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JANUARY 1984

# Prabuddha Bharata

OR

## AWAKENED INDIA



By Karma, Jnana, Bhakti, and Yoga, by one or more or  
all of these the Vision of the Paramatman is Obtained.

ADVAITA ASHRAMA  
MAYAVATI, HIMALAYAS



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# Prabuddha Bharata

Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

A MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE  
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JANUARY 1984

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# Prabuddha Bharata

VOL. 89

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No. 1

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

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## INTEGRAL VISION OF VEDIC SEERS\*

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

अहं तष्टेव बन्धुरं पर्यचामि हृदा मति ।  
कुवित् सोमस्यापामिति ॥

(1) As a carpenter creates the chariot,  
I create the hymn in my heart; for I have  
drunk of the Soma in abundance.

*Rg-Veda 10.119.5.*

न हि मे रोदसी उभे अन्यं पक्षं चन प्रति ।  
कुवित् सोमस्यापामिति ॥

(2) Both the heaven and the earth are  
not equal to one half of me; for I have  
drunk of the Soma in abundance.

*Rg-Veda 10.119.7.*

अभि द्यां महिना भुवमभीमां पृथिवीं महीं ।  
कुवित् सोमस्यापामिति ॥

(3) I excel the sky in greatness, and I  
excel the earth; for I have drunk of the  
Soma in abundance.

*Rg-Veda 10.119.8.*

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\* The *Iti-va-iti sūktam* begun last month is continued here. In it Indra expresses the exultation and elevation experienced in spiritual ecstasy. The hymn reminds us of the ecstatic utterances of the sage Trisanku beginning with *aham vrkṣasya reriva* in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad 1.10.1.*

## TO OUR READERS

With this issue *Prabuddha Bharata* is entering the 89th year of its publication. On this happy occasion we send our warm greetings and best wishes to our readers, subscribers, contributors, reviewers, publishers of books, friends and sympathizers, and thank them for their continued support.

Eighty-eight years ago Swami Vivekananda had this journal started with the conviction that spirituality being the backbone of India, the best way to arouse, uplift and strengthen the nation was to revitalize its rich religious heritage. History vindicated Swamiji's vision, for India's political resurgence billowed forth as the direct outcome of its spiritual

renaissance. But recent socio-political events show that the nation is now facing the danger of losing the original spiritual impulse through over-politicization. At this critical juncture when the nation is poised for a leap in technological advancement, economic prosperity and social transformation, nothing is more needed than reasserting the moral imperative and spiritual elan. In this task of national awakening and integration *Prabuddha Bharata* with its long record of effective service has a significant role to play. With this end in view we request our readers to try their best to popularize this journal among their friends and acquaintances.

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## ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This month's EDITORIAL discusses Swami Vivekananda's views on the ideal of *sarvamukti* and its basis in Vedantic scriptures.

A beautiful study of the spiritual kinship that existed between Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda is presented in SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND HIS 'ONLY MOTHER' by Swami Prabhananda, who is a trustee of the Ramakrishna Math.

In FREEDOM AND SPACE Dr. Margaret Bedrosian, M.A., Ph.D., shows how Sadhana

opens different doors to freedom which means the expansion of inner space, consciousness. The author is a lecturer in English and comparative literature at the University of California, Davis.

Ann Myren who teaches social sciences at the college of Alameda, Alameda, California, presents an illuminating study of Swami Vivekananda as a spiritual personality in her article THE SPIRITUAL TREASURE OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA, the first instalment of which appears in this issue.

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# LIBERATION OF ALL

(EDITORIAL)

## *Swamiji on 'sarvamukti'*

In modern times the ideal of *sarvamukti* or 'liberation of all people' is associated with the philosophy of Dr. Radhakrishnan. But long before him Swami Vivekananda had expounded and espoused it. In the course of a conversation with his disciple Sarat Chandra Chakravarti Swamiji once stated :

What is the good of that spiritual practice or realization which does not benefit others, does not conduce to the well-being of people sunk in ignorance and delusion, does not help in rescuing them from the clutches of lust and wealth? Do you think, so long as one jiva endures in bondage, you will have any liberation? So long as he is not liberated—it may take several lifetimes—you will have to be born to help him, to make him realize Brahman. Every jiva is a part of yourself—which is the rationale of all work for others. As you desire the whole-hearted good of your wife and children, knowing them to be your own, so when a like amount of love and attraction for every jiva will awaken in you, then I shall know that Brahman is awakening in you, not a moment before.

When the disciple exclaimed, 'Sir, it is a most tremendous statement that without the salvation of all, there shall be no salvation for an individual', Swamiji pointed out :

There is a class of Vedantists who hold such a view. They say that individual liberation is not the real and perfect form of liberation, but universal and collective liberation is true Mukti. Of course, both merits and defects can be pointed out in that view.<sup>1</sup>

Swamiji is known to have explicitly referred to the *sarvamukti* ideal only on the

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1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1972) 7:235-36.

above occasion. But, as is clear from his other talks, letters and lectures, this ideal of the liberation of all people was the main inspiration behind his emphasizing Karma Yoga, his organizing social service activities and his exhortation to the youth to dedicate their lives to the service of the poor and the downtrodden. Swamiji was first and foremost a spiritual man, and every undertaking of his had a spiritual motive behind it. Though overflowing compassion prompted him to ask his followers to sacrifice their lives for the welfare of others, the same spirit of compassion would not make him forget the spiritual welfare of those who heeded his call. Indeed, he appealed to them so unhesitatingly and fervently to ignore their own salvation for the sake of service only because he knew that the two, salvation and service, were inseparably interconnected.

Furthermore, Swamiji was deeply influenced by the life of Buddha and was imbued with the spirit of the Bodhisattva who renounces the supreme peace of Nirvana in order to help others to attain it. In some of his well-known statements, like the ones given below, the Bodhisattva spirit stands clearly revealed.

Will such a day come when this life will go for the sake of others' good? The world is not a child's play—and great men are those who build highways for others with their heart's blood. This has been taking place through eternity, that one builds a bridge by laying down his own body, and thousands of others cross the river through its help. Be it so! Be it so!<sup>2</sup> It may be that I shall find it good to get outside of my body—to cast it off like a disused garment. But I will not cease to work! I will inspire men

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2. *Complete Works* (1978) 6:273-74.

everywhere, until the world shall know that it is one with God.<sup>3</sup>

...and may I be born again and again and suffer thousands of miseries, so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God that I believe in, the sum total of all souls—and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species, is the special object of my worship.<sup>4</sup>

Towards the end of the conversation referred to earlier, the disciple expressed his doubt as to whether the ideal of *sarvamukti* had the support of Hindu scriptures or tradition. But, records the disciple in his diary, Swamiji was in an abstracted mood and did not clarify the issue. Our endeavour here is to see how far the ideal of 'liberation of all' can be justified in the light of Hindu scriptures and in the traditions of other religions.

#### *Universal salvation in world religions*

Regarding the scope of salvation or liberation<sup>5</sup> three main views are found in world religions. One is the doctrine of personal salvation. According to this view, liberation can be attained only through perfect purity and Self-realization and, since the number of people who have acquired such qualification is found to be small at all times, universal salvation is out of the question. This is the popular view in Hinduism, Jainism and Theravada Buddhism. In Hinduism it is strongly upheld by the Sāṃkhya-Yoga school. Vyāsa in his commentary on Patañjali's Yoga aphorisms says, 'For the perfected Yogi there is cessation of transmigration, not for others.

Any other view is defective (for that would imply the end of creation or the activity of Prakṛti which is impossible).<sup>6</sup> Many Vedantins hold the same opinion.<sup>7</sup>

The second doctrine is salvation of the chosen group. This is the main view found in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Jews, Christian and Muslims regard themselves as the chosen people of God. Catholicism makes salvation the responsibility of the Church, whereas Protestantism makes it the responsibility of the individual. Predestination is the dominant Protestant view according to which God foreordained that some people should be saved and the rest should be eternally damned in hell, the only doubt being whether this divine decision was taken before the Fall of Adam ('supra-lapsarianism') or after it ('infra-lapsarianism'). Strangely enough, this doctrine of predestination in a different theological garb is found in the Dvaita school of Vedanta founded by Madhvācārya.

The third doctrine known as universal salvation has found expression in three different ways in three world religions. In Christianity it is mainly associated with the movement known as Universalism, started in the middle of the eighteenth century by some German pietists and the Englishmen John Rely and John Murray, which holds that all men are eligible for salvation. Though in its early phase Universalism implied acceptance of Christ as the only

6. कुशलस्यास्ति संसारक्रमपरिसमाप्तिः न इतरस्येति ।

Vyāsa on *Yoga-Sūtra* 4:33

7. cf अत एव हि विद्वत्सु मुच्यमानेषु सर्वदा ।  
ब्रह्माण्डजीवलोकानामनन्तत्वादशून्यता ॥

Quoted by Hariharānanda Aranya in his notes on *ibid.*

3. *Complete Works* (1973) 5:414.

4. *Complete Works* 5:137.

5. Though treated here together, the words 'salvation' and 'liberation' have different connotations as they are based on different metaphysical presuppositions.

Saviour, its modern adherents do not insist on this condition.<sup>8</sup>

In Buddhism universal salvation is associated with the Bodhisattva ideal, a unique feature of Mahayana Buddhism. To understand its nature and scope we have to compare it with the Hinayana ideal of the *arhan*. In Hinayana only the individual self or ego is regarded as unreal, void, *śūnya*; but the world, though impermanent and full of suffering, is real. What appears as the ego is only a combination of five categories (*skandhas*) and, when one realizes this fact, one gets freed from suffering and transmigration. The means to this liberation is the Noble Eight-fold Path, of which the most important step is the last (eighth) one known as *samyak samādhi* or right concentration.<sup>9</sup> Perfection in *samādhi* leads to Nirvana, the experience of the emptiness of the self, the attainment of which is believed to be the ultimate goal of life. A person who has reached this stage is called an *arhan*. Enjoying supreme peace, he remains unattached to the world.

Mahayana Buddhism differs from the Hinayana in three important respects. In the first place, whereas in Hinayana the self alone is regarded as *śūnya*, in Mahayana

the entire world is regarded as *śūnya*<sup>10</sup>. Secondly, according to Mahayana, there is no real difference between Nirvana and *samsāra* and so withdrawal from the world is unnecessary. Instead of thinking about suffering one should cultivate *karuṇā*, compassion for all beings. Further, the Buddha is identified with the ultimate reality in the form of three cosmic bodies: *nirmāṇa kāya*, *sambhoga kāya* and *dharma kāya* of which the last one is the *śūnya*. The goal of meditation is to realize this universal void nature of Buddha, and a person who strives for it is called a *bodhisattva*. He has to pass through ten stages; the last of these is called *dharma-megha* after attaining which the Bodhisattva moves about in the world like a cloud raining virtue, peace and blessedness.

According to Mahayana Buddhism everyone is a sleeping Buddha, everyone has in him the seed of buddhahood called *bodhi-citta*. When a person has awakened this consciousness in him he becomes a Bodhisattva, even though he may not have passed through all the ten stages. Right vision of the goal and a firm resolute will to attain it are enough to make any man a Bodhisattva, whereas in Theravada a person is called an *arhan* only after he has attained complete liberation and perfection. This is the first point of difference between the Bodhisattva and the *arhan*. The second difference is that unlike the *arhan* who remains uninvolved in the world, the Bodhisattva, actuated by deep compassion, actively strives to bring enlightenment to all others.

8. The view of the Catholic Church that even the souls tortured in hell would ultimately reach heaven through the purgatory is too vague and distant a possibility to be classified under universal salvation, though it is more moderate than the theories of predestination and election held by Calvinists and Lutherans.

9. In Buddhism *samādhi* means only concentration and corresponds to *dhyāna* in Hinduism. Buddhist *samādhi* consists of four stages called in Pali *Jhāna* (*dhyāna* in Sanskrit). In the modern form of Hinayana known as Theravada *Samyak smṛti* or Right Mindfulness forming the seventh step is considered to be higher than even *samādhi* (which forms the eighth step) and is now becoming more popular under the names 'Vipassana' and 'Sati pattana'.

10. This is the central idea of Madhyamika school founded by Nāgārjuna. In the Yogācāra (*Vijñānavāda*) school founded by Asanga and Vasubandhu the ultimate reality is regarded as nondual consciousness (*vijñāna-mātra*), sometimes referred to as 'suchness' (*tattata*). When Mahayana thought spread in China, Tibet and Japan the concepts of voidness and suchness got united.

In his eagerness to help others he invokes the effects of the bad karma of others upon himself, and offers the merits of his own good karma to the welfare of others. He does not remain satisfied until all mankind attains Nirvana, and for this end he allows himself to be born again and again, or remains after his death in some supramundane world guiding and inspiring people. As a matter of fact, the Pure Land (Jodo-Shin) sects of Japanese Buddhism<sup>11</sup> are based on the belief that all those who take refuge in Amidabha Buddha would be re-born in his world known as the Pure Land (Sukhavati in Sanskrit, Ching-tu in Chinese, Jodo in Japanese) from where they would eventually attain Nirvana.<sup>12</sup>

A Bodhisattva strives to secure for others not only Nirvana but also material welfare; the eradication of all kinds of human misery is his goal. It is only natural that this ideal should appeal to a great lover of humanity like Swami Vivekananda. He adapted it to the frame-work of Vedanta and placed it before the world as the ideal of the present age. A Buddhist is apt to look upon Swamiji as a Bodhisattva. But was Swamiji a Bodhisattva? He was primarily a Vedantin and, to categorize him, we must understand the Vedantic concept of *mukti* or liberation.

We have seen how the ideal of universal salvation expresses itself in Christianity as the *eligibility* of all mankind for salvation,

<sup>11</sup>. Popularized in Japan by Honen and Shinran in the thirteenth century, the cult of Amidābha Buddha originated in India and was transplanted to China in the third century A.D. Its original scripture is the *Sukhāvati-vyūha Sūtra*.

<sup>12</sup>. Amidabha was, millions of years ago, an ordinary monk by name Dharmākara who vowed that he would become a Buddha and would then create a supramundane world (the Pure Land, also called the Western Paradise) where all people could live in unalloyed bliss and finally attain Nirvana.

and in Buddhism as the *possibility* of everyone's attaining salvation. The third form of expression of this ideal is the Vedantic concept of *sarvamukti* which emphasizes the *inevitability* of the liberation of the entire human race. According to it, liberation of all is an essential condition for the liberation of the individual, for no one can attain final and total liberation until every man and woman is liberated. It should, however, be admitted that this noble ideal has been neither categorically emphasized nor widely accepted, not even properly understood, in Hinduism. Nevertheless, as the late Prof. Hiriyanna has shown with his characteristic erudition and clarity, the concept of *sarvamukti* is as much a part of the Vedantic view of life as the ideal of *jīvanmukti* (liberation in life) is.

#### *Pralaya is not mukti*

Before discussing *sarvamukti* it is necessary to point out the distinction between *pralaya* (dissolution) and *mukti* (liberation). According to the cyclic theory of cosmogony accepted by all systems of Indian thought, the universe undergoes creation (*sr̥ṣṭi*) and dissolution (*pralaya*) alternately at regular intervals. Dissolution is of three types: *nitya* (daily), *naimittika* (occasional) and *prākṛta* (basic).<sup>13</sup>

*Nitya pralaya* is a purely subjective phenomenon experienced in sleep. In deep sleep the mind stops functioning and merges in its cause, the individual ignorance or *ajñāna*, and the world is not experienced by the sleeper. *Naimittika pralaya* is the merger of the Virāj (the psycho-physical universe) consisting of the three worlds (*bhū*, *bhuva* and *sva*) in the Hiranyagarbha or Cosmic Person who is the creator. It is supposed to occur at the end of every day of Hiranyagarbha's life which corresponds to

<sup>13</sup>. See, *Vedānta Paribhāṣā* of Dharmarāja Adhvarīndra, trans. Swami Madhavananda (Belur, Calcutta: Sarada Pitha, 1942) ch. 7.



