

VOL. 89

MARCH 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

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MARCH 1984

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# Prabuddha Bharata

VOL. 89

MARCH 1984

No. 3

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

## INTEGRAL VISION OF VEDIC SEERS\*

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

हिरण्यगर्भः समवर्तताग्रे

भूतस्य जातः पतिरेक आसीत् ।

स दाधार पृथिवीं द्यामुतेमां

कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम ॥

(1) Hiraṇyagarbha<sup>1</sup> existed at the beginning<sup>2</sup>. Being born, he remained the Lord of all creatures, sustaining this earth and heaven. Let us worship the divine Ka<sup>3</sup> with oblation.

*Rg-Veda* 10.121.1.

\* Begun here is the *Hiraṇyagarbha-sūktam*, one of the most important and beautiful hymns of the *Rg-Veda*, also found with minor variations in the *Taittirīya-Samhitā* 4.1.8. The seer of this hymn is unknown, and this fact points to its great antiquity.

(1) Hiraṇyagarbha is, in the last stanza, identified with *Prajāpati*, a term which frequently occurs in the *Brāhmaṇas* and *Upaniṣads*. In later Vedantic thought he is regarded as the Personal God—either *Īsvara* himself or the Creator, a lower manifestation of *Īsvara*.

(2) That is, before creation.

(3) The word *kasmāi* is generally taken by Western scholars to be the dative form of the interrogative pronoun *ka* (who), and they interpret the last line as, 'What God shall we adore with

oblation?' This profession of ignorance about the object of worship would make the poet an agnostic, but this is an unwarranted assumption as the name Hiraṇyagarbha and his attributes are already mentioned in the hymn. Ludwig interprets the line: 'What other God than *Prajāpati* shall we worship?' *Sāyaṇa* gives three meanings of *kasmāi*:

(i) as the dative of the indeterminate pronoun *kim* and thus indicating the undefinable magnificence of Hiraṇyagarbha;

(ii) as referring to the Creator—*sṛṣṭyartham kāmāyate iti kah*, 'one who desires for creation';

(iii) as referring to the bliss aspect of ultimate reality—*kam* meaning bliss (cf *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 4.10.4.)



## ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This month's EDITORIAL discusses three conceptions of the Universal Religion.

The REMINISCENCES OF SWAMI BRAHMANANDA (one of the foremost among Sri Ramakrishna's disciples) by Srimat Swami Vireswaranandaji Maharaj, President General of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, reveals certain aspects of Raja Maharaj's character which are not only interesting but also instructive. For even the ordinary actions of an illumined soul have some meaning and purpose.

SPIRITUAL LIFE : ITS CONDITIONS AND PITFALLS by Swami Shraddhanandaji, head of the Vedanta Society of Sacramento, is the transcript of an informal talk. Based as it is on the personal life and experiences of a senior monk, the article is valuable for the practical guidance it gives.

Under the simple-looking title PHILOSOPHIZING ON FAILURE, Swami Nityabodhanandaji has made some insightful observations based on years of study and experience. Written in an aphoristic style, these reflections need and deserve careful study. Founder-head of the Vedanta Society of Geneva, the author is well known for his erudition and creative thinking, and has several books in French and English to his credit.

In SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND ISLAM Swami Prabhananda has brought together a wealth of information on the subject. The author who is a trustee of the Ramakrishna Math is an authority on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature and has written several books. He wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to Sri Parthasarathi Neogi for providing the photos published with the article.

Dr. Arun Kumar Biswas M.Sc. Tech., D. Phil. (Cal.), S.M. M.I.T. Professor of Metallurgy at the Indian Institute of Tech-

nology, Kanpur, concludes his meticulously documented and scholarly article KHETRI IN THE RAMAKRISHNA MOVEMENT with its illustrated second instalment.

ADVAITA AND TRINITY shows how an enlightened Christian theologian can, through a sympathetic and disciplined approach, contribute greatly to inter-religious understanding and acceptance. It should, however, be noted that (1) the author's application of Advaita is restricted to intra-divine relationships within the Trinity (whereas the fundamental concern of Vedanta is the non-duality of divine-human relationship, *jīva-brahma aikya*) and that (2) his exposition of the Trinitarian doctrine conforms more to the other types of 'Advaita' like *Bheda-abheda*, *Viśiṣṭa-advaita*, etc. Dr. Michael von Bruck is a young Lutheran pastor and research scholar at the Department of Systematic Theology, University of Rostock, East Germany, and is at present a visiting professor at the Gurukul Lutheran Theological College, Madras. The article originally appeared in the *Indian Theological Studies* (Bangalore, March 1983) vol. 10, No. 1.

FROM MANESHWAR TO MANASAROVAR is an offbeat, vibrant, intensely personal account of a pilgrimage which has created considerable excitement in recent years. Vyom Akhil is the assumed name of a talented 39-year-old architectural consultant who regards himself as an Ekalavya-type follower of the American philosopher and design scientist R. Buckminster Fuller. When he is not designing and building geodesics and other types of houses, he spends his leisure trekking in the Himalayas. Sri Madan Mohan Bathija, who took the photographs of the pilgrimage, owns several business concerns in Bombay.

# UNIVERSAL RELIGION

(EDITORIAL)

## *The universal dimension of religion*

'Religion is not a matter of personal sentiment which has nothing to do with the objective realities of society', says Christopher Dawson, 'but is on the contrary, the heart of social life and the root of every living culture.'<sup>1</sup> Religion is not a special or unnatural attitude or the isolated activity of a few individuals. It is mankind's total response to Reality. An individual is religious only in so far as he shares in this universal response. 'The finally decisive factor as to the quality of the culture is not the environment', points out Von Ogden Vogt, 'but the total attitude and spirit of the men who compose society. It is this total attitude and spirit which is the religion of the tribe or nation.'<sup>2</sup>

Like everything else in nature, any power or instinct when misused can cause destruction. In the past religions played both constructive and destructive roles in the evolution of culture. But now, in this crucial period of history we are passing through, there is nothing more vital for the survival, enrichment and peaceful coexistence of humanity than the constructive and unifying forces of religion. And for this, religion must gain a universal dimension. As a matter of fact, according to Arnold Toynbee, the major religions of the world represent mankind's attempt to evolve a global community. In this sense they are to be treated as separate civilizations, different from ordinary civilizations which are defined

by ethnic and territorial limitations.

Says Toynbee :

The emergence of the higher religions seems to me to mark so important a new departure in human history that these cannot be dealt with adequately in terms of the civilizations whose declines and falls give rise to them. I try to show that they are not parasites or dying civilizations, nor do they simply serve as chrysalises for the births of new civilizations. On the contrary, I believe that the higher religions are themselves societies of a new distinctive species; their purpose is to enable men to find a direct personal relation with the transcendent reality in and behind and beyond the universe, though so far they have fallen short of their spiritual aspirations. Most of the religions have achieved the essential step of disengaging themselves from the restrictive matrix of the civilizations in which they came to birth, and have addressed themselves to the whole of mankind. But some have been betrayed by their institutionalization into becoming rigid in structure and intolerant in outlook.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, the very nature and purpose of religion are universal. Though the precise meaning of universality and the means of attaining it are controversial matters, the concept of universal religion has assumed great importance in modern times. It was in discovering, formulating and popularizing the universal dimension of religion that Swami Vivekananda made some of his most outstanding contributions to world thought and culture. His master Sri Ramakrishna had demonstrated the equal validity of all religions at the experiential level and had, through his doctrine of *dharma samanvaya* or religious harmony, laid the foundation of a new concept of universal religion based on mutual understanding,

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1. Christopher Dawson, *Inquiries into Religion and Culture* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1953) p. 295.

2. Von Ogden Vogt, *Cult and Culture* (New York: Macmillan, 1951) p. 36.

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3. Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, One Volume Abridgement (London: Oxford University Press, 1972) p. 319.



acceptance and fellowship among the followers of different religions. Swami Vivekananda carried forward the work of Sri Ramakrishna not only by expounding, establishing and spreading the message of his master, but also by contributing original ideas born of his own deep insight.

### *Three views on universal religion*

In India one often hears naive statements like, 'all religions are one', 'every religion is the same', etc. These are too simplistic to be true. Religions are complex and distinctive, and the concept of universal religion deserves greater understanding and more serious study than it has so far received. There are at present three main views on what universal religion means: (1) of the different religions only one is true and should be universally accepted; (2) there is only one Religion of which all religions are only different expressions; (3) Swami Vivekananda's view that universal religion is not a unitary concept but the sum total of all the religions.

Among the major religions of the world Buddhism, Christianity and Islam are claimed by their followers to be universal religions. By the term 'universal religion' they mean a religion which is not restricted to a particular region, race or society but is open to the entire mankind. This may appear to be a commendable, liberal attitude. But the followers of each of these religions also hold that their religion alone is true and that all people should accept only it. It is this belief that makes them propagate their own religion everywhere with tremendous zeal and compete with one another. But if only one religion is true and should be accepted by all, then it is evident that there can be only one universal religion in this sense. In other words, by their very claim to universality these religions cease to be universal!

The ancient religions Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Shintoism and Hinduism are not universal in the above sense. The first three are ethnic religions and the last one is based on caste. Membership in these religions is determined by birth. Until the end of the first or second decade of this century Hinduism was believed by its orthodox adherents to be limited to the geographical territory of India, and any one who dared to cross the Indian ocean lost his caste and ceased to be a Hindu. In modern times Hinduism has become evangelical in a limited way. Revivalist groups have sprung up which are trying to make Hinduism at least the national religion by identifying it with Indian culture and using this cultural basis for reabsorbing the other religions existing in India into Hinduism.

A religion can claim to be universal only if it can satisfy the diverse existential and cultural needs of the entire human race. At present no single religion, as it exists now, is in a position to fulfil this possibility. There are two reasons for this. One is that no single religion has discovered all the aspects of Truth and fully developed all the values of life. Every religion is deficient in some theoretical or practical elements. Secondly, each religion is restricted by the symbols, rites, myths and sacred language borrowed from the culture of the region where that religion originated. People belonging to other cultures find these symbols etc. strange, and hence find it difficult to accept that religion.

### *The second concept of universal religion*

To overcome these limitations many thinkers have proposed another view of universal religion. According to this view, there is only one eternal absolute Religion of which the existing religions are only different expressions. As man's response to reality, religion is one and, whether it is regarded as an instinct, attitude, experience



or relationship, this response under different cultural influences takes the form of different religions. One evidence for this theory comes from mysticism. Sri Ramakrishna through his great *sādhana* showed that all religions led to the same goal ultimately. Even otherwise, the experiences of the great mystics and saints of different religions have striking resemblances which point to the existence of one unitary religion common to all mankind.

Another set of evidences comes from the multidisciplinary study of religion in modern times. Eminent scholars working in different fields like anthropology, sociology, psychology, history, philosophy and theology have discovered certain fundamental characteristics shared by all religions in common. These are: existential concern, transcendence, holiness, ultimacy, fellowship and symbolic expression. The most important characteristic of religion is its concern for the existential problems of man.<sup>4</sup> Religion addresses itself directly to the self and its needs. However, religion seeks to find the solution to these problems not in the world of sense experience but in the transcendent world. As Swami Vivekananda has shown, religion is basically an attempt to transcend the senses.<sup>5</sup> This transcendence may take

4. Though the existential problems of man are the same everywhere, they have been articulated in different ways in different cultural contexts. Hinduism reduces them to one problem, bondage or ignorance. Buddhism recognizes three basic problems: impermanence, suffering, and selfhood. Christianity groups all the problems of man under sin. The Protestant theologian Paul Tillich recognizes three: anxiety, guilt, meaninglessness. Psychologists speak of conflicts and neuroses. Sociologists picture man's problems in terms of 'breaking points' or critical social contexts when man is confronted with uncertainty, powerlessness and meaninglessness. See, Thomas F. O'dea, *The Sociology of Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1966).

5. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1976) Vol. 2, p. 59.

the form of revelation, yoga, devotion, direct mystical experience, etc. Whatever its form, religion provides man a spiritual solution to the problems of life. The third principle common to all religions is holiness. In the Judeo-Christian tradition holiness is derived from God who, being 'wholly other', is untouched by evil. In Hinduism it is derived from the essential purity and divinity of the Atman. Even in Buddhism, which believes neither in God nor in Atman, strict morality is stressed as a pragmatic necessity. The fourth common characteristic of religion is that it induces a sense of ultimacy. God is the highest reality, spiritual experience gives the highest fulfilment, religious duty is the highest good—indeed, everything concerning religion is regarded as the ultimate. Again, religion induces a feeling of fellowship higher than the bonds of family, caste or race. Lastly, symbolization plays a more central role in religion than in any other field of culture. Religious experiences are commonly expressed through a variety of mystic symbols, rituals, attitudes, myths and special linguistic forms.

All this shows that the existence of an absolute common religion is not a mere abstract concept. However, as regards its exact nature and configuration there is no uniform opinion. On the whole there are four main views which we may term external, internal, phenomenological and mystical.<sup>6</sup>

The 'external' view is held mainly by sociologists and anthropologists. According to them, religion is not the direct expression of inner forces but is product of man's interaction with the environment. The 19th-century British anthropologist E. B. Tylor thought of religion as the attempt of the 'savage mind' to understand natural phenom-

6. The idea of 'external' and 'internal' is borrowed from the great work of N. D. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City* (New York: Doubleday, 1950).



ena like death, dreams, echo etc. Bronislaw Malinowski, Claude Levi-Strauss, Mircea Eliade and others have modified Tylor's view by showing the importance of rites, rituals and myths. According to them religion is an attempt to find meaning in life. The German sociologist George Simmel and the French sociologist Emile Durkheim developed the theory that religion is an attempt to heighten and abstract everyday social relationships. This idea has recently been revived by the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr.<sup>7</sup>

The 'internal' view of religion regards it as an essential attribute of human consciousness. According to Ludwig Feuerbach religion is the projection of the self, a process of self-alienation. 'Man—this is the mystery of religion—projects his being into objectivity, and then again makes himself an object to this projected image of himself thus converted into a subject... God is the highest subjectivity of man abstracted from himself.'<sup>8</sup> Freud looked upon religion as the projection of human desires and fears, and considered religious prohibitions, internalized as the 'super-ego', to be the main cause of conflicts, repression and neuroses.

7. The sociological viewpoint is discussed in many of the standard books on the sociology of religion. Specially recommended: J. Milton Yinger, *The Scientific Study of Religion* (New York: The Macmillan Co, 1970).

8. Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (New York: Harper, 1957) Pp. 13, 31. An apparently similar concept based on entirely different premises was developed by Swami Vivekananda who regarded Personal God as 'the highest reading of the Impersonal that can be reached by the human intellect'. Compare the following statement of Swamiji:

'The Self is the eternal subject, and we are struggling all the time to objectify that Self... But these are weak attempts, and the highest objectification of the Self possible to us is the Personal God. This objectification is an attempt to reveal our own nature'. *Complete Works* (1973) Vol. 5, p. 266.

Carl Jung modified Freud's view by interpreting the fundamental elements of religion as derived from the 'collective consciousness'. He regarded rituals and myths as the products of a fundamental symbolization process going on in the unconscious; this thesis has been developed further by Ernst Cassirer and, more recently, by Paul Ricoeur and others. Other notable followers of the projectionist view of religion include the two outstanding American thinkers George Herbert Mead and John Dewey.

There is a second type of 'internal' view of religion quite different from the above. According to it religion is an *a priori*, that is, a separate innate category of human consciousness through which man gains an insight into the nature of God even without the help of scriptures. This is of course the age-old claim of all mystics, but among Western philosophers and theologians it was Schleiermacher (1768-1834) who first formulated it. His concept of religion as the feeling of absolute dependence on God resembles that of the great Indian *āchārya* Ramanuja. Schleiermacher influenced Ernst Troeltsch who regarded the religious *a priori* as a rational intuition, and Rudolf Otto who regarded the religious *a priori* as a non-rational awareness of the Holy which he called the 'numinous'. The 18th-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant tried to understand religion through morality. According to him every human being has an awareness of the categorical imperative to act morally. Through this awareness all men share in one universal religion.

A third type of 'internal' view of religion is to look upon religion as a direct encounter. The Protestant theologian Emil Brunner spoke of a 'divine-human encounter', and the Jewish religious philosopher Martin Buber spoke of an 'I-Thou' relationship. This way of looking at religion took an entirely new turn with the ideas of Soren Kierkegaard and existentialist philosophers



like Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel. The famous American theologian Paul Tillich attempted to integrate existentialism into Protestant theology.

We now come to the phenomenological view of religion. A phenomenologist does not hold either the external or the internal view of religion. His purpose is not to judge religion (as valuable or useless, true or false, etc.) but only to describe it without bias. For this he has to practise what Edmund Husserl, the father of phenomenology, called *epoche* or suspension of belief. Following the pioneering work of the two Dutch scholars W. B. Christensen and G. Vander Leeuw, phenomenology has considerably influenced the attitude of sociologists and theologians towards world religions.

However, it is the mystical approach that has contributed most to the understanding of the universality of religion. In the other three approaches (external, internal and phenomenological) the attempt is to understand religion through the senses and to study its effects on the sense-bound world. But in the mystical approach the attempt is to transcend the senses and have a direct contact with the ultimate reality. Transcendence, immediacy, contact—these are the three essentials of mysticism.

We referred earlier to three conceptions of universal religion, and we have discussed the first two of these. Before discussing the third form of universal religion it is necessary to point out that Swami Vivekananda gave much importance to the second conception. In fact, he often interpreted Sri Ramakrishna's doctrine of the harmony of religion in terms of this second view. In his famous lecture on 'My Master' Swamiji said :

The second idea that I learnt from my Master, and which is perhaps the most vital, is the wonderful truth that the religions of the world are not contradictory or antagonistic. They are

but various phases of one eternal religion. That one religion is applied to different planes of existence, is applied to the opinions of various minds and various races. There never was my religion or yours...One infinite religion existed all through eternity and will ever exist, and this religion is expressing itself in various countries in various ways.<sup>9</sup>

In this second concept of universal religion Swami Vivekananda saw great scope for the spiritual development of the individual. Too much adherence to dogma and ritual curtails inner freedom and, without inner freedom, man cannot grow spiritually. Each person has to develop according to the law of his being. For this he must first of all discover his own religion which is an expression of the universal religion. That is why Swamiji said, 'No man is born to any religion; he has a religion in his soul';<sup>10</sup> and exclaimed, '...and would to God that these would increase every day, until every man had a religion unto himself!' In terms of Indian thought, what this means is that each individual has his own yoga and must follow it. This concept was taken up by Sri Aurobindo who made it the corner stone of his Integral Yoga.<sup>11</sup>

Swami Vivekananda was not merely a mystic but also a practical leader of men. He knew that though the second concept of universal religion discussed above is of great practical benefit to the individual spiritual seeker, it is too abstract to be understood and accepted by the common masses. So he propounded another form of universal religion. This is the third concept of universal religion mentioned earlier. Through it Swamiji interpreted Sri Ramakrishna's doctrine of *dharma-samanvaya* in yet another way.

<sup>9</sup>. *Complete Works* (1978) Vol. 4, p. 180.

<sup>10</sup>. *Complete Works* (1973) Vol. 6, p. 82.

<sup>11</sup>. See, Sri Aurobindo; *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1971) Pp. 41 and 51.

*Universal religion as dialogue*

Unlike the other two views, the third view does not necessitate the creation or discovery of a distinct universal religion. According to it, universal religion already exists: it is the sum total of all the existing religions of the world. This is not an abstract or theoretical concept to argue about, or an impossible ideal to be dreamed about, but an existent reality which can be immediately realized if only the obstacles on its way are cleared up. Swami Vivekananda pointed out:

And that universal religion about which philosophers and others have dreamed in every country already exists. It is here. As the universal brotherhood of man is already existing, so also is universal religion... Brotherhood already exists; only there are numbers of persons who fail to see this and only upset it by crying for new brotherhoods. Universal religion, too, is already existing. If the priests and other people that have taken upon themselves the task of preaching different religions simply cease preaching for a few moments, we shall see it is there. They are disturbing it all the time, because it is to their interest.<sup>12</sup>

What are the basic principles of Swamiji's vision of this universal religion? They are four: totality of religions, uniqueness of individual religion, mutual sharing, and a common unchanging standard of validity.

The first principle of totality has already been mentioned. Universal religion is not a special religion but the coexistence of all religions to form a whole. It is the acceptance of the plurality of religions as a law of life. This means that the religious consciousness of mankind will not be complete if any one religion is left out. As Swamiji has pointed out, religions

'are not contradictory; they are supplementary. Each religion, as it were, takes up one part of

the great universal truth, and spends its whole force in embodying and typifying that part of the great truth. It is therefore additions not exclusions.<sup>13</sup>

My idea, therefore is that all these religions are different forces in the economy of God, working for the good of mankind, and that not one can become dead, not one can be killed.<sup>14</sup>

The second principle is the recognition of the unique characteristic of each religion. Each religion has, according to Swamiji, a special bent, a dominant motif. What does he mean by that? 'I do not mean the external forms in which great thoughts are clad', he says,

I do not mean the different buildings, languages, rituals, books, etc. employed in various religions, but I mean the internal soul of every religion. Every religion has a soul behind it, and that soul may differ from the soul of another religion...<sup>15</sup>

Swami Vivekananda paid much attention to identifying this 'soul' of each religion. The dominant characteristic of Islam, for instance, is its spirit of equality and brotherhood and its positive, forceful way of dealing with problems. In a letter to a Muslim gentleman Swamiji wrote,

Yet practical Advaitism which looks upon and behaves to all mankind as one's own soul, was never developed among the Hindus universally. On the other hand, my experience is that if ever any religion approached to this equality in an appreciable manner, it is Islam and Islam alone.<sup>16</sup>

The dominant values in Christianity are love and sacrifice taught and exemplified by Christ. Buddhism's emphasis is on the values of renunciation, compassion, non-violence and rationality. The distinctive watermark of Hinduism is its emphasis on

<sup>12</sup>. *Complete Works* (1976) Vol. 2, p. 367.

<sup>13</sup>. *Complete Works* 2 : 365.

<sup>14</sup>. *Complete Works* 2 : 366.

<sup>15</sup>. *Complete Works* 2 : 365.

<sup>16</sup>. *Complete Works* 6 : 415.



the unity of consciousness, the need for direct experience and the attitude of toleration.

According to Swami Vivekananda every religion has not only a unique mark but also a unique mission in the world, a unique contribution to make to world culture.

The fact that all the old religions are living today proves that they must have kept that mission intact; in spite of all their mistakes, in spite of all difficulties, in spite of all quarrels, in spite of all the incrustation of forms and figures, the heart of every one of them is sound—it is a throbbing, beating, living heart. They have not lost, any one of them, the great mission they came for.<sup>17</sup>

We now come to the third principle of universal religion. It is not enough to recognize the unique feature of each religion theoretically, as phenomenologists and sociologists do. It is also necessary to absorb the good points of other religious traditions and apply them in practical life. There is no need to change one's religion and embrace another. It will be enough if each person studies the good points of other religions and tries to practise them within the framework of his own religion. This was pointed out by Swami Vivekananda at the Chicago Parliament of Religions of 1893 :

The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth.<sup>18</sup>

Each religion should integrate into its body the best elements of other religions. In this way it can not only overcome some of its defects and drawbacks but enrich and strengthen itself. It was this possibility that Swamiji pointed out as an imperative need in one of his letters :

Therefore I am firmly persuaded that without the help of practical Islam theories of Vedantism, however fine and wonderful they may be, are entirely valueless to the vast mass of mankind... For our own motherland a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam—Vedanta brain and Islam body—is the only hope.<sup>19</sup>

However, the idea of universal religion can not be realized without a common thread unifying the different religions. It is not possible to measure and evaluate diverse viewpoints without a fixed standard. Einstein's great achievement was not in showing the relativity of all phenomena but in using the invariable velocity of light as a means of correlating (through 'Lorentz transformations') the values of different inertial frames of reference. Such a 'principle of invariance' is necessary in the field of religion. This is the fourth principle of universal religion according to Swami Vivekananda.

What is the common standard or criterion or test to judge the validity of religious facts and values? World religions hold their ground with the help of three criteria: revelation, reason and experience—*śruti*, *yukti*, and *anubhava*. Since each religion regards its own scripture as containing the highest and only authentic record of the truths of the spiritual world, it is clear that revelation as such cannot serve as a universal standard. It is, however, interesting to note that every religion contains a curious provision to accommodate the truths of other religions. In Hinduism the Vedas alone are *śruti*, revealed; all other scriptures are *smṛti*. An orthodox Hindu can accept the Bible and the Quran only as *smṛti* at best. Islam accepts the Old and New Testaments as authentic but incomplete. The Catholic Church holds the doctrine of two types or levels of revelation first propounded by St. Thomas Aquinas—general revelation

17. *Complete Works* 2 : 371.

18. *Complete Works* 1 : 24.

19. *Complete Works* 6 : 415-16.

through nature and special revelation through Christ. Of these only the latter has salvational value. The Protestant theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968) made a sharp distinction between the Word (God's revelation through Christ and the New Testament) and religion. According to him, what is usually called 'religion' is a product of human culture or even a projection of human aspiration (as held by Feuerbach and Freud) and so it cannot give salvation to man. This fanatical view of Barth was applied by the Dutch theologian Hendrik Kraemer to non-Christian religions. All this shows that revelation can at best serve to provide a measure of tolerance but not acceptance of other religions.

Next is reason. In the religious context reason means either of two things: inference or hermeneutics (interpretation of scriptures). During the Middle Ages Western scholars tried to provide several 'proofs' for the existence of God through reasoning. Most important of these were the cosmological argument, the ontological argument, the teleological argument and the moral argument. Immanuel Kant demolished all these 'proofs' and demonstrated the impossibility of knowing God through reason.

The third criterion of religion is experience. Experience is of two types, mediate and immediate. Mediate experience is that gained through the senses. Many Western theologians and philosophers have held that faith and intellectual knowledge are a form of divine illumination. The theological edifices built on such knowledge only create division and disharmony. Immediate experience is mystical experience gained by transcending the senses. Since such experience touches the fundamental unity of existence, and is unaffected by the divisions and categories created by the ordinary mind and senses, mystical experience alone can serve as the universal test and criterion of religious truths and values. Swami Vivekananda

makes the following observation on this point:

Experience is the only source of knowledge. In the world, religion is the only science where there is no surety, because it is not taught as a science of experience. This should not be. There is always, however, a small group of men who teach religion from experience. They are called mystics, and these mystics in every religion speak the same tongue. This is the real science of religion.<sup>20</sup>

In other religions mysticism is only a side lane, followed by a small group of people. And since faith, morality and the observance of certain external customs and rites are enough to guarantee salvation, mystical experience is not regarded as necessary for all. But in Hinduism direct mystical experience forms the main road, for without it not one can get final liberation. Furthermore, it is only in Vedanta that mysticism has taken the form of a definite science with clear-cut terminology and methodology. It is only in Vedanta that the fundamental truths of religion have been formulated in a way which is in broad accord with the conclusions of modern science. Vedanta is built upon eternal principles, not upon the authority of persons. For these reasons Swami Vivekananda believed that the basic principles of Vedanta alone could serve as the universal criterion and test of religion, and also as a connecting link between the different religions of the world.

The coexistence of all religions, recognizing the uniqueness of each, and sharing the values of all of them, with Vedantic principles serving as the connecting link between them—this, then, is the form of universal religion envisioned by Swami Vivekananda. It is the only practical or practicable form of universal religion.

