wonderfully warm and reassuring acceptance this is. And should we ever doubt the authority of this statement, we could recall how Sri Ramakrishna himself regarded this very special relationship with his wife. Shortly after she had first come to Dakshineswar to live with him as a beautiful young woman of almost 18 years, he asked her point blank, 'Have you come here to drag me down to the life of the world?' 'Certainly not', she replied without a moment's hesitation, 'Why should I entangle you in the world? I am here to help you realize your spiritual ideal.' And when she on her part asked him one day how he regarded her, he told her that he saw no difference between her, his own mother and the Divine Mother Kali. And as we all remember, soon after that on an auspicious night he arranged in his room a special worship of the Divine Mother. Sarada took the place of the deity and her husband offered her formal worship. Through this worship Sri Ramakrishna awakened the divine Mother in her. From that time on, though she played the role of a traditional Indian wife, looking humbly on Sri Ramakrishna as the Lord himself and depending on his guidance, Sarada Devi became the Holy Mother. That he intended to prepare her for her future role as spiritual leader after he left this world is evidenced by the way he trained her not only in the practical everyday things such as personal conduct and caring for guests but also in spiritual disciplines. During that formal worship of her as the Divine Mother he had offered at her feet all the fruits of his own spiritual practices. All

his spiritual wealth was hers henceforth. Thus this simple girl, born and brought up in a small village, was transformed into a Veritable goddess. And although she spent the rest of her life trying to hide her real nature, she was fully aware of it and all that it meant.

Some people question why the Holy Mother tried to hide her divinity. A sceptical doubter might say, 'Oh, that's just an easy way to make a saint out of an ordinary woman'. But most of us westerners don't look at it that way. The easy approachability which the Holy Mother offered—that of a compassionate, loving mother who accepts all—that is precisely what we all need. And had not the Holy Mother played this role of easy accessibility, she might have seemed so lofty and far away that we could not hope to reach her. There were, however, a few times when she did admit her true divine nature and we are glad for these self-revelations also. In later life she once admitted 'The Master regarded all creatures as manifestations of the Divine Mother. He left me behind to manifest the Motherhood of God.'

Sometimes we find people who try to make an issue of who was actually greater, Sri Ramakrishna or the Holy Mother. This, of course, is a pointless waste of time, and only shows a misunderstanding of the teachings of both. We all have different tendencies and needs and, as Sri Ramakrishna so frequently said, we must choose one of the various expressions of divinity and follow one of the paths, though all of them lead ultimately to the one goal of God realization. In Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother there is a mysterious and unfathomable unity of the Supreme Spirit. Swami Saradananda has beautifully compared their relationship to that between the fire and its burning power.

A second great quality of the Holy Mother which attracts westerners and makes her such a great influence in our lives is her practicality. She was extremely practical and considered the little everyday things very important in spiritual life. It is all very well to have a nice place for meditation practice. But some of us may carry it too far. In the West I've seen special rooms for meditation constructed in private homes. They are expensively made soundproof with airconditioning and thermostatically controlled temperature. Some are even equipped with stereophonic sound systems so that soothing music may put one in the right mood for meditation. There may be upholstered chairs or soft cushions and beautiful draperies. These lavish furnishings conjure up a world of fantasy for the would-be meditator or he may even end up falling asleep. True meditation, as all of us who have attempted it know fully well, is not easy thing. It requires constant practice over a long period of time. It is far better to honestly recognize our limitations and utilize our time in a balanced variety of spiritual practices. Then, even our short but regular attempts at meditation will be much more fruitful.

I remember learning a good lesson about this personal honesty concerning meditation. It was during my early monastic years and I was sitting on the steps of our Hollywood temple with an older American monk. He was very particular about how he used the word meditation, and he had just shocked me by confessing that he didn't think he had ever really meditated except perhaps for a few blessed moments when his mind had become deeply concentrated for a second or two. He noticed the look of disappointment on my face. 'Don't worry about it brother,' he consoled me. 'It is worth all the possible effort you can give, and there

really isn't anything else so worthwhile in this life.' Those few seconds of deep meditation that he had just mentioned had, however, sustained him all those years. Then he put his hand on my shoulder and added, 'Now it's time for us to go into the temple and "sit" quietly.' He didn't use the word 'meditate', but added confidently, 'We can make japa, and we can pray, and these are the practices which will purify the mind and, someday, lead us to true meditation.' This is the practical approach that the Holy Mother used and this old American monk had come under her spell and was deeply devoted to her. I try always to remember that lesson.

In the West we are conditioned to admire that which is big, spectacular and instantaneous. This kind of conditioning can also influence our attitude to spiritual life if we are not careful. In spiritual life it is the apparently little things that count and the Holy Mother emphasized this point very much. She did it not only through her teachings but also through her mundane, everyday life. Think of the hours she must have spent in the preparation of food for the Master and for the many disciples and guests at Dakshineswar. And think of the endless number of humble household chores she engaged herself in till the end of her life. She looked upon these daily tasks as an act of worship and never uttered a word of complaint about them. One of her well-known teachings is: 'Many are known to do great works under the stress of some strong emotion. But one's true nature is known from the manner in which one does one's insignificant daily tasks.'

Western people pride themselves on being practical, but we are not always so especially in spiritual life. The Holy Mother has shown us how to be practical in spiritual life and so her influence in this

way is also greatly appreciated by us.

A third great influence the Holy Mother has made on the minds of the western devotees might be called a balancing of the head and the heart. The need for this inner harmony has been stressed by Swami Vivekananda and many of the other direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, but the Holy Mother's demonstration and practice of it is unusual. In terms of Indian thought, the balancing of reason and emotion means harmonizing Jñāna and Bhakti.

Western civilization also prides itself on being rational, on the development of the organized mental process called the scientific method, which along with other favourable factors has given rise to what is called modern technology. In the beginning of this technological development western people had hoped that it would solve all of life's problems. Now we are finding that it can never do this, rather it may even destroy us all, and the planet Earth to boot. Why? Because the head has not been balanced by the heart. Reason has not been tempered by the feelings of compassion and love. There are undoubtedly some atheists and materialists who will argue this point. But there are also a few exceptionally great thinkers belonging to the top level of the scientific community, recognized as authorities in their various scientific fields, who have realized that pure science and true religion are coming closer and closer together. And now some are admitting that the experienced inner realities discovered by those ancient Vedic sages may in fact be the Ultimate Truth. The multifarious, phenomenal universe is just an illusory expression of the One Ultimate Reality. We are deluded by an inscrutable veil of ignorance called Maya. How to break through it? By reason or by intuitive feeling? By head or by heart? By Jñāna

or Bhakti? What Mother's life teaches us is that it should be done by harmonizing both.

When the fatal cancer finally took Sri Ramakrishna's life, the Holy Mother was grief-stricken. She was removing her bracelets and ornaments and preparing to live the traditional life of a Hindu widow. Her emotions and feelings were the first and natural reaction. Then the Master appeared before her in a profound vision, took hold of her hands and said, 'Why are you behaving like a widow? Am I dead? I have just moved from one room to another.' Since then Mother never expressed her sorrow at her personal loss. As Sister Nivedita has remarked, Mother was always calm and radiated joy.

For most of us when the chips are down, when we are confronted with the most challenging tests, the emotions take over and reason falls by the wayside. Witness that song in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna—'Oh Mother, make me mad with Thy love. What need have I for knowledge or reason?' Many saints have followed this path of Bhakti, and reached the highest goal. The life of Sri Sarada Devi helps us westerners to realize that we need the heart as well as the head.

Outwardly the Holy Mother's influence in the West has been exercised through her role as the support and complement to the life of Sri Ramakrishna. But at a deeper spiritual level she has exerted a direct, personal influence on the minds of many westerners through her self-giving, all-forgiving, all-accepting, easily approachable and accessible motherhood on the one hand and her immense practicality and robust common sense on the other. She makes us realize that we should give up our grandiose spiritual day dreams and must start from where we are, climbing every rung of the spiritual ladder, not to think that we can egoistically make one

big jump through some miracle of meditation and all at once reach the top of superconsciousness. By spiritualizing the small, mundane activities of every day life we must learn to keep our minds on God. And only after this interior recollectedness has become habitual will our attempts at meditation be fruitful. To accomplish all this the head and the heart must be balanced. We westerners who have so often over-emphasized the importance of reason, must strike a balance between it and emotions. The Holy Mother has taught us that both are necessary in spiritual life.

Two days ago, when I discovered that I was to stand up here along with the rest of these respected Swamis and say a few words, I was a little perplexed as to what I might talk about. So I quietly asked a young Swami what I should do. He must have understood that I was a bit anxious, and he answered me comfortingly, 'Just say what is in your heart. Tell us how you feel about the Holy Mother.' That also, I realized, would not be so easy to do. The Holy Mother means a great deal to me, perhaps more than I could rightly put into words. I chose rather to say something in general terms hoping that my audience consisting chiefly of the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, all children of the Holy Mother, would intuitively understand what I failed to express. Let me now conclude my short talk with one little personal anecdote coming to you straight from my heart. I think it sums up what perhaps many other Americans feel about the Holy Mother.

A little over four years ago, in 1979, when my American brother monk and I came to take our vows of sannyasa here at Belur Math, we were not very well prepared. What I mean is that owing to the constant use of socks and shoes, our feet were very soft and our knees and legs

were not as flexible as yours are. So squatting cross-legged for a long time gave us great pain. Eating with our fingers was a new experience. Wearing a dhoti was a strange feeling and we were never quite sure it was going to stay on. All of this might seem quite silly to you who are naturally habituated to all this. But for us it consumed a lot of our energy. And of course, meeting so many new faces all at once and not knowing Bengali were an added strain. A lot of this might have been avoided if we had been better prepared. At any rate, after the first two weeks when we finally had our chance to visit the village of Jayrambati, the birth-place of the Holy Mother, we were feeling totally exhausted. My brother monk had even become quite sick and I was worried about him.

Soon after my arrival I happened to be sitting in the Mother's temple after the evening worship. Almost everyone else

had left. I just sat there gazing at the beautiful marble image of the Holy Mother and thinking about her life—about her great love, about the hardships she had to put up with, how she bore them all so willingly, how she accepted all those destitute ones that came to her as her very own children. And I quietly spoke out my feelings in a whisper, 'Mother, I am finally here. I don't know how we did it but we are finally here in this holy place of yours'. And then the last lines of Sri Chaitanya's prayer which we chant in English came out to mind, so I added them also: 'Do with me what Thou wilt. For Thou art my heart's beloved. Thou and Thou alone.' All on a sudden I felt as if a great burden had been taken off from my heart. I felt relaxed and peaceful, both physically and mentally.

And then that great and wonderful sense of quiet assurance filled my heart: 'Always remember, you have a mother.'

(Continued from page 506)

a friend of mine, for whose judgement and opinions I had the greatest regard. His life has been most useful. The State of Junagad owes him much, and I am afraid his health was affected by overwork and anxiety. I regret that Gujarat is deprived of the services of a man whose mature experience should have been so valuable. The Bombay Presidency has lost its most worthy and most able citizen. Men like Mr. Haridas Viharidas are rare in India and in all countries. I know how deeply you all will feel his loss.' Lord Harris wrote from his county seat Belmont Faversham, to say he was much distressed to hear of the decease of his friend Mr. Haridas Viharidas, whose death is a great loss to the British Raj in Western India, for his common sense and great experience in administration were a great source of

strength to rely on when advice was needed.