4,320,000 human years.<sup>14</sup> *Prākṛta* or *mahā* (great) *pralaya* is the merger of Hiraṇyagarbha in the ultimate cause. All elements are resolved back into the three *guṇas* and all beings who have not attained liberation will merge in primal cause, Prakṛti or Māyā.

Dissolution is going back to the cause which is, from the Advaitic and Sāṃkhya-Yoga points of view, is either Māyā (Prakṛti) or its product. In other words, *pralaya* is a return to the state of primordial ignorance. It is a form of sleep of varying duration. On the contrary, *mukti* is a return to the pure, self-luminous, infinite consciousness of Brahman. It can be attained only through *ātma-sākṣātkāra*, realization of the Self (the individual Self as well as the Supreme Self which are, from the Advaitic standpoint, one). As long as ignorance persists, the soul remains in bondage of some kind or other. The highest Self-knowledge alone can destroy ignorance and give the soul liberation. This is the fundamental belief of all Vedantins, only the non-dualists hold that this supreme knowledge arises spontaneously in certain qualified individuals, whereas the dualists hold that it is infused by God as grace.

In this context it is necessary to point out that, since Buddhists do not believe in the existence of the Atman or the self, Buddhist Nirvana (especially of the Hinayana variety) cannot be regarded as *mukti* or liberation. All orthodox Vedantic teachers are unanimous in holding this view. According to them Nirvana can at best be regarded only as a form of *prakṛti-laya*, merger in Prakṛti.

### *Kramamukti*

Coming back to the *sarvamukti* ideal, we should note that this ideal has been inter-

14. This is the only *pralaya* discussed in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* 8:17-19.

preted in three different ways by the teachers of Vedanta. One is to equate it with *kramamukti*. The Advaita traditions accept two types of liberation: *sadyomukti*, immediate or direct release, and *kramamukti*, gradual or indirect release. The first one occurs only when a person gains the direct non-dual realization of the oneness of his self with the Supreme Brahman and is freed from primordial ignorance. This is extremely rare; not more than a few people may attain it in a century. There are, however, a large number of people who advance very far but fail to reach the non-dual state. Many of them remain satisfied with the realization of their identity with Hiraṇyagarbha, the Cosmic Person, often spoken of as the 'Person in the Sun'.<sup>15</sup> It is also believed that all Sannyāsins who lead a life of renunciation and purity will attain this state even if they fail to get any higher spiritual experience.<sup>16</sup> During *mahāpralaya*, when Hiraṇyagarbha gets dissolved in the Supreme Brahman, all those who have attained his consciousness too will be liberated.<sup>17</sup> This is *kramamukti*.

It is sheer ignorance and conceit to look down upon *kramamukti* as an inferior form

15. This idea is implied in the famous declaration of the Vedic sage: 'I have realized the Great Person, effulgent as the sun and beyond the darkness of ignorance. By realizing Him alone can one transcend death; there is no other way.'

*Svetāsvatara Upaniṣad* 3:8.

16. cf वेदान्तविज्ञानसुनिश्चितार्थाः

संन्यासयोगाद्यतयः शुद्धसत्त्वाः ।

ते ब्रह्मलोकेषु परान्तकाले

परामृताः परिमुच्यन्ति सर्वे ॥

*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 3:2:6 [ Śaṅkara, however, interprets this to mean *sadyomukti*, not *kramamukti* ]

17. ब्रह्मणा सह ते सर्वे सम्प्राप्ते प्रतिसञ्चरे ।

परस्यान्ते कृतात्मानः प्रविशन्ति परं पदम् ॥

Quoted in *Vedānta Paribhāṣā*, 7.

of liberation, for the vast majority of spiritual aspirants can hope for nothing higher. Attaining the consciousness of Hiraṇyagarbha is generally spoken of as dwelling in his world called *brahma-loka* or *satya-loka*. The special supra-mundane worlds created by Avatars for their devotees are all parts of this *satya-loka*. Those who attain this world have to wait until the final pralaya. In the meantime some of them are reborn, in obedience to the will of the Divine, to become seers, religious leaders and teachers. It is from this higher abode that the Avatar brings down his apostles and chosen followers. Among them some belong to a special class of intimate companions, called *īśvarakotis* by Sri Ramakrishna. There are also a few rare souls known as *ādhikārika puruṣas* who after having attained the highest experience of non-dual Brahman and total liberation yet choose to retain their individuality in order to do good to mankind. Sri Ramakrishna classed Swami Vivekananda among these great souls who are regarded as greater than even the gods. All these illumined souls constantly strive for the spiritual welfare of earth-bound suffering men and women and raise more and more of them to the *satya-loka*. In the Upaniṣads the attainment of this world itself is often spoken of as immortality.<sup>18</sup> Although *kramamukti* does not mean the liberation of all people, still as the life span of Hiraṇyagarbha extends to millions of years, we may take *kramamukti* as a form of *sarvamukti* for all practical purposes.

#### *Sarvamukti according to Bhartṛprapañca*

But a more comprehensive and clear-cut concept of *sarvamukti* already exists. It was first propounded by *Bhartṛprapañca* who probably lived one or two centuries before

Śaṅkarācārya.<sup>19</sup> He advocated a form of monism known as *bheda-abheda* (difference-nondifference) according to which Brahman is the sole reality but consists of a variety of beings, just as a tree, though one, consists of roots, trunk, leaves etc. There is only one soul, but it functions through many centres. The common notion of a plurality of souls is due to this functional divergence and the mistaking of a temporary focusing of experience for the permanent individuality of the experient. Since there is really only one soul, its liberation can be attained only by the combined effort of all the apparent souls which are only centres of consciousness. As long as even one centre remains malfunctioning, as long as even one apparent soul remains imperfect, liberation of the universal soul is out of the question.

Furthermore, liberation is not totally unrelated to worldly activity. *Apavarga* (liberation) and *bhoga* (worldly enjoyment) are both parts of a single Dharma. The ultimate aim of all work is the attainment of liberation. So Bhartṛprapañca advocates a synthesis of work and knowledge (*jñāna-karma-samuccaya*). According to him work becomes an obstacle only when it is done for the sake of the individual, not when it is done for the sake of the universal soul. For this karma must always be based on *jñāna*, knowledge of the unity of all life. Similarly, a person who has realized this knowledge will spontaneously strive for the welfare of all people. Thus there is no contradiction between *jñāna* and karma.

It is quite possible that, in the conversation cited at the beginning of our discussion, Swami Vivekananda had Bhartṛprapañca in mind when he referred to 'a class of Vedantins who hold such a view'. But even within the fold of Śaṅkara's Advaita it is poss-

18. As for instance, in *Isa Upaniṣad*, 11.

19. see, M. Hiriyanna *Indian Philosophical Studies* (Mysore: Kavyalaya Publishers, 1957) Pp. 79-94.

ible to find the *sarvamukti* ideal either implied or expressly stressed. This is the third way the *sarvamukti* ideal has found expression in Hinduism.

### *Sarvamukti ideal in Advaita*

In his *Siddhānta Leśa Saṁgraha* Appaya Dīkṣita mentions a number of schools of Advaita. Of these, three are the most important : the Vārtika school of Sureśvara and Sarvajñātman, the Vivaraṇa school of Padmapāda and Prakāśātman, the Bhāmatī school of Vācaspati and Amalānanda. All these schools are agreed on the non-dual nature of Brahman ; it is only regarding the nature of primordial ignorance (*ajñāna*) and *jīva* (individual self) that they differ from one another.

According to the Vārtika school Īśvara or Personal God is the reflection of Brahman on cosmic *ajñāna*, while the reflections of Brahman on individual *ajñānas* are the Jīvas. The difference between God and the soul is like the difference between the reflections (*pratibimba*) of the sun in a lake and the water of a saucer.<sup>20</sup> Hence this view is called *pratibimba vāda*, and since Sureśvara also holds that the reflections are different from the original and are false, this view is called *ābhāsavāda*.

According to a second view, Brahman as the original (*bimba*) is God ; Brahman's reflections (*pratibimba*) are Jīvas. The difference between God and the soul is like the difference between the sun in the sky and its reflections in water, etc. This view is called *bimba-pratibimba vāda*. On the nature of *ajñāna*, the medium of reflection, this view is split into two. The Vivaraṇa school holds that *ajñāna* is one and is located in Brahman, whereas the Bhāmatī school holds that *ajñāna* is located in the individual self and is hence many.

The Vārtika school does not advocate *sarvamukti*, for according to it God and the souls are distinct entities (like the clay elephant and the clay mouse, as Swami Vivekananda puts it) and so identity of the *jīva* with Īśvara is impossible. The theory of multiplicity of *ajñāna* makes *sarvamukti* an impossibility for the Bhāmatī school. It is only some followers of the Vivaraṇa school who advocate *sarvamukti*. In this school some hold that there is only a single *jīva* (this view is called *eka-jīva vāda*) and all other *jīvas* and the multiplicity of objects exist only as long as the selfhood of this single *jīva* persists. When this single *jīva* attains liberation, all other *jīvas* cease to exist for *that jīva* ; this is *sarvamukti* according to some. This is almost a form of solipsism (*drṣṭi-srṣṭi vāda*) and is not worth considering here.

According to the other followers of the Vivaraṇa school, though *ajñāna* is one, *jīvas* are many owing to the multiplicity of minds (*antaḥkarāṇas*). Prof. Hirianna has argued that even in this view there is scope for the ideal of *sarvamukti*, liberation of all. According to him, Saguṇa Brahman (or Īśvara) being the sum total of all individual souls, 'the inward perfection of no soul can be said to be completed until the *whole system* to which it belongs ceases to be imperfect.' His conclusion is : 'We are therefore forced to admit that the enlightened soul only attains oneness with, and continues as, the Saguṇa or personal Brahman. This is described as *sarva-bhāvāpatti* or becoming one with all. He then sees all in himself and himself in all... And the person in question may be said to lead thereafter a divine life and work for others in the form of Īśvara.'<sup>21</sup> According to the interpretation of this savant, liberation for the individual means attaining oneness with

20. *Vedānta Paribhāṣā*, 7.

21. M. Hirianna, *Indian Conception of Values* (Mysore: Kavyalaya Publishers, 1975) p. 297.

Īśvara, not with the absolute Supreme Brahman. When *all* the jīvas attain such an identity with Īśvara, collective ignorance gets destroyed. When this happens, what had till then appeared as Saguṇa Brahman or Īśvara automatically becomes Nirguṇa Brahman, the impersonal Absolute. All individuals then become one with the Absolute. This is *sarvamukti*. In other words, *sarvamukti*, liberation of all, is alone true liberation; individual liberation is only a step towards it.

## SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND HIS 'ONLY MOTHER'

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

Unique was the relationship between Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda. It transcended the ordinary love and affection of a mother and her child and served a divine purpose. In spite of their vastly different personality traits and modes of conduct, the lives of Holy Mother and Swamiji had several points in common. For one thing, their lives were an inseparable part of the larger life and universal ideal represented by Sri Ramakrishna. Secondly, the highest spiritual realization that they had attained gave them a fundamental spiritual unity and kinship. Thirdly, they provided joint leadership in establishing the Ramakrishna Movement on a firm foundation. The purpose of the present article is to show how their deep spiritual kinship manifested itself on the physical plane on different occasions in different ways.

Sri Sarada Devi was once staying in a rented house close to the cremation ground at Ghusuri, Howrah. One day Swami Vivekananda and Swami Akhandananda went there to take leave of her. Swamiji had made up his mind to live alone for a long time, away from his monastic brothers of the Baranagore monastery. Recounting the incident later, the Holy Mother said: 'Naren also had a melodious voice. Before leaving this city he came to see me and sang a few songs. While taking leave of me he said: "Mother, I shall see you again if I become a real man. Otherwise, I now

say good-bye for ever." "What do you mean my child?" I cried. "Well", replied a faltering Naren, "I shall soon come back through your grace." The Holy Mother then suggested, 'Should you not see your own mother before leaving Calcutta, my dear?' Swamiji instantly replied, 'You are *my only mother!*' Mother heartily blessed him as well as his companion. Thereafter, addressing the latter she said, 'I am handing our all in all over to you. You know the condition in the Himalayas. Please see that Naren does not suffer for want of food.'<sup>1</sup>

This happened some time in July 1890. A few months earlier on 23 April, ten days after Balaram Bose's demise, some direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna had met at Balaram Bose's house and, in the course of a discussion regarding the Holy Mother Sarada Devi, Swamiji had observed, 'The Master told me about so many things, but nothing about her.' Immediately Swami Yogananda responded, 'Why, if the Master is *Īśvara* she must be the *Īśvari*.'<sup>2</sup> We are amazed to see how soon thereafter the greatness of the Holy Mother dawned on Swamiji. Truly it has been said that a jeweller alone can know the worth of a

1. Swami Gambhirananda: *Yuganāyak Vivekānanda* (Bengali), (Calcutta. Udbodhan Karyalaya, B.S. 1373) vol. 1, Pp. 271-72

2. Information based on the unpublished diary of 'M'.

jewel. The incident mentioned above also conclusively proves that Sri Ramakrishna did not impose the cult of the Holy Mother on Swamiji. What began as reverence for the holy wife of his Guru matured in the fullness of time into the recognition of her divinity and the divine role she had to play on earth. But it is also true that the Holy Mother in her own right got herself established in the shrine of Swamiji's heart.

On the last day of his earthly existence Sri Ramakrishna had assured Sarada Devi saying, 'You need have no anxiety; you will be just as you have been so long; and they will look after you and do for you as much as they have done for me.' When after the Master's passing away, the authorities of the Kali temple stopped the monthly allowance of seven rupees to Sarada Devi, Swamiji pleaded with them strongly, but in vain, to continue it. As a matter of fact, the welfare of the Mother was always in his mind.

Earlier still, when she lived at Dakshineswar, she had seen Narendra and heard the Master speaking highly of the spiritual greatness of the young boy. She had also listened to Narendra's spell-binding music. Often she had to make for him special dishes, particularly thick *chapātīs*, (unleavened whole-wheat bread) and chick-pea soup. In this context we may remember an interesting anecdote. One day Sri Ramakrishna asked her to cook something nice for Naren. She prepared *moong dal* and *chapātīs*. On being asked how he liked the food, Narendra said, 'The food was quite nice, but it tasted like an invalid's diet.' Sri Ramakrishna advised her to prepare thick *chānā dāl* and *chapātīs*. She followed his advice and Narendra relished her food greatly.<sup>3</sup>

Next to the Master, the Mother was the

3. *At Holy Mother's Feet*, By Her Direct Disciples, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1963) p. 141,

first to realize the true spiritual greatness of Swamiji. The first clear indication of the divinely chosen mission of Swami Vivekananda came to her in a vision which she had when she was living alone in her husband's cottage at Kamarpukur. She saw the Master approaching followed by Narendra, Rakhal, Baburam and other disciples. From his feet gushed forth a stream of water. Finally, the Master disappeared in the body of Narendra.<sup>4</sup>

Some time in 1893, at Nilambar Mukherjee's house at Belur, the Holy Mother had another significant vision. It was a moonlit night and she was seated on the steps leading to the Ganges. Suddenly she saw Sri Ramakrishna swiftly getting down into the Ganges and his whole body dissolving in the waters of the river. Later, recalling the incident, she said, 'I looked at the phenomenon in utter amazement. All of a sudden Naren also appeared, I don't know from where, crying, "Victory unto Sri Ramakrishna!"; he took the water in his two hands and began to sprinkle it upon the innumerable men and women gathered around. Immediately they attained liberation.'<sup>5</sup> So vivid was the impression that this vision had left on her mind that for several days she hesitated to step into the Ganges where the Master's body had dissolved. This also convinced her that in spite of his physical death Sri Ramakrishna had not ceased to exist, and that Narendra was going to take up the Master's work.