Unlike the other two types, this type of

<sup>20</sup>. *Complete Works* 6 : 81.



universal religion is a dynamic one. It calls for constant mutual contact, discussion, learning, experience and exchange between the members of different religions. This kind of dynamic and creative contact between religions is nowadays called 'dialogue'. Thus universal religion is not a mere concept but a process, not a theory but a practice, not an ideal but an experience. When people of different religions come together, talk and learn about one another's points of view, universal religion is born. In other words, *inter-religious dialogue itself is the universal religion.*

Formerly the encounter between religions usually took the form of confrontation, hostility or even war. The time has come for world religions to enter into a creative dialogue. The main aim of dialogue is not to teach or convert the other person or party, but to learn and change oneself. We are living in an age of dialogue. It is the spirit of this age. This spirit found its prophetic expression through Swami Vivekananda. And in the following words Swami-ji has articulated for all liberal-minded and thoughtful people the charter of universal religion and the manifesto of inter-religious

dialogue and, through these, the message of harmony, peace and collective prosperity for the whole world :

I accept all religions that were in the past, and worship with them all ; I worship God with every one of them, in whatever form they worship Him. I shall go to the mosque of the mohamedan ; I shall enter the Christian's church and kneel before the crucifix ; I shall enter the Buddhist temple, where I shall take refuge in Buddha and in his law. I shall go into the forest and sit down in meditation with the Hindu, who is trying to see the Light which enlightens the heart of every one.

Not only shall I do all these, but I shall keep my heart open for all that may come in the future. Is God's book finished ? It is a marvellous book—these spiritual revelations of the world. The Bible, the Koran, and all other sacred books are but so many pages, and an infinite number of pages remain to be unfolded. I will leave it open for all of them. We stand in the present, but open ourselves to the infinite future. We take in all that has been in the past, enjoy the light of the present, and open every window of the heart for all that will come in the future. Salutation to all the prophets of the past, to all the great ones of the present, and to all that are to come in the future !<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup>. *Complete Works* 2 : 374.

## REMINISCENCES OF SWAMI BRAHMANANDA

SRIMAT SWAMI VIRESWARANANDAJI MAHARAJ

(A talk given at the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bombay,  
on the 10th February, 1978.)

I am not giving a well-organized speech. But I will say something about his life, whatever I remember. All these incidents had taken place some 60 years back or even more. I shall just tell you a few incidents.

Raja Maharaj was a pocket edition or the Library edition of Sri Ramakrishna. He was, as it were, in many respects like Sri

Ramakrishna though on a smaller scale. When one looked at him from behind, one would mistake him for Sri Ramakrishna. So much was the likeness.

The main quality of Raja Maharaj was that his mind as it were was most of the time away from this world. It was lost in some other world. He was very little con-

scious of the external world. He was in the highest state, most of the time. Sometimes, he would call his attendant to give him a smoke (hucca, hubble-bubble). The attendant used to give it, but he was not conscious of it and after sometime he would call the attendant and ask him, "Why have you not given me the tobacco?" He was not at all conscious of the external world. The tobacco was brought; but for a long time he was just lost in himself and the tobacco was burnt up. Thus we see his mind would be least concerned about the environment.

He had good knowledge about many subjects; though he was not a university student and had not studied up to college. But his knowledge of varied subjects was very fascinating. I remember, when he was at Madras, he would sit after Arati and talk to the devotees on the open terrace of the Vani Vilas which was the house occupied by the Math at that time. Many devotees used to come and sit near him, and he would talk on various subjects, but very rarely on any spiritual matter. Still it was interesting to sit near him and nobody liked to leave the place. At that time the first World War was going on. There was one Sivaram Iyer (later known as Swami Avinashananda). He was one of the Asst. Editors of *The Hindu*—one of the best newspapers in South India. He used to come often after his work at 7 O'clock or 8 O'clock and as soon as he came, Maharaj would ask, "What is the news about the war? Where are the Germans today? Yesterday they were so many miles from the British; today where are they?" In this way he would ask. He remembered all the movements of the German Army and the British Army and questioned him and got information.

Then there was a gentleman who was the Manager of a cooperative bank. Raja Maharaj often talked to him and put to him all questions which elucidated much infor-

mation about banking and cooperative systems. There was another gentleman who used to come daily. He was connected with the agricultural department of the Government. He would talk with him about different varieties of flowers, fruits etc. and also about manure for such plants. Maharaj too in return would give to the gentleman some ideas about plant, manure etc. He was also a very good connoisseur of music though he himself was not a musician. He would appreciate and understand the musical tunes and timings. He thus collected vast knowledge about various things not from books, but from persons through conversations.

He was very particular about the service of Sri Ramakrishna. One day he saw a Brahmachari plucking all beautiful flowers from garden for the Puja. Maharaj said to him, "What are you doing? Are you going to keep the plants all barren without any flowers? You think, Sri Ramakrishna is only sitting in that room and does not come down for a walk in the garden. Never do that. Take a few flowers for the Puja and leave the rest in the garden."

He took interest in various departments of the Math, particularly the flower garden, fruit trees, vegetable garden, cows etc. For the cows he prescribed what kind of food was to be given. Not only that he expected everyone to take the same interest. Whenever anyone went from Madras to Belur, he would ask him all details about the flower plants, fruit trees, cows etc. He would ask, "How many calves that cow has given which I bought for Guru Maharaj? What quantity of milk does it give? The flower plant which I planted—is it giving good flowers?" He had planted a Bel tree from Benares. He would ask, "How big is the Bel?" He had also planted four Amlaki plants and he would ask everyone how these plants are thriving, whether they are yielding good fruits or not. When these plants were first



planted by him near the compound wall of the garden, he stood by and said, "By merely selling Amlakis from these trees you will get 100 rupees", and everybody would laugh. Any one who failed to give proper information was dubbed as a useless fellow.

He was also freely exchanging things from one part of the country to another. He would bring plants from Bangalore and other places and plant them in Belur Math for Guru Maharaj's seva. Thus he planted the Nagalingam plant from South India which has now grown into a big tree yielding fragrant flowers profusely. In this way he used to get good things from other parts and also take good things of Bengal to other parts. Even South Indian dishes which he liked, he would arrange for their preparation in Belur Math and offer to Guru Maharaj. He was particularly fond of Rasam prepared with Neem flowers.

He introduced in Belur Math the Ram Nam Sankirtan which was very popular in South India. To it he added a few couplets from Tulasidas and asked the monks to sing this Sankirtan on every Ekadasi and Ram Navami day. This is sung even now not only at Belur Math but in all the Ashramas of the Ramakrishna Order on the Ekadasi days. Thus where he used to go on tour, either to South India or North India, he would try to exchange ideas to make the North and the South familiar to each other. He performed Durga Puja at Hardwar and once at Madras. In this way he tried to mix up all the best things from different parts and spread them all over the country.

I will tell you now a few things about his personality. Once he was at Madras and Swami Vishuddhanandaji was also in Madras at that time as a worker under Swami Ramakrishnanandaji. Raja Maharaj saw Swami Ramakrishnanandaji taking money for some expenses from Swami Vishuddhanandaji who was the cashier. Raja Maha-

raj told him, "Take a receipt from Ramakrishnananda (Sashi Maharaj). Don't give money without taking a receipt from him." So, when next Sashi Maharaj asked for money Vishuddhanandaji demanded a receipt saying, "Raja Maharaj has asked me to take a receipt from you."

"Oh! Acchha, all right. I will give," said Sashi Maharaj.

Because Raja Maharaj was there, Sashi Maharaj went on spending money. He did not know how much he was spending. After Raja Maharaj left Madras, he asked Vishuddhanandaji, "What is the amount that you have given me?"

Vishuddhanandaji replied, "Some 2000 rupees or something like that."

"What! 2000 rupees you have given me. It cannot be so much," remarked Sashi Maharaj.

Then Vishuddhanandaji brought out all the receipts. Sashi Maharaj in reply said laughingly, "So Raja Maharaj has saved you. He asked to take receipts from me. Otherwise, you would have been in a difficult condition today. See how Raja Maharaj saved you."

At that time, the book *Inspired Talks* was published. The book had to be sent for review and Raja Maharaj asked Sashi Maharaj to send a copy to the *Bombay Chronicle* also. Sashi Maharaj said, "What is the use of sending to *Bombay Chronicle*? Send it to *The Hindu* that will be sufficient." And actually he did not send it to the *Bombay Chronicle*. Raja Maharaj got very much upset. He kept quiet. Sashi Maharaj found that Raja Maharaj was rather cool when he went to see him. He would not call him. Even when he made Pranams, he did not say anything. He was indifferent to the existence of Sashi Maharaj in the Ashrama. Sashi Maharaj slowly found out that the reason was that he did not send the copy of the book to the *Bombay Chronicle* for



review. Such was the great love between the two that one day Sashi Maharaj said, "Well Raja, I thought you were great and noble, but now I see you are very small-minded. Am I equal to you that you should fight with me and you should get angry with me? You should fight with your equal, and not with me. You can create any number of Sashis by your mere will." Raja Maharaj said, "No, no Sashi. Don't get worried—nothing has happened."

Once when Sashi Maharaj came to Belur Math, he found Raja Maharaj meditating. At that time Madras Mail used to come to Howrah at about 10 O'clock. By the time Sashi Maharaj came to Belur Math it was 11 O'clock. He found Raja Maharaj still meditating. Sashi Maharaj went inside the room and gave him a good jerk, and said, "You don't require any meditation", and made him get up from his seat. No one would have been able to do it. Only Sashi Maharaj could do it.

Raja Maharaj used to sit for meditation at 4 O'clock every morning after the Mangal-arati. He would come and sit on the Ganges side of the upstairs verandah at Belur Math where all would meditate in front of him; and after meditation, the talks etc. would last up to 7 O'clock and Baburam Maharaj would find that there was no one to dress vegetables. All were upstairs. Then he would say from downstairs to Raja Maharaj, "Well Raja, is there going to be any Bhog to Thakur or not?" Maharaj would say, "Baburam is getting angry; go, go."

He did not like particular persons. He seemed to be allergic to some persons. When he was in Madras, one person wanted to see him and he would always avoid. Now what happened was that the friend of this person was a devotee of our Mission and also a great friend of the Secretary, Ramaswamy Aiyengar. Whenever this person used to come with Ramaswamy Aiyengar to the

Math, Maharaj used to always receive him cordially. But one day when he came in the morning, Raja Maharaj refused to see him and asked him to come some other day. Ramaswamy Aiyengar went and told Maharaj that his friend had come. Maharaj replied, "Today I am feeling rather indisposed. Please ask him to come some other day." So, Ramaswamy Aiyengar went and told his friend that Maharaj was feeling indisposed and asked him to come on another day. Immediately after he left, another car came in and the person inside the car was the one whom Raja Maharaj avoided. The person enquired, "Is Mr. so and so here?" Ramaswamy Aiyengar replied, "He had come, but has just left." The person returned disappointed. Perhaps that was the arrangement between the two that both of them would arrive at the same time to the Math and the devotee who was free with Raja Maharaj would take the other person also with him to Raja Maharaj so that Raja Maharaj may not avoid that person. Raja Maharaj seemed to have a premonition of this arrangement and so he cut it at the very root by refusing to see the devotee which never happened before. He was always received cordially except on that day.

One person was going to an Ashrama in the North where Maharaj was staying at that time. Maharaj saw him from a distance and found that he was coming towards the Ashrama. Now Maharaj did not like him. So he went inside and lay down in his bed and said to his attendant, "I am shivering with fever; put blankets on me and press me." His attendant covered him with blankets, but still he was shivering. It was like the malarial fever and his whole body was shaking. The attendant came out and said to the person who had come to see Maharaj, "You cannot see him today. He is sick." So the person had to go back. After he went away, Maharaj enquired, "Has



the devotee left?" When he heard that the devotee had gone there was no fever, he sat up and asked for a smoke. Now actually he was having fever, his whole body was shaking even after covering him with two blankets. How he got ill suddenly and how he recovered is a mystery. But it is a fact that the person's arrival was the cause of his fever and his departure cured him.

When he was at Benares there happened to be a Bhandara in another Ashrama. One Swamiji visited the different Ashramas in the city issuing invitations for the Samashti Bhandara i.e. all Sadhus in every Ashrama were invited. When he came to our Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama he asked the local Head, "Swamiji, how many tickets are needed?" Normally it used to be seven or eight, but on this occasion as Raja Maharaj was there, there were many Sadhus present. So the Head asked for 50 tickets which took the other Swami by surprise. So much so, he asked the Head, "Are there so many Sadhus?" Our Head replied, "Of course". The Swami gave 50 tickets and went away. On the Bhandara day the local Head asked all the Sadhus to go. But most of them refused to go. Because Maharaj was there, they all wanted to be with him and did not like to go to Bhandara. This put the Head in an embarrassing position. So he told Maharaj, "I took 50 cards for the Bhandara, because so many Sadhus are here. But everybody has refused to go. I am not able to send even one. So what is my position?" Maharaj said, "All right, give the Bell." The bell used to be given when Maharaj wanted all the Sadhus of both the Ashramas to be present before him. So, the bell was given and everybody assembled in the courtyard below Maharaj's room and Maharaj was standing. He said, "Fall in a line ; fall in a line : " and all stood in a line. Then he told them, "Count one, two, three ... " Then one by one they began counting saying, "one, two, three ... "

When it came up to 50, he said "Stop, right about turn and march. Go to Bhandara." So, all the 50 people went to the Bhandara. He was very funny in this respect.

On his birthday, he was decorated very nicely with flower garlands, flower crown, etc. Next day, he asked all of us to take all those things and put them on Swami Shuddhanandaji, and do Kirtan around him. As Swami Shuddhanandaji was sitting in the courtyard, we put all those things on him and decorated him with those flower garlands etc. ; and with Khol and Kartal began to sing Kirtan and dance around him. Then Maharaj came down slowly and saw what was happening and passed by smilingly. Such was the kind of jokes he used to play.

In Madras it once happened that a person brought to Sashi Maharaj variety of sweets on a big plate for offering to Sri Ramakrishna. Sashi Maharaj took that plate to Raja Maharaj and said, "Raja, khao (Raja, eat)". Raja Maharaj said, "I am not keeping well. My stomach has been upset. I have been taking sago from yesterday. You know all this, and still you ask me to take all these rich things." Sashi Maharaj said, "Raja, you are not eating. Thakur is eating through you. So, you can take." Then quietly Raja Maharaj began to take and finished nearly seventy-five per cent of it and nothing happened.

When he was in South India, Sashi Maharaj took him to various temples, particularly to Madurai temple. In South India, they don't allow anybody to go inside the Garbha Mandira where the deity is installed. Except the Pujari, nobody goes inside. Now, Sashi Maharaj wanted to take Raja Maharaj inside, but he knew if the Sannyasins would go, they would question to what caste they belonged. Raja Maharaj was a Kayastha and that was the difficulty. So, what Sashi Maharaj did was that he took Raja Maharaj saying, "Alwar, Alwar!" There are great saints among the Vaishnavas and



the Saivas called Alvars and Nayanars. Alvars belong to the Vaishnava sect and Nayanars belong to the Saiva sect. So, when Sashi Maharaj took Raja Maharaj inside (both of them were bulky figures) he said, "Alwar, Alwar". Nobody protested. Sashi Maharaj took Raja Maharaj right in front of the Mother's image and made him seated there. In a moment Raja Maharaj went into a trance before the Mother and seeing all this, the Pujari who was inside stood mute like a stone image looking at Maharaj. That is how Sashi Maharaj took him inside the temple.

I think it was at Benares that Raja Maharaj found an old man coming and taking his seat before anybody else came for the Ram Nam and when it was over, he was the last person to leave the place. Maharaj came to understand that he was Mahavir Hanuman. From that day onwards he arranged for another Asana (seat) for the guest Mahavir.

In the Tirupati temple, he went inside, had darshan and everything. Ramu was with him. He enquired of Ramu, "What temple is this?" Ramu replied, "It is a Vishnu temple started by Sir Ramanuja." Raja Maharaj said, "I don't understand. I had a vision of Mother, and not of Vishnu. So what is the matter? How this has happened?" Then Ramu made enquiries, and found that Tirupati was originally a Mother's temple and Puja conducted there also shows that the original deity was the Mother. Even the Pujari accepted this and told the gentleman, "Yes, this was the Mother's temple. It was converted into a Vishnu Temple by Ramanuja." This is how the history goes. In India the temples are the fortresses, as it were, and they change the deities, change hands from one sect to another. This is the history of our cultural evolution. Only Raja Maharaj could understand by his vision that it was the Mother's temple.

After Swamiji's passing away, the Holy Mother did not come to Belur Math for many years. So Raja Maharaj one day requested her to visit the Math.

I am not sure, but some say, it is during the Durga Puja, Maharaj made elaborate arrangements to receive the Holy Mother from the southern gate to the shrine. At that time, that was the main entrance. From there, he gave red-carpet reception to Mother. From there she went to the upstairs shrine and then to Mahapurush Maharaj's room. Many of you have been to Belur and you must be knowing in which room Mahapurush Maharaj was staying—near the big window, there is a small verandah. It was not there previously. It was added afterwards for the convenience of Mahapurush Maharaj. Mother sat near the window which was as large as a door, and she was watching the courtyard where the Kirtan was going on. After sometime, there was dancing in the courtyard and Maharaj was also dancing. He was losing his balance—he was in a trance and was about to fall. Baburam Maharaj caught hold of him and brought him inside the room on the ground floor below the room in the first floor which is on the western side of Swamiji's room. He was made to lie down. He did not regain consciousness for a long time. Someone went and told Mother. Then Mother came and touched his chest. After her touching, he came to consciousness. Some say, of course, that she gave Prasad to him and slowly he regained consciousness. Anyway, Mother said, "There is no wonder that Rakhal went into a trance while dancing, for I saw Thakur dancing behind him."

There was one Swami who was in Buenos Aires for a long time. He has passed away. He was at Benares when Maharaj was there. His name was Pashupati. One day Maharaj asked, "Pashupati, have you seen Tilabandeswar?" He was not able to under-



stand at first. Tilabhandeswar Siva is a very big 'lingam' and this person was very fat. So, he said, "Have you seen Tilabhandeswar?" Then all laughed. Pashupati also understood and he too laughed and Maharaj remarked, "Late understanding".

## SPIRITUAL LIFE: ITS CONDITIONS AND PITFALLS

SWAMI SHRADDHANANDA

The 'ancient highway'<sup>1</sup> extending from man to God cannot be compared to an American non-stop 'freeway'. This subtle inner path has many stops and degrees of grading. In some areas it is level and smooth and in other regions it passes through difficult terrains of dirt and gravel. Its course may run through the outstretches of desert or along the narrow curves and bends of precipitous mountains. In spite of all these obstructions, we have to journey determinedly along this great road leading to God.

Fortunately, all along this path are found rest stops equipped with replenishing fuel, roadmaps, and guides experienced in the nature of travel who give correct directions and assist in safe arrivals. Ancient is this way of spirituality and glittering with bright hopes, but it is also frightening with dark pitfalls. It is a difficult but glorious road to climb. Those who have succeeded on this path offer encouragement with no uncertainty to proceed patiently and

cautiously and never to ignore the directions. They assert that we can make it, we *can* reach the goal, we can *know* God in this very life!

The highways and by-ways of ordinary life run on in circles—they seem to lead to nowhere. When the realization of the limitations of the treadmill of worldly existence and the futility of worldly pursuits takes hold of the seeking mind, it ignites the flame of spiritual enquiry. A restless yearning for truth and the fulfilment of happiness, an intense desire to understand love's deepest meaning, the fear of death, the apparent elusiveness of God, the contradictory nature of life's experiences—these urge us on to spiritual awakening.

What is spiritual life? A life centred in God. It is not an unusual life. According to the attitudes developed and the manner in which we live, our life on earth can be spiritual or non-spiritual. We are spiritual when the Divine enters our thoughts, actions, desires, emotions and aspirations. Then He is not distant or theoretical, but a living true God guiding our lives. Not understanding clearly the meaning of spiritual life is the first pitfall on the path.

A few basic requirements are necessary for deep and effective spiritual living. First is the faith that the goal sought after does exist, that there is a supreme unchanging Truth—a Reality which is the foundation and operative power of everything. We have to believe that at the back of the

1. अणुः पन्था विततः पुराणो  
मां स्पृष्टोऽनुवित्तो मयैव ।  
तेन धीरा अपियन्ति ब्रह्मविदः  
स्वर्गं लोकमित ऊर्ध्वं विमुक्ताः ॥

'The subtle, extensive, ancient way has touched me. (Nay) I have realized it myself. Through that sages—the knowers of Brahman—(also) go to the heavenly sphere (liberation) after the fall of his body, being freed (even while living).'

*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.4.8.

flux and contradiction in this world, including our own life, there is a cosmic intelligence, love and unity which is God.

Though difficult to see at an early stage, it is necessary to believe that this Reality, which is God, can be experienced here and now. He is the supreme object of our love, our everlasting friend and companion. Somehow we have to grow and strengthen this faith. Let us take an example. In the city of Jerusalem Jesus Christ walked teaching and consoling people and changing their lives; it was there that the final scenes of his life on earth were enacted. Faithful Christians everywhere hope to visit this Holy Land and, even though they have not seen it, they never deny its existence. They know that many people have been to Jerusalem. In the same way, as we put our feet on the spiritual path, let us have this confidence that although God is not yet visible, He is only some distance away—He can be experienced as many fortunate men and women through the ages have found Him in their lives.

The nature of God should remain an open question. Infinite, He manifests Himself in endless ways. The approaches to His nature are various. He is impersonal—without name or form; or Personal—with a Cosmic Personality. He can be given many names and can have many forms. He can come down to man as Avatars (Divine Incarnations) like Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Jesus Christ, Buddha. It is best not to be caught in a dogma about God. Let everyone have his own conception of Him. The Upaniṣads tell us that Brahman is both Nirguṇa (without attributes) and Saguṇa (with attributes)—man can experience God on both these levels.

Spiritual life is difficult for those who are lacking in faith. How to acquire faith? Amid all the doubts and confusions surrounding the existence of God, spiritual teachers reply: 'Through holy company'.

Seek those who are living in direct experience of God. In the lives of these persons we witness the proof of God's limitless knowledge and love. Our weak notions become enlivened by holy company.

Holy company also includes the reading of the scriptures of all religions which are the records of direct spiritual experiences of holy men and women. When we read the Upaniṣads, the Gītā, the Bible, and the sacred books of all religions we catch a glimpse of truths which are not the usual truths of this material world. They are spiritual truths. They speak of the harmony, joy, peace and strength of spiritual life. When we read these accounts in the scriptures our faith grows.

Faith of another type is also necessary. It is the faith in ourselves. Swami Vivekananda would say, 'First develop faith in yourself, then faith in God will come.' If doubt comes, limiting our capabilities, we have to do away with it! Doubt is weakness, an obstruction in spiritual life, a serious pitfall. On the surface man evidently is very limited. His mind, body and energy have limitations, but power and knowledge can be *developed*. Great potentialities are there deep within the recesses of the mind. Man has a hidden insight, an intuition, by which he can rise to the spiritual level and eventually reach the ultimate destination of life—realization of God. So, we should always be careful as to whether our faith, both objective and subjective, is being maintained.

A living and loving interest in the spiritual scheme of life is an essential requirement. A joyful enthusiastic attitude while actively following the guidelines prescribed is necessary to free oneself from mundane distractions and temptations and develop purity of character. Really speaking, the Self, the most essential truth of man, is ever pure and is a spark of the Divine. Of course we make mistakes, but



these indirectly help us search for truth and so we should never brood over them. Let us exercise caution and let us not again commit these errors—this is a healthy attitude. With the attainment of pure character undesirable distractions lose their hold on us. We develop an attitude of renunciation, and more and more feel in our heart and mind the Lord's presence. Renunciation is a spiritual attitude. It is not the abandonment of home, family, children, education or job in order to seek the Ultimate. Rather, renunciation is a joyful disregard for undesirable attachments for the sake of God. The heart will be made pure with the development of this attitude, and, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God'.

The spiritual seeker should be on the alert for the unripe ego seeking its expression. The 'I-am-so and so' attitude, devoid of spiritual content and affiliation, should be transformed into the attitude of the ripe ego as 'I am God's child, I belong to him, I am what I am due to His Grace.'

Every person is normally very much attached to his or her ego—and thinks, 'I have done this, I possess this, I am that' and so on. There is some joy in this feeling of the ego, but when we come to spiritual life we have to give up this false joy. If there is too much of this ego, it will obstruct our spiritual journey. Since we cannot give it up altogether, it has to be given a spiritual colour. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'There are two kinds of ego—the unripe ego and the ripe ego.' Our lives will become spiritual, pure and fearless, when this unripe or lower ego is subdued and transformed into the ripe or higher ego which says: 'Not I, but Thou'.

We must have a clear understanding of the different spiritual practices which will assist in our spiritual development. Regularity in meditation, prayer, repetition of the Holy Name, contemplation and spiritual

studies are very much necessary. Only earnest seekers will succeed, there is no room for triviality here. Non-attentiveness to a regular routine of spiritual practice is an impediment on the Way. The quality of our application in these practices determines the nature and course of our progress. No one can succeed without patience and perseverance.

We should avoid the possibility of despair and confusion by seeking guidance from experienced persons and by reading the 'roadmaps'. Every phase of life requires guidance, both practical and spiritual. So in order to proceed along the 'highway' safely it is best to stop now and then and seek instruction from an experienced guide rather than push on blindly. Too much pride in ourselves and unwillingness to learn from others is a stumbling roadblock.

Another pitfall is our impatience. After hearing or reading about the blessings of spiritual life we become eager to have those experiences immediately! We begin practising some meditation for one or two weeks; nothing remarkable happens and we feel frustrated. Then doubt comes and we impatiently say, 'Oh, let us try another method'. This is a wrong attitude, a serious obstruction. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'If you want to dig a well, you have to dig in one and that same place, deeper and deeper.' Upon receiving proper instructions from an experienced teacher, we should carry on our spiritual practice with great care and persistence.

Our interest in spiritual life should be genuine and deep, not superficial or shallow. A superficial mind can not consistently adhere to anything. He may have some little experience and then thinks, 'Well, that is enough'; but he is only fooling himself. Our purpose cannot have depth and sincerity if attachment to sense pleasure exists. The mind will remain on the level of *tamas* and *rajas* leading it restlessly

outward. With the calmness of *sattva* the wild horses of the senses can be tamed and quieted by developing self-control. Lack of self-control is another pitfall, and we should make a regular practice of 'watchfulness' over the senses.

Watchfulness can be achieved by stepping back from the senses. Try to separate yourself from them. Observe and watch the senses reaching outward like tentacles extending in all directions, fastening themselves on this object or that, impelled by desire after desire, and returning to the depository of the mind. Through an awareness of the movements of the mind we can filter out non-spiritual thoughts and ideas before they strike root and contaminate the mind. We can get out of undesirable predicament by observing what is approaching the door of the mind through the senses.

Another obstruction is vain argumentation—too much intellectualism. Spiritual life is experience, it is not words or arguments. On an academic level it is a different issue, like taking a college course in religious philosophy. There we seek

information and reason out ideas necessary for the writing of an article or a book. But for our own personal spiritual experience we do not need very much information or too much argumentation.

When these spiritual practices become fruitful parts of our lives, and when some real advancement becomes noticeable, a particular pitfall must be avoided: the reappearance of that villain—the vain ego! The vain ego will enter, take the platform, demand applause and claim: 'I am such a remarkable fellow. Everyone notices how special I am.' We should be on the watch for the resurgence of this kind of egoism.

So, these are some of the roadblocks that can be expected along the spiritual way. Let us be conscious that these pitfalls are there, but we need not be fearful. We have only to be cautious and prepared. If we have intense faith and are humble, sincere and patient, we need not be afraid of any pitfalls. Spiritual path is a sure path. It will lead us to our destination, namely God, even in this life.

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## PHILOSOPHIZING ON FAILURE

SWAMI NITYABODHANANDA

Man philosophizes as he lives. He may philosophize well or ill, but philosophize he must.

Philosophizing without being a philosopher is an art from which we may all benefit when the art is practised in the field of failure, the result may be a harvest rich in wisdom: loss is transformed into gain.

In this enquiry we are helped by the presence of the opposite of failure: success, with whom a dialogue may be held. On the neutral territory which separates today's failure and tomorrow's success, we engage

in a dialogue of opposites and gain new ground. I say 'neutral' because it is unoccupied territory, which may be claimed by anyone. The irrational or the supra-rational, which we often name 'chance', may intervene here, playing a role sometimes favourable, sometimes unfavourable.