In the Memorial Fund Circular, which is now being distributed, the good qualities of Mr. Haridas are aptly, and withal not extravagantly, summed up in these words: 'His many public and private virtues, prominent among which were integrity, straightforwardness, political sagacity, impartiality, spirit of altruism, devotedness to duty, and in short 'plain living and high thinking' have won him the love and esteem of all good persons who came in contact with him. And it is certain that the remembrance of his sterling qualities will continue to exercise great influence over a still wider circle.

Subscriptions already obtained from men of eminence are nearly Rs. 12,500/-.

(Concluded)



HARIDAS, 'THE GLADSTONE OF INDIA'

SWAMI EKATMANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

It was at this time in early 1892 that Swami Vivekananda, then a wandering monk, came into Haridas's life.

After a short stay at Limbdi, the Swami left for Junagad with letters of introduction from the Thakore Saheb to his friends there and elsewhere...At Junagad he was the guest of Haridas Viharidas Desai, the Dewan of the State, who was so charmed with his company that every evening he, with all the State officials, used to meet the Swami and converse with him until late at night.⁴ Girnar, about two miles from Junagad, is a place of pilgrimage (the mount is about 3,600 ft high)...; his pilgrimage to the place brought on a yearning to be absorbed in spiritual practices; for he soon sought out a solitary cave, where he practised meditation for a few days. While he was there, the Dewan took all possible care of him. This is known from the letter the Swami wrote to him from Mt. Girnar: 'Very kind of you to send up a man inquiring about my health and comfort. But that's quite of a piece with your fatherly character. I am all right here. Your kindness has left nothing more to be desired here. I hope soon to see you in a few days. I don't require any conveyance

while going down. Descent is very bad, and the ascent is the worst part of the job, that's the same in everything in the world. My heartfelt gratitude to you.'⁵ This place (Junagad) seems to have been a centre from which he (Swamiji) made a number of side trips through Kathiawar and to Kutch.⁶ It appears from the Swami's letter of April 26, 1892, written from Baroda to Dewan Haridas Viharidas Desai, that his first stop after Palitana was Nadiad, where he stayed at the Dewanji's house. He wrote: 'I had not the least difficulty in reaching your house from the station of Nadiad. And your brothers, they are what they should be, *your brothers*. May the Lord shower his choicest blessings on your family. I have never found such a glorious one in all my travels...I am going off this evening to Bombay...More from Bombay.'⁷

During Swami Vivekananda's long stay at Junagad with breaks now and then, Haridas had obviously apprised him of his State's problems created by the British Political Agent. Hence Swamiji wrote to the Dewan from Poona on the 15th June, 1892:

It is a long time since I heard from you... Perhaps by this time every hitch has been

4. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda By His Eastern and Western Disciples* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama. 1979) Vol. 1, p. 290. Henceforward cited as *Life*.

5. *Life*, Pp. 291-292

6. *Life*, p. 294

7. *Life*, p. 300

removed from your way in Junagad; at least I hope so. I am very anxious to know about your health, especially that sprain, you know...I hope you would gratify me by a speedy reply. With my sincerest respects and gratitude and prayers for you and yours...'

The difficulties were somehow straightened through the integrity and fortitude of Haridas.

When his youngest brother Gopaldas, then Assistant Revenue Commissioner in Bhavnagar, sought his approval for having a horse-carriage, Haridas chided him saying that the former's emoluments did not justify such a luxury. He once told his younger brother Gopaldas who was then in Bhavnagar State as Revenue Commissioner that politics was based mostly on untruth whereas the key to his own success was strict adherence to truth.

He now really yearned for complete rest after nearly a decade of hard work in Junagad and wanted to retire. The ruler Nawab Rasulkhanji reluctantly granted him leave for a year.

Haridas studied Advaita Vedanta seriously and also would visit temples religiously. Questioned how he could nurture two different types of spiritual practice, he would persuasively reply that in order to instil in the younger generation genuine faith in God and effectively suggest to them to take regularly to religious exercise for realizing Him, he set an example. And would add that one should not go in for abstruse philosophy without faith in and devotion to God; otherwise one would get confused, turn a sceptic and ruin oneself.

At the end of Haridas's leave, Nawab Rasulkhanji wanted him to rejoin the State service. But Haridas did not relent for his own reasons. Consequently he was given another year of furlough. Taking advantage of it, the British Government in its appointment of the Royal Commission

on Opium included Haridas Viharidas as one of its members, the only other Indian member being the Maharaja of Darbhanga. It was chaired by Lord Brassey.

From the next few letters of Swamiji written to Haridas from different places on different dates, prior to his Westward voyage, it is clear that he kept in touch with the Diwan and the latter too was deeply interested amidst his responsibilities of the State, in Swamiji and his dynamic mission. Close association with Swamiji generated in Haridas a sort of distaste for mundane matters.

In Swamiji's letter to him, written a little over a week before he set sail for the U.S.A., dated 22nd May, 1893, we see Swamiji encouraging Haridas in his spiritual pursuit.

Often and often, we see that the very best of men even are troubled and visited with tribulations in this world; it may be inexplicable; but it is also the experience of my life that the heart and core of everything here is good, that whatever may be the surface waves, deep down and underlying everything, there is an infinite basis of goodness and love; and so long as we do not reach that basis, we are troubled; but having reached that zone of calmness, let winds howl and tempests rage. The house which is built on a rock of ages cannot shake...

May the blows you have received draw you closer to that Being who is only one to be loved here and hereafter, so that you may realise Him in everything past, present, and future, and find everything present or lost in Him and Him alone. Amen!

After Swami Vivekananda burst forth as the triumphant hero of Chicago Parliament of Religions, he wrote to Haridas a fine letter, dated 15th November, 1893.

During November-December 1893, in connection with the work of the Opium Commission, Haridas went to Calcutta and, taking the opportunity, met Swami Vivekananda's mother and brothers, as we learn from Swamiji's touching letter to him from

Chicago, dated 29th January, 1894: 'You had been to see my poor mother and brothers...'

And in his next letter to Haridas, again from Chicago, dated 20th June, 1894, Swamiji gives Haridas his plan of work for the regeneration of India and Hinduism.

The Diwan had the satisfaction that he had done his best to the State with regard to a number of things. As Diwan he was in the midst of politics but never belonged to it. By the time the work of the Commission ended, Junagad was again confronted with some problems. At the Nawab's passionate insistence on rejoining the State, Haridas willy-nilly agreed but, after a few months, handed over charge to the new Diwan Chunilal Sarabhai and retired for good. The Nawab then offered Haridas five villages as a hereditary endowment for his selfless service to the State. Haridas who disapproved of the feudal system remarked humorously that while he had managed as many as 900 villages, the proposal of the Ruler that he should handle just five appeared ironical. He added that he had minor sons, and later on it would be difficult to look after the property from Nadiad, a distance of over 300 miles. At this, Nawab Rasulkhanji, with the knowledge and consent of Haridas credited to Junagad State Treasury rupees one lakh and advised the administration that the interest thereon be given to the executor's two sons. Here it may be mentioned that when, fifteen years after his death, the then State Administrator of Junagad instituted an enquiry into the financial management of the State during his Diwanship, nothing irregular or incriminating, despite thorough scrutiny, was detected and the interest on the Trust amount was continued to be given to his sons. Indeed, Haridas emerged unsullied out of the 'fire-test' (*agni-parīkṣā*) even after his death!

Now some vested interests in America raised all sorts of scandalous charges against the character and conduct of Swami Vivekananda. But, although he

...scorned to defend himself publicly, he felt that an explanation was due from him to the intimate friends in America who had so generously and trustingly helped and supported him these many months. Indeed, if he did not give them some assurance, his silence could be construed as a tacit admission of fraudulence, and it would be impossible for him to remain in America...To Professor John Henry Wright, who had made possible his appearance at the Parliament of Religions by vouching for his fitness to be a delegate, the Swami sent every scrap of favourable Indian testimony that he could gather...In May he wrote from his hotel in Boston to the Professor: '...If you like, I would send you over from Chicago some letters from Indian Princes and ministers—one of these ministers was one of the Commissioners of the late Opium Commission that sat under Royal Commission in India (meaning Diwan Haridas Viharidas). If you like, I will have them write to you to convince you of my not being a cheat...'

...He had written on April 26 to Isabelle McKindley... 'the mail you sent yesterday from India was really...good news after a long interval. There is a beautiful letter from Dewanji (Haridas Viharidas Desai, the Dewan of Junagad and Opium Commissioner whom Swamiji had mentioned to Prof. Wright.)' ...As far as we know, the letter the Swami sent to Professor Wright from the Dewanji of Junagad is no longer extant. But it was to this latter noble friend that the Swami now poured out the despair of his heart...⁸

in his letter to him dated June 20, 1894. It was perhaps in response to this letter that the Diwanji Haridas Viharidas Desai wrote to Mr. G.W. Hale in staunch defence of his beloved Swami Vivekananda. His letter, which was dated August 2, 1894, has come to light recently. He wrote:

Sir, I hope you will excuse my troubling you with this letter. I learn with regret that some people have given out in America that Swami

8. *Life*, Pp. 487-489

Shri Vivekanandaji is not what he appears to be in public there. Allow me to tell you as a friend of his that the Swami is known to me for some years. I respect and revere him very much. He is sincere to the avocation he has disinterestedly taken up for the good of the people at large. He has given up his family and social connections since about 12 years and has devoted himself entirely to the good of his own soul and that of others. He went to Chicago only with the avowed object of enlightening the American nation with the true religion of the Hindus, the knowledge of which he has acquired so much as to win the admiration of those who are in a position to appreciate it. He is a true friend of the Hindus and a staunch advocate of their religion. I saw his house, mother and brothers in Calcutta where I was in November and December last, to serve as a member of the Royal Commission on Opium. He does not keep any connection with his relations etc. because he has long renounced the worldly connections and become a sannyasi. I send you by Book-Post a small pamphlet, the perusal of which will introduce my humble self to you. You are welcome to make use of this letter in any way you think proper for the sake of truth and fair play...

'Your kind notes to G.W. Hale has been very gratifying,' Swamiji was to write in September to the Dewanji, 'as I owed them that much.'⁸

In November-December 1894 one more inspiring letter, apparently the last to him, dated Chicago, November (?), 1894 reached Haridas from Swami Vivekananda.

When Haridas returned to his native home after retirement, Nadiad gave him a grand civic reception. He then got all the joint-family properties including those purchased with his own earnings divided equally amongst all the five brothers (including himself). His old mother, Hetaba, suggested that a small part of the properties be allotted to his two sons in addition to their rightful share of their father's properties. Haridas consoled her saying that the two sons would receive the interest on the amount lying in their favour at Junagad and that this extra income would

be adequate enough. She was immensely gratified and compared him to the eldest of the Pandava brothers.