As the two principal persons entrusted with the mission of the Master, Sri Sarada Devi, 'the living Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'<sup>6</sup> and Swami Vivekananda, the

4. Swami Gambhirananda: *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1955), p. 152.

5. *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, p. 174.

6. Sarojini Naidu, 'Living Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna', *Vedanta Kesari* (Madras), July 1954. p. 93,

herald and interpreter of Sri Ramakrishna's message, followed their own respective paths, although not wholly independent of each other. Before Swami Vivekananda finally decided to go to the West on his great mission he yearned for a direct command from his Master. Several days later he saw the Master walking over the waves and beckoning him to follow. This convinced Swamiji that he must go to the West. But to make doubly sure, he wrote to Holy Mother for her blessings for the momentous step he was taking. Though she knew of Narendra's bright future she hesitated, for how could a mother permit her son to travel to such a distant land in uncertain conditions? But soon recognizing in it the will of the Master, she set her personal feelings aside and sent him her hearty blessings. Swamiji knew that her blessings were always with him, protecting him and strengthening him. Referring to this he wrote in a letter to Swami Shivananda, 'If but Mother orders, her demons can work anything. Brother, before proceeding to America I wrote to Mother to bless me. Her blessings came, and at one bound I cleared the ocean.'<sup>7</sup>

Even when he was borne on the wings of triumph from one city to another in the United States, Swamiji gratefully remembered the Holy Mother. And this sense of gratitude overflowed his heart and often found expression in his speeches.

On 1 July 1895, before a small group of earnest spiritual seekers at the Thousand Island Park, Swamiji for the first time publicly mentioned the Holy Mother. He said: 'She (Sarada Devi) herself was a great soul, pure and holy, who only desired to help his (Sri Ramakrishna's) work, never to drag him down to the level of the Gr̥hastha (a

householder).'<sup>8</sup> In the course of his lecture on 'My Master' on 24 February 1896 at New York, Swamiji again referred to Sarada Devi: 'The maiden was a pure and noble soul, and was able to understand her husband's aspirations and sympathize with them.'<sup>9</sup>

On another occasion too Swamiji publicly admitted the great role the Mother had played in the formative period of the Ramakrishna Order soon after the passing away of the Master. In his lecture on 'My life and Mission' he said, 'Then came a terrible time—for me personally and for all the other boys as well. . . . Who would sympathize with the imaginations of a boy? Imagination that caused so much suffering to others! Who would sympathize with me? None—except one. That one's sympathy brought blessing and hope. She was a woman. . . . Well, that lady, his wife was the only one who sympathized with the idea of those boys. But she was powerless. She was poorer than we were.'<sup>10</sup> From the very inception of the Ramakrishna Order Swamiji felt in the core of his heart that it was the Mother who was lovingly watching over the growth and progress of the Order. According to Swami Saradananda, Swamiji regarded her as the *Saṅgha-janani*, 'the Mother of the Ramakrishna Movement.'<sup>11</sup>

The Mother cherished a special affection for her child, Narendranath. She knew that Narendranath was an extraordinary person specially chosen by the Master. One day when Swami Trigunatitananda read out to the Mother a letter from Swami Vivekananda, she observed, 'Naren is an instrument of Thakur who makes him write these words to inspire his children and devotees

7. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1972) vol. 7. Pp. 484-85.

8. *Complete Works* (1972), vol. 7. p. 25.

9. *Complete Works* (1978), vol. 4. p. 173.

10. *Complete Works* (1977), vol. 8. Pp. 80-82.

11. Cited in Swami Ishanananda, *Matr-Sānnidhye* (Bengali), (Calcutta: Udbodhan Karyalaya, B.S. 1381).

to do his work, to do good to all in the world. What Naren writes is true and must take effect hereafter.'<sup>12</sup> The Mother told Miss Josephine Mcleod, 'The Master used to say he was the body and Narendra the head.'<sup>13</sup> Evidently for these reasons the Mother used to say, 'Why do you drag Naren into everything? He is in a class apart.'

Swami Vivekananda, for his part, considered himself the 'eternal servant' of the Holy Mother, no less than of Sri Ramakrishna. We find him writing in verse: 'Servant am I, true servant of thee both, Low at thy Shakti's and at thy feet I salute!'<sup>14</sup> As we probe deeper into his mind, we find that he considered the Holy Mother 'a living Durgā.' In 1894 Swamiji wrote to Swami Shivananda.

Without Shakti (power) there is no regeneration for the world. Why is it that our country is the weakest and the most backward of all countries?—Because Shakti is held in dishonour there. Mother has been born to revive that wonderful Shakti in India; and making her the nucleus, once more will Gārgīs and Maitreyīs be born into the world. Dear brother, you understand little now, but by degrees you will come to know it all. Hence it is her Math that I want first...<sup>15</sup>

Swamiji wanted very much to translate this idea into action. He wanted to establish a monastery for women with the Holy Mother as its central figure and guiding spirit. He believed that the Mother's glowing personal example of purity and character, her spiritual talks and teachings based on her own realization, and her universal love and care would inspire and elevate the

inmates of the proposed Math. But he could not proceed far. One reason for this might have been that his brother disciple Swami Yogananda one day, in the presence of Girish Chandra Ghosh, said to him, 'Do whatever you think will be conducive to the good of society at large; but please do not bring Mother into public prominence now. Don't you remember the Master telling us that his body would not survive if we preached him before the public? The same may be said in respect of Mother too...' Swamiji accepted this piece of advice and remarked, 'Let her fulfil her mission according to her own will and in the manner she chooses. Who are we to dictate to her? Rather, we can accomplish everything with her blessings, which can do miracles.'<sup>16</sup> In fact Swamiji maintained almost the same attitude that he had had about a decade earlier when, in a letter dated 14 February 1890, he advised Balaram Bose, 'Please act as the Mother desires. Who am I to dare say anything about her?'

The Durgā Pūjā, which was celebrated for the first time at the Belur Math in October 1901, was conducted in the name of the Holy Mother. This action of Swamiji signified that she was the patron and guide of the Math.

At times the Holy Mother appeared to Swamiji as the extended Self of Sri Ramakrishna, and at other times her individuality was merged into that of Sri Ramakrishna, and she became to Swamiji *Rāmakṛṣṇamayī*, 'the embodiment of Ramakrishna'. But whatever might be the relationship between the Master and the Mother, she had a special appeal for Swamiji. We come across an almost traditional Indian sentiment, only reverberating in a louder manner, in what Swamiji wrote to Swami Shivananda,

To me, Mother's grace is a hundred thousand times more valuable than Father's. Mother's

12. *Prabuddha Bharata*, April 1952, Pp. 80-82.

13. Quoted in Romain Rollands 'Diary', dated 16 May 1927. See, *Bhāratbarsha* (Bengali) by Abanti Kumar Sanyal, (Calcutta: 1976). p. 197.

14. *Swāmi Vivekānander Bāni O Rachanā* (Bengali), (Calcutta: Udbodhan Karyalaya, B.S. 1369). p. 272.

15. *Complete Works* (1972), vol. 7. p. 484.

16. *Prabuddha Bharata*, October 1952, p. 507.

grace, Mother's blessings are all paramount to me... Please pardon me, I am a little bigoted here as regards Mother... Brother, faith is very difficult to achieve. Brother, I shall show how to worship the living Durgā and then only shall I be worthy of my name... Brother, often enough when I am reminded of Mother, I ejaculate, 'What after all is Rama?' Brother, that is where my fanaticism lies, I tell you. Of Ramakrishna, you may aver, my brother, that he was an Incarnation or whatever else you may like, but fie on him who has no devotion for the Mother.<sup>17</sup>

He said he was ready to put up with all the vagaries of his brother disciple Niranjan (Swami Niranjanananda), who had a militant disposition, because of the latter's devotion for Mother.

One of Swamiji's urgent plans in the 1890's was to purchase a plot of land on the Ganges and build a house for the Mother. There are about a dozen references to this in his letters written to his monastic brothers from the West. We mention just one by way of illustration. He wrote on 9 February 1895, 'I shall consider myself absolved from a debt of obligation when I succeed in purchasing some land for Mother. I don't care for anything after that.'<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, he did not succeed. Maybe it was at the behest of the Holy Mother herself that he dropped the idea and directed all his energies towards procuring a suitable plot of land for the Ramakrishna Math. She was very happy when Swamiji one day went to her and said: 'Mother, I have dedicated one hundred and eight *bilva* leaves to the Master with the prayer that the Math might get a suitable land. You know that no karma is without its effect. You will see we shall have the land one day.'<sup>19</sup> When the land at Belur in Howrah District was purchased, Swamiji took the Mother over there one day and

showed her round the grounds saying, 'This is your own place, Mother; and here you can move about at ease.'<sup>20</sup> That the Mother had a liking for Belur village became evident when one day while reminiscing about her stay at Nilamber Mukherjee's garden-house in Belur, she said: 'How happy I was at that time? It is a peaceful place. I was always in a meditative mood. That is why Narendra wanted to build the monastery there.'<sup>21</sup>

Though calm and placid by nature, the Mother sometimes revealed the deep affection she had had for Swamiji. One instance of such an occasion is given below.

Koalpara Ashrama was then a hot-bed of Swadeshi agitation. One day the Mother told Kedar (later Swami Keshavananda), the head of the Ashrama, 'What will you gain by the Swadeshi Movement alone? The Master is the spring of all we do or have; he is the ideal. Whatever you do, if you hold on to him you will never go wrong.' An unconvinced Kedar argued, 'But, of a truth, Swamiji wanted us very much to work for the country, and he laid the foundation of selfless work by inspiring the youth of the country. What a lot of work would be done if he were alive now.' Prompt came the rejoinder from the Mother, 'O my dear! If Naren were there today, would the Company<sup>22</sup> let him alone? They would lock him up in a jail. I couldn't have borne the sight. Naren was like an unsheathed sword. After his return from foreign countries, he said, "By your grace, Mother, I did not have to cross the ocean by jumping in this Age, but went to those parts in their own ships; and there, too, I noticed, how great is the glory of the Master; what a number of good people have heard about him and accepted this idea from me with astonished eagerness!" They too are my children—don't you agree?'

<sup>20</sup>. *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, p. 184.

<sup>21</sup>. Swami Nikhilananda: *Holy Mother* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1963) p. 243.

<sup>22</sup>. By the word 'Company' the Mother referred to the East India Company which had ruled India before the British Crown took over the administration and made India a part of the British Empire.

<sup>17</sup>. *Complete Works*, (1972), vol. 7. Pp. 484-85.

<sup>18</sup>. *Complete Works* (1978), vol. 6. p. 299.

<sup>19</sup>. *At Holy Mother's Feet*, Pp. 71-72.



Kedar kept silent, he was dumbfounded by the Mother's liberality.<sup>23</sup>

In her liberal attitudes towards the Western disciples of Swamiji Mother was far in advance of her times. Although she lived the secluded and outwardly orthodox life of a Brahmin widow, Mother cordially received them and addressed them as 'My children'. A happy Swami Vivekananda wrote to his monastic brother Swami Ramakrishnananda, 'The European and American ladies went the other day to see her, and what do you think, Mother ate with them even there! Is not that grand?'<sup>24</sup>

Sri Sarada Devi was the unlimited storehouse of wisdom and strength from which Swami Vivekananda frequently drew inspiration for the fulfilment of his Master's mission. Sri Ramakrishna had before his passing away vested the whole power and responsibility of his mission in Swami Vivekananda, and entrusted Sri Sarada Devi with the responsibility of supervising it. On his return from the West, Swami Vivekananda decided to set in motion a machinery which could take care of his Master's mission. The Holy Mother came to Calcutta in April 1897 and stayed in a rented house at Bagbazar near the Ganga. It so happened that Swamiji too had come to Calcutta on a flying visit to meet his disciple, Maharaja Ajit Singh of Khetri. On the third day of his stay Swamiji came in the afternoon to see the Mother. Swamiji fell prostrate before the Holy Mother who was standing near the door of her room, covered from head to foot with a cloth. The following conversation took place with Golap Ma acting as the intermediary.

Golap Ma: Mother says that the Master is always with you. You have still many more things to do for the good of the world.

<sup>23</sup>. *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, Pp. 256-57, adapted.

<sup>24</sup>. *Complete Works*, (1977), vol. 8, p. 448.

Swamiji: I see directly, I feel, and I realize that I am a mere instrument of Thakur... I went to America with the blessings of the Mother. The success I attained there, and the respect they showed me, convince me that such impossible things could happen only through the power of her blessings. When I rested in silence I could clearly perceive that the same Divine Power which the Master called 'Mother' was guiding me.

Golap Ma: Mother says that the Master is not different from the Divine Mother. It was the Master who accomplished all his work through you. You are his chosen son and disciple. How dearly he loved you. He had predicted that you were one day destined to be a distinguished world teacher.

Swamiji: Mother, I want to spread his message and establish a worthy and enduring organization for the purpose as early as possible. But I feel frustrated because I cannot do it as speedily as I wish.

[Now Mother herself said in a whisper:]

Do not worry. What you have done and what you will do will endure for ever. You are born for this work, for this mission. Thousands of people will hail you as an enlightened teacher of the world. I can assure you that the Master will fulfil your desires in no time. You will before long find that your ideas taking practical shape.

Swamiji: Bless me Mother that I may see my plan of work materialize as quickly as possible.<sup>25</sup>

Swamiji prostrated before the Mother and left. A few days later, on 1 May 1897, he formally inaugurated the Ramakrishna Mission Association with the Holy Mother's blessings. The Holy Mother accompanied by her companions and women devotees attended some of the weekly meetings of the Association, and on several occasions Swamiji entertained the Mother with devotional songs. She was happy to see the Mission advancing by rapid strides in different parts of the country.

Sri Ramakrishna himself sowed the seeds

<sup>25</sup>. *Prabuddha Bharata*, October 1952 and *Holy Mother*, Pp. 112-13.

of the Ramakrishna Movement and Swami Vivekananda tended and cultivated it, but it was Sarada Devi who gave it life by watering it with her universal love for thirty-three years. Her motherly love, her self-denying service, her extraordinary purity, her boundless compassion, and her unflinching faith in the Master have become a part of the living tradition of the Ramakrishna Movement. As Sri Ramakrishna's Śakti and active spirit, Sri Sarada Devi was the 'mother moulder of the Ramakrishna Order.'<sup>26</sup> The alter ego of Sri Ramakrishna, she ensouled the Order as the living spirit of Sri Ramakrishna after his demise. It was the Mother who clearly realized the need of the Master's direct disciples' organizing themselves into a body for the purpose of propagating his message. It was her prayers and tears that invoked divine grace for the permanent establishment of the Ramakrishna Order. When in March 1890, she visited Bodh Gaya, the affluence of the monastery there reminded her of the penury of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples. A fervent prayer went forth from her, about which she said later on : 'Alas, how much did I weep and pray to the Master for my children ! That is why you find monasteries and centre of work everywhere through his blessings.'<sup>27</sup>

She could not bear to see her children wander about for a morsel of food. She wanted very much that her children would live together clinging to the Master and his teachings. In mid-1893 one day the Holy Mother visited the newly purchased plot of land at Belur, on which the construction of buildings for the monastery was progressing. Delighted to see her dream about to be realized, she said, 'At long last the boys have a place to lay their heads—the Master has cast his benign look (on them) after

such a long time !'<sup>28</sup> The power of her infinite love and heartfelt prayers immensely helped Swami Vivekananda in fulfilling the Mother's wishes. She is therefore believed to be the Śakti as well as the guardian angel of the Ramakrishna Order. In recognition of this, the first Durgā Pūjā celebrated in the Belur Math in October 1901 was conducted in the name of the Holy Mother. This action of Swamiji has now become a part of the tradition of the Math. The Holy Mother has established herself, like a *mangala-ghaṭa*, an auspicious pitcher of bliss, in the heart of every member of the Ramakrishna Order, showering bliss and benediction upon, and providing succour and inspiration to, one and all.