Hillary, the conqueror of Everest succeeded. Before him, Mallory, another genius of the mountain, had failed. Both took the same path. The successful one gained a little more on neutral territory. Obviously Hillary learnt a great deal from



Mallory's failure. Mallory may philosophize in this vein, 'Hillary and I are not two: Hillary is another me, for my defeat is a component of his victory. I consider my failure and his success as my own past and present'.

In the course of our lives we are often Mallory and Hillary. It is for us to philosophize with regard to failure and success.

Surely our existence implies the idea of the continuity of the self through time. In other words, does it not seem that existence involves more than the present; that it is to say, permanence? The realization of the Self necessitates bringing two elements face to face: *action* and my *potential*. That which is potential is realized through action, thereafter action is confirmed as potential energy. Throughout the course of our life, then, there is no such thing as a vacuum, but always *action* and *potential*.

The neutral ground between today's failure and tomorrow's success is occupied by action and potential certainty. In other words, the distance between 'I am here and I want to be there' is covered by our aspiration. Should the irrational intervene, we are in a position to manipulate it, for the neutral territory is in our hands and yields itself to our authority.

Does any real criterion for measuring success and failure exist?

We are forced to conclude that there is none, for the experience of the one, as of the other, is purely personal and subjective.

A writer may be famous and yet not view his work with complete satisfaction. A champion skier does not give up the competition in the face of defeat. The latter may philosophize and consider defeat as a small success, and conclude that he has advanced from a small success to a greater one. For the writer, the ideal that lives in him is more important than the material realization embodied in his work. The

constant gap between the ideal and the actual forces him to continue without halting or stagnating in self-satisfaction.

In both cases, the action is constant and perpetual. Therefore, instead of using the term 'gap' it would be more appropriate to say 'interval'. The interval is the temporal distance which may be reduced, minimized with the help of our inner strength.

Becoming conscious of the interval between failure and success, man summons his strength and reaches out to grasp success. The interval is dynamic, for it urges us to action. Between the failure of today and the success of tomorrow there is interval, reciprocity, exchange.

For my future success I must seek to perfect my creative thought and my method of action. My dynamic ability will depend entirely upon my inner conviction of possessing sufficient resources to overcome failure.

It is here that patience comes on the stage of the human drama. Patience is needed to make the best of our resources. Patience in this case is not linked with suffering, but with *ability, competence*. As I know that I am competent to carry out the task that I have undertaken, I work with patience to substantiate my ability. In this way the temporal distance, the interval between failure and success is encompassed by my expanding ability.

Established in this faculty, I become skilled in understanding the equivalence, or the equilibrium of forces of the opposites: failure in the left hand and success in the right. Living with the equivalence of opposites is to restore to creative thought its englobing or encompassing ability.

Witness the Gita definition of the sage who possesses the encompassing faculty. 'Serene between the extremes of hot and cold, equanimous before agreeable and disagreeable alike, the sage is complete and

immovable, unshaken by failure'. Upon the neutral zone within him, he directs his attention towards that measure of success acquired in the past. Thanks to the plasticity of the self, he is able to live by and in the equivalence of opposites. However, to live in this position is not a lasting situation. Even the sage may be assailed by conflicts and doubts. He needs to call forth his strength and spiritual certainty at every instant. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* says so meaningfully that he who walks on the path of Truth is walking on the razor's edge.

The art and faculty of directing the pendulum of our attention continually to the positive side, belongs to us all... Our own will and wisdom may bring us nearer to the ideal of the sage.

Had the divine Being been nothing but one, neither failure nor success would have existed. Inspired by love He chose to manifest Himself as the many, so creating the world of duality. By this gesture of love the divine Being ordained that man, having been tested by confrontation with duality, should be victorious. When man suffers, God suffers with him. Man's failure is God's failure, man's success is God's success. Through the power of love which the divine Being has placed in man, he can know himself and can encompass

the opposites, failure and success, and realize the unity of Love-Knowledge.

The philosophy of failure, as set out above, is not an arm-chair philosophy. It impels us to action within and in the outer environment. It inspires the mobilization of our latent forces as prescribed by the three yogas, Karma, Jnana and Bhakti, for life's fulfilment.

The champion skier who continues the competition in spite of defeat and the renowned writer who does not bask in self-satisfaction, both are symbols of the ideal of Karma-yoga.

That the distance, the interval, between the failure of today and the success of tomorrow can be bridged by action and the potential certainty in us is the voice of wisdom coming from the Atman-Self. To know the Atman partially or totally is to know this competence of the Self to bridge the gulf. The essentials of the Jnana-yoga are enshrined in this teaching.

Impelled by love the Unique divine chose to manifest Himself as the many; the emanation as the world of duality (success and failure). Through the power of the same love that dwells in his heart, man can unite opposites and overcome duality, thus fulfilling the divine intention. This is the essence of the yoga of love, Bhakti-yoga.



# SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND ISLAM

(Illustrated)

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

On Friday, 7 September 1883, Sri Ramakrishna was seated in his room at Dakshineswar with his devotees, reminiscing about his earlier spiritual experiences. He said :

One day I had the vision of Consciousness, non-dual and indivisible. At first it had been revealed to me that there were innumerable men, animals, and other creatures. Among them were aristocrats, the English, Mussalmans, myself, scavengers, dogs, and also a bearded Mussalman with an earthenware tray of rice in his hand. He put a few grains of rice into everybody's mouth. I too tasted a little.<sup>1</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna narrated the same experience again on 12 April 1885 as follows :

How many other visions I saw ! But I am not permitted to tell them. Someone is shutting my mouth, as it were. I used to find no distinction between the sacred *tulsi* and the insignificant *sajina* leaf. The feeling of distinction was entirely destroyed. Once I was meditating under the banyan tree when I was shown a Mussalman with a long beard. He came to me with rice in an earthen plate. He fed some other Mussalmans with the rice and also gave me a few grains to eat. The Master showed me that there exists only One, and not two. It is Satchidananda alone that has taken all these various forms ; He alone has become the world and its living beings. Again, it is He who has become food.<sup>2</sup>

The above experience which the Master had in the course of his practice of Islamic *sādhana* is a unique event in the history of religion. Apart from its mystical significance and theological interest, it has opened

a new vista for all-embracing brotherhood on the social level and an all-inclusive harmony of religions.

Although born and brought up in an orthodox Brahmin family, Sri Ramakrishna practised all religions. The desire to realize the ultimate Truth in different religious traditions led him to the practice of the spiritual disciplines of Islam, Christianity etc. He not only utilized their techniques of worship and meditation but also followed their ways of life, acquired their frames of mind, thought their thoughts and realized the highest truths cherished by them. Thereby he experientially proved that the different religions of the world are but different paths leading to the same ultimate Reality. He was neither a syncretist nor an eclectic, but the prophet of a new way of harmonizing world religions on the basis of some universally valid common principles without ignoring the uniqueness of the values and customs of every tradition. This great achievement of the Master which holds immense possibilities for mankind has created a stir among thoughtful people the world over. But owing to negligence, nearsightedness or indifference, it has not received the attention and study that it deserves. In this essay we shall try to analyse Sri Ramakrishna's practice of Islam and his experiences therein, and also to point out their implications.

Soon after the end of Sri Ramakrishna's continuous absorption for six months in *nirvikalpa samādhi*, he devoted himself to the practice of Islamic mysticism. This was a radical departure from the more traditional forms of Hindu *sādhana* which he had been practising for twelve long years.

1. 'M', The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. Translated by Swami Nikhilananda. (Madras: Ramakrishna Math. 1974) p. 222. (Henceforth 'Gospel'.)

2. Gospel. p. 723.

One might think that by that time his mind had been solidly cast in an unbreakable mould, but just the opposite was the case. Having realized the unity of existence through his monistic experience, he transcended all strictures of caste, creed and ceremony and became the embodiment of catholicity. Sri Ramakrishna made no difference between the Hindu, the Christian and the Muslim, and was able to move freely among all.

But the spirit of universal acceptance is not enough to explain the purpose and significance of the Master's practice of Islam and other religions. For that we have to take into account his unique disposition of mind that sought variety in religious experience. His 'taste' for things spiritual was unlimited, and could not be contained or satisfied within the sectarian bounds of any religion. About this he said, 'Do you know my attitude? I love all the preparations of fish. I have a womanly nature ... I feel myself at home with every dish—fried fish, fish cooked with turmeric powder, pickled fish. And further, I equally relish rich preparations like fish-head, *kalia* and pilau.'<sup>3</sup> Defending his attitude, he explained the rationale of his approach to 'M'; 'Let me tell you one thing. In a game of *satrancha* a piece can't reach the centre square until it completes the circle; but once in the square it can't be overtaken by any other piece.' His precepts were but the reflections of what he had realized in his life. He said, 'I had to practise each religion for a time—Hinduism, Islam, Christianity. Furthermore, I followed the path of the Śāktas, Vaishnavas, and Vedantists. I realized that there is only one God toward whom all are travelling; but the paths are different.'<sup>4</sup>

Swami Saradananda has fixed 1866-67

(B. S. 1273) as the year when Sri Ramakrishna practised Islam, whereas Sashibhusan Ghosh places it in B. S. 1275 (1868-69). Circumstantial evidences, however, support the former view. Romain Rolland too accepted the end of 1866 as the period when Sri Ramakrishna started on it. The Master was then only thirty.

Sri Ramakrishna's teacher in Islamic devotion was the Sufi mystic Govinda Rai<sup>5</sup> of Dumdum.<sup>6</sup> Sri Ramakrishna's biographer Swami Saradananda writes about Govinda Rai :

Hriday said that he was a Kshatriya<sup>7</sup> by birth. He was perhaps learned in Persian and Arabic. Having studied various religious doctrines and come into contact with different religious communities, he was at last attracted by the liberal doctrine of Islam and was formally initiated into it. Govinda accepted the Islamic faith thirsting for religion, but we cannot say how far he followed its social manners and customs. But, since he became initiated, he, we are told, engaged himself ardently in the reading of the Koran and in religious practices according to the process prescribed by that scripture. Govinda was an ardent lover of God. The method of worshipping God according to the teaching and mental attitude prevalent among the Sufis, followers of a sect of Islam, seems to have occupied his

5. Some have alleged that Govinda Rai was not a Muslim. Nalini Devdas writes, '...nor did he (Sri Ramakrishna) study Islam from a Muslim teacher. Govinda Ray, a Hindu deeply influenced by Sufi mysticism, introduced him to Islam.' *Sri Ramakrishna* (Bangalore: The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society.) p. 25. This is far from true.

6. Akshay Kumar Sen: *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi* (Bengali), (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office.) p. 117. According to Sashibhusan Ghosh, Govinda Rai lived at some place near Dumdum. See *Sri Ramakrishna Deva* (Bengali). p. 317.

7. According to Sashibhusan Ghosh, Govinda Rai belonged to the *Kaibarta* caste.

3. Gospel. p. 520.

4. Gospel. p. 57.



mind ; for, he now became engaged day and night in practising devotional moods like the Dervishes, the devotees belonging to that sect.<sup>8</sup>

Hriday also tells us that Govinda Rai had made the Kali temple at Dakshineswar his temporary home, accepting its hospitality and meditating under the shade of the Panchavati. Govinda Rai's Islamic name was Wajed Ali Khan.<sup>9</sup>

Among the Indian Muslims there are three major sects : Shiya, Sunni and Sufi. The Sunnis are the largest in number whereas the Sufis are close to the Vedanta of the Hindus. According to liberal scholars, Sufis represent the mystical tradition of Islam but the 'fundamentalists' consider the Sufis a heretic fringe sect. A Sufi studies the life of Muhammad (*sira*) to comprehend his code of conduct (*sunna*), and to be intimate with the traditions (*hadith*) handed down from generation to generation. The Koran is the first pillar and the *hadith* is the second. The third pillar demands of a Sufi that he diligently try to imitate the *auliya* (friends of God, the saints) and learn how these holy men conduct themselves. He must commit to mind and heart the words of wisdom and sanctity, and songs of devotion and heavenly love. A Sufi living a life of sincere obedience to the Will of God passes through the various states (*ahwāl*) and stages (*maqāmāt*) of the spiritual pilgrimage. A successful Sufi hopes to have a glimpse of immortality even in this mortal life by passing away from self (*fanā*) into the consciousness of survival in God (*baqā*). After death and judgement he aspires to dwell forever with the angels and

prophets in the blissful Presence of the Almighty.<sup>10</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna was attracted towards the humble and devout Sufi Govinda Rai who remained absorbed in his prayers at the Panchavati. Being charmed by the latter's sincere faith in and love for Allah, he felt a spontaneous urge to worship God in this way also. It is not known if he had received permission from the Divine Mother, as he had for his Tantric and Advaitic *sādhanā*. When he asked Govinda Rai to initiate him, the latter complied gladly.<sup>11</sup> Though we do not have the details of the initiation, it can be safely assumed that Sri Ramakrishna had to utter thrice the *Kalimah*, which reads *lā ilāhā illa'llahu : Muhammadun Rasūlu'llah* ('There is no deity but God ; Muhammad is the Apostle of God.') Thus Sri Ramakrishna became a Muslim for the time being, and set his heart and soul to the practice of Islam. Fully equipped with attraction (*injiẓab*), devotion (*ibādah*) and elevation (*uruj*), the three aids<sup>13</sup> necessary for a Sufi for his journey to the temple of the Divine, Sri Ramakrishna could naturally be expected to progress fast in his spiritual practice. But a spiritual virtuoso that he was, he took an incredibly small amount of time, as he did in the case of Tantric disciplines, to attain the highest realization. He later on reminisced :

10. A. J. Arberry: *Sufism* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1950) Pp. 13-14.

11. It was perhaps not a conversion in the traditional sense. Jane I. Smith writes: 'One way to understand it seems to be as conversion not to another tradition, even for a brief period of time, but rather conversion to a different set of circumstances in which to attain to the presence of God.' In Claude Allan Stark *God of All* (Cape Cod, Mass. Claude Stark, 1974) p. 183. ,

12. Thomas Patrick Hughes: *Dictionary of Islam*. p. 261.

13. *Dictionary of Islam*, p. 609.

8. Swami Saradananda: *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math) p. 259. (Henceforth, *The Great Master*).

9. Kalijiban Debasharma: *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilabhidhan* (Bengali). (Calcutta: Karuna Prakashani). p. 74.



I then devotionally repeated the holy syllable 'Allah', wore cloth like the Muslim, said Namaz thrice<sup>14</sup> daily and felt disinclined even to see Hindu deities, not to speak of saluting them, in as much as the Hindu mode of thought vanished altogether from my mind. I spent three days in that mood, and had the full realization of the result of practices according to that faith.<sup>15</sup>

Curiously enough, Sri Ramakrishna underwent such a total transformation of his mental structure during the practice of Islam that he did not even once enter the inner courtyard of the Kali temple but lived in the *Kuthibāri* (bungalow) of Mathuranath, from where he had the pictures of Hindu gods and goddesses removed.<sup>16</sup> He deliberately blotted out the thought of even Mother Kali. It has been said that he was 'ready to eat forbidden food'. A horrified Mathuranath begged him to desist from this and, as a compromise, had food prepared by a Brahmin under the direction of a Muslim. Sri Ramakrishna's behaviour, apparently like that of a bigoted Muslim during this period, sprang from his steadfast devotion to the Islamic spiritual practices. It reveals his extraordinary sincerity and earnestness. He was not a dogmatist who says, 'My religion alone is true, and the religions of others are false.'

We hear Sri Ramakrishna telling Naren and other devotees on 28 September 1884, 'I received the Allah mantra from Govinda Rai. Rice with onions was cooked for me in the bungalow (*Kuthibāri*). I ate some.'<sup>17</sup> During these three days of worship of God as Allah, the compassionate Ruler of the Universe, he would frequently dive deep into the ecstatic mood while uttering 'Allah'

14. A Muslim normally offers Namaz five times. They are called Fajar, Zoher, Asar, Magrib and Isha. The Sufis usually offer Namaz three times combining Zoher and Asar, and Magrib and Isha.

15. *The Great Master*, p. 260.

16. *Sri Sri Ramakrishnacharit* (Bengali), p. 80.

17. *Gospel*, p. 526.

and would have the vision of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>18</sup>

From Hriday, nephew of Sri Ramakrishna, it is learnt that during the period of his practice of Islam, Sri Ramakrishna went to the nearby mosque one day and said his Namaz.

Another version of the same incident can be seen in *Śrī Rāmākṣṇa Punthi*.<sup>19</sup> One day Hriday, Sri Ramakrishna's nephew, not finding him in his living room, went out in search of him and found him in a nearby mosque offering his Namaz. Gurudas Burman's *Śrī Śrī Rāmākṣṇacarit*<sup>20</sup> gives an almost similar description. Some additional information has been provided by Ramlal Chattopadhyay, another nephew of Sri Ramakrishna. At a short distance from the main entrance of the Dakshineswar temple there was a mosque, in front of which Sri Ramakrishna was seen one early morning. The caretaker who had come to open the door of the mosque noticed him. Sri Ramakrishna was wearing a cloth in the fashion of the Muslim. Among those who had assembled there for prayer one could readily recognize Sri Ramakrishna. Along with the Muslims Sri Ramakrishna offered the Namaz. Thus he worshipped Allah there for three days.<sup>21</sup>

At 16/9 Trailokyanath Biswas Road is located the mosque, popularly called Mollapara mosque, on a plot of land measuring 0.9 acre as described under dag no. 1679. The picture of the mosque given here shows its present dilapidated condition. The Wakf Commissioner's order dated 1 July 1952 in respect of this mosque (in E. C. No. 12055) mentioned, 'The Wakf estate mosque is associated with the hallowed memory of the great saint Ramakrishna Param Hangsha

18. *Sri Sri Ramakrishnacharit*, Vol. I, p. 81.

19. *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi*, Pp. 120-21.

20. *Sri Sri Ramakrishnacharit*, Vol. I, p. 81.

21. Kamakrishna Mitra: *Sri Ramakrishna O Antaranga Prasanga* (Bengali), p. 2.



Deb and it is reported that he used to cry *azan* in it.' The same order appointed an ad interim *Mutwalli* (caretaker), Janab Seikh Jalal Ahmed and four Hindu gentlemen. The Commissioner of Wakf visited the mosque again on 19 July 1976. In his report the Commissioner wrote, 'Next ... took me to Mollapara mosque, Dakshineswar where Sri Ramakrishna Deb used to perform *Namaz* and cry *azan* and also listened to Holy Quran from a Moulavi for some-time.' This Order appointed an administrative committee of five persons, four Muslims and one Hindu, for 'the purpose of upkeep and management of the Wakf estate appertaining to E. C. No. 12055.'

The present *Mutwalli* of the Mollapara mosque is Arique Hossain, aged 25, whose mother tongue is Urdu. He lives at the Baranagar Jute Mill School quarters, Calcutta-35. This mosque was perhaps established 200 years ago. In Mollapara there lived a large number of Muslim families. But the locality was practically deserted by the Muslims after the communal disturbances there in 1950, and scarcely a Muslim is found there now. The mosque has been enrolled as a Wakf property as per the Commissioner of Wakf's Order dated 1 July 1952.

Another interesting anecdote connected with Sri Ramakrishna and this mosque may be narrated here. One day at the mosque Sri Ramakrishna met with an old Fakir whose moustache, beard and hair all had turned grey. Wearing a gaberdine on his person, a string of glass beads around his neck, and a staff in his hand, the fakir smilingly welcomed Sri Ramakrishna saying 'You have come, very good, very good.' He also blessed Sri Ramakrishna by waving his hand.<sup>22</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna's biographer Swami Saradananda says, 'At the time of practising Islam the Master at first had the vision

of an effulgent impressive personage with a long beard; afterwards he had the knowledge of the all-pervading Brahman with attributes and merged finally in the attributeless Brahman, the Absolute.'<sup>23</sup> Analysing the nature and content of Sri Ramakrishna's Islamic realization just mentioned, one can distinguish three distinct stages or phases. The first has to do with the Personal God with form about which Claude Alan Stark remarks :

It is a matter for speculation only whether the 'radiant Person with long beard and grave appearance' was the Prophet Muhammad himself, one of his companions, or a great Sufi saint who had chosen to maintain separate identity from Allah in a subtle body in order to continue as an instrument of salvation for others, much like the *bodhi-sattvas*, the Christian saints, or the Shikh gurus.<sup>24</sup>

The second stage of his realization refers to the Personal God without form, that is, Sri Ramakrishna's experience of Allah as *Īsvara* or *Saguna Brahman*. It refers to the formless aspect of God yet with name, quality and attributes. The majority of Muslims worship God in this aspect.

The third stage relates to the impersonal aspect of the God-head. In this phase of superconscious experience Sri Ramakrishna merged his identity with that of the Absolute. Naturally this reminds us of the unitive experience of Sufi mystics like al-Hallaj who boldly declared '*ana'l-haqq*' ('I am the truth').

Thus we find that Sri Ramakrishna's Islamic experience involved harmonization

23. *The Great Master*, p. 260.

Kamakhyanath Bandyopadhyay, a contemporary of Sri Ramakrishna, wrote that on seeing this unexpected vision Sri Ramakrishna gave the pursuit of Islam (cf B. N. Bandyopadhyaya and Sajanikanta Das, *Samasamayik Dr̥ṣṭite Sri Ramakṛṣṇa Paramahansa*, p. 106). This is not tenable.

24. *God of All*, p. 75.

22. *Sri Ramakrishna O Antaranga Prasanga*, p. 3.



of three distinct aspects of divinity : the personal God with form, the personal God without form, and the Impersonal. Normally, these aspects of the Reality can be realized by seekers of truth in evolutionary stages only.

An important fact deserves special mention. Contrary to his other visions, the radiant personage with long beard did not merge into the person of Sri Ramakrishna. From this Sri Ramakrishna, according to Baikunthanath Sannyal, came to the conclusion that Muhammad was not an incarnation of God, but a God-sent prophet.<sup>25</sup> This deduction by Sri Sannyal is perhaps not dependable, for every year special offering is made to Muhammad, as the God-incarnate, during worship on Sri Ramakrishna's birthday and this tradition must have had its origin in some authentic statement of the Master accepting Muhammad as an Incarnation.

On the evidence of Swami Saradananda, Govinda Rai, like the other gurus of Sri Ramakrishna, had a new spirit infused into his own religious life. Also, perhaps, he was blessed to realize, through the divine life and power of Sri Ramakrishna, those hidden truths which he had been unable to experience in spite of his *sādhanā*.<sup>26</sup> No details, however, are known, nor is it known when he left Dakshineswar or how he passed the latter part of his life.

We may recall here some more anecdotes connected with Sri Ramakrishna and his practice of Islam.

When he was a child, Gadadhar (Sri Ramakrishna's name in childhood) once travelled in the company of his mother Chandramani to his maternal uncle's home at Sarati Mayapur. On the way the mother

and the child visited the famous *dargah* (sacred tomb) of a *Pir* (Muslim saint) near Sarati Mayapur. (See photo) There the child quietly sat in deep ecstasy for quite sometime.<sup>27</sup>

Again, once Gadadhar, then 9, went alone to witness the *namaz* on the occasion of *Id* at a village near Kamarpukur. On his way, close to the ground of *namaz*, he was standing under a peepul tree (see photo) when he had a divine vision, lost his external consciousness, and remained in that state for two hours and a half.<sup>28</sup>

There is a small mosque, called Geratala mosque (also called Kassem Ismail Madan Wakf mosque) at premises no. 142 and 142A Chittaranjan Avenue, Calcutta, at the northeast corner of the crossing of Chittaranjan Avenue and Mahatma Gandhi Road. It is enrolled under Wakf Commissioner's office on 9 May 1952 under enrolment No. 12057 (See Photo). Its present Mutwallis are Soleman Md. Doplay of 14 Pollock Street and Babubhai Azim Salehji of 19 Amratala Lane, Calcutta. One evening Manmathanath Ghosh, who had visited Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar several times noticed something unusual on the road as he was returning home from his office. Dusk was approaching. One Muslim fakir, standing in front of the Geratala mosque, was calling out in a passionate voice, 'Come my Beloved, Come'. Streams of tears were rolling down his cheeks. Charmed by his divine fervour, Manmatha stood there looking at the fakir when Sri Ramakrishna suddenly appeared on the scene. Sri Ramakrishna was returning from Kalighat temple to Dakshineswar in a carriage in the company of his nephew Ramlal. Getting down from the carriage, Sri Ramakrishna rushed towards the fakir. The two lovingly em-

<sup>25</sup>. Vaikunthanath Sannyal: *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilamrita* (Bengali), (Calcutta: Navapatra Prakashan), p. 37.

<sup>26</sup>. *The Great Master*, p. 539.

<sup>27</sup>. *Sri Ramakrishna Punthi*, p. 12.

<sup>28</sup>. Satyacharan Mitra: *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa* (Bengali). 1897. Pp. 17-18.



braced each other for quite some time.<sup>29</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna steeped in the love of the Divine Mother as he was, had a divine vision which is relevant here. On January 1883 he narrated his experience thus :

My Divine Mother is not only formless, she has forms as well. One can see Her forms. One can behold Her incomparable beauty through feeling and love. The Mother reveals Herself to Her devotees in different forms...She came to me another day as a Mnssalman girl six or seven years old. She had a *tilak* on her forehead and was naked. She walked with me, joking and frisking like a child.<sup>30</sup>

From the reminiscences of Sashibhusan Samanta, son of Pitambarchandra, store-keeper of the Dakshineswar temple, we have another interesting piece of information. It is said that Rani Rasmani was residing in the bungalow (*kuthibāri*), supervising the temple's construction, when one night she saw Baba Gazi Pir (literally, 'a Muslim warrior who later became a saint') in dream. The spirit said : 'I reside under the shade of the peepul tree on the northeast bank of the pond of Gazi. I am adored by Hindus and Muslims alike. Pave my residence with bricks and arrange to daily offer me *sinni* and lamp in the evening. I shall bless you.' Rasmani carried out the behest and appointed a Muslim caretaker for the purpose. Sashibhusan, as a young boy, had seen Sri Ramakrishna visiting the place of Gazi Pir (see photo) every morning and also occasionally in the afternoon and saluting the Gazi Pir. He also offered *sinni* to the Gazi Pir.<sup>31</sup> The Gazi Pir is said to be known as *Alam Gazi Pir* according to the local tradition.

As one of the proofs of the abiding influence of Islamic experience on Sri Ramakrishna's life, we may mention some Mus-

lims among his devotees and admirers. Sashibhusan Samanta mentions the names of some of them. They are : Sheikh Abdul Sobhan, Sheikh Barkutulla, Sheikh Namdar, Sheikh Kamdar, Sheikh Macham Mollah, Sheikh Khatir Mistri and Sheikh Maniraddi. Most of them lived in and around Mollapara. Of them the photos of the first two are given here (See group photos). Again Ramlal, nephew and long-time attendant of Sri Ramakrishna, refers to an old Muslim fakir Ustagar by name. He lived on the northern side of the main entrance of the Dakshineswar Kali temple. He used to call on Sri Ramakrishna now and then. Both of them would take their seats on the northern veranda of Sri Ramakrishna's room and talk about Islam. On hearing the soul-stirring words of Sri Ramakrishna the fakir would sometimes shed tears of joy. On every such visit Sri Ramakrishna used to give him some food to eat. The fakir would accept it with humility, salute him and go back to his cottage.<sup>32</sup>

The anonymous author of the Bengali book '*Sri Sri Ramakrishna-pradarsita Visvajanin Dharma*' published in 1895 mentions an equally interesting incident :

On the occasion of Sri Ramakrishna's visit to our house Amritalal Sarkar, son of Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar brought one Muslim physician to meet Sri Ramakrishna. After observing him for sometime the physician was deeply moved. Though he did not touch Sri Ramakrishna's feet, he vigorously danced with his two hands raised along with others to the accompaniment of music in the courtyard. Later on, he partook of *prasad* and heartily thanked Amritalal for giving him the opportunity of having this kind of an experience.<sup>33</sup>

31. Sashibhusan Samanta: Dakshineswar Mahatirthe Sri Sri Ramakrishna Dever Lilatattva (Bengali), Vol. I, B. S. 1345, p. 4-5.