In the said division of the properties, a plot of open land adjoining the 100-room ancestral house, fell to the lot of Gopaldas, the fourth and youngest brother of Haridas. Bechardas, the second younger brother got a cluster of dilapidated out-houses. When mother Hetaba desired an alternative for Gopaldas, Haridas said that what Bechardas got was no better. Hetaba argued that the latter had the will and ability to build a house for himself. Haridas fully satisfied her by pointing out that on his own he had presented his youngest brother, who had been promoted as Revenue Commissioner of Bhavnagar State, with a fine hackney carriage, and adding 'You will be happy to see "Nana" (meaning Gopaldas) build in due course a beautiful house on that open land.' Truly, in 1908, thirteen years after the passing away of Haridas, 'Nana' got a sturdy and attractive house built there.

Haridas donated Rs. 10,000/- to the Bombay University for giving scholarship to two students who would stand at the top in the matriculation examination from the Nadiad High School. Later, this responsibility was taken over by the Gujarat University.

A conference of the people of his community (Patels) in his region convened by Haridas under the presidentship of the Gaikwar of Baroda resolved to carry out several necessary reforms, of which the abolition of dowry system took priority and was immediately put into practice in his own family.

For serving admirably on the Royal Commission on Opium, Lord Brussey had proposed to the British Government the conferment of knighthood on Haridas who, sad to say, passed away before the decision was taken.

As predicted by the Palthar Chati holy man in 1888, six weeks before his 55th birthday,

Haridas Viharidas Desai breathed his last peacefully at 1 am on Monday, the 17th June, 1895. He had just returned from a visit to Junagad, on the invitation of the Vazir Saheb, after a stay there of a fortnight. When he went to and came back from Junagad, he was quite hale and hearty. After a week, he had an attack of slight fever which he did not mind. It continued for three days. On the fourth day, quite unexpectedly his temperature rose to 104 degrees. Still he was the same jolly good soul that he always had been. On Sunday he seemed to be well, for he could write to his distant friends. He was rash perhaps to take his bath that day. In the afternoon the fever began to rise and rose to 107 degrees. Up to 6 pm he was perfectly conscious and wore his winning smile, replying to inquiries. Then he fell into a calmness which seemed to be sleep, but it was the sleep of death. In death, as in life, he was all peace. In his last moments he expressed no anxiety about himself or those near and dear to him.⁹

The Gujarati poet Dalpatram Dayabhai wrote on the demise of Haridas a moving poem wherein he lamented 'Haridas has carried away (*har*) the lustre of not only his contemporary Dewans but also of the later ones, to my belief.'

Learning belatedly from a nephew of Haridas about his passing away, Swami Vivekananda hurriedly wrote to the former from New York on the 2nd March, 1896¹⁰ tersely referring to the great-souled Haridas thus:

228 West 39th Street,
New York, the 2nd March, 1896

Dear Friend,

Excuse my delay in replying to your beautiful note.

9. *Reis and Rayyet* (Prince and Peasant)—Weekly English Newspaper, Calcutta: Saturday, June, 1895

10. This letter is not yet added to the 'Epistles' of Swamiji in his *Complete Works*. The Bengali translation of it was published in

Your uncle was a great soul, and his whole life was given to do good to his country. Hope you will all follow in his footsteps.

I am coming to India this winter, and cannot express my sorrow that I will not see Haridas Bhai once more.

He was a strong noble friend, and India has lost a good deal in losing him.

I am going to England very soon where I intend to pass the summer, and in winter next I come to India.

Recommend me to your uncles and friends.

Ever always the wellwisher of your family,

Vivekananda

PS My English address is C/o E.T. Sturdy, Esq, High View, Caversham, Reading, England.

PRESS REPORTS ON THE DEATH OF MR. HARIDAS VIHARIDAS DESAI

The Bombay Gazette (News)

Ahmedabad, June 18: All Nadiad was thrown yesterday morning into heavy mourning by the sad and unexpected death of Mr. Haridas Viharidas, Dewan of Junagad. The deceased gentleman was much respected, and his sudden death came like a thunderbolt. He suffered from remittent fever for about four days. On Sunday, the temperature rose to 107 degrees in the morning, and there were no signs of alarm until 6 pm after which the doctors

Udbodhan vol 75, No. 9, p. 457. About a decade and a half ago the present writer had the occasion to visit Nadiad, see the house and room in which Swami Vivekananda sojourned, and procure from a grandson of late Haridas the thirteen original letters of Swamiji, written to his 'Dear Dewanji Saheb'. A year or so later, he again went to Nadiad and luckily got from another grandson of Haridas Viharidas the original letter of Swamiji referred to above (dated 2.3.1896), together with the old Tanpura with which Swamiji had sung melodious songs during his stay in Nadiad at the ancestral house of Haridas. At present, while the said fourteen original letters are in the archives of Belur Math, the stringed musical instrument is at the Rama-krishna Math, Rajkot.

almost gave up hopes of his recovery, and the patient breathed his last at 1 am yesterday. All schools and Government offices were closed, and all business suspended out of respect to his memory.

The Bombay Gazette (Editorial): Tuesday, June 18, 1895

We regret to announce that a telegram has been received in Bombay stating that Mr. Haridas Viharidas, the late Dewan of Junagad, died there yesterday. ...In all the principalities (where he worked for shorter or longer time singlemindedly), Mr. Haridas left behind him a reputation as an energetic hard-working administrator, and a consistent reformer of abuses. That the welfare and prosperity of both ruler and ruled were safe in his hands was shown by the improvements he succeeded in effecting in the several States in which he occupied high positions. Beyond the limits of the Indian Empire, the deceased statesman will be best remembered as a member of the Opium Commission, and by a strange coincidence, the mail arriving a few hours before his death has brought the full text of a Parliamentary debate on the opium question, in which his name is frequently mentioned. It is a noteworthy fact that, while Sir Joseph Peas and Mr. Ellis made personal attacks upon other members of the Commission signing the majority report, they brought no 'railing accusation' whatever against the courteous, even-tempered gentleman who shared with the Maharaja of Darbhanga the distinction of being the only Native member of the Commission. Mr. Haridas, while signing the majority report, wrote a separate minute of considerable value, to which special attention was paid...He has left two sons, three daughters, and an old mother, and four brothers, and a large family. His transparent honourable character is best summed up in the words of one of

his most intimate friends, who writes: 'He was known for his loyalty, faithfulness, truthfulness, liberality, independence, impartiality, simplicity and statesmanship. Able and popular as an administrator, he had won the highest opinion of the British officials, and confidence of all people and his masters.'

The Times, Bombay (Editorial): Tuesday, June 18, 1895

We greatly regret—and our regret will be shared by many of his distinguished fellow-countrymen and by many past and present members of the British administration who have had official relations with him—to hear of the death at his ancestral home at Nadiad, of Mr. Haridas Viharidas Desai, the late Dewan of Junagad...Mr. Haridas had in his time played many parts, and played them well...Appointed in September 1893 Dewan of the premier of Kathiawar State, Junagad—the post was highly responsible and very difficult one, for Junagad had to win back some of the credit that it had lost in the eyes of the British Government—Mr. Haridas faced the difficulties of the situation with courage and unflinching industry. His transparent honesty and straightforwardness won him the confidence of all who had to deal with him, and the practical good sense with which he applied himself to the improvement of the administration and to the wise husbanding of its resources had a marked influence for good on the condition of the State...He was one of the most active members of the Royal Commission on Opium, and we are sure that his fellow Commissioners will hear with regret the death of a colleague who co-operated with them with so much intelligence and assiduity...He retired on pension, to the great regret of everybody connected with Junagad State. His high character, devotion to duty, kindness of disposition, and old-fashioned

simplicity of life distinctly influenced one and all, and no figure in Kathiawar politics will be more mourned than the unassuming gentleman whose useful life was brought to a premature ending yesterday.

The Kathiawar Times (Editorial): Tuesday Evening, June 18, 1895

It is with deep regret that we have to announce the death of Mr. Haridas Viharidas, late Dewan of Junagad and member of the Royal Commission on Opium, at his residence at Nadiad yesterday very early morning...Throughout his career Mr. Haridas displayed great administrative abilities coupled with a suavity that made him one of the most popular administrators, while he was unsurpassed in the capacity for hard work. He made his mark in whatever position he found himself...At Junagad as everywhere he was recognized as a man of unusual capability, of unflinching honesty, and of great singleness of purpose. His death comes as a great blow to Gujarat and especially to Kathiawar which in him loses one of the most remarkable public servants...On receipt of information of Mr. Haridas's death, an 'Extraordinary' dated June 17, Monday 1895 (Vol. 28, No. 10) was issued by order of His Highness the Nawab Saheb, requiring the closing of public offices, throughout the State as a mark of respect to the late perfect gentleman.

The Kathiawar News (Editorial): Saturday, June 22, 1895

...The leading feature of his character was to be even-tempered and conciliatory, and these always stood him in good stead. His connection with this province dated since 1870 when he first entered the Bhavnagar State Service as a *Nyayadhish* (Judge) during the Percival-Gaurishankar administration. His gentle disposition and a quiet, unassuming way of working recommended him to Sir James Peile, the then Political

Agent in Kathiawar...Later when he took up the reigns of office of Diwan at Junagad, it was thought that he would prove quite unequal to the task imposed upon him. By degrees, however, these misapprehensions were removed, and Mr. Haridas's reputation as an efficient administrator was acknowledged throughout the province and credit must be given him for accomplishing what few indeed would have done under the peculiar circumstances; and indeed this it was that led Sir Charles Olivant to make the following remarks when installing on the Gadi (throne) Nawab Sahib Rasulkhanji: 'You are to be congratulated on having at your side one who has proved a faithful friend to your father and brother, and who has with great force of character influenced no less powerfully than unpretentiously the policy of the State. Thanks in great measure to him that you find at the helm of the administration a Dewan of proved service who is universally respected and of whom neither your predecessor nor the (Political) Agency had had any complaint to make except that he was contemplating too early a retreat from the cares of the office.'

...He was practical in all that he did and was successful which men seldom achieved...Mr. Haridas died mourned throughout the province because he was generally liked both by Europeans and natives...In him the Junagad State has lost a trusted counsellor and a worthy servant.

Indian Spectator (Editorial): June 23, 1895

We were shocked to hear, early this week, of the sudden death of Mr. Haridas Viharidas. It is many years now since this writer had the pleasure of his acquaintance at Wadhwan; and he cherishes a vivid recollection of the interchange of ideas, carried on at night, far into the wee small hours. During these hours of intimacy, Haridas impressed his

visitor as a genuine friend of the people, a thoroughly honest and devoted worker, and a faithful servant. As such he remained to the end, the good qualities mellowing with age...Haridas was a student all his days. But for his modesty and self-denial, he might have risen higher. For years past he seems to have longed for retirement. And when, on leaving Junagad a few months ago, he was pressed by this writer to give the benefit of his knowledge and experience to the public, he begged piteously to be let alone—'pray let me give my remaining years to the service of God.' Little did our friend know how soon he was to be detached from life, for the best mode of offering homage to his Maker. But though he has gone to a rich reward, he has left India the poorer for his departure. To Gujarat the loss of Dewan Haridas is irreparable. He was a good man all round, and was more useful than many a so-called great man, in that he was always unconscious of his sterling qualities.