Swamiji always depended on the advice and approval of the Holy Mother in major and minor decisions. Anyone close to Swamiji never failed to notice the unmistakable ring of faith and reliance on the Mother. Swamiji firmly believed that the Master was revealing himself through the Mother. How compelling was the force of a wish of the Mother will be evident from the following incident. Swamiji had dismissed a servant who had committed a grave offence. The latter sought refuge in the Holy Mother. In the afternoon that day Swami Premananda happened to visit the Mother's home. The Mother said to him, 'Look here, Bāburām, this man is very poor. He was impelled by his poverty to do as he did. Should Naren on that score scold him and drive him out ? The world is full of misery. You are monks who realize very little of it. Take him back.' Anticipating Swamiji's displeasure, Swami Premananda hesitated. But the Mother emphatically said : 'I say, take him', and he had to obey. He returned to the Math along with the culprit. Though Swamiji a little annoyed at the turn of events, he

<sup>26</sup>. Swami Budhananda: *The Ramakrishna Movement, Its Meaning for Mankind*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1980), p. 14.

<sup>27</sup>. *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, p. 332.

<sup>28</sup>. *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, p. 182.

simply kept quiet when he heard everything from Swami Premananda.<sup>29</sup>

Two other instances which reveal Swamiji's implicit obedience to the Holy Mother may be recalled. The month of May 1893 saw people of Calcutta terror-stricken by plague and dismayed by plague regulations. To meet the challenging situation Swamiji issued a plague manifesto and decided to organize relief operations on a large scale. When a brother-monk asked Swamiji about funds he instantly replied, 'Why, we shall sell the newly bought Math grounds, if necessary!' It is learnt from Swami Saradananda's reminiscences that the Mother intervened and prevented Swamiji from taking this drastic step.<sup>30</sup> However, necessary funds poured in and large-scale relief service was rendered to the satisfaction of Swamiji.

During the later part of 1901 Swamiji wanted to worship the Divine Mother in strict orthodox fashion during the Durgā Pūjā, Lakṣmī Pūjā and Kālī Pūjā at the Belur Math. Swamiji and Swami Premananda called upon the Holy Mother at Calcutta and sought her permission. The Mother gave her approval and with a few women devotees attended the festival. They were accommodated in the nearby garden-house of Nilambar Mukherjee taken on rent on this occasion. Though Swamiji very much desired to have sacrifice of animals during the Durgā Pūjā, it was dropped at the Holy Mother's instance. Henceforth animal sacrifices were abandoned for ever in the Order. Thus the Mother's wishes and pronouncements were binding upon Swamiji as well as other members of the Order.

Though the Mother's direct intervention in the Order's administration was rare and though she never insisted on the monks' following her advice, her expressed wishes were always honoured as if they were divine

commands. Like Swamiji every other member of the Order sought her advice and benign blessings, and she, like the mother bird spreading her wings to protect her fledglings, enfolded the whole Order in her universal love with tender concern for everyone of its members. Love, according to her, was the life-force of the Order. Whereas Swamiji emphasized the universal philosophical aspect of Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings, the Holy Mother demonstrated through her life the universal love embodied in Sri Ramakrishna and emphasized the personality of the Master to meet the need of the average man. She assured all those who were sincerely devoted to the Master of their salvation here and hereafter. A source of unflinching inspiration to the members of the Order, she looked upon the organization as the visible body of Sri Ramakrishna and its every part as one her own limbs. Thus she became the power behind the Ramakrishna Order.

The complementary nature of views of the two great souls particularly with regard to the growing organization may be understood from the following incident. At the behest of Swami Vivekananda the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati in the Himālayas was dedicated exclusively to the practice of Advaita. But during his visit to the Ashrama in January 1901 Swamiji found that a shrine-room with the photograph of Sri Ramakrishna had been established and regular worship was being done with flowers, incense and other offerings. Swamiji vehemently denounced the introduction of worship there, but did not order the members to do away with the shrine-room, for he wanted the inmates of the Ashrama to see their mistake and rectify it themselves. Nevertheless, Swamiji's criticism led to the discontinuance of the worship. Soon after Swamiji's demise Swami Vimalananda, an inmate of the Ashrama, referred the matter to the Holy Mother. She in her reply from

29. *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, p. 370.

30. *Udbodhan*, Pous, B.S. 1370, p. 202.

Jayrambati on 20 September 1902 wrote : 'Sri Ramakrishna was all Advaita. Why should you not also follow Advaita? All his disciples are Advaitins.'<sup>31</sup> Her pronouncement in favour of Swamiji settled once for all the issue which had agitated the inmates of the Advaita Ashrama.

The high esteem in which Swamiji held the Holy Mother is also evidenced by an incident narrated by Swami Vijnanananda. Once the Mother was staying at Balaram Bose's house. Swamiji and Swami Vijnanananda too were staying there. One day Swamiji learnt that Vijnanananda did not pay obeisance to the Holy Mother. Swamiji asked him to go to her immediately. When Vijnanananda went to the Mother's quarters Swamiji followed him. Vijnanananda saluted the Mother by kneeling before her and touching the ground with his head and got up hurriedly. Seeing him bowing like that Swamiji said from behind : 'Is this the way, Peshan, to make obeisance to the Mother? Prostrate yourself before the Mother. She is none other than the Divine Mother.' Saying this, Swamiji completely prostrated himself before the Mother.<sup>32</sup>

Swamiji regarded the Holy Mother as the embodiment of the Divine Mother. Once he remarked at the Belur Math, 'Mother is the incarnation of Bagalā in the guise of Saraswati. Outwardly she is all peace, but inwardly she is the destroyer of the power of evil.'<sup>33</sup> To propitiate her Swamiji procured the dust of her holy feet and placed it in a casket in the main shrine of the Math soon after the monastery was established at Belur. It is now being worshipped regularly. Narrating this incident, Swami Adbhutananda remarked, 'It was only

Swamiji who comprehended the worth of the Holy Mother.'<sup>34</sup>

Towards the end of his life Swamiji one day told the Holy Mother : 'Mother, this much I understand, that through your blessings many hundreds of Narens like me will be born. And I also know that the world has only one Mother like you ; you have no peer.'<sup>35</sup>

Swamiji's devotion to the Mother sometimes expressed itself in touching and almost inscrutable ways. One day Swamiji and Hari Maharaj were crossing the Ganga in a ferry-boat on their way to the house of the Holy Mother. Swamiji started sipping the muddy water of the river repeatedly, as an act of purifying himself. Noticing this Hari Maharaj asked him to stop doing it. Swamiji replied, 'No, brother, I am afraid. We are going to the Mother, I am not sure if I am pure enough.'<sup>36</sup>

In Swamiji's life it appeared as if knowledge and devotion struggled for predominance, one over the other. Seized by Advaitic knowledge Swamiji one day said : 'Mother, everything is taking flight nowadays. I see everything fly away.' But the Mother smilingly said, 'Well, see that you don't put me to flight as well.' Swamiji said in reply, 'But Mother, if I put you to flight, where will I stand? Knowledge which sets at naught the lotus feet of the guru is ignorance. Where can knowledge stand if it denies the sacred feet of the guru?'<sup>37</sup>

Along with this we may refer to a small incident which clearly reveals the naturalness of the relationship that existed between the Holy Mother and her great son. In

31. *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, p. 452.

32. Swami Apurvananda: *Sat Prasange Swāmi Vijnānānanda* (Bengali), (Allahabad: Ramakrishna Math, B.S. 1360), Pp. 187-88.

33. *Holy Mother*, p. 257.

34. Swami Siddhananda: *Satkatha* (Bengali), (Calcutta: Udbodhan Karyalaya, B.S. 1329), p. 14.

35. *Udbodhan*, Pous, B.S. 1370. p. 203.

36. Manadasankar Dasgupta: *Sri Sri Ma Saradamani Devi*, (Bengali) (Calcutta: Sm. Vijaya and Santwana Das Gupta, 1390 B.S.) p. 129.

37. *At Holy Mother's Feet*, p. 72.

February 1889 the Mother, in the company of Lakshmi-di, and Swamis Yogananda, Saradananda, Adbhutananda and Abhedananda, went to the house of Swami Premananda at Antpore, Hooghly. Swamiji, Swami Premananda, and Vaikunthanath Sannyal were there already. Lakshmi-di reminisced, 'Swamiji was extremely delighted to see the Holy Mother. As our luggage was brought down, Swamiji, like a young child, rode the rolled bedding, as if it were a horse and gesticulated showing that he was driving forward. The Holy Mother too laughed heartily at the joy of her Naren.'<sup>38</sup>

There is at least one instance when the Holy Mother gave her perspective judgement in an unpleasant incident which had perplexed and disturbed Swamiji's mind very much.

In October 1898, when Swamiji was in Kashmir, a disciple of a Muslim fakir became very devoted to Swamiji. The fakir grew jealous of Swamiji and resorted to the use of black magic against him. As a result Swamiji fell sick and had to leave Kashmir. On his return to Calcutta he visited the Holy Mother and said to her in a pique, 'Mother, how slight your Master's power is! A holy man in Kashmir became angry with me because one of his disciples was attached to me. He cursed me, saying, that on account of stomach trouble I would have to leave the place in three days. And so it happened. Your Master could not help me.' The Holy Mother replied through an intermediary: 'This is the result of psychic powers the holy man had acquired. You must accept the manifestation of such powers. The Master believed in them. He did not come to destroy. He accepted all traditions.' Swamiji, still piqued, said that he would no longer accept Sri Ramakrishna. 'My son', she said teasingly, 'how can you help it? Even the tuft of your hair is held in his hand.'<sup>39</sup>

Referring to this incident, the Holy Mother later said to Swami Arupananda on 25 September 1901, 'What power did Naren have

by himself? It was because the Master acted through him that he achieved what he did.'

Towards the close of his life Swamiji was in poor health. When he was living at the Math, the Holy Mother one day came to see him in the company of Yogin-Ma and the members of Balaram Bose's family. Swamiji talked with the Mother on the first floor of the monastery and then went downstairs to see her off. The hired boat, in the meantime, got stuck in the mud, for the tide was on the ebb. The Mother as well as the other members of her party boarded while Swamiji, wearing only a vest and with his dhoti tucked up tightly, along with a few other Swamis and Brahmacharins pushed the boat into the water.<sup>40</sup> This was the last time Swamiji saw the Holy Mother.

Swamiji breathed his last on 4 July 1902 at the age of thirty-nine years, five months, and twenty-four days. Gloom and a sense of desolation fell upon the monastery. The members of the Order were struck dumb at the thought of their irreparable loss. We do not know for certain what was the reaction of the Holy Mother who was then living at Jayrambati. But it can be conjectured that she wept bitterly, as she did at the death of Swamis Yogananda and Premananda. It took quite some days for the Mother to get over the shock. In her letter dated 31 August 1902, addressed to Swami Vimalananda, a disciple of Swamiji, the Mother wrote, 'How can I express the bitter sorrow I am experiencing at the bereavement of Sri Sri Swamiji Maharaj!' There is also on record another letter dated 17 September 1902, written to Swami Ramakrishnananda, wherein she consoled him saying, 'Please do not worry for Swamiji anymore.'

38. *Sri Sri Saradamani Devi*, p. 273.

39. *Holy Mother*, p. 115.

40. Swami Nirlepananda: *Swamijir Smṛti Sancayan* (Bengali) (Calcutta: Karuna Prakasani, B.S. 1374). Pp. 143-44.

The sun's rays fall equally on the peasant's cottage and on the prince's palace. But a black surface absorbs more heat than any other surface, while a smooth-surfaced mirror reflects the light more brilliantly than any other surface. Likewise, though the Mother's love and power fell equally on all, sinners and saints alike, Swami Vivekananda absorbed most and radiated best the Holy Mother's love and power. She was indeed his only mother on earth and through eternity.

## FREEDOM AND SPACE

DR. MARGARET BEDROSIAN

Moving beyond the image of Maheśvara, a Śaivite priest once unveiled the true image of the Great God by opening a curtain onto the sky itself. Contemplating this gesture and surrendering to the buried impulse of our spirit, we can momentarily sense our existence as flight on currents of infinity. Particularly in the twentieth century, as time impels us into expansion in every area of life and the rhythms of creation quicken, we glimpse the purest expression of life as freedom. Nothing is sweeter, nothing more fully captures the essence of divinity, as the seventeenth century poet, Richard Lovelace, wrote :

If I have freedom in my love  
And in my soul am free,  
Angels alone that soar above  
Enjoy such liberty.<sup>1</sup>

No matter how we express it, the chief motive behind the spiritual quest is this desire for freedom—not merely a freedom from particular conditions such as fear, pain, and physical limitation, but an absolute grounding in limitless spiritual space, where the heart can pump to cosmic capa-

city and respond to the urgings of the moment with skill and compassion.

Unfortunately, most of us live far from this ideal; habits and preoccupations drive us to contraction and we forget that our Higher Self needs neither explanation nor addition. As the R̥g Vedic 'Hymn to Creation' teaches, 'That One Thing, breathless, breathed by its own nature: apart from it was nothing whatsoever.'<sup>2</sup> Physical breath is of course a perfect symbol of the Self, reminding us of the path to freedom moment by moment: we must let go in order for the lungs to do their work. To hold on at any stage deprives the body of its most needed element, oxygen, and creates pockets of unswept tension that will eventually spawn disease. Conversely, when the body is given the chance to transcend its usual limits, to explore new spaces through movement and dance, the normal boundaries between the world and the person will crumble, leaving us with the knowledge that the body is ultimately space itself. A line from W. B. Yeats' 'Among School Children' states this idea when he asks, 'O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,/ How can we know the dancer from the

1. Richard Lovelace, 'To Althea, From Prison,' in *The Poems of Richard Lovelace*, ed. C. H. Wilkinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), p. 79.

2. R̥g Vedic 'Hymn to Creation,' in *The Hymns of the R̥g Veda*, Vol. II, trans. Ralph T. H. Griffith (Varanasi, India: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Studies, 1963), p. 575.

dance?'<sup>3</sup> When the body is free to move from this sense of connectedness—whether we are jogging, waltzing, or typing—we can never falter for the universe will support each impulse. Yet this same truth applied at other levels of our life—emotional, social, and creative—is often ignored as we stalk security and achievement through attachment. Over and over, the devotee of Truth must realize the paradox that our only refuge is the ever-free spirit within; grasping at anything external invites betrayal.

But however impatient with our bondage, tired of 'hugging and kissing the spokes of agony,'<sup>4</sup> we can't make the leap into freedom without adequate preparation. To attempt it while the spiritual muscles are still flabby welcomes destruction. Yet much of the secret of spiritual discipline lies in using the cords that tie us to pull us out. As D. T. Suzuki writes, 'Where is the spirit? Seek it in your everyday experience, and therein lies abundance of proof for all you need.'<sup>5</sup> Here in the thorough insight and respect for the dust and unwashed dishes of the daily round we find gurus aplenty for our individual sādhanās. Examining some of these areas in daily life can serve our desire to expand skyward.