32. *Udbodhan*, Vol. 13. No: 3. p. 192.

33. Page 31. The author of this article came by this book in the library of Vivekananda Ashrama, Kasundia, Howrah-4.

29. See, Kumud Bandhu Sen: 'Two Episodes' in *Prabuddha Bharata*, September, 1955.

30. *Gospel*, p. 108.



At the request of Ramchandra Dutta, Dr. Abdul Waziz of Satkshira, Khulna (now in Bangladesh), went one morning with his friend Abbas Ali, Deputy Magistrate, to see Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. The visit brought a transformation in the life of Dr. Waziz and he became a staunch admirer of Sri Ramakrishna.<sup>34</sup>

Sri Kumud Bandhu Sen, an old devotee of Belur Math who was well acquainted with all the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, has narrated another incident which reveals the Master's love for the Muslims.

I was returning by bus to Belur Math one evening. On the way a gentleman sitting by my side turned to me and asked. 'Do you, sir, belong to the Sri Ramakrishna Math?' I answered, 'Yes, why, would you like to tell me something?' He started, 'In my childhood I came to learn from my father—who had passed away some years ago—about an incident in connection with Sri Ramakrishna. Something really mysterious. We are Mohammedans, you know, and our homestead was not far from Kamarpukur. We keep a small shop at Chandni in Calcutta. I will now repeat what I learnt from my father's lips:

Economically we belong to the middle class. We had a thatched house and a barn adjacent to it. But due to some evil turn of fate, our house and barn would catch fire every year. This happened not once or twice but several times, and we were terribly worried about it. I was one day relating this sad state of affairs to a Brahmin friend of mine when we saw Sri Ramakrishna passing in a procession along the village road dancing and singing the glories of God. Referring to Sri Ramakrishna my friend said to me, 'Seek the protection of that great soul. He might free you from all your strange plight.' I approached Sri Ramakrishna with great humility and saluted him. He then compassionately asked me, 'What's the matter, my child?' I replied, 'Sir, we are a middle class family and are burdened with too many dependants but, as ill luck would have it, our house and barn invariably catch fire every year. And we are

reduced to paupers. I seek your refuge. Please find some way out.' Sri Ramakrishna inquired where my house was. Pointing it out I said, 'Please see, the ashes are still there.' Sri Ramakrishna then asked the members of his party to wait, and he himself proceeded to the spot along with me. On almost reaching it he asked me to bring some jujubes (a kind of fruit). Taking those jujubes in hand, Sri Ramakrishna asked me to go round the whole area on foot. I started accordingly, and Sri Ramakrishna followed me with those fruits in his hand. He was muttering inaudibly something and would throw the fruits at intervals. When I had covered the whole area I stopped. Sri Ramakrishna asked me if I had completed the round. On my answering him in the affirmative, he left me to join his party. After this never again did our house and barn catch fire and we, for our part, are immensely grateful to Sri Ramakrishna for that.<sup>35</sup>

In fact Sri Ramakrishna mixed with all people irrespective of their caste, creed or station in life, and treated them as if they were his own. His attitude has been very clearly expressed by what he said to the Brahma devotees :

When you mix with people outside your Samaj, love them all. When in their company be one with them. Don't harbour malice toward them. Don't turn up your nose in hatred and say: 'Oh, this man believes in God with form and not in the formless God. That man believes in the formless God and not in God with form. This man is a Christian. This man is a Hindu. And this man is a Mussalman.' It is God alone who makes people see things in different ways. Know that people have different natures. Realize this and mix with them as much as you can. And love all. But enter your own chamber to enjoy peace and bliss.

Lighting the lamp of Knowledge in the chamber of your heart, behold the face of the Mother, Brahman's Embodiment. You can see your true Self only within your own chamber. The cowherds take the cows to graze in the pasture. There the cattle mix. They all form one herd. But on returning to their sheds in the evening

34. See Jnanendranath Biswas: *Yogodyan Mahatmya* (Bengali) Vol. I, (Calcutta: Navabharat Library, B. S. 1384), Pp. 63-72.

35. Kumud Bandhu Sen 'Two Episodes' in *Prabuddha Bharata*, September, 1955.



they are separated. Then each stays by itself in its own stall.<sup>36</sup>

This significant statement not only shows Sri Ramakrishna's relationship with the people of other religions, but also teaches how one can practise the harmony of religions without hampering one's own spiritual growth. The misunderstanding, discord and violence which have at times embittered Hindu-Muslim relationship in India can be permanently resolved only by sincerely practising this advice of the Master.

On the question of Hindu-Muslim relationship Sri Ramakrishna had his own view. He did not dismiss the problem as some well-intentioned liberals do. Admitting the stark reality, he said: 'There is, as it were, a mountain of difference between them. Their thoughts and faiths, actions and behaviour have remained quite unintelligible to one another in spite of their living together for so long a time.'<sup>37</sup> Swami Saradananda thinks that Sri Ramakrishna's practice of Islam has opened a new way for the people of these two alien religions to come close to each other. But how soon? To find out Sri Ramakrishna's answer to this we may refer to one incident. Once Sashi (later Swami Ramakrishnananda) was studying the scriptures of Islam, perhaps with a desire to locate the points of accord between the two religions. Sri Ramakrishna, one day, said to him, 'It will take a long time as yet to achieve the harmony, for there lies a mountain of difference between the two. However, it will be achieved in the future.'<sup>38</sup>

The dilemma of religious plurality, though a serious one, cannot be resolved by theological speculation or by reference to scriptural authority. Sri Ramakrishna, who crossed the boundaries laid down by the

dogmas of faith, culture and practice, arrived at the heart of the problem and found a solution. Based on his own experience he argued:

I see people who talk about religion constantly quarrelling with one another. Hindus. Mussalmans, Brahmos. Vaishnavas, Śaivas, all quarrel with one another. They have not the intelligence to understand that He who is called Krishna is also Śiva and the Primal Śakti, and that it is He again, who is called Jesus and Allah. There is only one Rāma and He has a thousand names.<sup>39</sup>

Though the terms 'Brahman', 'Viṣṇu' and 'Allah' may vary considerably in conceptual orientation, Sri Ramakrishna outstepped the limitations of concepts and thought-forms and directly realized God as He is. This realization, whatever may be the form of that realization—dualistic or non-dualistic—is a solid meeting ground for the people of the two faiths. But over and above the unity of religions, Sri Ramakrishna's overriding concern was for the unity of God and of the approaches to God.<sup>40</sup>

But according to Swami Saradananda, the three facets of Sri Ramakrishna's realization, culminating in the non-dualistic Vedanta, have demonstrated the fact that Hinduism and Islam can be happily united only at the level of non-dualism. But will that be possible? Islam, which is dualistic to most Muslims, will hardly conform to this viewpoint. No less important is the question that has been raised by Jane I. Smith. She writes:

To begin to do justice to the Islamic perspective one must come to terms with the fact that by his own admission Ramakrishna could never affirm the Muslim creed which says that there is no God but Allah. His failure to attest to

36. *Gospel*, p. 604.

37. *The Great Master*, p. 261.

38. *Thakur Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 144.

39. *Gospel*, p. 374.

40. Cf. Jane I. Smith: Sri Ramakrishna's Approach to Religious Plnrality, in *God of All*, p. 188.

this would mean that from the Muslim point of view he had never really participated in the Islamic experience, that he was not a Muslim and could not be one without witnessing to that most basic of credal formulations.<sup>41</sup>

It is of course true that ordinary Muslims may be disappointed to find that Sri Ramakrishna did not even memorize a few hundred verses from the Quran or the *Masnavi* of Rumi. But Sri Ramakrishna dared to cut across the traditional and orthodox bounds of Hinduism to participate in the communion with God through Islamic mysticism. Muslim fundamentalists who do not give enough credence to Sufism are likely to ignore Sri Ramakrishna's Islamic practice and experience. Also it may legitimately be argued that Sri Ramakrishna had not fulfilled the specific social conditions of actually being a Muslim. But no serious student of religion should fail to note the deep significance of Sri Ramakrishna's communion with God in the context of Islam. This is not only unique in the history of hagiography but also offers a welcome solution to the dilemma of religious plurality.

It is also to be noted that Sri Ramakrishna's daring experimentation has drawn appreciation from Islamic scholars too. One such scholar, Muhammad Daud Rahbar, writes :

I pay tribute to Sri Ramakrishna's device to attain intimacy with Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian life. He demonstrated his own kind of desires and overtures, as against other possible ways of going about the enrichment and broadening of experience. He went about in a certain mystical way. It is valid, interesting, and meaningful because its motivation was pure.<sup>42</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna's contact with Islam was not limited to a period of only three days. Besides, his casual contact with Islamic tradition in the early days, his realizations

following his Islamic practices left an abiding influence on his life and teachings.

Sri Ramakrishna's experiences in Hinduism, Christianity and Islam suggest a method and model of dialogue for men and women of divergent religious beliefs and practices. Sri Ramakrishna found out that different religions are paths leading to the same goal, the attainment of everlasting peace. He said, 'All people are seeking the same Truth; the variance is due to climate, temperament and names.' Historical circumstances led to the development of different religions, and also to the accumulation of error and superstition in them. Sri Ramakrishna used to say,

Mother, everyone says, 'My watch alone is right.' The Christians, the Brahmos, the Hindus, the Muslims, all say, 'My religion alone is true.' But Mother, the fact is that nobody's watch is right. Who can truly understand Thee? But if a man prays to Thee with a yearning heart, he can reach Thee, through Thy grace, by any path.<sup>43</sup>

Through this yearning Sri Ramakrishna reached the state of *Vijñāna*. He understood that every religion was both a pathway and a stumbling block. He encouraged every sincere aspirant to overcome errors and superstitions and press on to the Truth at the core of religion. He gave this answer: 'Hindus, Mussalmans, and Christians are going to the same destination by different paths. A man can realize God by following his own path if his prayer is sincere.'<sup>44</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna kept everyone's ideals intact. He asked a Vaiṣṇava Hindu to hold to his attitudes, and a Muslim to his. Thus he revalidated the Vedic declaration: 'Truth is one, wise men speak of It differently.' Though the Reality is one and the same, it appears differently through name

<sup>41.</sup> *God of All*, p. 189.

<sup>42.</sup> *God of All*, p. 197.

<sup>43.</sup> *Gospel*, p. 18-19.

<sup>44.</sup> *Gospel*, p. 561.



and form. The mature spiritual experience of *vijñāna* ensures the realization of this truth. As a true *vijñāni* Sri Ramakrishna could lay aside his own perspective, even his own convictions and beliefs and take on the life and beliefs of the Muslim neighbour. He thereby paved the way for a loving inter-religious relationship.

The principle of *vijñāna* taught and experienced by Sri Ramakrishna harmonizes both non-dualism and dualism as two poles of existence. Through it Sri Ramakrishna proved existentially, though not perhaps metaphysically, that all religions are paths that lead to the same goal. This constitutes the basis of his spiritual, practical and humane solution to the ever-increasing problem of communal strife between Hindus and Muslims. In this doctrine of *vijñāna* Swami Vivekananda, Sri Ramakrishna's torchbearer and commentator, found a deeper social significance. In a letter dated 10 June 1898 Swamiji wrote to Sarfraj Hossain,

...practical Advaitism, which looks upon and behaves to all mankind as one's own soul, was never developed among the Hindus universally. On the other hand, my experience is that if ever any religion approached to this equality in an appreciable manner, it is Islam and Islam alone. Therefore I am firmly persuaded that without the help of practical Islam, theories of Vedantism, however fine and wonderful they may be, are entirely valueless to the vast mass of mankind...

For our own motherland a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam—Vedanta brain and Islam body—is the only hope.<sup>45</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna's approach was not to synthesize Hinduism and Islam into one religion, nor did he simply strive for the revival of Hinduism as had often been alleged. What he wanted was a rejuvenation of the spirituality behind every historical religion, not only for men's emancipation but also for his all-round development. Emphasizing the baneful influence of credal religions Swami Vivekananda wrote,

My Master used to say that these names as, Hindu, Christian, etc., stand as great bars to all brotherly feelings between man and man. We must try to break them down first. They have lost all their good powers and now only stand as a baneful influence under whose black magic even the best of us behave like demons. Well, we will have to work hard and must succeed.<sup>46</sup>

To secure a permanent cure, the spirituality behind every historical religion needs to be emphasized and better rapport between the followers of different faiths needs to be established.

<sup>45</sup>. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1978) Vol. 7. p. 415.

<sup>46</sup>. *Letters of Swami Vivekananda*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1981) p. 218.

# KHETRI IN THE RAMAKRISHNA MOVEMENT

(Illustrated)

DR. ARUN KUMAR BISWAS

(Continued from the previous issue)

## *Shekhawati involvement in Ramakrishna Movement*

Apart from rendering personal service to Swamiji, his family and friends, Raja Ajit Singh also took a deep interest in the philanthropic activities started under the inspiration of Swamiji. This endeared the Raja all the more to his subjects. His good administration elicited praise from the British Agent, Colonel Trevor.<sup>68</sup> On 20 September 1892, Swamiji wrote to Pandit Shankarlal of Khetri about the need for free thinking and travel to foreign lands 'to see how the engine of society works in other countries', and about the need to protect the poor from economic exploitation and oppression in the name of caste.

We have already referred to the frequent correspondence between Swamiji and Ajit Singh for a period of one year from April 1893, during which period even Swamiji's gurubhais, the members of his family and his disciples and admirers in India were looking to the Raja for information about Swamiji. The Raja was urged to visit foreign countries and learn from Japan's excellent industrial progress. Swamiji wrote to Alasinga on 31 August 1894 that he had sent a phonograph to the king of Khetri and, on 19 November 1894, that the Raja had intimated him of the safe arrival of the phonograph.

The message contained in the phonograph (Swamiji's address to the Raja in Hindi) was, according to Jhabarmal Sharma who

most probably got it from Munshi Jagmohanlal: 'Please spread education among your subjects, establish schools in villages and make arrangements for the treatment of the sick in hospitals. Your subjects' prosperity is your prosperity; therefore please look after them as you would your own children.'<sup>69</sup> The Raja must have found this message very inspiring. The phonograph was played in the Durbar hall before the leading citizens of Khetri. Unfortunately, the record containing Swamiji's solemn and melodious voice 'was sold as a part of un-serviceable stores to some kabadi (junk dealer).'<sup>70</sup>

Soon after Swamiji's success at the Chicago Parliament of Religions of 1893 there were concerted attacks against him and his views.<sup>71</sup> Swamiji needed formal support from the Hindu society in India for his cause. Rising to the occasion, Ajit Singh sought more information about Swamiji's activities (Swamiji requested Miss Mary Hale in his letter dated 30.3.1894 from Detroit to send relevant paper cuttings to Raja Ajit Singh), and arranged a special Durbar in Dewan Khana (above which

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<sup>69</sup>. Jhabarmal Sharma, *Khetri Nares aur Vivekananda*, p. 85.

<sup>70</sup>. *Swami Vivekananda—a Forgotten Chapter of His Life*, (henceforth *Forgotten Chapter*) p. 226.

<sup>71</sup>. It was at this time that Ajit Singh wrote to Swamiji on April 7, 1894, not to lose heart: 'My dear Guroo...you ought not to feel disgusted by the backbiting of our countrymen...Remain there where the people are jewellers of human beings'. See, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* by Eastern and Western Disciples, (henceforth *Life*). 1979. Vol. 1, p. 488.

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<sup>68</sup>. Pioneer, 31 January 1982; Quoted in *Khetri kā Itihās* (Hindi).



Swamiji stayed during his 1891 visit to Khetri) on the 4th of March 1895. A letter of appreciation for Swamiji's good work was read by Munshi Jagmohanlal, formally adopted, signed by the Raja and then sent to Swamiji. In return, Swamiji sent his beautiful letter of thanks to Raja in May 1895 in which he inspired the whole nation through Raja Ajit Singh. He feelingly mentioned: 'Once more the voice that spoke to the sages on the banks of the Sarasvati...has spoken again.' He concluded by hoping that there would be a 'glorious renaissance of the religion eternal' through Kshatriyas like Ajit Singh 'who have always been the backbone of India and the supporters of science and liberty'.

#### *Swami Akhandananda in Khetri*

Swami Akhandananda was the first amongst Swami Vivekananda's Gurubhais to be inspired by Swamiji's ideal of service to the poor and needy. He was so much in tune with Swamiji's love for the down-trodden that he had started work even before Swamiji encouraged him to do so. Closely following Swamiji, Swami Akhandananda toured through Rajasthan and reached Jamnagar where he was inspired by Jhandu Bhat's spiritual zeal for serving suffering people.<sup>72</sup> In July 1893 he went to Khetri to recuperate his deteriorating health, stayed there for a month and a half, and then proceeded to Malsisar at the request of Bhursingh. There he studied scriptures under Pandit Sitaram who told him about Sri Ramakrishna's message having been spread much earlier in the Shekhawati region by Narayan Sastri.

During his sojourn in and around Malsisar for eight long months he saw the piti-

able condition of the poor, and wrote a long letter in Hindi to the Raja of Khetri on 'The duty of a king to his people.' He described 'how his poor tenants lived in dingy huts, with scarcely any access to air and light, how they lacked nutrition and proper clothing, and how like leeches, the rich sucked them dry to satisfy their own love of luxury.'<sup>73</sup> This message was similar to, though a bit harsher than, Swamiji's message on the phonograph. The Raja acknowledged the pertinence of the advice to him to improve the lot of his subjects in his letter to Swami Akhandananda dated 26 December 1894.<sup>74</sup>

During the early part of 1894, Swami Akhandananda came back to Khetri at the Raja's invitation. From there he wrote a letter to Swamiji asking 'whether he was right in taking the vow of relieving the distressed people.'<sup>75</sup> Swamiji replied in the affirmative (1894) and sent him lofty words of encouragement:

Try to develop spirituality and philanthropy amongst the Thakurs in the different places of Rajputana...Make a trip now and then to Malsisar, Alsisar, and all the other 'sars' that are there...Go from door to door amongst the poor and lower classes of the town of Khetri and teach them religion...the poor, the illiterate, the ignorant, the afflicted—let these be your God. Know that service to these alone is the highest religion.

Swami Akhandananda had thought that he would leave Khetri if Swamiji did not inspire him to serve the poor. He used to cry to Sri Ramakrishna: 'Why this inequality? Why can't you get the people's wealth evenly distributed?'<sup>76</sup> Even after receiving Swamiji's inspiring letter, Swami Akhandananda thought whether Swamiji

72. Swami Akhandananda, *From Holy Wanderings to the Service of Man* (henceforth *Holy Wanderings*), p. 64.

73. *Holy Wanderings*, Pp. 68-9.

74. *Forgotten Chapter*, p. 224.

75. *Holy Wanderings*, p. 69.

76. Swami Annadananda, *Swami Akhandananda* (Bengali), p. 94.

would ask his Gurubhais also to engage themselves in the service of man. A post-card from Swami Ramakrishnananda (middle of 1894) contained the information that Swamiji had already done so.<sup>77</sup>

The first work undertaken by Swami Akhandananda was to arrange education for the boys belonging to the 500 families of 'gola' or hereditary servants in the kingdom of Khetri. The social background of the 'gola' system in Rajasthan has been described by Tod as follows :

Famine in these regions is the great cause of loss of liberty: thousands were sold in the last great famine. The predatory system of the Pindarries and mountain tribes aided to keep it up. Here, freedom is derived through the mother. The offspring of a *golee* (female slave) or *dasi* must be a slave (gola). Hence the great number of golas in Rajput families, whose illegitimate offspring are still adorned in Mewar, with a silver ring around the left ankle, instead of the neck.<sup>78</sup>

When Swami Akhandananda started organizing a school for the gola boys, the Raja's officers protested and pointed out that the boys, though illiterate, were required for work in their offices, and hence should not be sent to school. The Raja reversed his decision twice, and the school started with a Bengali M.A. teacher from Meerut as the headmaster. This was during the end of 1893 or the beginning of 1894. Towards the end of 1894 the Raja established, in accordance with Swami Akhandananda's suggestion, a separate education department and the Khetri Adarsha Vaidika Vidyalaya, a school for Vedic studies, inaugurated by Colonel Pride, the British Political Agent at Jaipur.<sup>79</sup> Echoing Swamiji's exhortation to the Raja on the phonograph, Swami

Akhandananda also urged the Zemindars of Malsisar (where a good school was established), Alsisar, Jhunjhunu, Chirawa, Khandela, Surajgarh, Lohegir etc. to dedicate themselves to the welfare of the people. He suggested that the bones of dead animals be used as manure. He also arranged subscription to agricultural periodicals and the improvement of hospitals.

Swami Akhandananda's love for the poor was so intense that he became an outspoken critic of all those who exploited them—the middlemen, money-lenders and corrupt officers. Some of them were annoyed with him for the gola episode. At the instance of Swami Akhandananda, the Raja stopped listening to the flatterers and started receiving 'nazar' or salutation of the common people directly, instead of doing it through the feudal lords. Whether the Raja himself was annoyed at such direct interference and unsolicited advice we do not know. Mahendranath quotes Swamiji as saying in London : 'The Raja used to treat Ganga (Akhandananda) very well in the beginning. But Ganga did not behave as a sadhu when he interfered in their politics, and the Raja did not tell him anything out of his respect for me'.<sup>80</sup>

During the early part of 1894, Swami Akhandananda went to Udaipur and became acquainted with the prime minister's nephew. There also Swami Akhandananda was appalled at the extreme poverty of the people and, when the Rana of Udaipur sent provisions to him (also to other Sannyasins during the *cāturmāsya* period), he refused to accept the gift on the ground that eighteen lakhs of Rana's subjects—his sons—were not able to get even a square meal every day. The headmaster of Udaipur High School later on warned Swami Akhandananda that the Rana was annoyed and

<sup>77</sup>. *Holy Wanderings*, p. 77.

<sup>78</sup>. James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (henceforth *Annals of Rajasthan*) Vol. I, Pp. 144-45.

<sup>79</sup>. *Holy Wanderings*, Pp. 79-80.

<sup>80</sup>. *Londone Swāmi Vivekānanda* (Bengali), p. 139.



that his life was in danger.<sup>81</sup> The prime minister's nephew once asked Swami Akhandananda to give a lecture on religion which must not encroach on politics or patriotism. Akhandananda wanted to talk on the tyranny of the moneylenders over the poor, but even this was disallowed.<sup>82</sup>

If Swamiji did indeed make the remark in Landon about Swami Akhandananda, as quoted before, it was probably because he had not by then received a first-hand version of the facts from his Gurubhai, and thus could not realize the predicament of a social worker actually witnessing social tyranny. After Jamnagar and Khetri, Swami Akhandananda initiated his pioneering social service work at Murshidabad in West Bengal. He expired as the third president of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission on the 7th of February 1937 in a room adjacent to the one in which Swamiji had passed away. Two days before his death when he was at Murshidabad, he dictated the following statement for insertion in his Bengali memoirs: 'The beginning of *Sevāvrata* (dedication to service) was at Jamnagar; Khetri saw its gradual unfolding and Murshidabad its expansion and culmination.' In the words of Swami Abhedananda, emotional experiences in Rajasthan had made Swami Akhandananda 'a patriot, statesman and philanthropist'.<sup>83</sup>

Till 1895 Swamiji's plan was to start his philanthropic work in Rajputana. In 1894 he wrote to Alasinga that he was planning to return to India and that after reaching Bombay he would go to Rajputana first. In a letter written to Swami Ramakrishnananda in 1895 he expressed his displeasure at the poor response from Bengalis, and wrote that his Math should be established in Rajputana. Again in his letter

dated 13 November 1895 to Swami Akhandananda, he wrote :

Take particular care to start a centre in Rajputana. It must be in some central place like Jaipur or Ajmer. Then branches must be established in towns like Alwar and Khetri...A Religious Association has been afoot at Ajmer—What is it? Let me know all about it...About Maths or centres, or anything of the kind, it is no use starting them in Calcutta...'

But Swamiji's displeasure might have been softened after the wonderful meeting at the Calcutta Town Hall on 5 September 1894 under the chairmanship of Raja Pearimohan Mukhopadhyaya. In this meeting, organized through the tireless efforts of Swami Abhedananda and others, the residents of Calcutta expressed their appreciation of Swamiji's work in the U.S.A. and thanked him for it. Swamiji inspired Ramakrishnananda and others to start social service for the poor, and to think of a centre around Calcutta mainly to accommodate the Holy Mother and to look after her welfare.

During the latter half of 1895, Swami Akhandananda (probably Swami Brahmananda also) was at Jaipur. In an undated letter sent in 1895 to Jaipur (probably addressed to Swami Brahmananda) Swamiji wrote :

Give my special love and blessings to Hari Singh and others. Never take part in quarrels and disputes. Who on earth possesses the power to put the Raja of Khetri down? The Divine Mother is at his elbow.

It is said that he sent along with this letter a poem to encourage Ajit Singh who had difficulties with the king of Jaipur under whom the Khetri Raja was a feudatory chief. The first and the last (sixth) stanzas of this beautiful poem are reproduced below :

If the sun by the cloud is hidden a bit,  
If the welkin shows but gloom,

81. *Holy Wanderings*, p. 75.

82. *Swami Akhandananda* (Bengali), p. 98.

83. *Swami Akhandananda* (Bengali), p. 105.

Still hold on yet, a while, brave heart,  
 The victory is sure to come. ...  
 With thee are those who see afar,  
 With thee is the Lord of might,  
 All blessings on thee, great soul  
 To thee may all come tight.

The above encouragement to the Raja was necessary, because Swamiji's Gurubhais (monastic brothers) like Swami Akhandananda and Swami Brahmananda left Rajasthan during the end of 1895, to take care of Alambazar Math, to start the work of social service in Bengal, and to make preparatory arrangements for Swamiji's arrival in India. The work in Rajasthan was initiated again six years later, when Swamiji's disciples Swami Kalyanananda and Swami Swarupananda organized relief operations during a famine at Kishengarh and started an orphanage.

Swamiji left the U. K. on 16 December 1896 for India. Raja Ajit Singh sent Jagmohanlal to Madras to meet Swamiji. Jagmohanlal came back to Khetri and reported on Swamiji's deteriorating health. By the time Ajit Singh reached Calcutta (on 18 March 1897), Swamiji had gone to Darjeeling after the tumultuous and warm receptions held in his honour in Calcutta on the 19th (arrival) and 28th of February (reception meeting), and after attending Sri Ramakrishna's birthday celebrations at Dakshineswar on 7 March 1897.

Swamiji came back to Calcutta on the 21st of March just to meet Raja Ajit Singh. This was a memorable day for both the guru and the disciple, not only because they met after four long years, but also because they visited Dakshineswar together. While this was the only visit of the Raja, for Swamiji it was the last visit to the holy temple (for he was not welcome there after!) A graphic description of the incidents on the 21st of March 1897 is available in the Khetri Waqayat Register reproduced by Benishankar Sharma in his

book; but this, however, sadly misses the tender moments of the guru and the disciple at Dakshineswar.<sup>84</sup>

When Swamiji's train arrived at Sealdah station, Raja Ajit Singh entered the first class compartment and prostrated himself before the Swami. 'He washed the Swami's feet and put kesar (saffron) and chandan (sandalwood paste) on them, garlanded the Swami and also offered him a bouquet.' Then they went to Shew Buxji Bagla's house and took rest. In the afternoon Swamiji escorted the Raja to the temples of Kali and Radhakanta at Dakshineswar and then entered Sri Ramakrishna's room where 'he rolled himself thrice, from one end to the other, prostrated before Sri Ramakrishna's picture and then look at it with a steadfast gaze. The Raja and others stood outside the room.' Swamiji took the Raja to the holy Pañcavatī, meditated there and then, sitting on a branch, swung like a boy. He told the Raja: 'During Sri Ramakrishna's time, we used to swing ourselves like this and make fun; the memory comes back to my mind. Look at this beautiful scene and surroundings on the bank of the Ganges.'