The Gujarati (Editorial): 23rd June, 1895

The sad news of the death of Mr. Haridas Viharidas has come upon the public with painful surprise...His indefatigable industry, generous disposition, the integrity of his character and the proverbial simplicity of his life endeared him to all he came in contact with, and supply the clue to his success in the highly responsible posts he held from time to time. The Desai family has lost in him a worthy member, and Gujarat a true and distinguished representative of irreproachable character. His death will no doubt be mourned throughout Gujarat and Kathiawar where he was such a well-known figure.

Gujarat Mitra and Gujarat Darpan (Editorial): 23.6.1895

The late Dewan of Junagad and a

leading Desai grandee was gathered to his fathers last week...Rao Saheb alias Haridasbhai was loved and adored in all the States he administered by the people, the Princes and the Politicals as also by the general public and the Government of Kathiawar...He has been cut off in the full bloom of his life if we view from a European standard...For uprightness and justice we have no equal to him...A blank has been caused in our public life.

Reis & Rayyet (Prince & Peasant)—Weekly English Newspaper: Saturday, June 29, 1895.

We are deeply grieved to learn of the death of Dewan Haridas Viharidas Desai... He might, if he chose, have been more widely known and much earlier. But he hated name and fame. A man of no ambition and strictly conscientious...Mr. Haridas Viharidas Desai was a jewel of a man—simple and unassuming, pleasant mannerism without the vices of Western education, pleasing and agreeable and with fund of information to instruct and amuse...The Desai family has all our sympathy in their great bereavement.

The Amrita Bazar Patrika (Editorial), Calcutta: Sunday, June 30, 1895

We deeply regret to hear of the death of Mr. Haridas Viharidas, the late Dewan of Junagad, on Monday the 17th instant. In him India has lost one of her best sons. Those who knew Mr. Haridas—and we had the privilege of his personal acquaintance—could not but be struck by the superior calibre of his mind and heart. His calm judgement, sweet temper, warm heart, and clear brain commanded respect even from the highest in the land...He was so self-sacrificing that though the head of his family and the largest earning member thereof, he would share every rupee he earned jointly with his brothers and nephews...We offer our sincere

condolence to his bereaved family.

Power, Calcutta: June 30, 1895 (Editorial)

In the death of Mr. Haridas Viharidas Desai, the late Dewan of Junagad, that State has lost a man who had rendered splendid service to it...By his own ability and exertions, he had risen from a humble station in life and with a rare self-abnegation, the fruits of his labours were divided amongst all the members of his family... He was a fine type of statesman and his death at the age of about 55 years will be mourned not merely in Junagad State but outside it as well.

The Cosmopolitan: (Editorial): July 8, 1895

The death of Dewan Bahadur Haridas Viharidas, the late distinguished Dewan of the Junagad State, removes a notable figure from the ranks of Indian Statesman. He was one of the leading lights of the Western Presidency and combined in himself the rarest virtues of a good and great man...The Dewan Bahadur by his exceptional talents won the esteem and confidence of the Government whose interests he never forgot to serve in the course of his patriotic public career. We had the pleasure to come in contact with him on more occasions than one. Having regard to the broad statesmanlike views and wide sympathies of the illustrious deceased and the great dearth of such really good and noble men at the present juncture, we cannot but consider his death as a heavy loss to all the presidencies alike, not to speak of the deplorable void it leaves in western political India.

India, London: September, 1895 (Editorial)

By the death of Mr. Haridas Viharidas, India has suffered a great and lamentable loss. The people of India had no more unselfish, single-minded and enlightened champion.

The Amrita Bazar Patrika, Calcutta: October 6, 1895

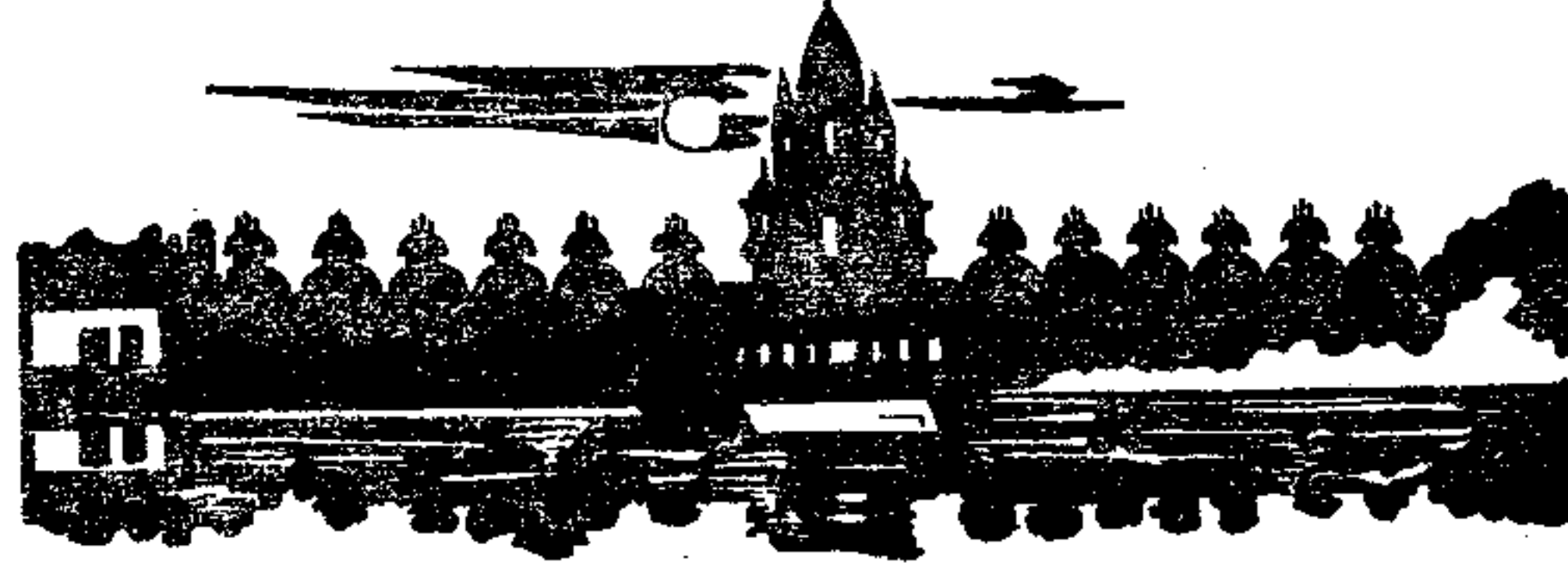
The distinguished gentleman Mr. Haridas Viharidas, whose death we deplored the other day, was the personification of unselfishness itself; and although he was the master of a big joint family and had the largest income, he had not one piece of cloth he could call his own—it belonged to the entire family. He never sought wealth and position, though both were thrust upon him. But for his modesty and self-denial, he might have risen higher and become a very rich man... He practically lived in a higher sphere of life, though he conducted the mundane affairs of a Native State. A superior personage that he was, Haridas moulded the character of his brothers.

The Bombay Gazette: Tuesday, October 22, 1895 (Editorial)

Proposed Memorial to the late Mr. Haridas Viharidas

We are pleased to give publicity to the fact that the friends of the late Mr. Haridas Viharidas—to whose many qualities of mind and heart tribute was paid in these columns soon after his death—are now raising a fund to be devoted to some useful public object to serve as a memorial of the late Dewan of Junagad. Mr. Haridas was one of those rare men who earn not only the respect but also the affection of all with whom they come in contact. The opinion of the last two Governors of Bombay concerning him, as conveyed in their respective letters of sympathy to the relatives of the late Dewan, are well worthy of quotation. Lord Reay wrote from Earston, Berwickshire, N.B. on August 8 last: 'It was with the greatest regret that I noticed the news of your mentor Mr. Haridas Viharidas. He was

(Continued on page 497)



RELIGION : FOR HARMONY OR DISCORD ?

NABANIHARAN MUKHOPADHYAY

(Continued from the previous issue)

Creative minority

There will always be some people who are afraid to recognize the import of some new and advanced ideas conducive to general well-being, who want to cling to their own narrow prejudice and outmoded ideas, who are lacking in broadness of mind and the capacity to size up new developments and changing circumstances. Great ideas and innovative doctrines are initially supported only by a small creative minority. But unless such correcting truths appear and work upon the minds of men as a balancing force, unless a creative minority rises to the occasion to guide the majority, civilization will decay in the tumult of confusion, contradiction, criticism and internecine wars. This has been pointed out by Arnold Toynbee in his monumental volumes on the history of civilization.

An eminent modern physicist echoes Toynbee's concern:

After civilizations have reached a peak of vitality, they tend to lose their cultural steam and decline. An essential element in this cultural breakdown, according to Toynbee, is a loss of flexibility...The loss of flexibility in a disintegrating society is accompanied by a general loss of harmony among its elements,

which inevitably leads to the outbreak of social discord and disruption.

However,...its ability to respond to challenges is not completely lost. Although the cultural mainstream has become petrified by clinging to fixed ideas and rigid patterns of behaviour, creative minorities will appear on the scene and carry on the process of challenge-and-response. The dominant social institutions will refuse to hand over their leading roles to these new cultural forces, but they will inevitably go on to decline and disintegrate, and the creative minorities may be able to transform some of the old elements into a new configuration.³¹

In such a critical transitional period of history, when the Indian mind has lost its flexibility, and in the West 'the cupboard of ideas is bare', has risen, through the process of challenge-and-response, a creative minority which has for its centre and ideal the life and message of Sri Ramakrishna. This creative minority now goes under the name, 'Ramakrishna Movement'. The social service activities of this movement have earned the respect and confidence of the government and the people in India. But its cultural impact is no less important than the social. The dominant cultural

31. Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point* (London: Fontana, 1982) Pp. 9-10

motif of the Ramakrishna Movement is all-round harmony and integration which are vitally needed in modern India to contain the forces of division and destruction. Swami Nirvedananda points out:

Diversity of taste and capacity has to be accepted as an ineffaceable fact of nature and has to be provided for. And this has actually been done through the introduction of the various religions. They have no reason to quarrel with one another...The vision of unity in diversity in this sphere is sure to give a quietus to all communal and sectarian squabbles.³²

Long ago Swami Vivekananda had recognized the advent of the creative minority when he wrote in 1896:

The beginning of our work has been splendid and the steady earnestness shown by our friends is beyond all praise. Sincerity of conviction and purity of motive will surely gain the day; and even *a small minority* (italics not his), armed with these is surely destined to prevail against all odds.³³

The majority may not recognize the importance of this creative minority or its influence or even the need for it. The minority does not seek recognition out of fear or for any special favour. But it remains a fact that the minority always delivers the goods and the majority are the recipients. Harmony of religions is a new response to a new challenge not met earlier, though thoughts in that direction are as old as the Vedas. The majority may not immediately understand the import of this doctrine. But the qualities of 'sincerity of conviction and purity of motive' should rather lie with the minority, otherwise they are likely to get diluted by quantity. This status of minority is not claimed as a special privilege. On the contrary, the object is to break down all

special privileges, which is the aim of Vedanta, according to Swami Vivekananda.³⁴