Sādhanā is a process of intense attentiveness; it begins with the acceptance of all experience as a pointer toward higher truth. Indeed, until we are willing to acknowledge that every thought, action, and word mirrors our relative condition and profiles our bondage, we have not begun serious discipline. Specifically, sādhanā leads us to

freedom by opening up new spaces in consciousness and thereby shifting the disciple's limited perspective. Our bondage stems from habitual identification with the tentacled ego, whose chief strategy of imprisonment is to replay the old mental and emotional "tapes," projecting outworn self-images onto the world. Until we throw out these forms that limit us to a rigid psychophysical identity, we can't experience that One within that holds and is the All. Through the systematic disciplines of yoga, sādhanā picks away at these moulds: the disciple who takes refuge in jñāna yoga, for example, swooshes aside the old identifications with the winds of negation, "not this, not that," whereas the follower of bhakti yoga approaches this task from another angle, expanding his identity by flooding it with divine attributes—compassion, detachment, patience. Whatever approach the disciple takes, though, he patiently sheds spiritual light on the 'I,' until every reference to this 'I' enlarges in the gaze of the Divine Witness peering behind the ego.

Another function of sādhanā central to the quest for freedom is that it weakens our judgemental tendencies at the same time that it—paradoxically—matures our discrimination. All too often, judgement indicates fixation on one perspective; we judge those who transgress against our little selves and narrow points of view. But the One, located nowhere in particular, has no criterion by which to judge in this sense. On the other hand, discrimination which distinguishes between the Real and the unreal, by affirming the Absolute and the emptiness of all forms, knocks the breath out of judgement. This is not to suggest that daily life can run without 'good judgement,' one of the disciple's best friends. Here, judgement stands for the ability to take the truest measure of any person and situation, 'truest' implying a standard derived from the Absolute. Such good judgement, rooted in

3. W. B. Yeats, 'Among School Children,' in *Chief Modern Poets of England and America*, Vol. I, ed. Gerald Dewitt Sanders et al. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), p. 136.

4. Sir Edwin Arnold, *The Light of Asia* (Wheaton, Ill.: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1969), p. 138.

5. D. T. Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), p. 72.

discrimination and its manifestation in daily life, can chart the direction of our journey and help us avoid many pitfalls. Indeed, any work involves incisive judgement to be successful : a teacher who makes no assessment of her students' relative abilities and performance abstains from a basic part of her duty ; a scholar who desists from evaluating the aesthetic value of a given artwork is likewise depriving his reader of an informed opinion. Now it may well be that time will prove these judgement wrong. Furthermore, treading the razor's edge between judgement that casts shadows and belittles for the sake of ego aggrandizement, and discrimination calls for constant vigilance. But as Krishna counsels :

Action rightly renounced brings freedom,  
Action rightly performed brings freedom,  
Both are better  
Than mere shunning of action.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, each time we act or judge in good faith, not 'shunning' the imperative to take a stand and not swayed by doubts of its eventual accuracy (who, after all, has the vision to penetrate the universal web except for the enlightened?), we are widening our gaze, prying loose our complacent, sticky egos, and practising mind focus. Such discrimination opens up the space of wisdom.

Fully using and exploring our gifts and opportunities unlocks yet another door to freedom. The law of karma works efficiently in that it guarantees that if we put our talents to use in whatever sphere we are in, the field of action will widen. In fact, some of the deepest satisfaction we can ever have springs from making the best of any situation we are in, unveiling its cosmic

dimension and becoming one with it. Accounts by survivors of inhuman conditions reinforce this perspective, as when Viktor Frankl in *Man's Search for Meaning* writes of his term in the concentration camps of World War II :

Naturally only a few people were capable of reaching great spiritual heights. But a few were given the chance to attain human greatness even through their apparent worldly failure and death, an accomplishment which in ordinary circumstances they would never have achieved... we could say that most men in a concentration camp believed that the real opportunities of life had passed. Yet, in reality, there was an opportunity and a challenge. One could make a victory of those experiences, turning life into an inner triumph, or one could ignore the challenge and simply vegetate, as did a majority of the prisoners.<sup>7</sup>

Frankl's comments remind us of all the times we've watched our own lives expand or contract, reflecting our willingness to grow in any space. Indeed, if we were to review the successive periods of our life and chart our energy output, we would probably notice that opportunities for greater, lasting authority—worldly and spiritual—have only come after we've shown willingness to explore and master preliminary stages of growth. As in proverbial stories of company errand boys who rise to become executives, each step of the success ladder must be firmly tread.

Another facet of daily life that opens up spiritual space concerns the sensory dimension. Certain sense stimuli have an expansive effect on the spirit whereas others close us in. Of course, by their very nature, sense impressions take us into different realms of consciousness. Colours, smells, sounds all remind us of different memories and evoke distinct moods. Perhaps the most potent of all senses is sound,

6. *The Song of God: Bhagavad-Gita*, trans. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood (New York: The New American Library, 1951), p. 56.

7. Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959), p. 72.



especially music. From earliest times, philosophers such as Pythagoras and Plato have known that by riding the waves of music we enter new spaces in consciousness. As Robert Assagioli, the twentieth century Italian psychologist, writes: 'Music can indeed be a powerful healing agent . . . What more efficacious, genial and acceptable means than music could a doctor devise for giving joy; that joy which the intuition of the ancients and the investigations of modern science alike declare to be a powerful tonic for both mind and body?'<sup>8</sup>

In yet another context, the domestic, we often observe that a house truly inhabited by its owner will radiate the warmth of being fully lived in: the space will exude integrity, parts won't be shut off, and each of the rooms will welcome, imbued with the vibrancy of inhabitation. In this case, size of dwelling isn't of absolute importance; with regard to physical space, the criterion of possession should always be, 'How much do I need to fulfil my personal needs without burdening myself and leaving voids in caretaking?' This criterion applied to every aspect of our lives—type and amount of clothing, vacations, feeding and maintenance of the body, the nurturing and deepening of relationships—brings us hourly chances to strike blows for spiritual freedom through attentiveness to daily life. For our choices will always demonstrate how well we know ourselves (again, Krishna teaches: 'Even a wise man acts according to the tendencies of his own nature. All living creatures follow their tendencies. What use is any external restraint?'<sup>9</sup>). Whether that choice be the colour of a new dress or the selection of a spouse, we have to live with its appropriateness—and to have chosen out of partial knowledge will bind us. The

great paradox we are working with throughout our sādhanā is that the more meticulously we satisfy our distinctive dharma, the karmic weave that shapes our lives, the more freely we can participate in life's threefold dance of creation, preservation, and destruction. Only when we aren't grounded in a temporal and spatial identity that is specific and well integrated do we risk imbalance at every level. Ultimately, such devotion to dharma enables us to let go of all dharmas as the fully ripened fruit falls easily into the picker's hand. There is no escaping our nature; to try means we are not being attentive, denying the existence of a karma that only binds more strongly.

Accordingly, ideas and ideals we identify with also inhibit or enhance our freedom. A philosophy teacher I once had was fond of reminding his students to choose their highest conception of the Self with care; this belief would set the boundaries of what they could actually achieve. Given this dictum, the ideals we live by day to day are not like clothes we can cast off at will; they permeate the curving recesses of our minds and twist their way into every action. And as we keep seeing through our media, culturally and sexually, human beings are continually trapped by self-images that work against the Self, freezing us into behaviours that do not lead to freedom.

Conversely, the merest touch of Truth, a verse from a scripture or the direct teaching of a holy person, can release us—at least temporarily—from layers of conditioning. Any of us who has spent time in the presence of a saint knows that his power is essentially that of simplification. When we enter his 'space,' the petty drops away and the mind is free to wing through boundless terrain, even touching the Absolute in moments of blessing. One of the secrets of the Teacher's power is his ability to hold everything: he gives us the space to be

8. Robert Assagioli, *Psychosynthesis* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), pp. 246-48.

9. *The Song of God*, p. 48.

whoever we are at that moment and as soon as we experience that, we can let go. As he interacts with a recalcitrant or obnoxious person, we see that the more insistent and aggressive the energy, the more yielding the saint, as if eluding the 'bad vibes' by creating more space to diffuse them. The following passage from the Tao Te Ching illustrates this notion, suggesting the unchanging fluidity of all space :

The space between heaven and earth is like a bellows.

The shape changes but not the form ;

The more it moves, the more it yields.

More words count less.

Hold fast to the centre.<sup>10</sup>

10. Lao Tsn, *Tao Te Ching*, Verse 5, trans. Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), n. pag.

The saint's skilful means also demonstrate another axiom : to witness, to be attentive, is to *enlarge* ; to ignore is to *diminish*. Thus, like any great work of art, the gaze of the saint restates the challenge of Rilke's Apollonian Torso : '[Here] there is no place that does not see you. You must change your life.'<sup>11</sup> To be seen by the Holy One from this larger spiritual space is to be transformed, to change our lives. And by extension, whenever we witness ourselves and the world from the widest extent of our own vision, we serve the Highest. Ultimately, nothing else is asked of us.

11. Rainer Maria Rilke, "Torso of an Archaic Apollo," in *Fifty Selected Poems with English Translations*, trans. C. F. MacIntyre (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1947), p. 91.

## THE SPIRITUAL TREASURE OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

ANN MYREN

### I

Swami Vivekananda was the foremost disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, the great God-man of India, and he was chosen by the Master to carry his message into the world for all humanity. Narendranath Datta, later known as Swami Vivekananda, first met Sri Ramakrishna in the winter of 1881, and was instructed by him until Sri Ramakrishna's death in 1886. Toward the end of the Master's life, when his young men disciples had gathered around him and were practising spiritual disciplines intensely, Naren had the very highest spiritual experience, nirvikalpa samādhi, realization of the Absolute. After this samādhi Sri Ramakrishna said that the direct knowledge of the Absolute was to be locked away in a

treasure-box and that he would keep the key. When Naren had finished his work, then the treasure-box could be unlocked.<sup>1</sup> Of course, for a person such as Naren, there were other spiritual treasures which he acquired throughout his life, but complete absorption in the Absolute was to remain locked away until he finished his Master's work. The purpose of this paper is to assess the nature and dimensions of Swami Vivekananda's spiritual treasure, and further, to discuss the meaning of this treasure and its significance for humanity.

Narendranath Datta was born on January 12, 1863, the sixth child and the first surviv-

1. Eastern and Western Disciples. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1979) vol. 1, p. 178. (Complete work is two volumes.)

ing son of his parents. The Dattas were an aristocratic family of Calcutta where Naren spent most of his boyhood and young manhood. An energetic and spirited child, Naren grew up with many advantages such as an excellent education, affluence, and opportunities for boyhood adventures. As a child his most notable characteristic bearing on our subject was his capacity for meditation. To Naren meditation was a part of his nature. As he grew up this innate ability manifested itself, until by the time he was fourteen or fifteen years old he was experiencing high meditative states.

Naren also had spiritual experiences. For example, when he went to sleep, he used to see a light which came from deep within his consciousness. The light would come down a long avenue of light as if kicked by a boy. Then when it came between his eyebrows, he fell asleep. This way of falling asleep stayed with him until the end of his life, although it was less frequent in later years.<sup>2</sup> When he meditated he also saw the same light which began minutely like the light of a firefly, eventually becoming a cloud of light that proceeded from a mass of light, and finally turning into an intense illumination in the form of a rectangle.<sup>3</sup> We have no records of exactly what kind of visions the young Naren had, but when he finally went to Sri Ramakrishna, he discussed these visions with him. Sri Ramakrishna called him *dhyāna siddha*, perfect in meditation because of this great spiritual treasure, perfect meditation.

By the time Naren had finished his early schooling and was ready to go to college, several characteristics distinguished him. He was a dynamo of physical and mental

energy. Everything was of interest to him. He loved all kinds of knowledge and especially the subjects of philosophy, history, Sanskrit and science, his favourites. He was pragmatic, always testing to find the truth and always insisting on experiencing whatever it was that he sought. He was also a rationalist; he demanded a rational explanation of the universe. He insisted that whatever was to be considered real could not be contradicted by reason and further, that truth or reality could and should be tested.

Naren's mother exerted a powerful influence in the formation of his character. She used to teach all her children to be truthful even unto death, to be chaste, to be dignified and to respect the feelings of others, and not to interfere with the liberty of others. She counselled them to be gentle in the extreme, but also to be firm and remain both unmoved and unchanged when necessary.<sup>4</sup> Naren carried these ethical teachings into manhood. And with regard to chastity, he practised brahmacharya all of his life. He was so pure that when he went to Sri Ramakrishna, the Master would encourage him to eat the food considered too impure for himself or his other disciples. Sri Ramakrishna explained that Naren was a raging fire and that no impurity could touch him. So when Narendra came to Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar in January, 1882, he already had two spiritual treasures, perfection in meditation and absolute purity.

Narendranath had actually seen Sri Ramakrishna before he went to Dakshineswar, having sung several songs at a gathering which the Master had attended in November, 1881. Sri Ramakrishna asked about Naren and invited him to come to Dakshineswar, but it was about a month before he went. All during this time

2. Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati, Almora: Swami Virajananda, 1912,) vol. 1., p. 54. (Complete work is four volumes. vol. 2 (1913), vol. 3, (1915), vol. 4 (1918).

3. *Life*, (1912) vol. 1, p. 78.

4. *Life*, (1912) vol. 1, p. 86.

Naren's life was filled with intellectual and spiritual inquiry. He was studying at the Scottish Church College where he was to receive his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1884. He studied English, Sanskrit, history, mathematics and philosophy. His philosophical training no doubt added to his rationalism which later found expression in his lectures and writings. His pragmatism led him to go to Maharshi Devendranath Tagore whom he questioned, asking, 'Sir, have you seen God?' The Maharshi's answer was evasive. He answered, 'My boy, you have the eyes of a yogi.'<sup>5</sup> Although the answer did not help Naren test the truth of God vision, it did inspire him to be more conscientious about meditation. As a member of the Brahma Samaj, a society for the reform of Hinduism and Indian society, Naren accepted the dualistic doctrine of an infinite God with attributes. Thus when he finally went to Sri Ramakrishna, he was a dualist seeking someone who had actually seen and experienced God.

The first meeting at Dakshineswar of Naren and his Master was indeed memorable from both of their viewpoints. Sri Ramakrishna immediately recognized Naren's greatness from an unusual vision he had during his years of *sādhana*. According to Sri Ramakrishna's account, he ascended to a formless region beyond the relative where he found seven sages, great in love, renunciation and knowledge, deep in *samādhi*. These sages were in a luminous region; a portion of that region became the form of a child who approached one of the sages, clasped his arms around his neck and tried to draw him out of *samādhi*. At last the sage opened his eyes, gazed affectionately at the child who said, 'I am going down. You must go with me.' The sage answered by a loving look of assent.<sup>6</sup> Then

Sri Ramakrishna saw a fragment of the sage's mind descending to earth as a light. Seeing Naren before him, Sri Ramakrishna recognized him to be that sage. The Master later said that he himself was the child. Sri Ramakrishna was both the witness to the seven sages and the child himself who was made from the infinite light. Later Sri Ramakrishna saw a light flash across the sky, and he exclaimed, 'My prayer has been granted and *my man* must come to me one day.'<sup>7</sup> Indeed his man did come, so he greeted the young Narendranath with deep respect, saying, 'Lord, I know you are the ancient sage Nara, the incarnation of Narayana, born on earth to remove the miseries of mankind.'<sup>8</sup>

This greeting was a shock to the ever-rational, logical, doubting Naren. And although he did not know what to make of Sri Ramakrishna, he was attracted to him by his wonderfully concrete answer to the question, 'Have you seen God, Sir?' to which Sri Ramakrishna replied, 'Yes, I see Him just as I see you, only in a much intenser sense.'<sup>9</sup> The Master continued talking about the sincerity and renunciation necessary to realize God. Naren concluded that Sri Ramakrishna might be mad, a mono-maniac, but that he was plainly filled with deep and genuine renunciation. Furthermore, Naren experienced a wonderful feeling as he sat near the Master and listened to him. Yes, perhaps mad, but divinely so. It does not seem at this time that Naren realized how profound their relationship was, actually having its origin deep in the consciousness of Ishwara.