Trailokyanath Biswas (Mathuranath's son and the then keeper of the Dakshineswar temple) did not receive the guests in person, and later on wrote to the editor of a Bengali newspaper (a translation of the letter appeared in the *Indian Mirror* of 4 April 1897) that he 'did not want to keep any contact with a person who had crossed the oceans and yet called himself a Hindu'. He had also ordered a purificatory puja for the Goddess defiled by the visit of such a person! The forces of conservatism made it clear that Swamiji was not welcome to the holy place which had earlier inspired him and, through him, the whole world. Swamiji's opponents were overjoyed

<sup>84</sup>. *Forgotten Chapter*, Pp. 213-19.



and made capital of this incident without, however, making any dent on the mighty liberal forces of Hinduism.

From Dakshineswar the party came to the Alambazar Math where a welcome address was presented to the Raja. He dined there. We read in Swami Virajananda's reminiscences :

In Alambazar Math, the Raja sat in a kneeling posture before Swamiji on a mat spread on the floor of the hall and conversed with him for a long time. Plainly dressed and modest in manners, he attracted the notice of everybody. On the occasion, under the orders of Swamiji, a special *bhoga*, which included fruit, sweetmeats and *halua* was offered to the Master.<sup>85</sup>

Benishankar Sharma has reproduced a letter written by one Satish Chandra Dutta to Raja Ajit Singh on 7 August 1897. Dutta wanted to meet the Raja on the 21st of March 1897 (in Dulichand's house, prior to the Raja's trip to Dakshineswar temple) and seek financial assistance from him for his daughter's marriage. Swamiji's brother-disciples did not allow Dutta to meet Ajit Singh and advised him to write a letter. Dutta's letter starts with the introduction : 'I am one of the disciples of Swami Vivekananda that is your honour's Gurubhai...' Benishankar Sharma comments that 'it is evident that he wanted to exploit the sentiments of the Raja'. Indeed, many persons wanted to take advantage of the Raja's kindheartedness and his regard for Swamiji. In this particular case, however, the present author finds that Mahendranath had identified Satish Chandra Dutta as a householder disciple of Swamiji whom Swamiji nicknamed (evidently before 1891) 'Mutku'.<sup>86</sup>

Raja Ajit Singh was invited to attend

Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebrations in 1897. He wanted to take Swamiji with him, but the doctors and friends strongly advised Swamiji, who was in failing health, against a second trip so soon. The Raja made a successful trip to U. K. and Germany, meeting Max Muller, Bismarck and other eminent persons. Queen Victoria honoured Ajit Singh by presenting him with a diamond-studded sword.<sup>87</sup> According to the *Indian Spectator* of 31 October 1897, the Raja showed considerable courage in crossing the 'Kalapani' and pushing forward the liberal reform movement. The press had always been spontaneous in its praise for the Raja. *The Times of India* in its issue of 10 November 1893 referred to the Raja's philanthropy in granting tax-exemption to his subjects to the extent of more than a lakh rupees, in planning an orphanage, and his foresight in requesting the Government of India to arrange geological exploration in Khetri (which is now the site of extensive copper mines and works).<sup>88</sup> Ajit Singh was the first to introduce land reforms in Rajasthan.

Naturally, Swamiji was proud of his disciple. On 23 July 1897 he wrote to Sister Nivedita : 'One of my best workers is now in England, the Raja of Khetri. I expect him soon in India, and he will be of great service to me no doubt.' On 15 November 1897 he wrote to Shrimati Indumati Mitra that he was proceeding to meet his friends in Rajputana to secure adequate funds for the Math (by that time the Raja had come back to India). Swamiji and his party reached Khetri and presented the Ramakrishna Mission's address of appreciation to the Raja on 12 December 1897. 'Swamiji

<sup>85</sup>. *After Smriti* (Reminiscences of Swami Virajananda recorded in Bengali) p. 91.

<sup>86</sup>. *Vivekananda Swāmijr Jibaner Ghatanābali* (Bengali). Vol. II, Pp. 79-80.

<sup>87</sup>. *Forgotten Chapter*, p. 120.

<sup>88</sup>. Shankari Prasad Basu, *Vivekānanda O Samakālin Bhāratbarsha*. (Calcutta: Mandal Book House. 1975) Vol. I, Pp. 73-4. (Henceforth *Samakalin*).

was accommodated in Sukmahal. . . . The earthen lamps were placed on the stairs of the tank in wave-like fashion and on bamboo arches made in the doorways. The whole of Bhopalgarh fort was also lighted.<sup>89</sup> On the 20th of December Swamiji delivered his lecture on Vedantism. At the time of leaving Khetri the Raja gave Swamiji Rs. 3,000/- for the Math. The details of this emotional and memorable third visit of Swamiji to Khetri have been vividly chronicled by other authors.<sup>90</sup>

Swamiji again met Raja Ajit Singh at Nainital on the 13 May 1898 (their last meeting) when he took the opportunity of introducing the Raja and Sister Nivedita to each other. Then Swamiji went with his party to Almora and wrote to the Raja on 9 June 1898 : 'Very sorry to learn that you are not in perfect health.' Again on 10 August 1898 : 'I have not heard long news of you. How are things going on with you bodily and mentally ?'<sup>91</sup>

### *Ajit Singh's mental problems*

Ever since Shekhji revolted against the tyrannical rule of the Amber (Jaipur) dynasty in the early part of the sixteenth century, and started his kingdom, the Shekhawati tradition of assertion for independence continued right up to Raja Ajit Singh's tragic death in 1901.<sup>92</sup> It is very significant that Swamiji told the Raja in his very first meeting at Mount Abu in 1891 that life is the unfoldment of the self against heavy odds.

Jhabarmal Sharma has narrated in his book *Ādarśa Nareś* (1940) the development of the strained relationship between Ajit

Singh on the one hand, and Madhav Singh, the ruler of Jaipur, and his chief minister Kanti Chandra Mukherjee on the other. As early as 1881, Ajit Singh had started asserting himself, and later on obtained mining rights in the Babai district of Khetri. He was always subjected to the overlordly treatment of the court of Jaipur. His association with Swamiji was probably never liked. The Raja's decision to go abroad was probably disapproved by the court of Jaipur. During his absence there was an uprising in Narehra, an interior village, which had to be quelled by the Raja's troops.<sup>93</sup> The Jaipur court charged that Ajit Singh was not properly administering his subjects and hence should abdicate in favour of his son. Ajit Singh was also toying with the idea of renouncing the world.<sup>94</sup>

Under the circumstances, Ajit Singh must have communicated his mental agony to Swamiji whose letter dated 26 October 1898 reads :

I am very very anxious about your health...I am praying day and night for your welfare. Do not lose heart if anything befalls, the 'Mother' is your protection...I am ready to lay down my life ever for your well-being.<sup>95</sup>

Six days before his departure for the second visit to the West, Swamiji wrote on 14 June 1899 :

I want your Highness in that fashion as I am here, you need most of friendship and love just now. I am starting for England again on the 20th this month...May you be protected from all dangers and may all blessings ever attend you.<sup>96</sup>

### *Pandit Motilal Nehru's friendship*

At this stage, Pandit Motilal Nehru helped Raja Ajit Singh considerably, as a

89. *Forgotten Chapter*, p. 142.

90. See *Forgotten Chapter*, Chapter 7; and also *A Comprehensive Biography of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, Pp. 1023-30.

91. *Forgotten Chapter*, p. 179.

92. See Part I of this article.

93. *A Comprehensive Biography*, Vol. II, p. 1483.

94. *Forgotten Chapter*, Pp. 182-3.

95. *Forgotten Chapter*, p. 178.

96. *Forgotten Chapter*, Pp. 183-4.



law practitioner, in the Raja's dispute with the Jaipur Durbar. Nandlal Nehru was associated with the Durbar of Khetri and thus his brother Motilal had been Ajit Singh's family friend. Motilal was brought up as a child at Khetri and was taught by Qazi Sadruddin.<sup>97</sup>

On Jawaharlal Nehru's birth, Ajit Singh wrote on 9 December 1889 to Pandit Motilal Nehru who was in Allahabad: 'Very much pleased to learn that you have been pleased with a son. I congratulate you for this. As for the horoscope, it will be sent to you sometime afterwards.'<sup>98</sup> The court astrologer of Khetri eventually sent Jawaharlal's horoscope.<sup>99</sup>

Sent by the Raja to the U.K. to lobby for his case against Jaipur, Motilal wrote back to Jagmohanlal on 22 October 1899 about his efforts to persuade influential people in London.<sup>100</sup> However, he had reservations about the Khetri administration which he later on confided to Jagmohanlal: 'Your famine operation was a fiasco ... at considerable hesitation, I consented to put in a glowing account ... advantage was taken by subordinate officials of serious indisposition of His Highness by systematic misrepresentation.'<sup>101</sup> In the said letter Motilal had also written:

I think you showed me a telegram from H. H. asking certain particulars about a horse for Jawaharlal...Jawaharlal has nearly forgotten all he learnt of riding, and I feel he must have a horse at once...you must have received my typewritten letter about (Paris) exhibition business...I am told there is a very clever Beenkar player in Been in the employ of H. H. (Musraf

Khan). I will be glad if H. H. permits him to go to Paris for a few months.

Eventually Musraf Khan did go to Paris Exhibition to play on the Vina.<sup>102</sup>

While Swamiji was in California, he wrote to Mrs. Ole Bull on 7 April 1900: 'Letter from the Math received today tells me that the Raja of Khetri has stopped the stipend ... well, Mother's wish. The Raja has been very good for years. All blessings on him.' Marie Louise Burke has put forward a hypothesis that the Raja might have thought that his guru had collected many American admirers, and therefore did not need the personal stipend.<sup>103</sup> We believe that this is a somewhat unfair verdict on the Raja who might have been pressured for by the court of Jaipur to cut down his expenditure. Swamiji's mother's stipend was never suspended, though.

Raja Ajit Singh's last birthday was celebrated in Rawalpindi in October 1900 a few days after the festival of Dussehra. Jagmohanlal recalled later on that amidst merrymaking and musical programmes, a singer sang a couplet expressing deep pathos:

Having become my own unfaithful life,  
My Beloved has cheated me;  
And at the sudden separation from Her  
I have lost the zest for life.<sup>104</sup>

The mood of pathos that this song created almost forewarned the listeners about the impending tragedy.

102. The author of this article contacted Prime Minister Indira Gandhi for further information, if any, on the subject, and was informed by her that Pandit Motilal Nehru did not leave any memoirs or unpublished material dealing with the Durbar of Khetri or Swami Vivekananda; nor did she recall having heard of any other episode.

103. Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda—His Second Visit to the West—New Discoveries* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama). Pp. 482-85.

104. Quoted in *Adarsh Naresh (Hindi)*.

97. B. R. Nanda, *The Nehrus—Motilal and Jawaharlal*. (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd. 1962) p. 22.

98. *Adarsh Naresh (Hindi)*, p. 344.

99. *The Nehrus—Motilal and Jawaharlal*, p. 25.

100. *The Nehrus—Motilal and Jawaharlal*, p. 38.

101. Letter dated 18 March 1900—Jhabarmal Collection in Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

Two weeks before Swamiji reached Belur Math after his second visit to the West, Raja Ajit Singh's tragedy had reached a climax.<sup>105</sup> On 26 November 1900 Ajit Singh, undergoing medical treatment at Agra, received a stiff note from the chief minister of Jaipur (who was also his erstwhile teacher) Sri Kanti Chandra Mukherjee, stating that 'a trustworthy Kamdar should be appointed by the Durbar (of Jaipur) to look after the interests of the Khetri ryots.' Ajit Singh politely denied that there was any maladministration in Khetri, and that the present Kamdar (Pandit Gopinath) was a gentleman who had received his education under him (Kantibabu). Ajit Singh met Kantibabu in Agra on the 15th of December while the latter was on his way to Calcutta. Kantibabu was persuaded by Ajit Singh's arguments and hoped that he would be able to restore harmony between the Durbars of Khetri and Jaipur. However, on his way back to Jaipur, Kantibabu expired on 4 January 1901 at Nagpur. This was a shock to Raja Ajit Singh and drove him to extreme despair. He developed acute heart and brain problems. On 18 January 1901 he went alone to Secundra (containing the mausoleum of emperor Akbar) on the outskirts of Agra, ascended one of the minarets, the height of which was 86 feet, and fell from above meeting instantaneous death.

Swamiji wrote to Mary Hale on 5 July 1901: 'Raja of Khetri was repairing this grand old piece of architecture at his own expense at Agra, and one day while on inspection he missed his footing.'

Though according to Swamiji, it was an accident, Mahendranath later heard from Jagmohan that it was a clear case of suicide.<sup>106</sup>

105. *Adarsh Naresh; A Comprehensive Biography of Swami Vivekananda*, Pp. 1471-74.

106. *Ghatanābali*, Vol. II, Pp. 186-7.

The turn of the century moved very fast indeed for the guru and the disciple. Swamiji reached Belur Math from his second visit to the West on 9 December 1900. He had heard of Capt. Sevier's death and had to leave Belur Math on 27 December 1900 for Mayavati. Sometime during this time (between the 9th and the 27th December) he wrote his famous letter to the Raja of Khetri, the last of the interesting series of letters discovered by Jhabarmal and Benishankar Sharma :

I feel that my work in this life is done. Through good and evil, pain and pleasure my life-boat has been dragged on—the one great lesson I was taught is—that life is misery, nothing but misery. Mother knows what is best. Each one of us is in the hands of karma; it works out itself—and no way. There is only one element in life which is worth having at any cost—and it is love. Love immense (sic) and infinite, broad as the sky and deep as the ocean, this is the one great gain in life. Blessed is he who gets it.<sup>107</sup>

Swamiji indeed had the Buddha's heart, and Raja Ajit Singh was blessed in that he received the great saint's pure and infinite love before his death. Like his Master, the Raja expired before he completed forty years of his life which was full of struggles.

Ajit Singh's son Jai Singh died in 1910, and then the succession passed from his family. Amar Singh ruled Khetri between 1911 and 1927, and since then Raja Sardar Singh has remained the titular head. Raja Sardar Singh donated the Dewan Khana, where Swamiji had stayed, to the Ramakrishna Mission on 29 December 1959. The Mission's new centre in this building was

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According to one of Raja's trusted lieutenants, the Raja confided to his officials, few days before his death, the following: life had become a burden to him; his cremation should be done at Mathura and his officials should not betray the cause of Khetri Durbar. *Adarsh Naresh*, p. 275.

107. *Forgotten Chapter*, Pp. 184-86.



inaugurated by Sri Sampurnanand, Governor of Rajasthan, on 11 November 1963.

The story of Khetri's contribution to the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement will remain incomplete unless we make a fitting reference to some of the illustrious members of the family of Raja Ajit Singh and other citizens of Khetri.

Raja Ajit Singh was ably supported in his philanthropic work by his wife Champa-batji of Atva (Jodhpur) whom he had married in 1876. The Rani picked up training in nursing from her American lady physician Dr. Clara Swain, M.D. Two daughters were born to the royal couple: Suryakumari (in 1879) and Chandrakumari (in 1888). Even though they had no male issue for sixteen years after their marriage, the Raja refused to marry a second time and his prayer for a male child was fulfilled through Swamiji's blessings in 1893.

We mentioned earlier the wedding of the elder princess that followed the next year. Suryakumari married Umed Singh, Prince of Shahpura in 1894. She was not only proficient in English, music and Sanskrit but also in Vedanta and Vivekananda's writings. She wanted Swamiji's works to be published in Hindi, and entrusted for this purpose a sum of Rs. 1,70,000 to Kashi Nagari Pracharini Sabha before her death.<sup>108</sup>

Pandit Narayandas, who was referred to by Swami Vivekananda as 'my professor' (as he had taught Swamiji Pāṇinī's Aṣṭādhyāyī), was born in 1845 in Gaji ka Thana of Alwar and educated in Benares by Pandit Govinda Shastri and Pandit Shib Kumar Shastri. He joined the court of Khetri in 1883. Pandit Gopinath, Raja Ajit Singh's erstwhile teacher at Jaipur, and his son Lakshminarayan served Khetri administration quite ably for decades.

Munshi Jagmohanlal born in 1866 (son

of Haribansji Mathur of Jaipur) studied at Jaipur till 1883, then came to Khetri, and was later on entrusted with the charge of external affairs. He was not only Ajit Singh's trusted minister but also one of Swamiji's initiated disciples.

Jagmohan was conversant in English, Sanskrit, French, Urdu and the Rajasthani dialects, and thus became the 'right hand' of the Raja. He was a Vaiṣṇava, a vegetarian and a dedicated spiritual aspirant.<sup>109</sup> It may be recalled that it was he who introduced Swamiji to the Raja on 4 June 1891 at Mount Abu. His trip to Madras to bring Swamiji to Khetri and his accompanying Swamiji to Bombay to see him off in 1893 are parts of history. We may quote from Swamiji's letter dated 22 May 1893 written to Haridas Viharidas, the Dewan of Junagadh, Swamiji's appreciation of Jagmohan:

The private secretary of H.H. of Khetri and I are now residing together. I cannot express my gratitude to him for his love and kindness to me. He is what they call a Tazimi Sardar in Rajputana i.e. one of those whom the Rajas receive by rising from their seats. Still he is so simple, and sometimes his service for me makes me almost ashamed.

After Jai Singh's death in 1910, Munshi Jagmohanlal was thrown out of job, and spent a somewhat difficult time in Calcutta where he was ill-treated by some of his erstwhile Marwari friends who had given him temporary shelter. After a few years he got a job in the court of Alwar and lived there till he died, probably in 1920. For his outstanding services he was conferred the title 'Rajratna'. He gave a lecture on Swami Vivekananda in Calcutta.<sup>110</sup> Apart from the Waqayat Register records, much of our information about Swamiji's activities in

<sup>108</sup>. *Adarsh Naresh*, Pp. 287.

<sup>109</sup>. *Ghatanābali*, Vol. II, p. 176.

<sup>110</sup>. *Ghatanābali*, Vol. II, Pp. 176,187-8.

Khetri during June-October 1891, his famous conversations with the Raja, the nautch-girl episode, and also about the Raja's difficulties with the court of Jaipur etc. have come to us from the recollections of Jagmohanlal recorded in the works of Jhabarmal Sharma and Mahendranath Dutta.

Starting from Narayan Shastri, who was directly initiated by Sri Ramakrishna and first spread the Master's name in the Shekhawati kingdom, Raja Ajit Singh, Munshi Jagmohanlal and Pandits Narayandas, Shankarlal, Sunderlal Ojha and many others of the Khetri region have been inspired by the messages of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Hari Singh Ladkhani of Jaipur served Swami Akhandananda<sup>111</sup> and Swami Brahmananda<sup>112</sup> like a true disciple. Benishankar Sharma, the famous author was born and brought up in Khetri. His father Pandit Baliram Sharma had the proud privilege of attending upon Swamiji while the former was a student of Yajurveda under Pandit Sunderlal Ojha. Padmabhusan Pandit Jhabarmal Sharma, an eminent literator and an authority on Raja Ajit Singh and Shekhawati Kingdom, was also an illustrious son of Khetri. The author of this article sought some help in his research from Jhabarmalji but as ill-luck would have it, Panditji passed away on the 4th of January 1983 in his house at Jaipur.

### *Music lovers of Khetri*

It is not very well known that Swami Vivekananda was linked with several men of Khetri, like Raja Ajit Singh, Dulichand Kankrania, and Shyamlal Khetri through their love for music and their schools (*gharana*) of musical training. They belonged to the post-Moghul era of the

resurgence of Indian Classical music that took place at Jaipur, Gwalior, Calcutta and other centres.

After the fall of Muslim empires in Delhi and Lucknow, the descendants of Tansen and Sadarang moved out and settled in Jaipur, Gwalior and other places. Atrauli (Jaipur) Seni gharana specialized in instrumental music, particularly on Veena. Raja Ajit Singh learnt Veena from Bhop Singh of Barsane (Braj mandal) who was the court-musician at the Durbar of Jaipur.<sup>113</sup> Later on Ajit Singh was tutored by the famous Musraf Khan, who was employed by him at Khetri.

The Gwalior gharana became famous in vocal traditions. Ganpat Rao Bhaiasaheb, Alladia Khan and Badal Khan practised music together at Gwalior during the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>114</sup> They knew another great artiste at Gwalior: Ustad Ahmad Khan, who belonged to the Sadarang school and whose disciple Beni Ustad (Das) was the music teacher of young Narendranath (later Swami Vivekananda). Ahmad Khan later on came to Calcutta and stayed as the court-musician of the Raja of Andul (near Calcutta). Narendranath might have taken some lessons directly from Ahmad Khan also.<sup>115</sup> Ganpat Rao recalled that Ahmad Khan was exceptionally gifted about 'tān': 'Be-bayan Tanaiat'. His voice was loud but somewhat hoarse.<sup>116</sup>

Ganpat Rao was a master musician of Harmonium recital and Lachao Thumri. His disciples Seth Dulichand Kankrania and Shyamlal Khetri belonged to the kingdom of Khetri and earned reputation as great musicians in Calcutta.

<sup>113</sup>. *Adarsh Naresh* (Hindi), p. 22.

<sup>114</sup>. Suresh Chakravarti, *Sudhāsāgar Tīre* (Bengali) (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers). Third section.

<sup>115</sup>. Amiyannath Sanyal, *Smritir Atale* (Bengali) (Calcutta: Jijnasa). p. 236.

<sup>116</sup>. *Smritir Atale* (Bengali). p. 20.

<sup>111</sup>. *Holy Wanderings*, p. 76.

<sup>112</sup>. Mahendranath Dutta, *Swami Brahmananda Mahārājer Anudhyān* (Bengali), Pp. 56-7.



It may be recalled that Raja Ajit Singh used to send money to Swamiji through Dulichand, who was the proprietor of Messrs. Harsukhdas Dulichand firm. His garden palace at Dum Dum named 'Orchid Dale' was a favourite spot for many a musical soiree in Calcutta. Seth Dulichand employed Badal Khan and Alladia Khan of Gwalior for coaching his musician wife Tarabai, who hailed from Goa. Another famous musician from Goa, Kesarbai Kerkar later on sought Dulichand's help in becoming a disciple of the illustrious Alladia Khan. It is well known that Badal Khan subsequently trained Bhisimadeb Chatterji. It was at Dulichand's house that Ustad Alla-uddin Khan met Ahmad Ali, the Sarod player and went with him to Rampur. (During his stay in Calcutta Ustad Alla-uddin Khan witnessed Narendranath's fame as a Dhrupad singer and received musical instructions from Swamiji's brother Amritalal (Habu) Dutta.<sup>117</sup> Dulichand died in 1929 at Varanasi.

Shyamlal Khetri was not a rich person like Dulichand. But he was of a deep religious temperament and earned fame as an accomplished music teacher of Calcutta. Stalwarts such as Mouzuddin Khan, Amiyannath Sanyal, Girija Shankar Chakrabarti received musical instructions from him at his residence : 101, Harrison Road. It was Shyamlal who introduced Ustad Alla-uddin Khan to the Nawab of Maihar.<sup>118</sup> Subsequently, Alla-uddin Khan's school of music at Maihar (where he stayed for decades) became a legend in our country.

Shyamlal Khetri has left some precious memoirs about Raja Ajit Singh and Swami Vivekananda : 'The Raja was an expert Vina-player. His recital would charm music connoisseurs. Once Swami Vivekananda

was present at the Raja's Vina recital and showed his appreciation by nodding his head. Later on he addressed the Raja : "What an enchanting spell you cast with your Vina!"<sup>119</sup>

When and where did this musical soiree take place? Shyamlal met Raja Ajit Singh thrice : once in Lahore and twice in Calcutta (1890 and 1897). Ajit Singh and Swamiji never met each other at Lahore, and Ajit Singh did not know Swamiji in 1890, when he visited Calcutta and stayed in Babu Kirti Chandra Mitra's palace at Hatibagan.

Waqayat Register shows that Ajit Singh and Swamiji had a hectic day on the 21st of March 1897 visiting Dakshineswar and Alambazar Math and later on at night dining and resting together in Dulichand's garden. Next day morning, the great music lover Sourendra Mohan Tagore came to meet them at the garden.<sup>120</sup> Therefore it is likely that the musical soiree took place in Dulichand's garden at Dum Dum sometime between the 22nd and the 25th of March 1897.

#### *The musician, poet and philosopher*

It is significant that a musical expert of Swamiji's calibre fully appreciated the accomplishment on the Vina of Raja Ajit Singh who belonged to the Seni gharana. It may be recalled also, that the disciple used to follow his spiritual guru's vocal presentation on the harmonium.<sup>121</sup>

Jagmohanlal has given several illustrations of Ajit Singh's competence as a poet and a composer. While travelling by boat to London in 1897 and watching the unceasing movement of waves on the sea, Ajit Singh was inspired to compose a song dealing with the various modes of calming

117. Alla-uddin Khan, *Amār Kathā* (Bengali). (Calcutta: Grantha Jagat), Pp. 11-12.

118. *Amār Kathā*, p. 21.

119. *Adarsh Naresh*, p. 380.

120. *Forgotten Chapter*, p. 218.

121. *Forgotten Chapter*, p. 40.

one's mind. He also set it to music based on the *rāga* (tune) Bihag. *Rāga Bihag* was the favourite melody of Swamiji also. The hymn to the Devi beginning with *sarva mangala māngalye*, sung during the vesper service in Ramakrishna Ashramas, is tuned in this raga.

We have already referred to Swami Akhandananda's mentioning a particular song, composed by Raja Ajit Singh, and frequently sung by Swamiji himself, in his foreward to Jhabarmal Sharma's book.<sup>122</sup> Jhabarmal has narrated how this particular song was composed. A *thumri* composed by Nawab Sahib Ibrahim Ali Khan was being sung in the court of Khetri. Ajit Singh asked his courtiers to compose similar *thumris*. Then he himself tried with his pen and produced the wonderful, now famous, composition.

The song is a beautiful and poignant portrayal of the soul of a spiritual aspirant who has lost the charm of *life* owing to the separation from the beloved, and who nonetheless shrinks from *death* in the hope that the Lord may yet come. The song amply illustrates the deep devotion of the composer, and naturally received Swamiji's warmest approbation.

Raja Ajit Singh was a very special disciple of Swami Vivekananda. He not only helped his guru during the moments of his greatest need, but also fully shared his guru's deepest thoughts on music, poetry and spiritual yearning. His nexus with Swamiji reminds one of the beautiful relationship between Arjuna and Lord Krishna, and that between Mathuranath Biswas and Sri Ramakrishna.

### III

My visit to Khetri on 24 December 1982 was an emotional pilgrimage. I received a

warm welcome from the Swamijis of the Ramakrishna Mission centre there now known as Swami Vivekananda Smriti Mandir. A young student of class eight, who belonged to the Shekhawati lineage, took me round.