The removal of privileges as a sociological principle has been incorporated in the aims and objects of the Ramakrishna Mission: 'The root of all misery in India is the wide gulf between the lower and upper classes. Unless this difference is made up, there is no hope of any well-being for the people.'³⁵ The doctrine of religious and communal harmony has also been similarly incorporated:

The duty of the Mission is to conduct in the right spirit the activities of the movement inaugurated by Sri Ramakrishna for the establishment of fellowship among the followers of different religions, knowing them all to be so many forms only of one undying Eternal Religion.³⁶

Such wide sympathy and far-seeing vision, can be expected to come only from a small creative minority. Thus,

a distinct contribution of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda-Vedanta Movement to the modern world is its message that all help given to men by individuals or by society should be based on the recognition of man's innate divinity regardless of man's differences. The only way to mutual regard, love and unity among mankind, on which rests peace and progress in life, is to find an all-embracing ground of human relationship that transcends all distinctions of race, nationality, colour, creed, rank, and merit.³⁷

Critics of the Movement

It is therefore anachronistic that in modern times there are some people who

34. Ibid 1:424

35. Swami Gambhirananda, *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1957) p. 137

36. Ibid p. 119

37. Swami Satprakashananda, *Swami Vivekananda's Contribution to the Present Age* (St. Louis, USA: The Vedanta Society of St. Louis, 1978) p. 115

32. Swami Nirvedananda, *Hinduism at a Glance* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Calcutta Students' Home, 1969) Pp. 234-35

33. *Complete Works* 4:278

still think that we need fanaticism to protect and propagate our religion. Swami Vivekananda has sounded the warning:

Think of the fanatics, they make the longest faces, and all their religion is to fight against others in word and act. Think of what they have done in the past, and of what they would do now, if they were given a free hand.³⁸

Swamiji wrote,

I agree with you so far that faith is a wonderful insight and that it alone can save, but, there is the danger in it of breeding fanaticism and barring further progress.³⁹

In a letter to Swami Brahmananda, Swami Vivekananda advised them to do everything possible for famine relief and wrote, 'Remember this always—that the only answer to those conservative fanatics who abuse us is such work.'⁴⁰

Having had his spiritual training at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda learnt not merely to tolerate all religions, but to accept all religions as true, as valid paths leading to the ultimate goal of God-realization, and to cherish reverence for all prophets. But he did not hesitate to use harsh words to correct the followers of any religion, when he found them talking or doing anything contrary to the tenets of their religions. So he criticized Christians and Muslims, when there was the need; and his scathing criticism of the Hindus infuriated some Hindu zealots. He was fearless in his thought, action, and expression. He had learnt from his Master not to think, say, write, or do anything secretly, out of the public gaze. He

never said or did anything which he did not believe to be true or conduce to the welfare of others. Fresh material on his life and message is continuously coming to light and is placed before the public, providing everyone the opportunity to be acquainted with all facets of his life and mind. Nothing about him or his work is secret, nothing has been expunged from his works which are vast and varied and need patient perusal and search. When such great men whisper they speak to humanity, but we must listen attentively and understand.

A mighty socio-religious movement has been set rolling by Swami Vivekananda to bring to humanity welfare, harmony, blessedness, peace. About its power and inevitable triumph Swamiji himself has made this prophetic declaration:

On the other hand, those who are showing unjustified signs of causeless, rancorous hostilities, out of absolute malice and envy—natural to a slavish race—at the success and the celebrity of Sri Ramakrishna and his name—to them we say, 'Dear friends, vain are these efforts of yours! If this infinite, unbounded, religious wave that has engulfed in its depths the very ends of space—on whose snow-white crest shineth this divine form, in the august glow of a heavenly presence—if this be the effect brought about by our eager endeavours in pursuit of personal name, fame, or wealth, then, without your or any other's efforts, this wave shall, in obedience to the insuperable law of the universe, soon die in the infinite womb of time, never to rise again! But if, again, this tide, in accordance with the will, and under the divine inspiration of the One Universal Mother, has begun to deluge the world with the flood of the unselfish love of a great man's heart, then, O feeble man, what power dost thou possess that thou shouldst thwart the onward progress of the Almighty Mother's will?'⁴¹

38. *Complete Works* 4:11

39. *Ibid.* 4:356

40. *Ibid.* 5:244

41. *Ibid.* 8:411

KABIR AND NANAK AS LINKS BETWEEN HINDUISM AND ISLAM

DR. SUSHANTA SEN

A proper appreciation of the spiritual genius of Kabir and Nānak, the two eminent poet-saints of medieval India, who attempted a kind of religio-cultural synthesis between Hinduism and Islam through their devotional songs and religious preaching, needs some preliminary understanding of the basic characteristic of Hinduism in general and the history of the first arrival of Islam in India.

Though Hinduism had never deviated from its central creed which consists in an unshakable faith in the essential teachings of the Upaniṣads—the concluding part of the Vedas¹—yet it has always been a policy of the Hindus to overcome religious and cultural antagonism by absorbing some of the traits of the non-Hindu traditions with which they have been in contact. This is clearly discernible from the fact that the Buddha—‘the rebel child of Hinduism’²—who had abandoned the Hindu faith in the prime of his youth and established a new religious order of his own in sharp opposition to Hinduism, was later given an exalted position in the Hindu pantheon: he came to be regarded as one of the many incarnations (*avatars*) of Viṣṇu, the chief of the Hindu deities. Thus we read in the *Devī Bhāgavata*,³ an authoritative work on

the Hindu Tantra, that the supreme God took the form of the Buddha in order to put an end to wrong sacrifices and prevent injury to animals. The receptive and catholic spirit of Hinduism thus had no great difficulty in coming to terms with the Buddha and in assimilating into itself much of his message.⁴

But with the introduction of Islam into India by the Muslim invaders of 10th/11th centuries A.D.,⁵ Hinduism was confronted with quite a different problem and with different dangers. The early Muslim invaders of India were bitter enemies of the Hindu religion. The worship of the images and idols of deities, which is so prominent a feature of the popular form of Purānic Hinduism, has been contemptuously denounced in the Koran, the sacred book of Islam. For this reason the Muslim invaders regarded their war against the Hindus, and the destruction of Hindu temples and the images of the gods, as a

1. What the central creed of Hinduism stands for as figured in the Upaniṣads, see my paper, ‘The Heart of Hinduism’ in *Prabuddha Bharata* (Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati), June, 1981.

2. Swami Vivekananda very reverentially attributes this epithet to the Buddha, See *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1973) Vol. 3, p. 275

3. The particular verse of the *Devī Bhāgavata* reads as follows:

*Duṣṭa-yajña-vidhātāya pasu-himsā nivṛttaye
Buddha-rūpam dadhau yo'sau tasmai devāya
te namah*

4. I have discussed in detail the influence of the Buddhist tradition on Hinduism in my paper, ‘The Influence of Non-Hindu Traditions on the Development of Hinduism’, in *The Visva-Bharati Journal of Philosophy* (Santiniketan, 1980), Vol. X, No. 2, pp. 20-28. Also see my paper, ‘Is Buddhism a Radical Departure from Upanisadic Hinduism?’ in *The Visva-Bharati Quarterly* (October 1983), Vol. 47, Nos. 1 and 2, pp. 48-72.

5. The Muslims in fact had started coming to India much earlier than this period. But in the beginning it was not in the nature of serious invasion or complete conquest; rather it was a type of infiltration that went on for centuries into the northern part of India. Muslim invasion started in all seriousness in the 10th/11th centuries A.D., and by the sixteenth century the great power of the Moguls succeeded in setting up a whole dynasty in India.

sacred duty.⁶ In the course of his seventeen successive raids into India, Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni (997 – 1030 A.D.) demolished numerous Hindu temples and destroyed innumerable sculptured images of the gods. As a fanatic Muslim, Mahmud believed that he was rendering a great service to God by destroying the magnificent temples and invaluable works of art of the *kaffirs* (non-believers). This ruthless iconoclasm of the Muslim invaders challenged everything that Hinduism had stood for through the centuries. To Al-Birunī, the great Muslim scholar of the eleventh century A.D. who had accompanied Sultan Mahmud to India and had acquired first-hand knowledge of the Hindu scriptures through his study of Sanskrit, Hinduism and Islam appeared to be diametrically opposed to each other, like day and night. As he tersely put it, 'The Hindus totally differ from us in religion, as we believe in nothing in which they believe and vice versa.'⁷

6. Professor R. C. Mazumdar, the eminent historian of modern India, substantiates this point by citing various historical documents and literary evidences with special reference to the Muslim rulers of Bengal, namely Giasuddin Azam Shah, Murshidkuli Khan, Alibardi etc. Mazumdar shows that even Alauddin Husain Shah who was supposed to be the most liberal and enlightened Muslim Sultan of Bengal during his time was not free from the iconoclasm against the Hindus. See R. C. Mazumdar, *Kamala Lectures* (Calcutta University, 1966) pp. 81-84.

7. As quoted by R. C. Mazumdar in the 'fourth lecture' of his *Kamala Lectures*, p. 114. Professor R. C. Zaehner also quotes the same words of Al-Biruni in his book *Hinduism* (Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 4. Vidyapati, the famous Vaisnava poet of Mithila who flourished during the 15th century A.D., also wrote about the fundamental opposition between the Hindus and Islamic cultures. Dr. Sukumar Sen has translated a whole passage from Vidyapati's writings into Bengali which dwells on this particular theme. See Sukumar Sen, *Madhyayuger Bānglā O Bāngālī* (in Bengali), p. 7

In the light of this attitude of total rejection expressed by Al-Birunī, it seemed impossible that Hinduism and Islam could ever meet in amity and learn from each other. Nevertheless, the accommodative spirit of Hinduism soon discovered a common platform where it could meet its aggressive opponent; this was the Sufi mysticism of Islam. The Sufi orders came to India in the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries A.D. from Persia and Iraq where they had already flourished for several centuries. Sufi mysticism, although a branch of the Islamic faith, was nevertheless free from the fierce iconoclasm and rigid dogmatism of Islam. Sufism was characterized by an utter indifference to the performance of external religious duties and an effort to attain a direct ecstatic vision of God which was thought to be ineffable in nature. It was a religion of intense monotheistic devotion.