Taking into account the divine origin of Narendra, it is clear that one of Naren's spiritual treasures was his relationship to Sri Ramakrishna. However, this relation-

5. *Life*, (1979) vol. 1, p. 60.

6. *Life*, (1979) vol. 1, pp. 80-1.

7. *Life*, (1979) vol. 1, p. 81.

8. *Life*, (1979) vol. 1, p. 76.

9. *Life*, (1979) vol. 1, p. 77.

ship as acted out at Dakshineswar and Cossipore did not manifest itself by the easy assent of Naren to Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual knowledge. If we examine Swami Vivekananda's own words about his state of mind when he first came to Sri Ramakrishna, we see that he was desperate. He wrote in a letter in 1900 from San Francisco, 'I never had a struggle in the jaws of death, but it meant a tremendous upheaval of the whole life. One such brought me to Ramakrishna...' <sup>10</sup> This letter seems to indicate that Naren was struggling with the meaning of life.

About a month after his first visit, Naren returned to Dakshineswar. The Master took the unsuspecting Naren out onto the porch by his room, touched him and plunged him into a state where everything disappeared. Naren's individuality was about to disappear into a void when he exclaimed with fright, 'What are you doing to me? I have my parents.' <sup>11</sup> Sri Ramakrishna laughingly told him that everything was all right and that everything would come in time. With this experience fresh in his mind, Naren went to the Master a third time, resolving to keep his guard up. But Sri Ramakrishna put Naren into a state where he lost all outward consciousness. Then he asked Naren questions, and tested the accuracy of his own inferences about Naren. We do not know precisely what went on, but the Master said this much, 'I came to know that he was a sage that had attained perfection, a past master of meditation, and that the day he knew his real nature, he would give up the body through yoga, by an act of will.' <sup>12</sup>

At this time Narendra was a dualist, critical of Advaita, the philosophy of non-

duality, but Sri Ramakrishna would gradually turn his mind toward Advaita. The Master gave Naren the *Aṣṭāvakra Samhitā*, an Advaitic text, to read aloud to him. In this way he exposed Naren to non-dual thought. However, the strongest push toward Advaita that Naren experienced was not in the realm of ideas, but was an actual experience of the non-dual state. One day Naren had left the Master's room and was talking to a devotee, Hazra, on the porch. Narendra was enjoying himself, poking fun at the Advaitic concepts, saying, 'This jug is God, this cup is God and we too are God : nothing can be more preposterous.' <sup>13</sup> Sri Ramakrishna came out of his room, touched Naren and sent him into samādhi. For Naren there was nothing but God ; everything appeared to be Brahman. The people he saw, the food he ate, the carriages, the road, all appeared to be God. This condition lasted some days and was followed by another state in which the world became dreamlike. Naren himself said that he had had a glimpse of the Advaita state and henceforth could not deny the conclusions of the non-dual philosophy. In this way Sri Ramakrishna satisfied Naren's necessity for direct proof. Of course the Master knew that Narendra was a born jñānī, a seeker of truth through reason ; so in keeping with the Master's greatness as a teacher, he set Naren on that path early. When Sri Ramakrishna first met Naren, he said that '... the sun of knowledge had risen in Naren's heart and removed from there even the slightest tinge of Maya and delusion.' <sup>14</sup> The ultimate Advaitic experience did not come to Naren until 1886 when, after he complained to the Master that other disciples were having high experiences and he

10. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1956) vol. 6, p. 430.

11. *Life*, (1979) vol. 1, p. 78.

12. *Life*, (1979) vol. 1, p. 80.

13. *Life*, (1979) vol. 1, p. 96.

14. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master*, trans. Swami Jagadananda, (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1952) pp. 753-4.

was not, he attained nirvikalpa samādhi. However this much longed-for state did not occur until he had passed through a severe trial.

Naren was still in college and living with his family when his father, Vishwanath Datta, died suddenly. He had been a prominent attorney, and had encouraged Naren to study for the bar. Upon Vishwanath's death, Naren and his family discovered that there was no money at all. His father had spent freely and given generously; there were only debts. As a result the responsibility of providing for a family of at least eight people fell upon Naren, the oldest son. He struggled to find permanent work but nothing turned up. His family lived on the edge of starvation for some time. Often Naren went without food so that his family would have more. Furthermore, some of his relatives were trying to get possession of his mother's house through court proceedings, and Naren was looking after the case. Fortunately the case was settled in favour of Naren's family, and they had a little more to live on. During this time Naren had a profound spiritual experience in which he solved for himself the problem inherent in the existence of misery in a world created by a merciful God. Regrettably, the solution to this problem is not recorded for us. But Naren had come to understand the meaning of this contradiction, and filled with new strength and vigour, he developed a strong sense of detachment.

This experience and his intensified detachment helped Naren to make up his mind to renounce the world as his grandfather had done. He had already rejected marriage and with the death of his father, the pressure somewhat lessened. In any case his family was probably beginning to get the idea that Naren would seek his own destiny. He went to the Master intending to tell him of his desire to renounce the world, but the

Master knew his thoughts and sang to him a song which expressed his tremendous love for Naren. He then asked Naren to stay in the world as long as he, Sri Ramakrishna, was alive. He told Naren he had come to do the Mother's work and that he would not be able to live a worldly life.<sup>15</sup> Although at this time Naren did get some work to support his family, he was still deeply concerned about their needs, and so he hit upon an idea.

Naren decided to go to Sri Ramakrishna and ask him to pray to the Mother for the material welfare of his family. He made this request of the Master who replied that he had already done this but to no avail. Then he told Naren to go and pray to the Mother for relief of his family. Naren went to the Kali Temple, but when he got there he forgot his family problems and began to pray for discrimination, detachment, divine knowledge, devotion and the unobstructed vision of the Divine Mother. He went three times to the temple to pray for his family, but each time his mind turned toward spiritual matters. Finally Sri Ramakrishna promised him that his family would not be without plain food and clothing.

By this time Naren's spiritual development had taken a new turn. Originally directed along the path of jñāna or knowledge of the Absolute through reason, he suddenly accepted Kali, the symbol of the relative universe, whose worship he had previously ridiculed and detested. He had become a devotee of Kali, and he served her for the rest of his life. He said, 'She made a slave of me.'<sup>16</sup> But this relationship was always a private matter, and as Swami Vivekananda the world teacher, he never taught Kali worship. However, given his nature, a knower of the Absolute, it may

15. *Life*, (1979) vol. 1, p. 127.

16. Basu, Sankari Prasad, ed. *Letters of Sister Nivedita* (Calcutta: Nababharat Publishers, 1982) vol. 1, p. 157.

be that this personal experience contributed much to his understanding of humanity and to his breadth of vision, which he later so clearly demonstrated. To have this relationship to Kali, to be her slave, to do her work and to have this devotion greatly increased his spiritual treasure.

This decisive incident with Sri Ramakrishna took place in 1884 while Narendranath was studying law, having already passed his B.A. examination. His study methods were most unusual, consisting of doing very little work during the term and then mastering the required texts a few days before the examination. However, during the semester he really did another kind of preparation. Besides attending lectures, he debated, conversed and argued with his fellow students. He was renowned for his keen intellect which, when pursuing an argument, regularly routed his opponents. He also examined all sides of any question, testing the various views for the truth. Needless to say he thoroughly tested the Master's knowledge by questioning and arguing so that he could find the truth. As he later said we do not go from error to truth, but from lower truth to higher truth. From this cogent statement we can understand the necessity of a discriminating mind in spiritual life, and we see that we must test everything for the truth. Everything the Master told him was tested for both rational and pragmatic truth. Every scripture he learned was given the same treatment: rational examination and pragmatic testing. We find his lectures steeped in these two ways of arriving at truth.

With such intense mental and spiritual activity, it is obvious Naren's discipleship was not an easy one. Although Naren often saw Sri Ramakrishna in samādhi, it was some time before he accepted his Master's teachings. He saw the powers of the Master demonstrated as he led people to God and changed their lives. He heard

first hand of Sri Ramakrishna's great sādhanā, of his experiences, his disciplines, his attainments. He saw with his own eyes the product of this sādhanā, the transformation of a man into a God-man. But in spite of the evidence, Naren still found it necessary to search out the truth through his own viveka, discrimination. Nothing was accepted on faith by Narendra. This practice of not accepting anything on the basis of faith is the most arduous kind of discrimination. And it is the kind of discrimination which leads one to higher spiritual truth, since apparent reality is continually subjected to analysis. Of course, when he met Sri Ramakrishna, who was immersed in God, Naren's power of discrimination was given a spiritual turn, and was heightened and intensified.

During this period while studying law, Narendranath saw Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. However in 1885, when the Master became ill with cancer of the throat, the devotees moved him to Calcutta where he could get better care. In December he was moved to Cossipore, and the devotees and Holy Mother continued to take care of him. While the Master lived at Cossipore, several great changes took place in Naren's life: he undertook a period of intense spiritual training, he chose renunciation as a way of life, and he was given certain very important instruction by the Master regarding the future of the work.

Although his law examination was approaching, Naren was not paying such attention to his studies; instead he was spending his time with Sri Ramakrishna. The Master told him, when Naren wanted to have spiritual experiences as the other young men were having, to settle his family affairs and come to him. Naren specifically requested samādhi and the ability to remain in that state, coming down only occasionally. The Master called him a small-minded man and said if he settled his family

affairs and came to him, he would get everything, a state higher even than samādhi.<sup>17</sup> There is a state called sahaja samādhi, a condition where there is no difference between nirvikalpa samādhi and the waking state. In this state an adept has continuous consciousness of the Absolute, while at the same time living and acting in the sense world. Perhaps this was the state Sri Ramakrishna promised Naren; it is the ideal state of consciousness for a world teacher.

One day while studying at home, Narendra was overcome by a great fear, '... as if studying was a terrible thing.'<sup>18</sup> He wept bitterly, caught in the conflict between assuring his family's finance by a few years of law practice or renouncing the world. He abruptly left his books and ran, actually ran, to Cossipore where the Master remarked that Naren was in a wonderful state of mind and that his soul was longing for God.<sup>19</sup> So for the next three months Sri Ramakrishna initiated him into many spiritual disciplines, from which Naren had numerous spiritual experiences. During this period Naren would take up a practice, realize its goal, and then take up another practice, realize, and so on. We do not know how many spiritual practices he undertook, but the sādhanā went on day and night, leaving all of the other disciples flabbergasted. Narendra never spoke much of his spiritual experiences and attainments, but Swami Saradananda said that everything he (Naren) taught he did so from his own personal experiences. If we ponder these experiences deeply, we can begin to understand the magnitude of Naren's spiritual treasure.

At this time Naren tested his ability to give spiritual power by touching a fellow disciple who then felt something like an

electric current which caused a tremor in his body. Sri Ramakrishna scolded him and said he was giving away his power before he had a full store, and furthermore he had changed the course of his fellow disciple's spiritual path, making him more monistic. The Master did not approve of this because it was not in keeping with the nature of the disciple. According to Sister Nivedita, Sri Ramakrishna said Naren would bestow knowledge with a touch. And she attributed an experience she had of '... gazing deep into an Infinite Good' to his touch.<sup>20</sup> In 1900 Swami Vivekananda wrote to Mrs. Bull from California, saying, '... the next phase will be the *miraculous touch and not the tongue* — like Ramakrishna's.'<sup>21</sup> To what extent his power was used is not known, but the power to awaken spirituality by touch was in Swami Vivekananda's treasure.

Naren's three-month period of intense spiritual practice at Cossipore culminated in nirvikalpa samādhi. He had been pestering the Master for samādhi and finally it came, the experience of the Absolute. As mentioned before, Sri Ramakrishna said to Naren after this samādhi, 'Now then, the Mother has shown you everything. Just as a treasure is locked up in a box, so will this realization you have just had be locked up and the key shall remain with me. You have work to do. When you have finished my work, the treasure-box will be unlocked again; and you will know everything then, as you did just now.'<sup>22</sup> Thus Naren gained the ultimate spiritual experience, a most extraordinary treasure. Finally, as the Master's days on earth drew to a close, he called Naren to him, poured into him all of his powers, causing Naren to lose con-

17. *Life*, (1979) vol. 1, p. 162.

18. *Life*, (1979) vol. 1, p. 162.

19. *Life*, (1979) vol. 1, p. 162.

20. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita* (Calcutta: Secretary of Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, 1967) vol. 1, p. 81.

21. *Complete Works*, (1955) vol. 8, p. 491.

22. *Life*, (1979) vol. 1 p. 178.



sciousness. When Naren came to, the Master was weeping, and he said, 'My Siddhis (powers) will manifest through you in time.'<sup>23</sup>

All during this period Naren was no doubt conscious that he would soon renounce the world. He had given up his studies; the promise of plain food and clothing for his family had been given by Sri Ramakrishna. He had had all of his life a desire to renounce the world. This idea habitually came to his mind in the form of two opposing visions: one in which he was a powerful worldly person and the other in which he was a sannyasin. Sri Ramakrishna had indicated that Naren would renounce the world when, seeing Naren one day, he said that a 'grand renunciation' was in the making.<sup>24</sup>

For all practical purposes, Narendra had renounced the world when he turned his back on his studies and stayed with his Master to look after him. To ease his mind about his family, he had been lent some money by 'M' for their care. A more formal day of renunciation came when Gopal Senior, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, wanted to distribute ochre cloths and rudrākṣa beads to sadhus. The Master learned of this and said that the boys, his close disciples who were not involved in the world, were full of renunciation. Consequently the cloths and beads were given to the Master who, distributing them to eleven disciples, informally made them the first monks of the Ramakrishna Order.

Naren wore the ochre cloth when he and two of his brother disciples went to Bodh Gaya. Naren had had in his earliest days of contact with Sri Ramakrishna an unusual experience. He had been practising a new way of meditating which the Master had taught him. One day when he was

meditating, Naren felt a current of bliss, so he did not leave his seat immediately. As he remained sitting the figure of an ochre-clad monk appeared. The monk was calm, serene and meditative; he seemed to be indifferent to all things. He walked toward Naren as if he wanted to say something, but Naren became afraid and left the room. He later thought that the monk had been Lord Buddha. Naren had also immersed himself in Lord Buddha's doctrines. Thus when at Bodh Gaya Naren meditated on Buddha, his teachings, his compassion, his great renunciation, and the effect of Buddha on India, the picture was so vivid in his mind that he could not control his feelings, and bursting into tears embraced Tarak, one of his companions. The relationship of Naren to Lord Buddha is a matter worthy of study and meditation.

Shortly before the Master left his body he summoned all of his young disciples except Naren, and gave them the express command that they were to pay 'every attention' to Naren, and also that they should watch over his health and comfort. And then calling Naren to him privately, he put his disciples into Naren's charge.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, often he would call Naren into his room and privately give his instructions on various spiritual practices for two and three hours at a time. The Master also told him how to train his fellow disciples. One evening when Naren entered the room, '... the Master wrote on a piece of paper, Narendra will teach others.' Naren, however, hesitated and said, 'I won't do that!' Then Sri Ramakrishna summoned his strength in a great effort to speak and said, 'You *have* to do it! Your very bones will make you do it!' The Master had said sometime before that his powers would manifest through Naren in time.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup>. *Life*, (1979) vol. 1. p. 182.