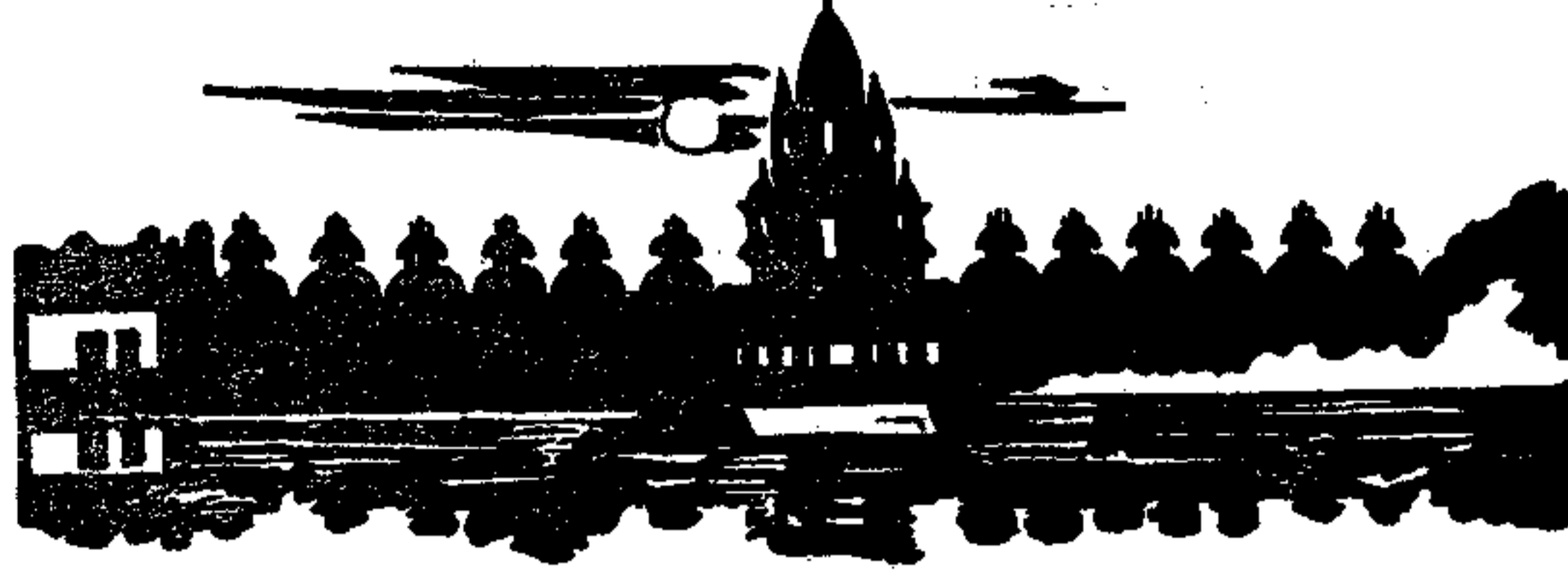
Leaving Futeh Bilas or Dewan Khana, now Vivekananda Smriti Mandir, I went across the old city gates, past the temples of Sri Hanuman and Sri Satyanarayana, and then through the massive metal fort gate up the walled fortress of Bhopalgarh. From the Bhopalgarh hill, I could see the beautiful eastern panorama, the valley and the two palaces where Swamiji stayed—Dewan Khana in 1891 and Sukh Mahal in 1897.

My mind hovered over the hallowed and hoary past of the northern Rajasthan—the land of Ṛg-Vedic Saraswati valley near Bikaner, the land of Rajputs who fought hordes of invaders for centuries in their valiant struggle to preserve ancient ideals and traditions. I almost saw Raja Ajit Singh riding with Swamiji and protecting him from prickly shrubs, and heard him saying, 'It has been the duty of Kṣatriyas to protect Dharma always!'

From time immemorial, Khetri has supplied copper to successive civilizations in India. Dr. D. P. Agrawal has proved in his book *The Copper Bronze Age in India* (p. 17) that copper metals and alloys used in Harappa and pre-Harappa chalcolithic civilizations were derived from Khetri ore. Britishers saw Hindu miners raising the ore and Muslim technicians smelting the same for making good quality metal and coins near Singhana and Khetri. As a mineral engineer I collected samples of ancient slag on the hills of Singhana, and heard unstinted praise for the earlier metal-making practices from the modern experts at the Hindustan Copper Limited, situated in the same area, now known as Khetrinagar.

122. विन विन मोहि कूं कछ न सुहावै  
तरफत चित अति ही अकुलावै । etc.





## ADVAITA AND TRINITY\*

DR. MICHAEL VON BRUCK

In the quest of God, we can no longer exclusively follow either the Western or the Eastern philosophical tradition alone. Human beings all over the world share one fate today, facing the results of a world-wide political, social, ecological and spiritual crisis. The understanding of the Human has changed owing to the interpenetration of different cultures. And a changing experience of the Human always changes the understanding of God. These reflections want to ponder possibilities for an understanding of God in this situation of interpenetration and dialogue.

The topic is going to be approached in three steps. The second step again has three sections. First, I am going to reflect on the purpose and goal of this study. Second, I will try to show the meeting point between the Indian Advaitic Concept of reality and the Trinity. Thirdly, I will sum up some basic consequences. In the second section, we will first focus the attention on some aspects of the doctrine of God in Advaita Vedanta. Second, we will stress some important aspects of the mystery of the Trinity in Christian understanding, analysing the goal and the structure of the

doctrine of the Trinity. Thirdly, the non-dualistic understanding of the Trinity will be discussed.

### I. Purpose and Goal

#### 1. *Reflection on the ongoing dialogue of Religions*

Both the World Council of Churches and the Vatican have stated that any semi-colonial practice of mission is completely out of place today. Thus, a new concept of finding and sharing the truth any religion finds in its own tradition has been worked out and tested successfully. It is based on the Socratic insight that truth can be found only in dialogue. If one partner wants to convince another, he does well to draw forth the truth out of the other, rather than force him to accept a concept which is strange to him.

Such a dialogue is going on today at different levels. There are conferences organized usually by different ecumenical organizations. Here the stress is on the good will of all the participants belonging to different religions and ideologies. One agrees that all share in the responsibility to work for peace, justice and the survival of mankind. But often there remains the doubt whether Christians and Buddhists e.g. have spoken really on the same thing when talking

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\* This study is the extended version of a paper read at the conference on "God: The Contemporary Discussion" held at Maui, Hawaii, December 26-30, 1981.

on God, spiritual fulfilment, etc.

The second level is a permanent living together of people coming from different religious backgrounds. This happens in Europe and America within the framework of an industrial society; this happens in new religious communities such as Zen-centres; this happens in India where people work in developmental and social programmes.

A third level is the theological reflection on this on-going dialogue and sharing. It is an experience of those living with different traditions, that a mutual stimulation can take place. In meeting the other, the understanding of our own tradition can be deepened and widened. This is a common phenomenon which need not be stressed for those who are already well aware of it. Applying it systematically, we might gain new criteria and means to interpret a new awareness rooted in Christian faith as well as Hindu and Buddhist faith.

A fourth level is the level of spiritual practice. Methods of meditation are coming from the East to the West and vice versa for a mutual enrichment, widening our consciousness. Spiritual practice is certainly the most important key to understand religion but practice without reflection is blind. Only when we know what we already do, can we integrate this new practice into our already existing behaviour and knowledge. This integration might bear fruit. Thus, the relationship between practice and reflection is a dialectical one. Any contribution towards a Theology of Religions should be aware of this.

Under a Theology of Religions I understand the reflection on the on-going dialogue of religions. Keeping in mind what has already been said, we can go on to formulate, as a methodological principle, that it is not sufficient to gain criteria for this dialogue only from Christian sources, because we are not aiming at theological clarification for Christians only, but we

want to find the common responsibility for the future of mankind in mutual exchange with people of other religions—and asking for the notion of God means also reflecting on the possibility of a future for human beings. Thus, we need different traditions as a basis. The same holds true, of course, from a Hindu or Buddhist point of view.

In our case, we have to take into account both the Christian Trinitarian tradition and the non-dualistic (*advaita*) notion of Reality in Indian Advaita Vedanta as well as Buddhism. We should be able to relate them to each other. This causes methodological difficulties, and we are aware of it. But in the adventure of this undertaking, there is a great potentiality for a new awareness, for a new experience of what all these traditions have called "God", "The One", etc.

It is not the similarities in words or ideas which matter, because the specific historical background has to be always taken into consideration. It is rather the intentions and structures of thinking concerning the Trinity and the advaitic understanding of Reality in the East which are of importance.

Our basic hypothesis is that the Trinity and the Eastern *advaitic* notion of Reality interpret each other in this way, that, for one thing, the universality of Christ can be understood more clearly, and, for another, the theological basis for a common struggle of religions towards peace, justice and spiritual fulfilment will be made manifest.

## 2. *Reflection on deeper Spiritual Experience*

Everywhere in the world, there is a strong evidence for a new awakening of spiritual experience. People feel the insufficiency of their life which is manipulated by impersonal structures and material consumption. They take refuge in interiority and use efficient methods for contemplation such as Yoga and Zen. But very



seldom are they aware of the implications given with these spiritual practices. They still go on living their dualistic life and nourishing their Ego only in a more subtle way.

We have to learn and to understand what happens when we allow ourselves to step into a religious experience which claims to overcome dualism. Without this understanding, we hardly can integrate what we are thirsting for. Are these non-dualistic experiences in complete contradiction to our ways of thinking, or may they be a certain fulfilment of our own tradition? What are the implications for our *Weltanschauung* when we end up exclaiming: *aham brahmāsmi* (I am *brahman*) or when we pierce through the shell of our Ego into the Buddha-nature?

We need to reflect on what we do; we need to find clearness in our expression; we need to distinguish and should be in search of criteria for what is called truth. Theological reflection might help to integrate the ways of Eastern meditation into our rational culture of science and technology which cannot be simply rejected in a romantic withdrawal. It might enable us to create a deeper awareness for our human dignity and destination, in order to bring out a value-dimension for our technological age, an idea of wholeness as it were. Our reflection may help to conduct this quest with a sense of theological responsibility. Only then do we know what we do. And only then will our doings be blessed.

## II. Advaita and Trinity

Let me begin with some preliminary remarks. Reflection on God is always a reflection and can never be just a logical exercise without the previous process of a *Widerfahrnis* (encounter or experience). An experience of God is always prior to our notion of God, whatever the signifi-

cance of both these terms "experience" and "God" may be. What is religious experience? What is the experience of God? These are key questions for our contemporary discussion on God, and I suppose we are not able to give a comprehensive and satisfying answer.

To approach the problem, we first have to make a distinction between experiences which can be objectified because they are independent from space, time and a specific person, and those experiences which can not be objectified because they are at least not independent of the experiencing person. The first kind of experiences may just be a special case and a kind of the latter. If so, the latter category could be considered the more comprehensive one.

All religious experiences are non-objectifiable, but not all non-objectifiable experiences can be called religious experiences, at least not in our sense here. In quantum physics, for instance, you find a similar interdependence between the experienced facts of the case and the experiencing person.

I am not able to give a definition of the term "spiritual or religious experience" because this would imply an objective approach. Experience determines itself as such by practice. This holds true for any Hindu as well as Buddhist understanding of experience. That is why I want to try a more poetic circumscription, using the Sanskrit metaphor *anubhava*, which means "being according to", "being in tune with" or "being along." Getting into an experience is therefore an approach of involvement, becoming according to God in our case, getting in tune with Him. Thus, reflection presupposes resonance.

Enabling human beings to merge into this field of resonance—of God, the Universal Law, the sound of silence or whatever it is called—is the point of all spiritual ways in many religions.

There is a tremendous variety of spiritual



experiences in India. But the common ground of all Indian spirituality could be described with three characteristic marks:

1. They want to achieve inner independence from all things, feelings, thoughts, etc.

2. They develop a feeling for the presence of God in all things and all happenings.

3. There is a deep desire for a genuine comprehensive experience as it is to be prepared especially in various forms of Yoga.

This ground is the basis for reflection on God in India.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. *Advaita*

This spiritual experience is interpreted in different ways, and, indeed, it allows different theological interpretations. But it is always an overcoming of dualistic concepts and behaviour. Thus, dualism like body-spirit, world-God, I-God, etc., merge into one holistic awareness which might be a new consciousness seen from the level of dualistic discriminations. Therefore paradoxical language is usually applied to speak about this inexpressible experience. Polar symbols such as Yin and Yang may point towards this wholeness, but never express it really, because the expression is a result of dualism.

The Indian *advaitic* experience points towards the non-duality of the Self or nature of all beings (*ātman*) and the One Reality (*brahman*). The *brahman* is the all-com-

<sup>1</sup> The spiritual climate reflected in these characteristics is also the soil of Buddhism: "Because the Buddha emphasized the practical aspects of religious life, avoiding philosophical speculations and theories, as well as unfounded and fanciful beliefs in supernatural phenomena, he did not live in a spiritual vacuum in which nothing existed beyond very foundations of a metaphysical, non-Vedic tradition..." (Lama Anagarika Govinda, *Creative Meditation and Multi-Dimensional Consciousness*, Wheaton, III, 1978. p. 198).

prehensive One (*ekam*), the One Reality. The experience of this inexpressible non-duality of Being corresponds with a state of consciousness that goes beyond the usually utilized capacity of mind, namely waking, dream and deep sleep. This state beyond has been called simply the fourth one or *turiya*. Yet, this expression might be misleading. It is not a level of consciousness among others, but the unified awareness or the integration of all possible states of consciousness. Similarly, in Zen, the experience of *satori* cannot be called an experience among other experiences, adding quantitatively something to our mental capacity; but it is precisely the "unifying awareness". Hence, this specific state of consciousness called *turiya* in the Vedantic tradition does not point to a reality beyond or outside the reality which we experience in our daily life, but it is this reality experienced in unified intensity, in integrating light as it were. This intuition is, as far as I can see, the basis for the famous Buddhist saying: *nirvāna is saṃsāra* (and vice versa).

In the same way, God cannot be conceived of in symbols or terms which indicate that he is different or separated from the reality we have objectifiable experience of in our daily life. But God is also not at all identical with this reality: it is precisely a relation of non-duality.

Thus, we can neither speak of God in terms of identity nor of duality, but we have to refer to the category of non-duality (*advaita*) that transcends both these terms. Strictly speaking, we cannot say anything about God at all, but we speak *out of God*, out of an awareness which makes us be *according* to the One Reality, thus reflecting *anubhava*, our being in tune with God.

What is non-duality or *advaita*? It is a category which can be applied not only for objectifiable experiences, but also for those which are non-objectifiable, according to our previous discrimination. But, can this category be objectified and explained



with the same clarity as we discriminate between identity and non-identity? Again, I do not know an unequivocal answer, but I suppose that only the dynamism of a oneness which is constituted by a polarity may serve as a means for explaining non-duality. I will come back later to this problem when the non-dualistic character of the Trinity will be explained, because the symbol of the Trinity offers a deep insight into the nature of ontological non-dualism.

Similarly in Buddhism, *advaita* is a category going beyond identity and non-identity. Nagarjuna's philosophy is definitely not a no-reality doctrine,<sup>2</sup> but the denial of any affirmative discrimination which could describe reality. In Buddhism, too, *advaita* is an integrated awareness encompassing and transcending both identity and non-identity.

Concerning Advaita Vedanta, *brahman* is said to be self-sufficient, resting in itself, being without any change. Nothing can be said about it, because any predicate would imply discrimination: it would be this and *not* the opposite. Non-dualism cannot imply discrimination. *Brahman* does not have any attribute. This is obvious from Sankara's understanding of *adhyāropa*. Similarly Nagarjuna denies any predicate of Being. Concerning the One Reality, he cannot speak of an object with characteristics at all.<sup>3</sup>

2. T. R. V. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, London, 1955, p. 160.

3. There is a similar discussion in the early Greek philosophy. For Zeno, movement cannot be thought. In Buddhism there is no possibility of attaining truth either by thinking or not-thinking, because both are still on the level of contradictions. In getting beyond both thinking and not-thinking into *Non-Thinking*—as Nishitani Keiji calls it in Zen categories (talk with the author on December 16, 1981)—we reach the point where reality determines itself directly.

Yet, there is a symbol, not describing but formulating the "nature" of *brahman*: *saccidānanda*.

*Sat* is Being, the imperishable. It is also truth, the unchangeable. It could be called "Being itself" (Tillich), if this term does not imply that modifications are possible which would have an effect on *brahman*.

*Cit* is pure consciousness or total awareness. It is the self-reflection of *Sat* in itself. *Brahman* is consciousness, it does not *have* it. Thus, *cit* is not a qualification on *sat*, but it is the self-expressing awareness of the One.

*Ānanda* is bliss. It is the ecstasy of Being, which again cannot be understood as qualification on *sat*, but the very nature of the One is bliss in self-awareness.

Therefore the expression *saccidānanda* does not modify *brahman*, it does not add anything to the One, but it speaks out the Being-Awareness-Bliss, which the One Reality is. Yet, is there a certain dynamism implied, when we speak of pure consciousness or awareness? Is there not a certain polarity in the One, when it expresses itself in *sat*, *cit*, *ānanda*? If so, how could this dynamism be understood without violating the basic principle, namely: One without a second (*ekam eva advitīyam*)?

Many schools of thinking have come out in India to solve this problem, but still there is no definite answer.

Let us go one step further. *Brahman* manifests itself by its creative power called *māyā*. *Māyā* is the measurable, the quantifiable. It is this which we can have a mathematical theory of. But it is also the principle of dynamism. It is the source of

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This is precisely what Sankara has in mind when he describes the *brahman* beyond any *adhyāropa*, including the difference of substance and non-substance.



all phenomena.<sup>4</sup> Now, *māyā* is neither different from nor identical with *brahman*. Their relationship is undeterminable (*anirvacanīya*). Usually there is a classification of three stages of "manifestation" of the *brahman* through *māyā*:

1. *īśvara* the Lord and the creator, a personal God

2. *hiranyagarbha*, the Golden Seed, the First Born of all creation

3. *viraj*, the development of the world in all its material as well as spiritual phenomena.

The complexity of these "stages" is called *saguṇa brahman*, the qualified *brahman*, in contrast to the unqualified, the *nirguṇa brahman*. Actually, the *saguṇa* is not a real manifestation which would have an ontological status. It is just an appearance in our consciousness caused by *Māyā*. Hence, the reality of the world is not of ontological but of noetical nature. *Māyā*, which is said to be neither real nor unreal, creates a reflection in our consciousness which lets appear the unchangeable *brahman*

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4. Lama Govinda stresses the importance of the concept of *māyā* from a Buddhist point of view, expressing that every form of life, including consciousness and mind, is conditioned: "To the unawakened, *māyā* is illusion, the cause of error and ignorance, because he tries to cling to its momentary forms, to stop their continuous flow, to possess them or to subordinate them to his narrow purposes. To the awakened one it is the creative power of the mind, the only reality we can speak of which we had better term "actuality", because only what "acts" is real in the sense that it affects us and can be experienced. A reality that is not experienceable is only an abstract concept, a product of our speculation, a hypothesis, i.e. something without influence or relationship to our actual life. As such it has as little place in Buddhism as the Absolute, which haunts Western philosophy as a substitute for the concept of God, after having been deprived of all positive content and experiential value or relationship." (*op. cit.*, pp. 34f). In this regard, it is very misleading to translate the Vedāntic *brahman* as the "Absolute".

as the changing and qualified *saguṇa brahman*.

Thus, in one way, dualism is avoided: you have only the *brahman*-reality. But the price to pay for this theory is that the world of appearances does not have an ontological status and significance.

What really is *māyā*? What is *māyā's* relationship with *brahman*? The term *anirvacanīya* does not give a sufficient answer to this crucial problem. And further: in denying an ontological status of the *saguṇa brahman*, we avoid ontological dualism indeed, but we create a certain kind of existential dualism, because the historical reality, the world of change, mutation and development is excluded from the movement towards salvation. The non-dualistic experience is achieved by reductionism, not by integration. In this way, God cannot stand for the very symbol of integration of reality. But precisely this would be the demand in the context of a non-dualistic approach.<sup>5</sup>

One most interesting aspect of the Vedāntic philosophy is that the One Reality, the power which manifests itself as it were existentially but not ontologically, the *brahman*, is energy (*prāṇa*). *Prāṇa* is the one basic energy, the only reality, the power which manifests itself truly in very different forms and many kinds of energetic expressions. *Prāṇa* is in everything, but it is at the same time beyond any specific expression. *Prāṇa* is the life-source of the universe. I wonder whether this concept could not express the unity of Being, the wholeness which is beyond any particular experience of human beings, but emerging in any experience. Thus, it is a theophanic event.

The *advaitic* experience is not an

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5. Cf. V. Bruck, *Advaita und Trinitat. Indische und christliche Gotteserfahrung im Dialog der Religionen* (unpublished Habil-Thesis, University of Rostock, 1980), especially pp. 336ff.



experience of a "something". It is the awakening to an awareness of Reality; God is always there, and to experience him (*anubhava*=being according to) means that the cover from the reality is removed. The dualistic mind disappears; the feeling of being a separated Ego vanishes, so that the true nature of reality, the *saccidānanda* reveals itself to us. It is a revelation of what is, not a special knowledge of what has not yet been. Thus, experience of God is not an additive knowledge about a higher reality, but is the awareness of the wholeness of reality. It is the awakening of a stage of consciousness which the discursive mind does not reflect.

This realization of God is a happening which the individual consciousness cannot achieve because any striving for the experience hinders the mind from stepping into total silence which is the basis for the non-dualistic break-through. But intuitive knowledge (*jñāna*) and total loving surrender of the Ego (*bhakti*) can prepare this jump. The stage of mind, which we usually connect with the term meditation, leads into the realization of the *ātman/brahman* non-duality. It is a realization of interrelatedness of all Being. Nobody is simply an individuality. Hence, knowing the *ātman*, you realize the ontological solidarity of all beings. This is what I call cosmic solidarity.

I want to close this paragraph with some questions which arise immediately:

1. What does it mean to realize *brahman* as the One Reality when we are faced with a world of diversity? What is the value of evolution and progress in history? What is the relationship between time and the One? Or in other words: What is the ontological status of *māyā*?

2. What is the relationship between a holistic consciousness of meditative awareness and the rational consciousness which functions in distinguishing and setting up dualities?

I do not claim to be able to answer

these questions, but in order to find ways for a solution, we may look at another non-dualistic concept of Reality: the Trinity.

## 2. Trinity

Many Christians and even theologians are often not aware of the specific characteristics of the Christian understanding of God, which is neither monotheistic nor polytheistic but Trinitarian. The Trinity has been declared sometimes as a mythological relic which is not any more understandable and important today. This has deprived us of a great chance to bring our specific Christian contribution into the discussion on God today. I hope that, through dialogue with *advaitic* thinking in the East and the questions which we have become aware of precisely in this dialogue, we will be able to rediscover the Trinitarian experience of Reality and its non-dualistic character. This is my whole point. And hereby I envisage a deeper understanding of God which is integrative in the most comprehensive sense of the word.

I am going to draw the attention just on a few characteristic features of the Trinitarian understanding of God without being able to exhaust the well of this beautiful and rich tradition.

The early Church's interest in the Trinity was soteriological. The basic experience is doubtless God's incarnation in Christ and its purpose: God became man so that man may become God. The vision of *theopoesis* is again and again the underlying power in Athanasius's thinking. And this holds true for all the discussions at that time. The divinisation, as the structure of history of salvation, leads towards the non-dualistic concept of Reality which has been expressed in the god-man-reality, revealed in a unique way in Christ, but finally the goal of all creation (cf. 1 Co 15:20ff).

There is One Reality, which has a Trinitarian structure. This statement com-

prehends both God and world. In the Christian tradition, this has been expressed in the attempt to find Trinitarian structures in our human experience corresponding to the Trinitarian nature of God. But I will try to explain that the Trinity transcends this double approach which could still express a hidden dualism.

To show one example of Trinitarian thinking, I want to go into Augustine. Augustine reflects on the unchangeable unity of the one absolute God and finds in it the basis on which he builds his doctrine of the Trinity in the line of the Cappadocian Fathers. God is the absolute simple being, the Being itself without any differences or parts. That is why he calls God *essentia*, viz. *summa essentia*, which he conceives in Neo-Platonic terms as pure consciousness. God is pure being and not at all involved in his actions; he does not change:

Ut sic intelligamus Deum, si possumus, quantum possumus: sine qualitate bonum, sine quantitate magnum, sine indigenta creatorem, sine loco ubique totum, sine tempore sempiternum, sine ulla mutatione mutabilia facientem, nihil patientem.

(*De Trin.* 5. 1. 2)<sup>6</sup>

Nothing shall limit the notion of God, and therefore no differentiation is possible. Augustine makes a distinction between the effects of the accidentless *essentia* inwards and outwards. This is the place for his doctrine of the Trinity. But since there is one God, he hastens to add that any work of the Trinity is a work of the whole Trinity:

opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt<sup>7</sup>

When we attribute certain actions to certain persons of the Trinity, we follow

6. "Let us understand God, if possible, as far as possible, as good without quality, great without quantity, creator without any need, whole without space, eternal without time, making changing things without undergoing any change, in no way passively affected."

only our limited capability of understanding. Such differentiation is meaningless for God.

It follows that:

1. the Trinity is one God, neither the Father is God, nor an abstract *essentia* beyond the Trinity

2. it is a differentiated unity, not because of different actions outwards, but because of inner relationships (*relationes*).

Inner relationships mean that it is Being in movement, that this Being is energy. Augustine tries to find analogies to show the nature of these intimate relationships. In this regard, the human soul and its experiences is most important to him:

Father	Son	Spirit
<i>esse</i> Being	<i>nosse</i> Cognition	<i>velle</i> Will (Love)
1. <i>aeternitas</i>	<i>veritas</i>	<i>voluntas-caritas</i> ( <i>beatitudo</i> )
2. <i>memoria</i>	<i>intelligentia</i>	<i>voluntas</i>
3. <i>mens</i>	<i>notitia</i>	<i>amor</i>
4. <i>amans</i>	<i>quod amatur</i>	<i>amor</i>

Explanation:

The eternity of the *Father*, who is Being itself, is seen in *memoria* as store of past experience. Spirit (*mens*) is intelligibility and as such the "where from" of all psychic life. In the same way, the Father is loving subject (*amans*) and thus the cause of inner divine relationship of love.

The *Son* is the self-reflection of Being and as such truth. This corresponds to *intelligentia* in the human mental process because it is the reflecting representation of all that happens, and the ability to think a notion (*notitia*), which makes possible our

7. "The external activities of the Trinity are undivided."



self-awareness. At the same time, the Son is the 'object' of the Father's love.

The *Spirit* is the intentional movement between Father and Son, the energetic field, which describes the activity of Father and Son in the realm of the human spirit. Thus, it is the primordial communion of love (*amor*) and thus the aim of God's activity, i.e. the bliss (*beatitudo*) of the self-sufficient inner divine life.

The climax of Augustine's theology is the vision of a new man who is not any more separated from God, and therefore, sees God eternally (*visio beatifica*). This becomes real in unification with Christ. The Word has become flesh, and therefore we can conceive of Christ and imitate Him. In imitating Christ, we will be transformed and transfigured into the beatific vision. God is the One, but, as dynamic unity, he draws us unto Himself. Here again we see

the soteriological point. The purpose of this ongoing process is the eschatological fulfilment, in which human beings will share in the inner trinitarian life and love, namely in the beatific vision:

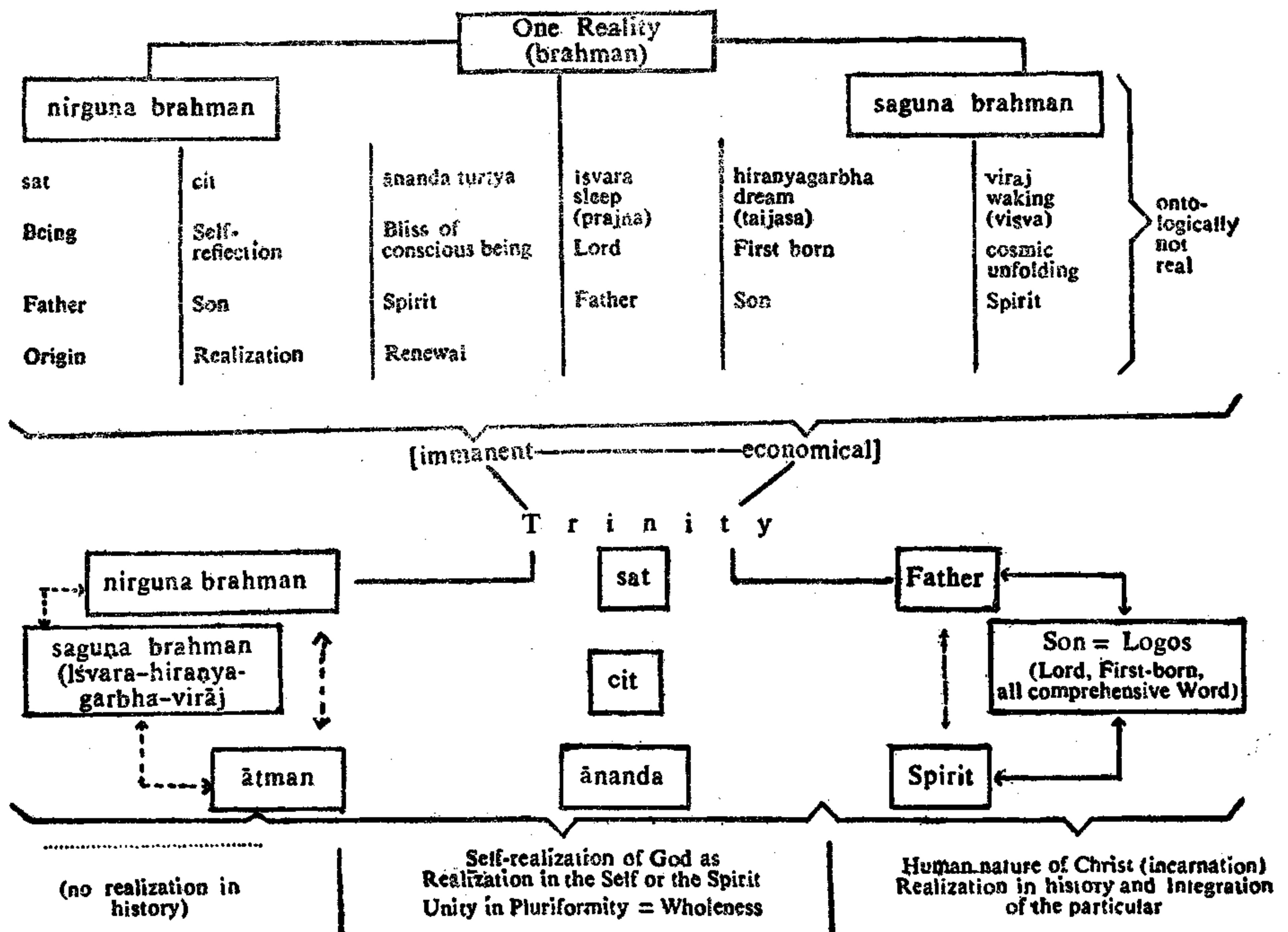
Christus unus amans seipsum.<sup>8</sup>

### 3. Non-dualistic Interpretation of the Trinity

To show the structural similarity and difference between Advaita Vedanta and the Christian understanding of the Trinity, in expressing the *advaitic* intuition, I will put both these doctrines together in the graph found below.