These mystical conceptions of the Sufis strongly influenced Kabīr (1440-1518 A.D.), the famous religious reformer and poet-saint of medieval India. He was born in a Muslim family but abandoned the Muslim faith early in life under the influence of the Bhakti tradition of Hinduism. Kabīr composed a number of devotional songs expressing a remarkable synthesis between the Sufi and Bhakti tradition. He boldly attacked the religious bigotry which he found in both Hinduism and Islam, and founded a new sect of his own which came to be known as Kabīrpanth (path of Kabīr) with its membership open to Hindus and Muslims alike. This new sect embodied a firm faith in unqualified monotheism, a rejection of polytheistic idolatry, an aversion to the caste system, the adoption of the devotional path as the most effective way to God-realization, and the rejection of all mechanical rites and rituals. Kabīr thus inherited from Islam its monotheism, and his rejection of caste distinctions was

likewise mainly derived from the Islamic idea of the brotherhood of all believers. But the devotional element which was so central to Kabīr's sect came from the Bhakti tradition of Hinduism, which had made a strong impression on his mind during his early years. His rejection of religious rituals was the bold expression of his own religious nonconformism. The sect of Kabīr is generally regarded as a branch of Hinduism in view of the fact that he always referred to his cherished ideal deity (*iṣṭa*) by the name Rām, one of the many incarnations of Viṣṇu and the mythological hero of the Hindu epic, the *Rāmāyaṇa*; but Kabīr himself always refused to be identified either as a Hindu or as a Muslim. He was probably able to call God by the name of a Hindu deity, in spite of his own disinclination to be classed as a Hindu, because by his time the deification of the mythological hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa* had gone so far that his name had ceased to have any sectarian connotation and had become a general synonym for 'God'. Concerning his religious nonconformism Kabīr wrote :

O Servant, where dost thou seek Me ?

Lo! I am beside thee.

I am neither in temple nor in mosque,

I am neither in Kaaba,⁸ nor in Kailash⁹ ;

Neither am I in rites and ceremonies,

nor in Yoga and renunciation.

If thou art a true seeker, thou shalt at once see Me ;

thou shalt meet Me in a moment of time.

Kabīr says, 'O Sādhu! God is the breath of all breath.'¹⁰

8. A piece of black stone in the city of Mecca which is regarded very holy by the Muslims.

9. A famous Hindu place of pilgrimage on the Himalayas which is supposed to be the holy abode of Lord Śiva.

10. *Songs of Kabir*, translation by Rabindranath Tagore. (New York: MacMillan), Song No. 1.

Kabīr frequently attacked religious rituals as being spiritually empty. To him there was no spiritual value in bathing in holy rivers and offering oblations to a lifeless stone-image in a temple, or in the mechanical repetition of the sacred scriptures. Religion to him was a living experience and not a system of doctrines and rituals :

There is nothing but water at the holy bathing places ;

and I know that they are useless, for I have bathed in them.

The images are all lifeless, they cannot speak ;

I know, for I have cried aloud to them.

The Purāna and the Koran are mere words ;

lifting up the curtain, I have seen.

Kabīr gives utterance to the words of experience ;

and he knows very well that all other things are untrue.¹¹

For Kabīr religion is a matter of deep inwardness, for it is in one's own heart that one may meet God.

If God be within the mosque, then to whom does this world belong ?

If Rām be within the image which you find your pilgrimage, then

who is there to know what happens without ?

Hari is in the East,¹² Allah is in the West¹³

Look within your heart, for there you will find both Karīm and Rām ;

All the men and women of the world are his living forms.

Kabīr is the child of Allah and of Rām ;

He is my Guru, He is my Pīr ;¹⁴

In these inspired and inspiring lines Kabīr was voicing the immortal message of the Upaniṣads that the Truth is one and indivisible, and is to be found in the inner depths of our own being rather than in the world

11. Ibid, Song No. 42.

12. The Hindus turn to the east (or north) when they do worship or meditation.

13. All Muslims wherever they are turn towards Mecca at the time of prayer ; in India this means turning to the west.

14. *Songs of Kabir*, Song no. 69.

outside. The entire universe, including all human individuals regardless of caste, creed and religion, is the manifestation of the one eternal Truth. But mankind, under the spell of ignorance, attempts to divide the indivisible Truth by erecting temples, mosques and churches to contain It; and then engage in futile quarrel with each other over their possession of the Truth. There is no strife, tension or contradiction in the Truth itself, but only in the different systems of man-made religion. Thus in order to reach the eternal and indivisible Truth within the depth of one's own heart, and to attain the unity of mankind, we must transcend the artificial barriers set up by the different religious traditions. Thus on the ground of universal religion Kabir tried to bridge the gulf between Hinduism and Islam, a gulf that had seemed unbridgeable to Al-Biruni in the eleventh century A.D. Kabir thus represents the best product of the interaction of Hinduism and Islam in medieval India.

The next important religious reformer, in whom the influences of Hindu Bhakti and Sufi mysticism blended more intimately, was Guru Nānak (1469-1538 A.D.), the founder of Sikhism. Nānak was born in a Hindu Kṣatriya family at Talwandi, near Lahore (now in the Pakistan part of the Punjab). As he grew up he reacted against the caste-system and the practice of idolatry prevailing in the Hindu society. His own spiritual quest made him travel to many parts of India and even beyond to other countries. It was during his extensive travels that he came into contact with Kabir and several Sufi mystics whose unorthodox and liberal teachings made a permanent impression on Nānak and showed him the goal of his spiritual yearning. Like Kabir, Nānak was a strict monotheist, and a determined opponent of the caste-system, of idolatry and ritualism, and a believer in the devotional mode of approach to God.

All that was best in both Hinduism and Islam became integrated together in his own thought. His belief in strict monotheism and his opposition to idolatry and the caste-system reveal the influence of the Sufi form of Islam, whilst his strong devotionism came from his Hindu upbringing. Nānak composed a number of devotional verses and hymns which were later brought together in a book called *Adi-Granth* or *Granth Sāhib*,¹⁵ which has become the holy scripture of the Sikh community. Nānak's disciples came to be known as Sikhs, which is a Punjabi version of the Sanskrit word *śiṣya* meaning disciple.

Nānak thought of God under the image of Truth and Light:

O Nānak, this alone need we know,
That God, being Truth, is the one Light of all.¹⁶

He insisted on the mysterious infinity of God, beyond the capacity of man's reason:

It is not through thought that He is to be
comprehended,
though we strive to grasp Him a hundred
thousand times...

15. The compilation was made by Arjun Singh (1563-1606 A.D.), the fifth Guru of the Sikh Community. It concludes not only the hymns and teachings of Nanak but also the writings of the subsequent Gurus as well as the songs of Kabir and other saints belonging to both the Hindu and Muslim-Sufi communities. The non-sectarian character of the *Granth Sāhib* is evident from the fact that besides the writings of the Sikh Guru it includes hymns by Farid (12th century), Beni (12th century), Jayadeva (12th century), Sadhanā (13th century), Trilochan (b. 1267), Nāmdēva (13th century), Rāmānanda (1360-1450), Sāin (1390-1440), Pīpā (b. 1425), Kabir (1440-1518), Rāmdās (15th century), Dhannā (early 16th century), Bhikkan (b. 1573), Sūrdās (b. 1528) and Paramānanda, a disciple of Rāmānanda.

16. *Selections from the Sacred Writing of the Sikhs*, translation by Trilochan Singh (London: George Allen and Unwin). It should be noted here that Islamic thought also conceives God in the image of Light (*nūr*).

All the innumerable devices of wordly wisdom leave a man disappointed; nor one avails
How then shall we know the Truth?¹⁷

Nānak found the answer to this question in the grace of the Guru or spiritual teacher. The Guru, being the chosen representative of God, could lead a man by his grace from the darkness of ignorance to the Light of God.

There is one God
Eternal Truth is His Name;
Maker of all things,
Fearing nothing and at enmity with nothing,
Timeless is His Image;
Not begotten, being of His own Being;
By the grace of the Guru, made known to men.¹⁸
Nānak himself became the first Guru of the Sikhs, and he organized them into a close-knit and strong religious community under his own wise guidance and efficient leadership. After his death the position of Guru came to be occupied by a person who had proved himself to be the most efficient and faithful follower of Nānak's teachings,

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

and who succeeded him as head of the Sikh community. In this way there was an unbroken succession of ten Gurus.¹⁹ But the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, had no successor, and after his death the position of the Guru was taken by the *Granth Sāhib*. The Sikhs have ever since regarded their sacred scripture as the sole guide and governor of their spiritual life.²⁰

19. The names and dates of these ten successive Gurus are as follows: Guru Nānak (1463-1532 A.D.), Guru Angad (1504-1552), Guru Amar Dās (1479-1574), Guru Rām Dās (1534-1581), Guru Arjun (1563-1606), Guru Har Govind (1595-1644), Guru Har Rāi (1630-1661), Guru Har Kishen (1656-1664), Guru Teg Bahādur (1621-1675) and Guru Govind Singh (1666-1708).

20. During the lifetime of Nānak the Sikhs were generally regarded as a branch of the Hindu community. But in the course of time, especially in the days of Arjun Singh, the fifth of the Sikh Gurus, they separated themselves from the main body of Hinduism and came to be known as an independent and exclusive community, separate from both Hinduism and Islam.

NEWS AND REPORTS

THE GENERAL REPORT OF RAMAKRISHNA MATH & RAMAKRISHNA MISSION FOR APRIL 1982—MARCH 1983 *Issued by the General Secretary* History

Shortly after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, the prophet of harmony of all religions, in August 1886, a monastic Order bearing his name was organized in pursuance of his own instructions with a monastery (Math) at Baranagore, a northern suburb of Calcutta, by his Sannyasin disciples headed by Swami Vivekananda. It gradually set up a twofold ideal before it: To create a band of Sannyasin teachers of Vedanta as propounded by Sri Ramakrishna and practically illustrated by his own life; and in conjunction with the lay

disciples to carry on missionary and philanthropic work, looking upon all, irrespective of caste, creed or colour, as veritable manifestations of the Divine. For some time the latter work was carried on through an association called the Ramakrishna Mission Association, started by Swami Vivekananda in May, 1897, shortly after his return from the West. In 1899 he transferred the Math, which had changed places by now, to its present site at Belur, across the Ganga, about six kilometres north of Calcutta, where it set itself more vigorously to the task of training a band of monks inspired with the twin ideals of Self-realization and service to the world. Soon after this, the Math authorities took upon themselves the work of the Mission Association.

Though the Ramakrishna Math was registered as a Trust in 1901, for the efficiency of the

work of the Mission Association and for giving it a legal status, a society named the Ramakrishna Mission was registered in 1909 under Act XXI of 1860 (see Appendices A and B). Its management vested in a Governing Body. Both the Math and the Mission gradually extended their spheres of activity as a result of which a number of branches in different parts of the country and abroad came into existence.

Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission

Though Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, with their respective branches, are distinct legal entities, they are closely related, inasmuch as the Governing Body of the Mission is made up of the Trustees of the Math; the administrative work of the Mission is mostly in the hands of the monks of Ramakrishna Math, and both have their Headquarters at Belur Math. The Math organization is constituted under a Trust with well-defined rules of procedure. The Mission is a registered society. Though both the organizations take up charitable and philanthropic activities, the former lays emphasis on religion and preaching, while the latter is wedded mainly to welfare service of various kinds. This distinction should be borne in mind, though 'Ramakrishna Mission' is loosely associated by people with Math activities also. It is necessary, moreover, to point out that the appropriation of the name of Sri Ramakrishna or Swami Vivekananda by any institution does not necessarily imply that it is affiliated either to Ramakrishna Math or to Ramakrishna Mission.