<sup>24</sup>. *Life*, (1979) vol. 1. p. 171.

<sup>25</sup>. *Life*, (1979) vol. 1. p. 182.

<sup>26</sup>. *Life*, (1979) vol. 1. p. 427.

After the death of Sri Ramakrishna, the young men disciples banded together under the leadership of Naren and established a monastery at Baranagore. On Christmas Eve of 1886 these young monastics took the vows of sannyasa and, although the Master had already made them sannyasins, this ceremony strengthened their renunciation. Naren spent about two years at the new math, and then went on pilgrimages with his fellow disciples, occasionally returning to the math. From 1891 to 1893 he usually wandered alone.

Toward the end of his wandering days in India, Naren took the name of Swami Vivekananda; he was called Swamiji by his fellow disciples. He had travelled the length and breadth of India, meeting with the high and the low, the educated and uneducated, the rich and the poor. He came into contact with all facets of Indian life. His wandering life was rich in experience: hunger and plenty, fatigue and rest, danger and safety, luxury and poverty, intellectual challenge and the problems common to humanity. The Swami met all of these contrasts and countless more with the power of a mind trained in the keenest discrimination. And from these experiences, he grasped the totality of Indian civilization and history as well as the equally important principles underlying the culture of India. Directing on Indian culture and civilization an intellect illumined by Absolute Truth, the Swami gained a profound comprehension of India. And by knowing one culture to its depths, he had access to the principles inherent in all cultures. As he wandered in India his spiritual destiny began to take shape; unknowingly he was preparing himself for the world mission of teaching Sri Ramakrishna's message.

Another unusual characteristic emerged in the Swami at this time. Through his experience of the common people and his deep spiritual knowledge, he developed a

great heart which felt for the sufferings of mankind. His heart is reminiscent of Buddha's, but Buddha felt for all creatures whereas Swamiji felt for all humanity. By the time he reached the end of his wanderings, his heart was given entirely to humanity; and the work for which he was unconsciously preparing was to raise all men and women. Before Swami Vivekananda went to America in 1893, he said to Swami Turiyananda, 'Haribhai, I am still unable to understand any of your so-called religion. But my heart has expanded very much, and I have learned to feel. Believe me, I feel intensely indeed.' Swami Turiyananda felt that these were the very words and feeling of Buddha, and he could clearly see '... that the sufferings of humanity were pulsating in the heart of Swamiji ...'<sup>27</sup> Swami Vivekananda's mission was beginning to take shape. This mission when finally formulated would be to raise humanity not just spiritually but also to infuse spirituality into all human life in such a way that all the activities of men and women would be raised to a new level of accomplishment.

At sometime during his wandering Swami Vivekananda completed his *sādhanā*. He once said when he was twenty-nine that he had finished everything. And at about that time Swami Akhandananda saw him in Western India and remarked about the sublime light in his face. Swami Akhandananda was especially devoted to Swamiji, and in Swamiji's early wandering days he was often with him. According to Swami Akhandananda the following incident took place. One day when Swamiji and Swami Akhandananda were on a pilgrimage together, Swamiji directed Swami Akhandananda to take a certain trail while he walked through the forest to a certain place where they would meet. Swami Akhandananda

<sup>27</sup>. *Life*, (1979) vol. 1. p. 388.

went along and soon came to a beautiful place full of flowers which gave off a wonderful fragrance. Then he looked up and saw Sri Ramakrishna embracing Swamiji.<sup>28</sup> This of course was after Sri Ramakrishna had left the body.

Swami Vivekananda's wandering culminated in his plan to go to America. We have his own words from a letter written after the Parliament of Religions. He wrote, '... At Cape Comorin sitting in Mother Kumari's temple, sitting on the last bit of Indian rock—I hit upon a plan.' He goes on to say that it is madness for sannyasins to wander about and teach people metaphysics; instead what is needed is some way to better the condition of the people. First he said he wanted men to do the work, and then he needed money for the work. He said that he had come to America to earn the money himself.<sup>29</sup> From the depths of his being with the force of his great heart, he longed to raise the people of India.

After his meditation at Cape Comorin, Swamiji had a dream in which Sri Ramakrishna was crossing the ocean. Sri Ramakrishna beckoned Swamiji to follow, indicating that going to America was part of the divine plan. He later wrote to Holy Mother asking her blessing for his trip across the ocean. She blessed him and told him of a vision she had had in which she saw Sri Ramakrishna enter the body of Naren. Among other things, Holy Mother's vision indicates that the Master would work through his chief disciple.

The Swami's spiritual treasure was greatly increased during his wandering years. He had added a deep knowledge of mankind

through his power of discrimination and, through his power of emotion, a heart which felt for all humanity. He was already perfect in meditation. He had been from his childhood fearless, and we know that nirvikalpa samādhi bestows absolute fearlessness on a person. So he was a man without the slightest taint of fear, a fact which is clearly demonstrated by his coming to America, uninvited and unexpected. Added to these wonderful treasures were total renunciation and purity. And finally he had an immovable devotion to his Master as well as a living relationship with him. Sri Ramakrishna had initiated him into many spiritual disciplines and the attainments which followed these practices made his spiritual treasure truly extraordinary. He had become a supremely great spiritual genius. Fearless and illuminated, he set off for America with spiritual treasure which would be spent for the good of all people.

So the Swami, having come to America as a result of '... a tremendous upheaval of the whole life ...' prepared to address the Parliament on the opening day.<sup>30</sup> He did so, uttering the words, 'Sisters and Brothers of America.' Four thousand persons rose to their feet, applauding, moved by an unseen power, the power of a fully realized soul born to raise all humanity. No doubt the all-inclusive warm words of welcome, 'Sisters and Brothers', had the power to move, but the real power of the Swami was the realization of the absolute divinity of man and the effect this realization had on the minds of others. The mind of a realized soul is somewhat like the ocean at flood tide which raises all the ships in the harbour. When a Swami Vivekananda speaks, all minds present are raised to a level where there is a natural and intuitive sense of the unity of God with man. Such

<sup>28</sup>. Swami Annadananda, *Swami Akhandananda* (Bengali) (Calcutta: Udbodhan, 1st ed, 1376 B.S.) p. 68. (Translation of material in this article by Swami Chetanananda).

<sup>29</sup>. *Complete Works*, (1956) vol. 6, pp. 254-5.

<sup>30</sup>. *Complete Works*, (1956) vol. 6, p. 430.

a person brings, at the very least, a direct experience of divine peace and freedom.

From this time on, 1893 to 1896, Swamiji preached his message in America and England, returning to India in 1897. We do not have a great deal of information about the Swami's spiritual experiences, but we do know that Sri Ramakrishna said that Naren's knowledge of the Absolute was to remain 'locked up' until he finished his work. In spite of Sri Ramakrishna's words, Swamiji had nirvikalpa samādhi three times while in the United States. In 1895 he wrote from Thousand Island Park, where he attained this state, '... From me all difference has fallen, all right or wrong, all delusion and ignorance has vanished, I am walking in the path beyond the qualities.'<sup>31</sup> This is a description of supreme consciousness. To be beyond all qualities is to become one and the same with the Absolute. While he was in this condition, he was working and teaching. This very well may have been the state, the 'higher state', the state called sahaja samādhi, which Sri Ramakrishna had promised him.

Nirvikalpa samādhi confers upon those who have the knowledge of the illusory nature of the world, the perfect knowledge of the real nature of humanity, and absolute fearlessness. When we consider Swami Vivekananda's attainment of nirvikalpa samādhi, we must not only relate this experience to his teachings, but we must also explore the wider implications that it held for his world mission.

We know that the Swami came to America to get material help for India. But to what extent he felt in 1893 the command given by Sri Ramakrishna, 'Naren will teach men,' as a command to undertake a world mission is a matter worthy of our consideration. When those words were spoken to Naren, he objected. In *Swami Vivekananda*

*in America—New Discoveries*, Marie Louise Burke presents extensively researched evidence which shows that the idea of a world mission slowly evolved in the heart and mind of the Swami. He began his lecturing in September of 1893, but it was not until the beginning of 1895 that '... [he] embarked with full vigour and assurance upon his world mission, that of teaching Vedanta ...'<sup>32</sup> Later in 1895 he wrote in a letter, 'I know my mission in life, and no chauvinism about it; I belong as much to India as to the world, no humbug about that.'<sup>33</sup> He had come to get material aid for India, but had realized that Vedanta was needed by humanity, and that it was his mission to give Vedanta to the world. By the summer of 1895, two years after his arrival in the United States, he had become conscious of his role as a world teacher. He had a message, a spiritual treasure, to give humanity.

The greatest of Swami Vivekananda's spiritual treasures was his mastery of nirvikalpa samādhi. The attainment of nirvikalpa samādhi, the ultimate non-dual experience, is very rare. Usually those who have it die shortly thereafter; as it is said, the body drops off. Or if they remain in the world they lead a reclusive life, losing themselves in higher states of consciousness. Only those who have a special role in the world can return from this state and be active in the world. One such person was Sri Ramakrishna, and another was his disciple Swami Vivekananda. Although Sri Ramakrishna's teaching was universal, his work was carried on within his own culture. In contrast, Swami Vivekananda was a teacher who roamed the planet. To have

<sup>32</sup>. Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in America, New Discoveries* (San Francisco: Vedanta Society of Northern California, 1958) p. 602.

<sup>33</sup>. Burke, *New Discoveries*, (1958), p. 607.

<sup>31</sup>. *Complete Works*, (1955) vol. 8, p. 345.

that treasure, experience of the Absolute while working and teaching, is unique. Swamiji's treasure has meaning for us both individually and collectively, and to grasp those meanings, we must try to understand the nature of his experience of the Absolute. We know this experience is beyond mind and speech, but in spite of that difficulty, let us try to get some idea of nirvikalpa samādhi from Swamiji's own words in the poem, 'The Hymn of Samādhi.'<sup>34</sup>

We can see by this poem that Swamiji went from the consciousness of the objective universe to complete transcendence of the objective-subjective world. He first experienced a 'void of space' in which the 'image-universe' floated 'shadow-like'. Here the

universe was already losing its reality; it appeared as an image. Then his mind became finer, turned upon itself to become still finer, more subtle, and he saw the universe as 'fleeting' — momentary. As the universe rose and fell in the ceaseless current of 'I', Swamiji became the witness to the universe entering the 'primal womb' and also to the current 'I am', the causal desire to become. And finally the current of 'I am' stopped and what occurred was beyond speech. Swami Vivekananda had become infinite, absorbed into the Absolute; Swamiji had ceased to exist as a separate person. He had gone beyond one and not one. He had attained perfect identity with the only Being, Brahman. He was boundless, free.

<sup>34</sup>. *Complete Works*, (1955) vol. 4, p.498.

(To be concluded)

## REVIEWS AND NOTICES

SURESVARA'S VARTIKA ON YAJNAVALKYA-MAITREYI DIALOGUE: BY DR. SHOUN HINO. Published by Motilal Banarsidass, Bungalow Road, Jawaharnagar, Delhi 110 007. 1982. Pp. 328. Rs. 125.

Sage Yājñavalkya is the most well known and perhaps the greatest among the philosophers of the Upaniṣadic literature. His dialogue with one of his two wives, Maitreyī, in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (II. 4; IV. 5) presents one of the best statements regarding the nature of the Self (*Atman*). This dialogue is, in fact, the quintessence of the Upaniṣad. The author of the book under review, who hails from Japan, has taken up, as a part of his doctoral work at Poona University, the commendable and challenging task of translating the *Vārtika* (exposition) of Suresvara on the *Bhāṣya* (commentary) of Śamkara on the above-mentioned dialogue. The entire *Vārtika* on the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* consists of 11,151 verses and still remains unavailable in English translation. It may, however, be noted with satisfaction that the complete *Vārtika* on *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (consist-

ing of 1,027 verses) has been translated, with an Introduction, into English by Dr. R. Balasubramanian (published by Madras University, 1974). Dr. Hino translates 515 verses of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad-Bhāṣya-Vārtika* (relevant portions) along with an Introduction of seventy-four pages and annotations. The work is, undoubtedly, an important one in the study of Advaita and serves to fill a gap in the history of Advaitic studies. This translation marks the first step towards the translation of the monumental *Vārtika* in its entirety. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Vārtika* may be regarded as the chief source book of Advaita, and in it Suresvara is at his best in his exposition and vindication of Advaita as well as in his criticism of other schools.

As the *Vārtika-kāra* or expositor of the commentary of his divine master, Suresvara has to fulfil two obligations. On the one hand he has to be faithful to the scripture and, on the other, he has to respect his Guru's analysis. A *Vārtika* is supposed to examine what has been said (*ukta*), what has not been said (*anukta*) and what has been said incorrectly or disorderly (*durukta*). Being a devoted disciple of Śamkara,

the *Vārtikakāra* interprets what has been said in the *Bhāṣya* to make the purport more intelligible. He also explains what has remained implicit, or what has not been said in the context (for instance, Yājñavalkya seeking the consent of his wife for renunciation, *krama-sannyāsa*; cf. *Br. Up. Bhāṣya-Vārtika*, 39; as against the position of the *Jābāla Upaniṣad*, 4: *yadi vetarathā brahmacaryādeva, pravrajat gṛhādvā vanādvā...*). But a difficulty arises regarding the third aspect of the exposition dealing with what has been said wrongly. How can a disciple think of any explanation given by his master as wrongly said or not well said? And yet, we find at least one instance of a *durukta* in the context, namely, Śamkara's explanation of the words *itihāsa* etc. mentioned in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, II. iv. 10. One possible explanation (offered by Dr. Balasubramanian) is that Suresvara sets forth his interpretation as an alternative to the one given by Śamkara, taking into consideration the competence of a different type of spiritual aspirant to understand the teaching. The other possibility is that Suresvara prefers to interpret some texts in his own way. In the dialogue under reference Suresvara takes the word *Itihāsa* as referring to the *Brāhmaṇas*, and not to the well-known epics like the *Mahābhārata* (popularly called *Itihāsottama*) and the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

The Yājñavalkya-Maitreyī dialogue of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* brings out clearly the nature of the Self (*Atman*) by asserting it to be the dearest thing to a person. The realization of the true nature of the Atman urges Yājñavalkya to take up *vidvat-sannyāsa* (the renunciation of an illumined person). He proposes to divide his property between the two wives, Kātyāyanī and Maitreyī. Being more spiritually inclined, the latter doubts the worth of her physical share and asks for that which has prompted her learned husband to renounce his entire physical wealth. In her attitude we find *vividīṣā-sannyāsa* (renunciation for preparing oneself for true knowledge). The husband teaches the inquisitive wife through illustrations that the Self is the dearest of all things, and it is for the sake of the Self that everything else becomes dear. He further states that this Self is to be seen through hearing, reflection and meditation (*ātmanā vāre drastavyah, srotavyah, nididhyāsavyah*).

The commentarial discussion centres on this statement of Yājñavalkya. Whether the word *drastavyah* is to be taken as an injunction (scriptural command) or not is one of the major

issues. The Mīmamsā emphasis on the injunctive nature of Vedas provides for salvation through action (*mukteh kriyābhih siddhatvāt*). But Śamkara is convinced of the revelatory character of knowledge and holds that the knowledge of Brahman cannot be produced even by a hundred commands (cf. *Brahma-sūtra-Bhāṣya*, III.2.21). Hence the expression *drastavyah*, appearing as if it were a command, is actually meant to invite one's attention to Reality; there is no injunction in it that one should actually attain any knowledge.