How far could the *advaitic* interpretation of the Trinity be more radically *advaitic* than the Indian non-dualism?

8. "The one Christ loving himself."



First we have to go back to Augustine. We can see how much his ideas are related to what we have called the *advaitic* experience. Augustine's concept of the One in three aspects, which are not attributes, but relational impulses somehow, in which any single aspect comprehends the whole, is parallel to the Indian *saccidānanda*:

sat	cit	ānanda
esse	nosse	velle

The *cit*-aspect of *brahman* incorporates the same point as Augustine's attempt to find analogies expressing his theological reflection on the Trinity: Consciousness is one and identical in itself in reflecting a pluriformity of contents.

But there are also important differences between Augustine and the Advaita Vedānta. Sankara for instance does not know of a concept of the soul as we find it in Augustine. Further, for Sankara, the *brahman* is a motionless being. His dynamic principle (*māyā*) cannot be fully integrated into this Absolute (a deficiency which is solved in Buddhism, as we have seen).<sup>9</sup>

For Augustine, the one God is a dynamical One, which is life in itself, but in such a way, that it does not suffer any change or accidental determination. The dynamic element is the essence of the Godhead, which manifests itself in mutually dependent relations. What Sankara separates—not completely—in order to think the notion of *brahman* purely, Augustine unites in order to think the fulness of God (*pūrṇa*), a fulness which is integrated and non-dual. Thus, the Trinitarian experience could possibly prepare the way for an even more radical non-dualistic concept than found in the classical Advaita Vedānta.

The Trinity has a similar function as the Indian Advaitic view: the mediation between absolute and relative, eternity and

history, God's '*per se*' and '*pro nobis*'. This can be seen in the necessary unity of economical and immanent Trinity and in the attempt to think at the same time God's unity as well as his self-differentiation.

The *advaitic* character of the One Reality has been recognized in recent philosophy especially by Hegel, who says, in his *Dialectical Logic*, that infinity is not a numerical quantity of the finite, but a quality which is realized in the finite. It is the same with his dialectics of Being and Nothing, which consists in permanent interpenetration of both these polarities in 'Becoming'.

And this is, as I understand, the meaning of saying that God is in three Modes of Being (*Seinsweisen* according to Karl Barth) or Relations, in which God realizes himself permanently. The process has been called an endless *perichoresis* (John of Damascus). Hence, these three Modes of Being presuppose the unity of God on the one hand, but, because this unity is nowhere unless in the dynamic process of the Trinity, the three Modes constitute the unity in an ongoing process: the history of the theocosmic unity, the creative dance of Being: *perichoresis*.

In India, we find a certain acosmism because *māyā* is not integrated into the One; its ontological status is not clear. A similar acosmism prevails in Christianity always, when the Trinity is not understood as this sacred dance of Being, as *perichoresis*, the non-dualistic mystery. This acosmism causes further dualities which we are suffering from in our world. It has such consequences as a devaluation of history and of social concerns, a split into the spiritual and the material, which go against the basic non-dualistic intuition.

The doctrine of the Trinity stresses that the world, i.e. all deeds of God in creation, salvation and new creation, is real, is a multiplicity, because God in Himself is differentiated. God Himself is the principle

<sup>9</sup>. Cf. Govinda, *op. cit.*, pp. 6f.



of differentiation (*māyā*). He is in this differentiation and remains the same God who is unchangeable, precisely because he is in this differentiation of Becoming.

And now we can try to answer the question raised above: The ontological status of *māyā* is clarified by means of Trinitarian thinking: God is One, the *brahman*, being in *māyā* the One. *Māyā*, the principle of differentiation, is what it is, being the expression of the 'Location' of the being of the One God. *Māyā* is, as it were, the 'how' of God, the limitless plenteousness, fulness and love. Therefore, God is to be seen in a Trinitarian structure. He is self-moving in *perichoresis*. His 'what' is unity, namely the integration of His self-movement, which we experience as integration of our life, our world.

It is interesting to compare this Trinitarian dynamism with Buddhism which is also a philosophy of Becoming, an extremely dynamic concept of reality. Nagārjuna<sup>10</sup> differentiates, like Sankara, between *pāramārthika* and *vyāvahārika*. The *pāramārthika* view means that nothing can be affirmed, but all is dependent existence. This is expressed by the term *śūnya*, which again should not be mistaken as a negatively substantial term. Emptiness has to be emptied, too, in order to establish perfect non-substantiality (*anitya*). Relationship is—as in Trinitarian thinking—the last category to mark that nothing is unconditioned.<sup>11</sup>

The Trinity is a non-substantial concept, it is the symbol of a dynamic event which integrates the on-going self-negation expressed in the *kenosis*. God empties himself in self-negation. The central symbol of the cross is the pre-condition to understand the relations of the Father and of the Spirit to the Son. The Spirit as negation

of negation or emptied emptiness in Buddhist terms, is precisely fullness because it is twice emptied of form. The Father does not remain a self-affirmative entity behind the Trinitarian process, but he is an integrated moment in the Trinitarian *dynamis*. Some Christian theologians felt the desire to establish a "Godhead" beyond the Trinitarian dynamism. This would be a substantialization which—interestingly enough—has always been rejected by the mainstream of Christian theology.

If the idea of *pratītyasamutpada* is understood as a theory of non-substantiality which is realized in the direct experience of a reality as such (*tathata*),<sup>12</sup> it could reflect the same basic intention as the Trinity: Reality is the dynamism of relationship.

To experience the eternally same unity in the movement of the self-realization of God, in other words, to experience the faithfulness of God, is to realize the *advaitic* structure of the Trinity.

The non-dualistic concept of Reality, which seems to me a proper interpretation of the Trinity, effects all different possibilities of experience and its reflection. God, the wholeness of Reality, appears as the basic energy in its self-movement. He is the One in All. The following table will give some examples with, at the end, the Indian counterpart where, significantly, the aspect of realization in multiplicity is missing.

### III. Some Basic Consequences

One of the main problems of our reflection on God is that we cannot any more express the 'being' of God in substantial categories only. The development of thinking during the last few centuries has ended in an atheism which is precisely a denial of the unmoved *substantia* which had been the first metaphysical

10. G. C. Nayak, "The Mādhyamika attack on essentialism: A critical appraisal," in *Philosophy East and West* 29, 4 (Oct. 1979), pp. 477-490.

11. Govinda, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

12. Nayak, *op. cit.*, pp. 481f.

	FATHER	SON	SPIRIT
Different possibilities of the experience of the One Reality	Origin of Being	Being, Realization	Return of Being, Renewal of the existing from the origin
	beyond all transcendence	through all immanent transcendence	in all immanence
	One Simplicity	Many Multiplicity	Unity of Multiplicity, Realization of the One in the Many, way back to the Father through the Son
	Possibility	Reality	Making possible new reality, resp, realization of the possible
	<i>Creatio ex nihilo</i>	<i>Creatio in participatione</i>	<i>actus participationis</i>
	principles of the universe	principle of history	principle of individuality
	Origin beyond time	eternal presence	presence of the origin in realization
	"where from"	"in what"	"where to"
	source	wisdom	life-love
	freedom	tie	becoming free
	undisposability	going into disposability	free disposal
	<i>nirguṇa brahman</i>	_____	<i>ātman</i>
	<i>sat</i>	<i>cit</i>	<i>ānanda</i>

### Aspects of the Trinitarian self-movement of God

determination of God. Hegel's insistence on God as the *Subject* leads into a new awareness, into a new understanding of the relationship between God and man. And the post-Hegelian history expounds this subjectivity clearly enough. We may not have understood really what Hegel meant when he denominated God as the *Subject*. But the three consequences of our non-dualistic reflection, which I am going to mention now, seem to point at least in this direction.

#### 1. *Overcoming of Dualism*

Theoretically we are usually aware that a metaphysical dualism cannot help any

more to explain Reality, be it in its natural, social, political, ecological or religious dimensions. But, in practice, it seems to be very difficult to overcome dualistic ways of behaviour, because often we are not enough aware of the sources of those dualistic structures. The newly emerging meditative consciousness all over the world might be a key for the solution of this dilemma.

In a non-dualistic Trinitarian understanding of the One Reality, we might be able to overcome the dualism of matter and spirit. This again has consequences. The philosophy and practice of Dialectical



Materialism, for instance, is penetrated by its basic question concerning the primacy of matter or of spirit. F. Engels made it the corner-stone of the Marxist ideology. This question, however, is meaningless in our approach, because both matter and spirit are realizations of the One in the cosmic *perichoresis* of the Divine Reality. The concept of *prāṇa* as the one basic energy could be an auxiliary construction pointing towards the unity of reality which natural sciences seem to be in search of: *prāṇa* is in its manifestations, but it is neither of them.

Now we are touching one of the main problems of the approach I am discussing here. We participate in the *perichoresis* of Reality, we realize the non-dualistic wholeness in a supra-discursive meditative consciousness. This consciousness is passive awareness, a self-reflection of Being. It is the experience of God in an objective as well as subjective sense of this genitive: it is the unity of the experience which we have and the experience which God 'has' in His Trinitarian self-realization. This is *anubhava*, our part in the cosmic dance.

However we try to circumscribe this holistic awareness, it cannot be expressed in logical terms, because logic has its basis in the principle of contradiction.

Now the problem is: what is the relationship between meditative awareness and reason? If our whole argumentation is to make sense, it must be a non-dualistic relation. But how is this imaginable? And how could here be a reconciliation of distinguishing reason and integrating meditation? These questions are of the most urgent importance in our reflection on the possibilities of human consciousness in quest of God. I am not able to give a satisfying answer, of course, and, if an answer could be found, it would have to include all the aspects of human ambiguities in our today's fragile world. Unless we collectively venture to jump into holistic

awareness and yet reconcile this with our ability to take reasonable decisions, we will fail the *kairos* of our situation.

Another aspect of the duality is the relationship between social and individual interests. When we realize that everybody is an *ātman* participating in the One as a realization of the self-unfolding divine mystery, we will realize an ontological solidarity. In realizing the Whole, we realize ourselves and vice versa. We can go through the individual differentiation and integrate it into a social harmony which is nothing but an expression of the non-duality in the *perichoresis* of the Trinity. The contradiction between the individual and the social could be integrated into a process of personalization. The mature person would be the integrated individual, being aware of the interrelatedness of its being. Much more has to be said at this point, and this is only to indicate a possible direction of our thinking.

## 2. *Personality of Reality*

Asking for the meaning of the person we also ask for the meaning of the personal God. There is much discussion between those who want to surrender themselves to a personal God and those who come out of an impersonal spiritual experience. Both these standpoints claim to be the 'higher' one, and the fruitless discussion neither brings clarification nor leads to the real spiritual practice. Thus, any clarifying contribution in this discussion might be of importance.

What is the person? I cannot go into a detailed analysis here but would like to apply our non-dualistic conception just to sketch an outline at this point.

The person is the centre for integration. Being this centre, it is an energetic field in which all energies and experiences of the reality get their meaning and order. The person is the structuralizing principle of the one basic energy, *prāṇa*.

We can try to understand it by means of a simile. Take reality as a limitless amount of lines, points and segmental chains of such lines and points. By means of the unifying and ordering power of the personal, this unordered plenteousness turns into the structure of an ordered crystal. Or take another analogy: Reality is like a net which hangs in central knots. Each person is such a knot.

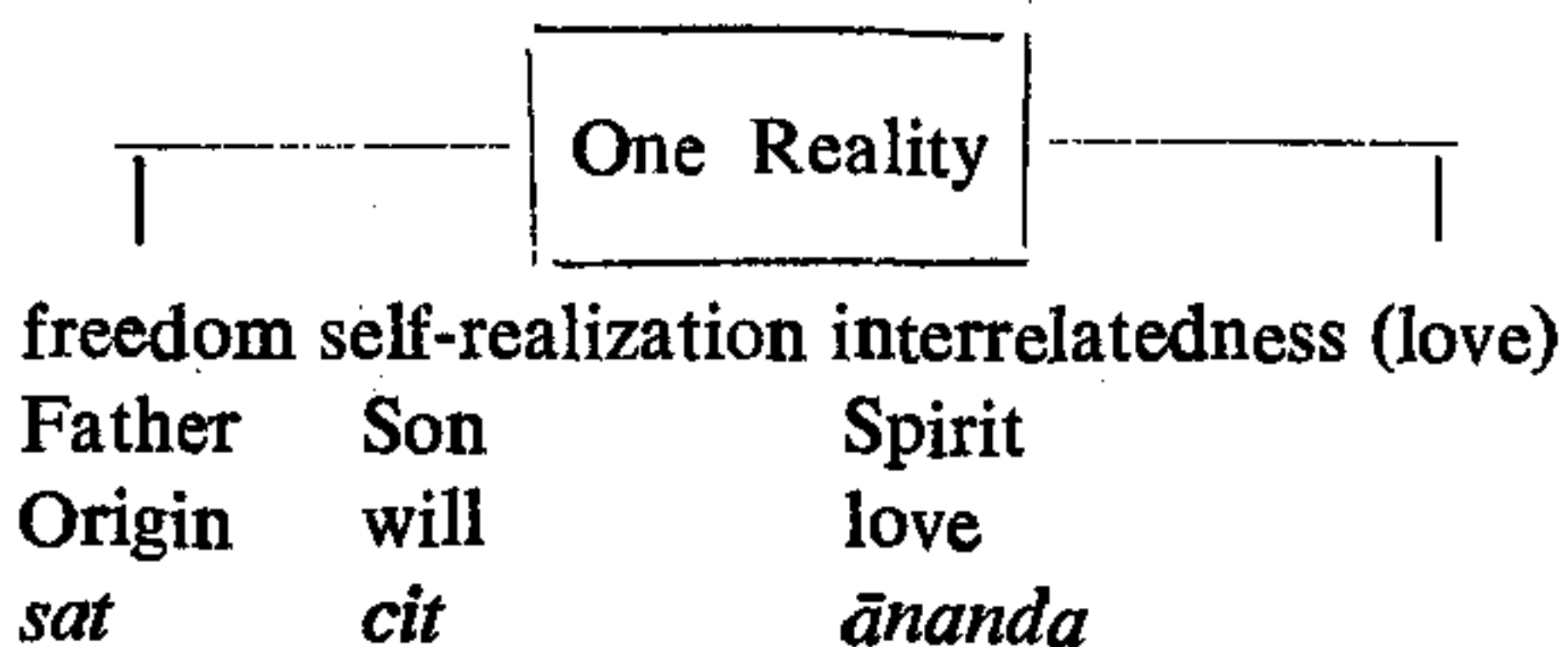
Thus, there is personality from the most primitive forms of organization of matter until it reaches the integrated structure of the human brain. The whole reality is a manifestation of this principle of personality. The Trinity as the integrating wholeness of its self-movement is the most powerful expression of personality. Reality becomes more and more personalized as much as it participates and gets integrated in the Trinitarian process of *perichoresis*.

### 3. Unity of Freedom and Love

Karl Barth's famous saying, God is the one who loves in freedom, expresses clearly the problem of combining freedom and love (involvement) together with the notion of God. Only if we are able to do so, shall

we answer the soteriological problem. This means that, in our non-dualistic approach, only when the One Reality is freedom and love, there is hope for fulfilment of the human destination.

Again, I will try to apply the Trinitarian *perichoresis* in order to demonstrate the non-dualistic nature of freedom and love:



If we compare this diagram with those given above, we can easily interpret it. It means that the freedom of the One Reality is its self-realization in love. If God is the continuity of freedom in realizing love, we can go on to formulate, that the Trinity is the continuity of freedom in its eternal self-realization in interrelatedness. This is the *perichoretic unity* of Being. This is the Trinitarian dance, in which creation is salvation and salvation is creation. This is the process of continuous new creation in the Spirit.

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(Continued from page 126)

Raja Ajit Singh passed away eighty years ago. The other Rajas of Rajputana laid down their power soon after the British rulers left this country in 1947. Now the common people of India must protect their own ancient ideals and traditions. The business magnets of this area such as Singhanias, Dalmias, Jhunjhunu-walas and Birlas (of Pilani) have attained national fame. They should contribute more to the uplift of their fellow countryman. Swamiji, however, relied more on the common people.

The missionary zeal for social service must reappear on the soil of Khetri. There is a Christian Mission school at Khetri. Why can't Hindus have their own

schools, institutions for Vedic studies, and technical institutes in and around Khetri? The Shekhawatis of today should come forward and take the initiative in these matters. Lastly, the ideals of Swamiji, who inspired the Shekhawatis during his three visits, should be more actively pursued.

At dusk, standing on the terrace in front of the room where Swamiji stayed in 1891, I had a beautiful westward view of the illuminated Khetri town and the Bhopalgarh fort on the hill. This charming view Swamiji too must have enjoyed more than eight decades ago. It was Christmas eve. I felt blessed for being a pilgrim at Khetri hallowed by the presence of Swamiji.

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# FROM MANESHWAR TO MANASAROVAR

(Illustrated)

*Text :* VYOM AKHIL

*Photo :* M. M. BATHIJA

For many of us in the 20th century—sometimes endearingly called The Rat Race—Time is usually in its present tense. There is no Time Past and—when we look out at the world through our newspapers, radios and TVs and observe it being practically clad in annihilating weaponry—no Time Future. So, when the Editors of *Prabuddha Bharata* graciously invited me to describe my pilgrimage to Kailas and Manasarovar in the Fall of '82, a memory portal, often found shut, gratefully opened in my mind. But memories and the gift of narration do not often go together. This prologue to the following 'pilgrimage' cannot, therefore, do better than conclude with the apologies of two amateurs—the trekker and the journalist in me.

I have yet to meet a fellow Hindu who, as a child, had not dreamt of the white, pearl-picking swans of Manasarovar, or, one whose heart remained unimbued with the mystique of Kailas, the eternal Abode of Shiva and His Consort, Parvati, Daughter of the Himalayas.

Today the veracity of these stories about a lake and a mountain on a plateau is a matter of utmost irrelevance to me. Myths and legends are a kind of associative shorthand to address essential information to the collective subconscious of a people. And for this, what better time could there be than when nascent imagination is in its first bud? Young trigonometricians, when they have to recall the intricacies of the right-angled triangle, do fondly speak of 'some people whose curly brown hair turns a permanent black'!

At the Humpty-Dumpty Time, the sur-

realistic images of a lotus-lake—blue as the sky, every wavelet a pearl sparkling in the Sun—and a snow-bright mountain atop which epics unfolded, implanted deep into my memory the names of Manasarovar and Kailas; leaving there a seed, an ember. And then, nearly three decades later, in the dust-gold solitude of a crisp, mountain-dawn, that quiescent ember glowed and enflamed into a silent passion with the suddenness of a paradox; I had for the first time in my life, splashed my face with the pristine drops of a limpid emerald of the Himalayas—Bhrgutal. The night before, on an alpine meadow near the small and solitary lake 7,000 feet above the Vale of Kulu, outside a shepherd's tent in which I had later slept myself to a rejuvenation, I had marvelled at how the bright stars above—twinkling diamonds—cast their reflections within me to become gleaming peace-pearls cresting each ripple on the surface of an inner lake.

Then another decade later—and again for the first time—the Manasarovar passion, now a leviathan lurking just below, spouted into the conscious, surface level in the most unlikely of all places—New Delhi. It was 1981, still a few months before the bureaucrats of China and India would sign and exchange the bits of paper which would reopen the border-pass to the first pilgrims after the 1962 war. A fellow-trekker (whose heart is filled with as much goodness as there is snow on those mountains) and I were sharing the passion and a 'dingy' little room of a seedy, off-Paharganj tenement-turned-hotel on that dust-stormed June afternoon, soaked in our sandy sweat, oppressed by

the sultry heat into an unwillingness to move. But the chemistry of our thoughts changed abruptly when one of us said, 'Well, how about Kailas and Manasarovar?' And the other took a deep breath to echo, 'Well, why not?'

During the following weeks we quixotically blundered around, first through the offices, embassies, bookshops and libraries of the city; and later on through the tea-shops, hotel-desks, tourist offices and Ramakrishna Mission's ashramas in Almora, Sukhi Dhang and Lohaghat. We ended up at the Mission's Advaita Ashrama in Mayavati, a few kilometres off Lohaghat, in the border district of Pithoragarh in north-eastern Uttar Pradesh. There, while my friend, a devotee, engaged himself in the activities of the ashrama, I shut myself in our rooms to furiously copy the maps and information from the meticulous works of Swami Pranavananda, the only outsider, more than anyone else I know of, to have spent time in the Kailas-Manasarovar region between 1928 and 1949. We were very fortunate to find his out-of-print books in the excellent reference library of the editorial office of *Prabuddha Bharata* at the ashrama.

We were even more fortunate the following week when we met an 86-year-old version of Pranavananda living all by himself in a small rented room in Pithoragarh town. A bit taken aback to see a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society (U.K.) and a Padmasri (India) in such humble seclusion we, nevertheless, found him content with his lot, his mind agile with his current projects, his eyes still clearly reflecting the serenity they had seen nearly half a century ago. And quite fortuitously, in the town's only bookstore, we also bought the last available copy of his *Exploration of Tibet*.

After journeying through the Kumaon and Gerhwal mountains we returned to Delhi in August. The newspapers were rumouring the imminence of the re-opening of the Pass. The Chinese Foreign Minister was in

Delhi. But for us, it was the Rat Race Time. Back in Sambalpur, the irony of the human effort struck me as I read in the newspapers that the first batch of pilgrims—all members of the Indian elite—was about to set off. I did not feel sorry for myself; I knew I would one day go. I concentrated on Swami Pranavananda's book—and on the physical fitness regimen I had adopted since 1979.

In Sambalpur, I live by the side of a hill atop which is a Shiva temple. Its foundations are laid in a legend which goes something like this: The old Raja of the city's lore was once fasting, unhappy because he could not cross a flood-swollen rivulet for his Monday prayers at the Shiva temple in Maneshwar, on the eastern outskirts of Sambalpur. In a dream Lord Shiva beckoned him from the top of a hill at the northern end; and thus was built the Būdhārāja Temple (The Old King's Temple) lending its name to this area of the city. At dawn each day, I climb up 197 of the 208 cracked stone steps on this hill and turn right to commence jogging downhill on a much ravined path which winds through the bush and shrubbery. The foot of the hill is about two bicycle-minutes from my home. By the end of 1981 I was clocking 16 minutes, doorstep-to-doorstep.

Summer followed spring. And then, on the 6th of May, almost as if preordained, the inexplicable happened. I forgot to switch off my radio after the 6 O'clock supper-time news. After the five-minute bulletin from Delhi, the local announcer came on the air to advise how I should apply to the superintendent of police to become a constable; or, to some governmental bureau in Bhubaneswar, the capital of Orissa, to become a lower-division clerk... I raised my left hand to switch off the receiving set, but the announcer must have somehow sensed my disinterest, for she said hurriedly: 'The pilgrimage to Kailas and Manasarovar is now announced for 1982



...Those wishing to go should apply to ...' The girl droned on and on at an unusually fast clip, in Oriya, but there was no need for me to be annoyed at this, or to even listen carefully, because the moment she had said 'Kailas-Manasarovar' my raised hand had moved away from the radio switch to the twin buttons of the tape-combination. At the end of the announcement I was informed that the last date for receiving the applications was the 10th of May—just four days away. Immediately after supper, I re-heard the announcement on tape, brought out my typewriter and, by 7 pm my application was on its way to Delhi—on the last clearance of the Railway Mail Service.

Two months and two days later, on July 8, a telegram arrived; and twenty-three days after that, I was on the train to Delhi. But before that I had to beg around for funds, feeling a little like the bhikshuks (mendicants) of yore. When I reported myself to The External Affairs Ministry, August 2, to be taken for the mandatory check-up at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, I hid the fact of an excruciating internal injury on the right side of my back (Due to a negligence, not mine, I had been able to locate my train only when it was leaving its platform; I had rushed across two pairs of tracks to board it from the off-side but had lost my grip on the hand-holds when my 35-kilo pack, jutting out from my back, was hit by a pole. I had fallen on the track-side gravel, the fall cushioned by the very pack which had been its cause. Somebody in the train had pulled the alarm chain and, miraculously, I was up, picking my gear which was strewn on the track-side and was on board the train before a crowd could gather to fuss over me...*Ja ki kripa pangu giri langhe...*). It took four days of paper work and bureau visits before we were declared 'processed' for the trip. As we were told we would have to provision ourselves for the twelve days in Tibet, I repacked my rucksack, discarding almost

everything except the boots and the sleeping-bag, to create space for the food. On departure day, August 6, 1982, I had a fever, a toe-blister, an aching back and the last seat on the last row in the bus.

In my condition, therefore, there is little to tell of the 48-hour bus trip. After the first lunch at Rudrapur, the bus driver was kind enough to let me comfort my back by reclining on a bench next to his seat and after the second lunch at Pithoragarh I discovered that Pranavananda was away in Andhra Pradesh, leaving me to go unblest by him to Kailas and Manasarovar. At the first night halt at Champawat, official paper work would still not leave us in peace; tired as we were, we signed all the forms we were asked to. We could not understand the logic of the second halt at Dharchula where there was another health check. The halt could have been scheduled for Tawaghat, the bus terminus just half an hour's ride away, thereby saving us an extra packing and unpacking of ourselves and our gear in the bus. Of my 24 co-pilgrims—a miniature India in their diversity—I had avoided acquaintance. I dislike being herded around, particularly on mountains where one's own self is more than enough company. So, if package-travel was unavoidable, the least I could do was to keep a respectful distance from others. But a few tea and grocery shops at a staging point called Tawaghat, 2,000 metres above sea-level, are not conducive to much self-centred thinking. It was road's end. For Kailas and Manasarovar, all I now had to do was to remember to put one foot in front of the other.