The Math and the Mission own separate funds and keep separate accounts of them. Though both the Math and the Mission receive grants from the Central and State Governments and public bodies for their social welfare activities, the other activities of the Math are financed from offerings, publications, etc., and the Mission is supported by fees from students, public donations, etc. Both the Math and the Mission funds are annually audited by qualified auditors.

Summary of Activities

In spite of some obstacles, hindrances, and intimidations faced by the organization, the following notable developments took place during the year under report:—

Three completed floors of the multi-storeyed building for the Vivekananda Institute of Medical Science of Ramakrishna Mission Seva

Pratishthan, Calcutta, a Mobile Dispensary at Gauhati Centre, and a new Medical Ward at Narottam Nagar (Arunachal Pradesh) were inaugurated; A Dispensary and a Library-cum-Reading Room at Cherrapunji, a new Kitchen and Dining Hall at Midnapore, and a new Karmi Bhavan at Puri Mission were declared open.

Foundations were laid for Sri Ramakrishna Temple at Gauhati (new site) and Library and Reading Room at Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Madras.

In the other wing of the Organization, the Ramakrishna Math, the following developments took place:

New Monks' Quarters at Matri Mandir, Jayrambati, new Viman (Tower) over the Prayer Hall of the Ramakrishna Institute of Moral and Spiritual Education, Mysore, and new second floor, including Prayer Hall, of South Block of Probationers' Training Centre at Belur Math were inaugurated. At Dinajpur (Bangladesh) three Charitable Homoeopathic Dispensaries in three villages were declared open, and one Primary School in each of three villages were started.

Centres

Excluding the Headquarters at Belur, there were in March 1983, 118 branch centres in all, of which 52 were Mission centres, 22 combined Math and Mission centres, and 44 Math centres. These were regionally distributed as follows: two Mission centres, five combined Math and Mission centres and three Math centres in Bangladesh; one Mission centre each in Sri Lanka, Singapore, Fiji, Mauritius and France; one Math centre each in Switzerland, England and Argentina; 12 Math centres in the United States of America, and the remaining 45 Mission centres, 17 combined Math and Mission centres and 26 Math centres (88 in all) in India. The Indian centres were distributed as follows: 28 in West Bengal, 11 in Uttar Pradesh, 11 in Tamil Nadu, seven in Bihar, six in Kerala, four in Karnataka, three each in Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh, two each in Maharashtra and Meghalaya, and one each in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh and Chandigarh. Moreover, attached to some of the branch centres there were over twenty sub-centres where monastic workers resided more or less permanently.

Types of Work

Medical Service: The Math and the Mission institutions under this head served the public in

general, irrespective of creed, colour or nationality. Prominent of these are the indoor hospitals in Calcutta, Kankhal, Lucknow, Itanagar, Ranchi, Trivandrum, Varanasi and Vrindaban. In 1982-83 there were altogether 13 Indoor Hospitals with 1,743 beds which accommodated 52,423 patients, 78 Outdoor Dispensaries which treated 46,46,763 cases including the old ones and 12 Mobile Dispensaries treated 4,19,316 cases in Urban, but mostly in Rural and Tribal areas. Besides, some centres had provision for emergency or observation indoor wards attached to their dispensaries. The Veterinary section of the Shyamala Tal Sevashrama treated 38 cases. The Sanatorium at Ranchi and the Clinic at New Delhi treated T.B. cases alone, while large sections of Seva Pratishthan, Calcutta, and the hospital at Trivandrum were devoted to maternity and child-welfare work. At Trivandrum there was also a department of Psychiatry. Research on different branches of Medical Science as also Post-graduate training in degree and diploma courses were conducted at Seva Pratishthan, Calcutta.

Educational Work: The twin organizations ran, during the year, 5 Degree Colleges, of general education at Madras, Rahara (24 Parganas), Coimbatore, Belur (Howrah), and Narendrapur (24 Parganas) with 4,571 students on their rolls. The last two were wholly residential, and the colleges at Madras and Coimbatore had attached hostels for residing students. In addition, there were 3 B. Ed. Colleges at Belur, Coimbatore and Mysore with 355 students; one Basic Training School at Coimbatore with 26 students; one Post-graduate Basic Training College at Rahara with 104 students; 4 Junior Basic Training Institutes at Rahara, Sarisha and Sargachhi with 312 students; a College for Physical Education, and a School of Agriculture with 113 and 60 students respectively at Coimbatore; 4 Polytechnics at Belur, Belgharia, Madras and Coimbatore with 1,584 students; 9 Junior Technical and Industrial Schools with 684 boys; 10 Vocational Training Centres with 292 students; 92 Students' Homes or Hostels, including some orphanages with 11,328 boys and 1,639 girls; 42 Higher Secondary, Secondary and High Schools with 22,934 boys and 10,507 girls; 25 Senior Basic and M.E. Schools with 5,124 boys and 2,939 girls; 44 Junior Basic, U.P., and Elementary Schools with 6,751 boys and 3,605 girls; and 454 L.P. and other grades of Schools with 23,893 boys and 4,244 girls; 22 Adult Education and

Community Centres with 685 students; An Institute of Medical Sciences with 37 students, was conducted by the Seva Pratishthan of Calcutta. Training of Nurses and Midwives was undertaken by Seva Pratishthan of Calcutta and also Math Hospital at Trivandrum, the total number of trainees being 293, and a new School of Nursing was started at Vrindaban. Two Schools of Languages for teaching different Indian and foreign languages—one with 2,485 students by Institute of Culture, Calcutta and another with 446 students by Hyderabad,—were conducted. The Ashrama at Narendrapur conducted a Blind Boys' Academy, an Institute of Commerce and a Village-Level Workers' Training Centre with 160, 190 and 1,577 students respectively. The centre at Ranchi (Morabadi) ran a training centre in farming (Divyayan) with 1,614 (718 in campus) students. The centre at Rahara conducted a Rural Librarianship Training Centre (residential) with 68 students. Thus there were altogether 84,040 boys and 24,580 girls in all the educational institutions run by the Math and the Mission in India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Fiji and Mauritius.

Recreational Activities: Some of the Math and the Mission centres have been providing scope for recreational, cultural and spiritual activities for youngsters at stated periods outside their school hours. *The Vivekananda Balaka Sangha* of the Bangalore Ashrama has a fine building of its own. At the Mysore Ashrama also a number of boys take advantage of the various kinds of facilities provided for them, and the youth section of the *Janashiksha Mandir*, Belur, is engaged in similar activities. Hyderabad Centre also started similar activities for boys on Sundays.

Work for Women: The organizations have ever been conscious of their duties to the women of India. Typical of the work done for them are the Maternity Sections of the Seva Pratishthan, Calcutta and the Hospital at Trivandrum; the Domiciliary and Maternity Clinics at Jalpaiguri and Khetri; the women's sections of the Hospitals at Varanasi and Vrindaban; the attached Invalid Women's Home at Varanasi; the Sarada Vidyalaya at Madras; the Girls' High Schools at Jamshedpur; the Sarada Mandir at Sarisha and the three Training Schools for nurses in Trivandrum, Vrindaban and Calcutta. Moreover, there are separate arrangements for women in other hospitals, dispensaries and schools, and some institutions are conducted

only for them. The Madras Math also conducts a High School and a Primary School for girls.

Rural Uplift and Work among the Labouring and Backward Classes: The twin organizations have all along tried their best to serve the unfortunate countrymen who have fallen back culturally or otherwise. These services are done in three ways: (a) By bringing them from rural areas to our Urban Centres; (b) By sending our dedicated workers in rural areas; (c) Through Centres located in rural areas. In addition to the more prominent village Ashramas like those at Cherrapunji, Sarisha, Ramharipur, Manasadwip, Jayrambati, Kamarpukur, Chandipur, Sargachhi, Along, Narottam Nagar, Itanagar, Coimbatore, Kalady, Trichur and Nattarampalli, a number of rural sub-centres—both permanent and semi-permanent—are run under the branch centres at Belur, Rahara, Sarisha, Trichur, Kankurgachhi (Calcutta), Malda, Ranchi, Narendrapur and Cherrapunji. Of these, special mention may be made of the numerous village sub-centres started for educating the hill tribes in Meghalaya and a farming centre at Ranchi, specially meant for Adivasis and Scheduled Castes. Welfare work of various kinds was done among the Nagas, Kukis and Mizos etc. by the Silchar Ashrama. Our educational, medical, and cultural activities in Arunachal Pradesh are also proving very useful and popular. During the year, the organizations ran in the rural and backward areas 19 Secondary or High Schools, 48 Senior Basic, Junior Basic, M.E. and U.P. Schools, 53 Primary Schools, 32 Night Schools, 10 Vocational Training Centres, a Rural Librarianship Training Centre, a Village-Level Workers' Training Centre, 2 Sanskrit Schools, a School of Agriculture, 22 Adult Education and Community Centres, 350 Non-formal Education Centres, and an Institute (Divyayana) for training village youths in farming—with a total of 47,409 students. The organizations also conducted 3 Indoor Hospitals treating 1,435 cases, 37 Outdoor Dispensaries treating 9,90,549 patients and 5 Mobile Dispensaries serving 1,51,765 patients, besides running 144 Milk-distribution centres and a number of libraries with 4 mobile units all located in the rural and backward areas. In addition to such varied activities, preaching and educative tours, screening moviefilms and slides and such other efforts were also undertaken frequently.

Pallimangal: (Integrated Rural Development): The Math and the Mission Headquarters directly conducted Pallimangal activities, as Pilot

Project, in 17 villages in and around Kamarpukur, Jayrambati and Bali-Dewanganj. Its day-to-day fieldworks are being conducted with the 18 trained young men as Pallimangal cadre under the supervision of the monks. The following programmes were implemented by the Headquarters during the year 1982-83 with a total expenditure of Rs. 3,96,971/-.

1. Agriculture: (i) Agricultural inputs, worth Rs. 66,000/- were given on credit to 172 farmers; (ii) Demonstration was made on both Hemp and Jute on 10 Kathas of land to find out the comparatively more profitability, and Marketing possibilities of their products are also being explored; (iii) A Soil Testing Laboratory was set up at Kamarpukur.

2. Pisciculture: Composite fish-Culture was done by 40 persons under our guidance in addition to Demonstration in one pond at Kamarpukur with appreciable result.

3. A. I. Centre: Artificial Insemination Centre (with Frozen Semen) served 140 cases; so far the results are very encouraging.

4. Credit for Small Business: Materials worth Rs. 17,000/- were given as loan to 12 persons for various kinds of small business, Brass Industry, Poultry, and Pisciculture.

5. Cottage Industry: 21 persons were trained and employed in Cottage Industry. 98 trained persons divided into 13 groups are gradually taking over independent projects.

6. Self-reliant Projects for Handicapped women and children and Destitute women: 12 Handicapped women and children and 6 Destitute women were trained and then given Sewing Machines, Hobbylooms, Knitting Machines, and Raw Materials for these, including for Dhoop-making.

7. Educational: One Adult Education Centre for girls at Jayrambati was conducted and 30 Non-formal Schools, run by Kamarpukur Mission Branch, were supervised by Pallimangal cadres.