Suresvara carries on an elaborate discussion on this point in accordance with his teacher. But he differs from Śamkara regarding the preparatory conditions for this knowledge. Whereas Śamkara admits only four requisites (*sādhana-catustaya*) for knowledge of the Real which do not include action of any sort, Suresvara accepts fourteen pre-requisites, including *nitya-karmas*, for *citta-suddhi*. Performance of daily rites is admitted by him to be an essential stage for salvation. According to his treatise *Naiṣkarmyasiddhi* (I.52) Karma serves to remove ignorance; it is a necessary means of purifying the intellect, but not a direct means to salvation. The *sambandha-vārtika* (Introduction to *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Vārtika*), along with the above statement of *Naiṣkarmyasiddhi*, prompts Shoun Hino to treat Suresvara as an adherent of the theory that compromises between action and knowledge as means for salvation (*jñāna-karma-samuccayavāda*). This is clear from Mr. Hino's remark on page eleven. But at a later stage, on page sixty-one of his book, while discussing the grounds of Suresvara's refutation of *Bhartrprapañca*, Brahmadata (and Baṇḍana-misra?) in *Sambandha-Vārtika*. 356-7 and *Naiṣkarmyasiddhi*, I. 20, he regards the *Vārtikakāra* as opposed to the integrative theory. The author should be more elaborate on this point and make his position clearer.

Regarding the relation between the three means of seeing the Self, namely, *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana*, there is an interesting difference of views amongst the commentators of the text. Śamkara, of course, combines the three and does not seem to hold the principal-subordinate relation among them. Suresvara treats *śravaṇa* and *manana* as co-existent, as one continuous logical process which culminates in meditation. But Anandagiri considers, like the Vivaraṇa stand-point, *śravaṇa* to be the principal term because it is the direct means of knowledge. Consequently, *manana* and *nididhyāsana* become subordinate to *śravaṇa* (cf. his commentary on

the *Br. Up. Bhāṣya*). It may be interesting to note that Anandagiri, elsewhere (in *Sāstra-Prakāśikā*, II. iv. 128) follows Suresvara's view regarding this very context. It would be valuable to investigate further these two phases of Anandagiri. Vācaspati Misra, being closer to Śamkara's position, holds that the three terms constitute a continuous sequence and form a chain of causes.

As may be easily expected, a *Bhāṣya-kāra* or a *Vārtika-kāra* requires a methodology of reason to bring out clearly the meaning of a given text. Suresvara, in accordance with the tradition of his teacher, uses in his expositions of the scriptural texts the well-known Vedantic mode of reasoning known as the *anvaya-vyatireka* principle. This reasoning produces *viveka* (discernment) between the Self and the not-Self which are found to be intermingled at phenomenal level. Śamkara, while employing this method of argument in explaining the great sentence (*mahā-vākya*) *tat tvam asi*, states that the sense of *pratyagātman* is conveyed by the word *tat*, and the sense of *duḥkhiṇ* is discarded from amongst the meanings of the term *tvam* (cf. his *Upadesa-sāhasrī*). This positive-negative method is applied by Suresvara throughout his exposition, and has been clearly explained in the *Naiṣkarmya-siddhi* (III. 74) by the analogy of the man and the post. The post, mistaken for a man, is stated to be a post, and not a man. Thus the knowledge of the object is ascertained by the *anvaya-vyatireka* method.

Shoun Hino does not discuss the controversy regarding the identity of Maṇḍanamisra and Suresvara. He simply avoids the issue by expressing his allegiance to Kuppaswami Sastri who (in his Introduction to *Brahma-siddhi*) advances eleven proofs against the identity theory. The issue deserves more attention from an author writing exclusively on Suresvara. Further, the dates of Suresvara have not been discussed. The years 720-770 have simply been put within brackets, as if taken to be final. Although the dates of most of the Vedānta commentators are not finally ascertained, if the usually accepted dates of Śamkara (A.D. 788-820) are adopted, the dates of the disciple are bound to shift to a later period. Even approximate dates are to be discussed in a book of this nature.

The printing of the Sanskrit texts in both Devanagari and Roman scripts is very useful. A few printing mistakes (as for instance, the initials of Dr. N!K! Devaraja and Dr. R. P.

Singh, in the Bibliography) can be corrected in the next edition. The price of the book, of course, is prohibitive. A cheaper edition will attract many Indian readers to Suresvara through this admirable English translation.

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PSALMS OF A SOLITARY SAILOR: BY ANTHONY ELENJIMITTAM. Published by Aquinas Publications, Mount Mary, Bandra, Bombay 400 050. 1980. Pp. 146. Rs. 10.

Anthony Elenjittam's prolific writings on a variety of subjects do not need any introduction to the readers of *Prabuddha Bharata*. His catholicism of outlook, erudition and above all his concern for human welfare in all its aspects are invariably reflected in the impressive volume of his writings ranging from Subhas Chandra Bose to the *Upanishads* and the *Gita*.

*Psalms* reveals a fresh facet of his versatility: his talent for versification. Here are simple but deeply moving verses ranging in the usual concerns of an alert and sensitive nature. Poems evoking the physical destitution of man jostle alongside prayerful contemplations of a deeply mystical sensibility. Poems such as 'Gayatri', 'Be Up and Doing', 'The Grand Vision', 'God-Intoxication', 'Fight On', 'Sat-Chit-Ananda Unveiled' deserve special mention. These reflect freshness of perception, earnestness of conviction and spontaneity in expression.

There is however a certain unevenness in the volume in regard to craft. The author does have the gift for novelty in expression. But he should also pay attention to the remark made by T.S. Eliot after going through the TS. While commending unhesitatingly the 'happy blend, a real fusion between the best of religious and philosophical traditions of East and West,' Eliot suggested that 'the literary form should be brought up to the mark'. Poetry after all is not merely statement; it is also a memorable, musical statement.

The volume, in any case, deserves careful study by all those interested in poetry that is simple and passionate and above all marked by earnestness of conviction in regard to the higher values of life.

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## SANSKRIT-ENGLISH

VISNUSAHASRANAMA WITH THE BHASYA OF SRI SAMKARACARYA. TRANSLATED BY R. ANANTHAKRISHNA SASTRY. Published by The Adyar Library and Research Centre, Adyar, Madras 600 020. 1980 (First Edition). Pages xxx + 475. Rs. 40.00.

In the hymnal literature of Hinduism an important place is occupied by the class of hymns known as *Sahasranāma* or 'Thousand Names'. Of these unique hymns the most celebrated one is the *Viṣṇusahasranāma Stotra* taught by the sage Bhīṣma to Yudhisthira. Many a devout Hindu may admit from his own experience that the recitation of the *stotra* gives him mental peace, spiritual well-being, and happiness. Śrī Śamkara, the celebrated authority on Advaita Vedānta, has given us an illuminating Commentary on these thousand names of God spoken of here as Śrī Viṣṇu. Though there are nearly twenty commentaries on this *stotra*—many of them unpublished—Śrī Śamkara's has become not only popular, but authoritative. The 'Anusāsanika Parvan' (Chapter 135) of the *Mahābhārata* has these 142 verses. Some names are repeated, and the text with 1,031 names of the Lord has to be interpreted properly to give us a thousand names only. The additional ones are treated as adjectives.

Sri R. Ananthakrishna Sastry has rendered these thousand names into English presenting at the same time the substance of Śrī Śamkara's Commentary. The original version came out as early as 1901. A revised and enlarged edition came out in 1926. The great problem faced by the original commentator and his translator was to reconcile devotion or bhakti with Advaita Vedānta. Viṣṇu is viewed here as Saguna Brahman, the God of religion, whose grace (*prasāda, anugraha*) is necessary for the attainment of knowledge, as we read in Śrī Śamkara's Commentary on the *Brahma-Sūtras* 2.3.41 and 3.2.5 and on the *Gītā* 7.14 and 18.58. The translator has done well in rendering these verses accurately.

The highest purpose served by this *stotra*, says Śrī Śamkara (on verses 129 and 130), is the attainment of *mokṣa*, liberation from the wheel of birth and death. In this Kali Yuga, we are advised by our Purāṇas and Smṛtis, we have to depend chiefly on *nāmasamkīrtana*, recitation of the names of the Lord. The translator took the help of Nilakantha's *Nāma-kārikā* in clarifying Śrī Śamkara's expression, since this commen-

tary contains all the different explanations given by the earlier writers. This gives a great value to the present rendering. Collating different manuscripts, Sri Ananthakrishna Sastry has given us a definite edition of the text and a lucid translation of the same. The present edition, published after a lapse of 53 years—has been thoroughly revised by Dr. A. G. Krishna Warriar and Prof. A. A. Ramanathan.

This edition has some interesting features. Some additional verses found only in the southern recension are given in the footnotes (Pp. 4—5). The quotations given by Śrī Śamkara are traced to the various sources. The variant readings are given. Some additional verses found in *Hari-vamsa* and the like authorities are given in the footnotes, and these throw some new light on the text (Pp. 27 etc.). The *anganyāsa, karanyāsa,* and *dhyāna slokas* are given in the footnotes. Nilakantha's additional interpretations are separately given immediately after the original *Bhāṣya*. The names of the Lord are transliterated and translated separately.

We mention some interesting renderings. *Govinda* means 'the reclamer of the earth'. This is reinforced by the explanation given in *Nāma-kārikā* (P. 153). The possible ten meanings of this word are highly illuminating. '*Govidām patih*' is the lord of the knowers of the Vedas in the form of the spiritual preceptors. *Hamsa* is the Self, the ultimate Reality. The elaborate exposition of the first name 'Visvam' is very illuminating in the English rendering. The translator is more interested in clarifying the interpretation of the commentator Śrī Śamkara. How *Visva* comes to mean 'Om' is well brought out. *Nyāyah* (P. 163) means 'the unshakable power of reasoning for those who want to go beyond the sastras'. *Pramāṇam* (P. 227) means 'the authority for all dharmas or otherwise'. *Avijñātā*, says the gloss, is one who 'does not count the faults of his devotees'. Such elucidations add the greatest value to the text.

This edition has a bibliography, an alphabetical index of the thousand names, and an index of the quotations appearing in the *Bhāṣya*. The translator, like Śrī Śamkara, has not deviated from the basic standpoint of Advaita Vedānta.

The reprint of the text after nearly five decades fills a great void. The book is a must for all devotees and at the same time for all students of Indian philosophy. Words cannot adequately praise this great work. The Theos-



ophical Society at Adyar deserves our gratitude for publishing it.

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### SANSKRIT-BENGALI

UPANISAD-CAYAN: BY SWAMI SATYANANDA.  
Published by Sri Ramakrishna Sevayatan, 2  
Pranakrishna Saha Lane, Calcutta 700 036, 1982.  
Pp. iv + 66. Rs. 4.

Swami Satyananda, an initiated disciple of Swami Abhedananda, was well known during his lifetime as a good writer, music composer, and

also as a remarkable scholar. He was revered by many for his high spiritual attainments. The present small book may be taken as an illustration of all the above-mentioned qualities of the Swami. It gives a collection of some famous mantras culled from the following Upaniṣads: *Isa*, *Kena*, *Katha*, *Muṇḍaka*, *Prasna*, *Taittirīya*, *Śvetasvatara*, and *Chāndogya*, and the author's commentary on them based on science, philosophy, realization, and psychology. The style is all through lucid, lively, and captivating.

The printing and paper of the book are good and the price is reasonable.

BRAHMACHARI APURVACHAITANYA  
Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta

## NEWS AND REPORTS

### RAMAKRISHNA MISSION ASHRAMA PURI-752 001

#### REPORT FOR 1982-83

*Spiritual and Cultural:* In the ashrama shrine morning and evening services and fortnightly Rāmanāma samkīrtana were carried on as usual. The Birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda and other religious teachers were celebrated. Regular classes on Kathamrita and other scriptures were conducted in the shrine hall every Sunday evening. A two-day Youth Convention with over one hundred delegates from all over the state was held in May 1982.

*Educational:* The Students' Home accommodated sixty-five students, out of whom forty-one belonged to Scheduled Tribes, seventeen to Scheduled Castes and seven to economically backward classes. Board, clothing, bedding, textbooks and stationery were free for all students. Orientation to work was given by encouraging the students to work in the ashrama garden, bakery and dairy in their leisure. Private coaching was given by experienced teachers to supplement studies in school. A typewriting class was also conducted for the students. The students' Text-book library contained 3,230 books. The wall

magazine 'Keshari' was a regular feature of the students' home.

The ashrama library had a daily average attendance of 180. At the end of the period under review, it had 16,474 books and the reading room received ten newspapers and seventy periodicals. The library has a separate text-book section for college students.

*Humanitarian:* Relief was provided in the flood-affected areas of Kakatpur, Astaranga and Gop blocks of Puri district for three months by distributing cooked food prepared with milk powder, chira, molasses and sugar and providing clothes to some 25,200 people. The amount spent on this score was approximately Rs. 2 lakhs.

*Present Needs:* To accommodate the ever-increasing number of people using the library Rs. 1 lakh is required for an extension to the library building. Also for the library, a permanent fund of Rs. 3 lakhs is needed. For the students' home a permanent fund of Rs. 3 lakhs is required, the interest of which amount will support ten poor students.

All donations to the ashrama are exempt from Income-tax and may be sent to The Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Puri-752 001, Orissa.

## NOTES AND COMMENTS

### *Training for Rural Women*

In September 1978 an international conference was held at Alma-Ata, U.S.S.R., under the auspices of the WHO and the UNICEF. It fixed as the main social target for governments and international organizations the attainment by all peoples of the world by the year A.D. 2000 of a level of health that will permit them to lead a socially and economically productive life. In recent years it has increasingly been felt that the balance of medical strategy has been wrong, that there has been undue preoccupation with disease rather than with health. In developing countries health is essentially a question of improvement in nutrition, and one of the prime needs in these countries is the creation of a widespread awareness of the importance of nutrition. And since, at the home level, food and nutrition are the concern of women, their education in this field deserves special attention.

In this context newspaper report (*Times of India* 7-11-83) of a new scheme to train future home-makers, mothers and workers in villages prepared by Dr. C. Gopalan, president of the Nutrition Foundation of India, is a most welcome piece of news. The programme is designed to provide skills and education to village girls emphasizing socio-economic factors and dissuading them from early marriage. The scheme envisages the setting up of special schools of arts and crafts in villages exclusively for girls of the 12-20 years age group including those who have had no primary education. It is proposed to start the project in 1,000 villages at a cost of about Rs. 200 million and cover the entire countryside by the end of the Seventh Plan.

A two-year course will be conducted through only audio-visual aids on education for better living, covering subjects like personal hygiene, nutrition, sex education, pregnancy care, immunization and legal rights of women. The instructors will be women. As regards vocational education, the crafts chosen will be appropriate to the location and the acceptability and marketability of the product to be manufactured. Such crafts may include basket weaving, mirror work, doll making, tailoring, etc.

While many Government and voluntary agencies could be associated with the training programme, the proposal calls for the payment of incentives like a monthly stipend of Rs. 25 and 15 Kg of grains. It is expected that the total number of girls in such schools at a given time will be 1,000. Support of village elders will facilitate availability of free accommodation. Even if the budget is a little high, the programme will have spin off benefits such as creating a large body of qualified village-level workers and better results for the population control programme.

Women can play, as they should, a pivotal role in bringing about a healthy transformation in the highly structured and tradition-bound Indian society. They constitute the ridge-pole of home life, and any improvement in their condition, cultural or economic, benefits the entire family without extra investment. We hope Dr. Gopalan's scheme will be followed by, or expanded into more comprehensive schemes for the uplift of women in India.

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