8. Mobile Medical Service: (i) Cases treated 53,432, in and around Kamarpukur, Jayrambati and Koalpara; (ii) Free Eye Operation Camp was conducted: cases operated 46 and given spectacles; For this project Rs. 71,550/- was spent.

9. Seminars by Beneficiaries: Every month beneficiaries met together to discuss their problems and also find out the solutions.

10. Youth Convention: A five-day Yuva Sammelan with an exhibition on Pallimangal products was conducted at Bali-Dewanganj in

which 700 village youths participated with great enthusiasm in various competitions namely, Recitation, Speech, Essay Writing, Painting, Drama, Yogasanas, Gymnastics, Games and Sports, and also in Prayer and Meditation.

By the Branch Centres: (i) 5 Mobile Dispensaries (Mission) were run and total cases treated 1,92,263—(Bombay 50,853, Kankhal, 2 Units 52,981, Raipur 53,269 and Vrindaban 35,160); (ii) Vocational Training, Distribution of nutritious food and clothings, Financial help and loan to the needy persons were conducted by Bombay Centre; another Mobile Dispensary (Math) was run by the Madras Math through Nattarampalli: cases treated 21,856 in 150 villages.

Mass Contact: From the foregoing account it will be evident that the organizations' activities are not confined or concentrated in urban areas alone; they are spread over other fields as well. The message of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda is steadily spreading in all parts of India, which is evident from the participation of innumerable people during the annual celebrations. The Ashramas and temples also draw thousands of people throughout the year. Over and above these, there are a number of medical institutions where lakhs of people get free medicines and thousands are treated in the indoor departments. In the educational institutions also a considerable number of poor students get free education, board, or lodging. The organizations are also running a good number of free libraries in the rural areas. The publication centres, sometimes, sell booklets at nominal price to suit the pocket of the masses.

Spiritual and Cultural Work: Both the Math and the Mission centres laid emphasis on the dissemination of the spiritual and cultural ideals of India, and through various types of activity tried to give a practical shape to the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna that all religions are true. The centres established real points of contact among people of different faiths through public celebrations, meetings, classes, publications, etc. More than 121 Libraries containing large number of books and journals were conducted by them. Attached to the libraries Reading Rooms were maintained in many places. One Sanskrit Chatushpathi too was run. At least ten centres published books on religious subjects and 12 journals in different languages. Special mention should be made of the Institute of Culture, Calcutta, which has published *The Cultural Heritage of India* (5 Volumes so far) and which

has been trying to bring together eminent men and women of India and other lands in cultural fellowship. The Math centres at Mayavati, Baghbazar (Calcutta), Madras, Nagpur, Mysore, Rajkot, Trichur and Bhubaneswar, in particular, have to their credit a considerable number of useful publications. Some of our foreign centres too are publishing valuable books. It may not be out of place to tell here of the continuous preaching of Vedanta through classes and lectures for quite a few years now, being carried on by Swami Nihareyananda in Africa (Ramakrishna Vedanta Society, 35-37 Rhodes Avenue, Box 1096, Harare/formerly Salisbury, Zimbabwe/formerly Rhodesia).

Relief and Rehabilitation Work: As usual the Mission undertook relief and rehabilitation work either directly through the Headquarters or in conjunction with some branch centres. Some works were also conducted by the branch centres themselves.

1. The following Relief Works were conducted in India:

(A) Flood Relief: (i) at Jaipur, Tonk, Sawai Madhopur and Bharatpur in Rajasthan by the Headquarters assisted by Khetri Centre; (ii) at Kardabagh and Baxi Moda in Allahabad through Allahabad Centre; (iii) at Kusunda, Bahmunia and 13 other villages in Cuttack District of Orissa through Bhubaneswar Centre; (iv) at Haridaspur, Chandanpur, Tara Galarsgada, Gualali, Ala Dandapatna, Kuhudi and 3 other villages in Puri District of Orissa through Puri Mission Centre.

(B) Cyclone Relief: (i) at Darmikhal, Uzanagram, Patbari, Sachinpur and Panichera Anchals in Assam through Silchar Centre; (ii) at Kansapal, Bartada and 26 other villages in Cuttack District of Orissa through Bhubaneswar Centre; (iii) at 45 villages in Bhavnagar and Amreli Districts of Gujarat through Rajkot Math Centre.

(C) Drought Relief: (i) at Kasimpur, Gobindapur, Taidanga, and 510 other villages through 15 Distribution Centres in Malda District of West Bengal by the Headquarters assisted by Malda Centre; (ii) at Podlara, Bangabari, Hatwara, Chharra and Jahajpur in Purulia District of West Bengal through Purulia Centre.

(D) Disturbance Relief: (i) at Dangi Camp in Alipurduar of West Bengal by the Headquarters; (ii) Abhaypukhri, Chapai, Dhola, and Shantipur camps in Assam by the Headquarters assisted by Gauhati Centre.

(E) Medical Relief: at Ganga Sagar Mela

(and Chemaguri) through Seva Pratishthan, Manasadwip and Sarisha Centres.

2. The following Rehabilitation works were conducted:

(A) By the Headquarters: (i) Inauguration of Saradamani Balika Vidyalaya, consecration of Sitala Temple at Bali-Dewanganj and also reconstruction of Damodarpur High School at Bali-Dewanganj in Hooghly District of West Bengal, were completed; (ii) Construction of 1,012 houses, being the balance of the total project of 2,012 houses, was completed in Malda District of West Bengal and handed over to the beneficiaries; (iii) Construction of 246 pucca houses at Gunupur in Orissa was completed and handed over to the beneficiaries; (iv) Roofs of 89 fire-devastated houses at Gidhuria in Bankura District of West Bengal were reconstructed with the help of Saradapitha Centre.

(B) By the Branch Centres: Through the Rajahmundry Centre, construction of 200 pucca houses at Srikakulam in Andhra Pradesh was completed and handed over to the beneficiaries, and further construction of one Balwadi and a Temple was nearing completion.

Annual Celebrations: Most of the Math and the Mission centres appropriately observe the days sanctified by the advent of great saints and prophets. The general features of the celebrations of the birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi (the Holy Mother) and Swami Vivekananda are: Special worship, *Homa* (making offerings in the sacred fire), chanting of scriptural texts, *Bhajan* and *Sankirtan* (often in chorus), distribution of *Prasad* (sacramental food) to the devotees, feeding of the poor in large numbers, and lectures by eminent speakers, including the Swamis of the Order. Thus the message of Sri Ramakrishna and his direct associates is steadily spreading, and many young and ardent soul are coming into closer touch with the ideals of the Math and the Mission. In co-operation with the local public, a few centres celebrate some of the more popular Hindu festivals, accounts for these being maintained separately.

FOLLOW-UP OF THE SECOND CONVENTION OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MATH AND THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION 1980

As it was felt necessary to spread the message of Swami Vivekananda among the younger

generation in particular and as there was an urgent need for Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Bhava Prachar, a Committee named "Sri Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Bhava Prachar Committee" was constituted at the close of the grand Second Convention 1980.

Under the auspices and directions of the above Committee, during the year a good number of Youth Conventions (Yuva Sammelans) were held by the Branch Centres and also regionally at Saradapitha directly by the above Committee, with commendable success, and a great enthusiasm was visible from youths in respect of joining in the above Sammelans and also in participation in the subjects discussed there. The name of the Centres which conducted the Youth Conventions may be mentioned here: Allahabad, Bombay, Bhubaneswar, Ramakrishna Mission Pallimangal (Headquarters) at Bali-Dewanganj, Chandigarh, Institute of Culture (Calcutta), Madras Vidyapith (Vivekananda College), Malda, Madras Math, New Delhi, Nagpur, Patna, Puri Mission, Purulia, Raipur, Sarisha, and Tamruk.

Copies of the publications of the Conventions (1926 & 1980), and Two Coloured Movie Films of the Convention 1980, one longer, with narrations in three different languages (English or Hindi or Bengali) separately available, and the other shorter, with narration in English only (for the present), are ready for sale.

RAMAKRISHNA-VIVEKANANDA MOVEMENT

A Committee named "The Committee for the Comprehensive Study of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement" has been constituted with a view to exploring the possibility of implementing the idea of having a true picture and a balanced evaluation of what Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda stand for in the annals of Indian History, and how relevant is their message to both modern and future India. In order to implement these ideas, this Committee, with the active support, co-operation, and participation of historians, political scientists, philosophers, economists, social scientists, litterateurs, and men and women of other disciplines will organize regional and national seminars/conferences throughout India. The first such Seminar has recently been held at Hyderabad with great success.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Srimati Indira Gandhi

India today is a bereaved nation. A few lethal bullets of perfidy have deprived the country of its ablest and most charismatic leader at a critical period in its history. The blood thirst of religious fanaticism and insane sectarianism succeeded at last in rendering lifeless the hands that had held them in check for many years.

In the death of Srimati Indira Gandhi India has lost far more than a Prime Minister. A child of both the spiritual renaissance and the political resurgence of the nation, she embodied in herself in equal measure the noble ideals and values of the renaissance and the aspirations and dynamism of the resurgence. She stood at one of the great watersheds of India's history as a protectress towering over national infirmities and calamities, discharging with indomitable courage her duties to the several millions of people whom Providence had entrusted to her care. She stepped in at a time when India's image in the comity of nations was low. Perpetual food shortage had made the country dependent on foreign doles, two wars with neighbouring countries had shaken the nation's morale, economy was in the doldrums and fissiparous forces were active everywhere. But after she took charge, the country achieved within a few years complete self-sufficiency in food production, rapid expansion in science and technology and an unprecedented industrial boom. She had inherited from the founding fathers what then looked like an impossible ideology—an incongruous combination of democracy, socialism, secularism and non-alignment. It was her faith and performance that gave it viability and credibility, and to the end of her life she remained steadfast in her loyalty to this ideology.

If her political achievements were great, her personal qualities were greater still. Noteworthy among these were her extraordinary courage, fierce independence, superhuman will-power, immense pragmatism, sympathy for the underprivileged, and freedom from religious and social prejudices. The minorities and the poor masses looked up to her as their only reliable support. No other leader after Nehru came to be so universally accepted by all sections of people all over the country as their own. Indeed, so closely had she identified herself with her country that the common people instinctively regarded her as the living symbol of Mother India.

In the death of Indira Gandhi the contemporary world has lost one of its most distinguished leaders. The voice of this woman-Savonarola will no longer be heard in international forums. The developing Third World countries have lost their ablest spokesperson, the Non-aligned Movement its most powerful integrator, and democracy its ardent champion.

Her soul had a marked spiritual orientation which made her close to saintly people, including some of the elderly Swamis of the Ramakrishna Order. Her mother Srimati Kamala Nehru was a disciple of Swami Shivanandaji (otherwise known as Mahapurush Maharaj), the second president of the Ramakrishna Order. Influenced as she had been from her childhood by the ennobling ideals and ideas of Swami Vivekananda, she was one of the few among the top leaders of India who understood the significance of the Ramakrishna Movement and unhesitatingly supported it.

Prabuddha Bharata shares the sorrow of millions of people and pays homage to the departed soul.