So, while the other pilgrims busied themselves with the ponies and porters and the correct weightment of their luggage, I set off for the Enchantment we call the Himalayas. I had planned to commence very gently, almost as a toddling child; but my aching back and my own burden (I think I was the only pilgrim to have carried all his



gear all the way) were not the only reason for this. I spend most of my life just 200 metres above the sea, and there is no fitness regimen I know of which would change me instantaneously into a Sherpa. I have to wait, often two, three days, before I can get into my trekking rhythm. By the time I trekked the five kilometres to Thani Dhar, most of my fellow-pilgrims had passed by me. In their excitement they had yet to learn that the Himalayas dislike being hurried through. From Thani Dhar, six kilometres on a decline bring you to the picture village of Pangu. We stopped for a snack-lunch and were then off again, climbing up to Tithilakot, 2763 metres, and down to Sirdang and, then Sirkha, completing the remaining eleven kilometres of the trek for the day to camp for the night at 2438 metres above sea-level. I was almost the last man to be in.

I must stop here to commend the excellent young men of the Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam who took care of us on the camps this side of the border. Their humane touch made their service a most happy experience and the food they cooked and served in the camps—it had to be simple under the conditions—was wholesome and tasty. KMVN went out of the way to help the pilgrims in every way. In this they were, of course, aided by the local population and the jawans of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police.

The next day—as on every day between Dharchu La and Lipu La at the border—amidst much cheerful confusion amongst the KMVN, the ITBP, the porters, the pony-men and, of course, us the pilgrims, we left camp Sirkha for camp Jipti, eighteen kms away. As I had decided to make the pilgrimage in as much solitude as possible, I was the last man out of the camp, the object of the staff's polite curiosity. I climbed down three kilometres to Sumariya and then up, nearly four kilometres to Ringling at

about 3,000 metres elevation; and then down again, to Sinkholagad for lunch.

Sinkhola is a cheerful village in a wide basin in the mountains. The terrain is still fertile and there was much activity in the fruit orchards. As I ate, and took in the terrain, I noticed I was not the last man after all. In the distance I saw three figures descending from Ringling. Closer up, a few minutes later, I recognized my fellow-pilgrim and, later friend, Mr. Madan Mohan Bathija and two staff-members of the KMVN. We had our tea together. Climbing up from Sinkhola to Galla village and then on to the camp in Jipti, I changed my rubber shoes to put on a pair of canvas hunters hoping they would be a comfort to my toe-blister. They were, but I woke up the next morning to discover that the hunters had given me a blister on the heel of the other foot! And I was disgusted that I had still to learn that shoes are not essential. From Jipti onwards I walked barefoot for the most part, my 'essential' shoes on my back!

The 2200 metres elevation Jipti Camp, though 250 metres lower than Sirkha, was located on the tip of a bluff which commanded a horse-shoe view of mountains, streams and their little valleys, and tiered cultivation wherever Man could scratch the mountains. But the idyllic view from Jipti is deceptive. Around a curve we could not see from the Camp, lay the most treacherous part of the trail. The fun and games were over. The novice trekker would have to go through an ordeal before he would come out a veteran. More than strength, the trek would test his will, courage and endurance.

The ten kilometres down to Malpa camp, at 2072 metres, led the pilgrims through a flight of precariously set stones that never seemed to reach an end; but, of course, they did, finally, only to meet a perilous path which seemed to go on and on by the side of the dangerous, roaring gorge through which river Kāli was rushing down. With



the gorge on the right and the sheer rock-face on the left, the latter seeping water from every crevice, and space enough only for one foot, there was no option but to walk manly through the miniature waterfalls we encountered. The ordeal lasted only half a day, and most people had to do it on foot as a pony-perch on a downhill is even more precarious; but that half a day was enough, and we were grateful to KMVN for spacing out the camps not by kilometres but by the amount of strain to be endured in reaching them.

By this time, I had become more friendly with the porters than with the pilgrims. At Malpa I chatted up with one of them, 45-year-old Pratap Singh, from a village near Lohāghāt. This was his first time as a hired porter. He had been a trader between Taklakot and Tanakpur before the '62 war but had fallen on hard times since. To add to his woes, his 20-year-old son was missing. A simple man, Pratap Singh empathized with me because, he said, unlike other pilgrims, I was carrying my own burden thereby earning the respect of the porters. He was amazed that I, a plainsman, had trekked in Ladakh and in the far-away French Alps. I noted the particulars about his son and promised to write letters to help locate the lad, which I did upon my return, sending copies to him. He would have to ask someone in his village to read them out to him because Singh had not had the benefit of education. Some high-nosed pilgrims thought I was odd to have associated with such friendliness with the porters, but I could not care less.

If the Jipti-Malpa trail was not for yodelling in the mountains, it was merely a prelude to the next stretch to Būdhi, only seven kilometres away but nearly 800 metres above. But just when other pilgrims were having a tough time, I was coming into my elements. I lacked the pudgy flab of most middle-class plainspeople and had taken pains to keep my muscles in trim. They

were now surprised to see that whereas they were negotiating the climb with some difficulty even when they were carrying nothing but their own bodies, I was doing it very well with thirty-five kilogrammes on my back and not even panting hard for breath. By now, I had noticed who my fellow-pilgrims were. Apart from me from Orissa, there was one each from Bihar and Assam; Tamil Nadu and Karnataka were represented by two pilgrims each; and there were three from New Delhi. That left six from the state of Maharashtra including Mr. Bathija and the charming 65-year-old Dr. Lalitha Rao whose good nature was a source of inspiration to me; the person for whom I would eventually feel the strongest, 50-year-old Mr. Lalman Shukl, though a Madhya Pradesh, had also to be included in this group because he worked and lived in Bombay. That left West Bengal to send nine members, including two husband-and-wife pairs, to complete the Sixth Batch of Pilgrims for The K-M Yātrā.

We were in Būdhi in time for lunch. The camp had a lively young camp-in-charge from Nainital who sported an Afro-hairstyle and who, every hour on the hour, day or night, would come out of his office-cum-room, to shout out, just once, the word, 'Shiva' merely for the pleasure to have it echoed back by the surrounding mountains. Hitherto, as one of the stragglers, I had to sleep in tents strung out at each camp; but from Būdhi onwards, my accommodation changed into the one or the second room each camp had at our disposal. In Būdhi, pilgrims rested their bodies; some made a foursome and played cards, and I washed my laundry. In the evening Mr. Shukl and I went out for a walk to the dispensary only to find the doctor dead drunk. But he was still pleasant and, with unsteady hands dressed up my blisters. Būdhi has a wider location than the last one, Malpa-on-the-gorge, but the mountains were arrayed high, and the night came soon.



The next morning, as we prepared to leave Būdhi, there was something in the air which made me feel I was about to be back in my kind of land. During a decade of trekking in the Himalayas, I had noticed a subtle change came over me when I reached an altitude ranging between 8,000-15,000 feet (approx. 2,500 to 4,500 metres) the noticeable effect of which was a greatly enhanced sense of physical and mental well-being, a heightened sense of perception and alertness which suffused me with an indescribable joy. I might have been a Tibetan or an Andean in an earlier incarnation!

From Būdhi, the trail curved out for half a kilometre towards a mountain and then there was a steep, three-kilometre climb. As I zipped ahead of most of the pilgrims, my breath and step in near-ideal rhythm, I noticed that even the ponies were puffing for breath, burdened as they were to carry humans; but more surprisingly, I noticed that those astride on the ponies were also breathing hard without having to make any exertion at all! The altitude was catching up with them. And they had not been doing enough to acclimatize themselves to adapt to it. I hoped the group would not have to face problems so soon, but the thought of the ITBP doctors and the oxygen available in cylinders comforted me somewhat.

I was the first to reach the end of the climb on a beautiful plateau called Chhato Tanga. We had left behind the vegetation. Now only the grasses would be with us. Presently I was in the midst of a half-kilometre stretch of the most exquisite wild flowers. After half an hour of walking on the gentle decline we had lunch at Garbiyang.

At 3,130 metres elevation, Garbiyang is the kind of place I would choose to settle down. The village used to be a node of commerce in the past between the regions of Tibet, Nepal and Kumaon. It is in a wide expansive area and it is easy to see that the weather here would be very harsh in

winter. But for me it is at altitude A.

We had to hurry, though, because we were only half way to our camp at Gunji. The mountains were bleak, barren and, without a binding vegetation on them, brittle. Strong gusts of wind would dislodge small pebbles which would then whizz by as if they were bullets. Occasionally, a rock these pebbles were holding down, would loosen and begin to roll down, hitting others to set off a chain-reaction which might culminate in a landslide. Having passed through such fears before, I hummed my way on the gentle trek, alert and watchful, my pace swift.

Three kilometres short of its destination, the trail turned left and opened into a valley, wide and made the more majestic by the mountain-columns on either side. Presently, I was at the beautiful confluence of Kālī and Tinker rivers. A kilometre later, a bridge over the Tinker looped me back towards the confluence to pass through Gunji village which had the last post-office on our side, and then on the campside on top of a long and wide escarpment above the river. The weather, the view, the feelings within, all were in a grand harmony. I was happy. Soon, others arrived and we fell into the camp routine, but with a big difference. It was Janmāṣṭamī Day and we decided to celebrate Lord Krishna's birthday in traditional style. The merry villagers of Gunji joined in. There was much singing of joyous hymns and kirtans and picture-taking. Dr. Rao brought out her flute to play the *rāga hamsadhvani*. Then, at the stroke of midnight, there were cheers and greetings, breaking of fasts with prasād. I enjoyed it all. Gunji is another place I would like to settle down!

On the morning of August 13, we set off for Kālāpāni. Our brief sojourn in the magnificent Tinker valley was over but from Gunji, which is at the same height as Garbiyang, climbing only 500 metres in 14 kilometres offered little in the nature of a



test. The Kālī river had been narrowing down and, en route to Kālāpāni, we were seeing it in its infancy. The ITBP had set up a coffee point in a clearing, and then we were in camp at 3,600 metres. As we were now only a day away from entering a territory where there would be little support from the Indian side, we were given, after a very thorough final check on our blood-pressure and general condition, a pretty comprehensive medical kit by the ITBP officials. There were pills and instructions for every conceivable eventuality. Our passports were taken from us by the Indian Customs Officials to stamp our departure from India.

The last camp had been changed from Shang Chan at 4,000 metres and 5 kms short of the Lipu Lekh Pass, to Nga Vidang due to weather problems at the former. For me the climb to the camp was no problem. We would soon be crossing the Great Himalaya Range and now there were no towering mountain walls—just a gentle rising of the terrain made bleak with the extreme erosion by the elements. Nga Vidang was well located on what seemed like a pleasant meadow with a superb view all around. There were three round tents for the pilgrims and two tents of the KMVN and the ITBP. Food was excellent, the camaraderie matched it. Even the ponies seemed to be especially fond of Nga Vidang grass. The porters had gathered in a big, round *imbada* on the grass, cheerful and happy. We ate and drank many cups of coffee and bedded down early. Tomorrow the departure would be very early—at 4 am.

Mr. Shukl and I were the first to leave the camp on August 15, Independence Day. It was still dark, but we could make out the trail in the faint glow from the east. I love the mountains so much that I hate every hurried step and so, we were going out as if it were a pleasant walk in the park. I had no intention to enter into a trekking competition with anyone. At a point, I

turned off the track to walk on higher ground and see as much as I could. Dawn came and then sunrise. I could see in the Nga Vidang camp far below a burst of activity as pilgrims, ponies, porters, the KMVN and the ITBP men sorted things out. Then there was a file of perhaps fifty living beings walking out of the camp. I sat quietly on a stone, happy in the view and in my solitude. Mr. Shukl had stuck to the winding trail and his red plastic rain-coat would occasionally become visible around a bend. It was peace. Soon, the ITBP men supporting us fanned out above and below the pilgrim-line to be at hand at the first signs of troubles. They were taking regular precautions, ready to detect the first signs of High Altitude Stress. Some pilgrims were nervous and tense about the high altitude. There was little talk. Everybody seemed to have realized the importance of breathing and was concentrating on it through their noses! Four and half hours of goose-stepping, and we were at the foot of the Lipu Lekh Pass. People rested their backs on rocks to have tea and biscuits, and then we were off to the final escarpment and saw the narrow opening in the ridge. Only the very ominous could be as calm as Lipu Lekh was on that morning. We were fortunate.

The Chinese would not have more than one group of pilgrims on their territory at a time. So the transfer of the pilgrims to and from Tibet had to be synchronized at the Pass. If the preceding batch failed to reach the Pass from the other side by 10 O'clock, we would have to retrace our steps to Nga Vidang and wait it out for another day. But we were fortunate even in this. Twenty minutes later a cheer went up. The first members of the Fifth Group had appeared at the Pass followed very quickly by the rest of the Group. Their delight and relief at having made it was infectious, and soon complete strangers were exchanging all kinds of information. Pilgrims



from our Group were asking ; the Fifth was answering. Mr. Shukl and I stayed away from this out of our sense of politeness. As it was Independence Day, I had hoped there would be a brief flag-hoisting ceremony at the Pass—a fitting welcome and a send-off. In the event, when my turn came, I crossed over into Tibet singing our national anthem all by myself.

From 5,121-metre pass to Taklakot camp, a thousand metres below and 22 kms away, the journey was required by the Chinese to be made on pony. The descent was comparatively gentle but, on that clear day, the morning ultraviolet was harsh and the mountains we were leaving behind appeared unreal in the desolate, bleak and jagged silence. The big Range looked different from the north. Our luggage and our lunch packets were strapped on to the yaks which had been herded off away from us and so, when we arrived at a spot called Pala which had nothing but two stone huts for the shepherds to take shelter in, there was no lunch and no shade for us. The Chinese ponies had a mind of their own, and all that the pilgrims could do was to balance themselves upon them. We had three guides, none of whom spoke a word of either Hindi or English. In the afternoon we came to the first village, Tashigong, and then to the second one Magrum, two kilometres later. But we did not stop to greet the villagers who came out to welcome us with their Namaste (an Indian greeting). Towards evening, tired and hungry, we arrived at Taklakot camp—and to unexpected luxury.

There was a spruced-up Reception Committee of Chinese Customs, a male and a female interpreter, some other officials we could not identify, and the large staff of the camp—all assembled at a wide steel gate of the walled-off enclosure at the eastern end of the little town. Inside, on either side of the gate and on the right, were offices, staff-rooms, a kitchen and stores. On the left were four single-storey buildings hav-

ing semi-detached rooms. These were for us. There was a road wide enough for trucks to go around a central building which had the dining-room, a small shop and a little office ; the dining area also served as an auditorium for Chinese movies in the evening—and there were two or three of them every day of our stay. The rooms were quite well furnished with nice beds and curtains and large glass windows. There was a tin of Chinese tea by the side of a thermos flask of hot water and beautiful china. At the southern end there was a pool with lilies. And to look after us there were smart, young Chinese and Tibetan girls, clicking their shiny black shoes around purposefully. I was quite unprepared for this westernized efficiency.

Those huge beasts, the yaks, had deposited our luggage in a clearing by the Customs Office and were milling around, tethered at the back of the Dinner House in the middle. Tired and hungry though we were, we had to first go through a customs-check before we could get organized and eat. But the Chinese made everything go like clockwork and soon we were in our luxury beds, sleeping on dragon-motifs.

As the cost of all this service would have been excessive for me, I had to deny myself the excellent Chinese lunch and dinner during the staging-stay of nearly five days at Taklakot. A substantial helping of the main item in the breakfast was enough. I felt that with time, the Chinese would be able to readjust the schedule for Indian pilgrims so that they could spend more time away from Taklakot than we did.

The sixteenth was a day of rest. Our group had to be broken into two, one part would be visiting Kailās and the other Mānasarovar ; and then, they would interchange. Those areas had yet to be equipped to support more than a dozen persons at a time. A pilgrim from Delhi had been designated as our liaison officer, and we had some self-appointed VIPs (very import-



ant pilgrims) amongst us. This sort of thing is quite natural in any group of humans, even in many other species. Because the Chinese were finally allowing pilgrims into 'their' territory, the L.O. and the VIPs seemed to be infected with the Indian government's concern for preventing even the smallest cause of offence to the Chinese; and so, when we were told that we would have to reconcile ourselves with only a partial circumambulation of Mānasarovar, we acquiesced meekly; all of us, except my friend Mr. Shukl.

Mr. Shukl, a devout pilgrim, had cherished the hope of making complete *parikramās* (circuits) around the holy mountain and the lake. He now felt cheated and sad. Very bravely but politely, he let it be known that he was not interested in proceeding further if a complete circumambulation of Mānasarovar was denied him. This annoyed the L.O. and the VIPs who were more worried about offending the Chinese. A confrontation ensued, but Mr. Shukl would not budge from his position. The others lost their patience and, from the way they let this be known, their wits too, thereby allowing the confrontation to degenerate from one about merit and feasibility to one about 'face'. For Mr. Shukl there was nothing to do but wait out the consequences of his determination. The man had a very becoming grace under pressure and I was full of admiration for him.

Mr. Shukl and I were sharing the same room in Taklakot and I felt I could avert a crisis by intervening in this matter. I spoke to our liaison officer, an employee of the Indian Government. If he and his friends, I said, had run out of ideas on how to handle this situation, would they let me take over and speak directly to the Chinese? I then went up and spoke to the interpreters explaining to them the need to make an exception of their procedures and make arrangements for my friend to go around the entire lake. They asked for an hour to

consider the matter, at the end of which, the lady interpreter came to our rooms to explain that Mr. Shukl would have to forgo visiting Kailās, would have to pay an extra charge for a special guide and he would have to sign a bond releasing them from all responsibility in the event of a mishap. I translated this to Mr. Shukl. He agreed readily to all this but I could see he was having some difficulty in containing his joy. With moist eyes, he began to thank me for all I had done for him. I felt very humble in front of this courageous man and with great humility I asked him, in Hindi, 'Shuklji, now that you have what you wanted, will you not please consider giving it up for the sake of all of us?' At this Mr. Shukl could not control himself anymore. With tears rolling down his cheek, he quietly nodded his head. As the interpreter was also an Asian, she understood everything when I informed her that it would be no longer necessary to make any special arrangements.

With this bit of drama-in-real-life out of the way, the early morning truck-ride to Kailās and Mānasarovar the following day, August 17, was an anticlimax. We were huddled on the floor of the covered truck. The ride was bumpy, the wind cold. But our spirits remained high because we would soon be where we all had wanted to be. Soon it was dawn, and as we neared Rākshashtal—Mānasarovar's twin—there was hymn-singing inside the truck. Soon the 50-km ride was over. The Chinese truck stopped and someone shouted, 'We are there!' There was a minor stampede within the truck as those of us, who were in the interior and could not see anything outside showed little concern for the apparently million bruises the bumpy ride had given us, tried to get out of the truck all together to get our first *darshan* (look) of the holy lake.

As I had been amongst the first to scramble on the truck at Taklakot, I was



among the last to get off. For me, the truck had merely stopped to drop those who would 'do' Mānasarovar first; I was amongst those who would have to bow to Shiva first at Kailās. Even as I got off the truck, I was careful not to look at the holy lake. There was little point in doing so before I had rid my mind of its several irrelevancies.

At last, I turned around into the morning. And then, receiving an inner direction, without any conscious thought, I was already walking briskly towards it, my hands unzipping my shirt. At 4,572 metres above sea-level, I was taking a dip in a lake in an early morning as if I had been doing it all my life! And then, when I brought out my head from under the freezing cold water, I finally saw Mānasarovar, my eyes level with its sparkling surface.

Soon I was out of it, drying my body, shivering as much with the cold as with the ecstasy. I was back near the truck. It was time to part with the 12 of my fellow-pilgrims, including my friend Mr. Shukl, to resume the journey to Kailās. We would be back on the banks of this lake in three days' time.

On our way to Tārchen, the base camp for Kailās about 30 kms from Chaiti, the Mānasarovar base camp where we had stopped to off-load a part of our group, we stopped at Parkha near Hoare village. The latter would be the spot from where the *Lake-parikramā* would either end or commence. We were in Tārchen by lunch time. In that region of Tibet, place names might give the impression of a semi-permanent habitation. But there is nothing like that. A place with two tents was called Chaiti, and Tārchen had just one tent!

The thirteen of us pooled our provisions and we had Dr. Rao with us—our personal physician, chief par excellence and Master of Ceremonies all rolled into one. If there was any leader with us, she was it. This is not surprising because in addition to all

the above, she was then a legislator in the Maharashtra Assembly, later to become the state's minister for health. But I admired her personal qualities more than anything else.

Tārchen, south of Kailās Massif, commands a nice view of the mesa containing Rākshaśhtal, Mānasarovar's twin with a larger surface but less depth. The Gurla Māndhātā mountains with their cones of snow, to the south-east of Tārchen, looked deceptively small. To the west the plateau reached out to the curved horizon. And when the clouds scurried to reveal the massif (pilgrims scurried around with their cameras), the majestic peak of Kailās, the highest of the 22 peaks in that massif, could be seen, its shape tetrahedral, its summit glowing bright with eternal snow. Before the Chinese takeover, there used to be five monasteries around Kailās.

August 18, Wednesday—bright, cold and very dry. A quick breakfast and we were ready to begin our 54-km circumambulation of the Kailās massif. There were only five or six ponies, and pilgrims would have to share their legs and lungs with them. My spirits could not have been better. They had reached their own high ground after I had left Būdhi and would remain there until I returned. We walked west for a couple of kilometres and then turned into the small valley of Lha Chhu river, entering the massif from the west; our goal, the Diraphuk camp comprising just one tent, 20 kilometres upstream.

The Lha Chhu valley is small and silent. The massif blocks direct sunlight until noon, but the valley glows heavenly with diffracted light. I passed a solitary Tibetan performing *sāṣṭāṅga-parikramā* of Kailās (*s.p.* is more arduous as it requires you to take one step the length of your body, prostrating yourself flat on the ground and repeating this for the circumambulation). And then, half way to Diraphuk, met a Nepalese family come on pilgrimage. My head fre-



quently turned right and up, to catch a glimpse of Kailās which appeared to be even more magnificent than the photographs I had seen; a huge beauteous dome of snow which, it was easy to see why, invited nothing but awe and reverence and enflamed the imagination into fables any myths. The air coming from it had an intoxicating pureness. A single bird, a tiny speck, flew across my field of vision. The spell broke. I saw, straight ahead, the tiny tent, with smoke coming out of a chimney.

We were in Diraphuk for a late lunch. There was little we could do now but wait and rest. The next stretch would be the toughest of the entire trek. There would be everything on that stretch which a trekker would wish to pit himself against. I borrowed a needle from our Tibetan guide to mend my rucksack. Then, dinner and sleep. I felt well rested the next morning when we got ready to move out. It was still quite dark, and pilgrims used their flash-lights to follow the trail. We began climbing.

From Diraphuk at 4,938 metres to Dolma La (the pass in the northern side of the Kailās Massif) at 5,670 metres, the climb is more than 100 metres per kilometre, average. We had been informed that negotiating the Pass after even 10° of sunrise was fraught with danger—the reason for starting so early. After about an hour, I was fairly ahead of our group to turn around and look. Most were having it tough. I was glad that the two members who came from Tamil Nadu and one from Maharashtra had the foresight to stay back at Tārchen and forgo the Parikramā. Of the ten who did it, all, except me, had to take the aid of the pony at one time or another. The extreme altitude and the extreme exertion needed of them, caused almost all to have headaches, nausea, blackouts etc., but I, the only pilgrim to carry my things on my own back, had no problems at all! In fact, I was feeling ecstatic enough to shout

just to hear my voice echo back from Kailās. In a few minutes the fatherly looking Tibetan guide who was encouraging other pilgrims, came up and smiled at me. Spontaneously, we linked hands and broke into a dancing run uphill, shouting 'Ye...' (possibly, Tibetan for 'Here we go!') We went but a dozen or so steps to stop and pant and laugh at each other. When a few of the pilgrims caught up with what they probably thought were two crazies—one Indian, one Tibetan—up on a mountain, the guide turned to say to them, 'Ye Tibbati Ghorā Hai' (He is like our Tibetan horses). A thoroughbred of the mountains—I do not think I would cherish any other compliment in my life more than the one from this old and happy Tibetan.

At the top of the Pass, when all around there was so much beauty to see, my fellow pilgrims were having trouble. One had collapsed, but we all helped her revive, telling her it was more dangerous to stay on the pass than to walk down it to safety. From the top of Dolma, the descent to Gouri Kund was through a moonscape. There was nothing but rock all around, rock which bore the marks of all the snow it had carried over the aeons.

Less than half a kilometre down the trek, just 70 metres below the Pass, we saw, rimmed by rock, the emerald green Gouri Kund. It was like looking down a crater inside its caldera. Climbing down to the level of the water was, for me, an overwhelming experience of diminution of scale. I looked so small to myself. I collected some of the pure water from the Kund and climbed up to the trail.

The descent to the valley of Lhamchukhir river, east of the Kailās Massif, was steeper than the approach from Diraphuk. But the tension was over and soon we were at the banks of the Lhamchukhir, brewing tea and eating a brunch. Being ahead of my fellow-pilgrims, I missed the tea, but

ate a little of what I had been carrying in my back-pack.

After the Tinker Valley we were in briefly, Gunji, the valley of Lhamchhukhir river which becomes the Zhong Chhu further downstream, was the most captivating. The sun had just passed our meridian and our trail kept us, for the most part, in the shade of the Kailās Massif. Soft, alpine grass had grown in the valley which was little wider than the banks of the brook-like river. This part of the trek, though it stretched well into the evening, will go down in my memory along with the trek down the beautiful Pangi Valley in Lahaul, in Himachal Pradesh.

After Lhamchhukhir met Topchen Chhu, six and a half kilometres downstream and became Zhong Chhu, the valley broadened into further majesty and, in the bright sun, the mountains we were leaving told me that the Kailās Range of the Himalayas lacked none of the grandeur I had seen in the Ladakh, Zaskar and Lahaul ranges. It was an idyll. I stopped to take a nap on the grass. I was in my personal heaven.

Presently, I awoke and stretched out to shake off the languor which had come over me. I must have slept for fifteen to twenty minutes. I commenced walking, feeling satiated in my life. And in a couple of hours, still within the mountains, I could see the shimmering Rākshashtal, glittering like a huge pearl on the Tibetan mesa. The shadows had begun to lengthen. A small cloud chose to spray a little rain over me. Hastening my pace, I soon found the trail turning west again, and another hour saw me back in Tārchen camp. When the other pilgrims came back and rested for the night, some half-jokingly suggested I should try climbing Mount Everest. It doesn't look that I shall be doing that in this lifetime, but if ever I got the opportunity and the time to train up for it, and the will too, I would choose to do it like Reinhold Mess-

ner, without oxygen cylinders. But why should someone who loves the mountains think of conquering their peaks? Is it not enough to be in them? I am quite happy to deeply love the Himalayas. Obsessions are oppressions.

We rested an extra day at Tārchen to allow our friends in Mānasarovar to complete their longer circuit. But we were happy when, on the morning of August 21, they came on the truck. A happy reunion. And soon, we took their place. All except three of us, including me, had opted not to circle the Lake. They would drop us at the starting point, Hoare Camp, and would wait it out on the banks of the Lake, at the Chaiti Base Camp. At Hoare, a point on the northern bank of the Lake, not identified in Swami Pranavananda's maps (it looked to be a comparatively recent settlement close to Langbona shown on his map), the truck stopped long enough for the pilgrims to get excited by the things the settlement's only shop had for sale. We saw a stampede reminiscent of those sales which the shopkeepers of Connaught Place in New Delhi announce to get rid of their slow-moving wares. Even I could not resist buying a few things as mementoes and gifts from my visit to Tibet. The price was reasonable and the quality of the goods was not bad. Soon, we were saying goodbye to all those who had been with us on the Kailās Parikramā. The three of us who were left behind had an afternoon to kill and a night to sleep through before our journey around the lake could begin. I went out to sit on the wall of a dilapidated building to watch yaks grazing near the lake, children playing games and a single solitary black tent some distance away. There were a couple of fierce-looking dogs guarding the tent and so, I was content to sit out in the sun, often looking out in a north-westerly direction in the hope of catching a glimpse of the Kailās Peak from this distance. With darkness approaching, we ate the supper we



cooked, and I rolled into my sleeping-bag for a restful night's sleep.

In the morning, there was a strong breeze blowing from the west and, as two of my fellow-pilgrims had opted to do the circumambulation on ponies, I had little choice left but to keep pace with them by hiring, with great regret, a pony for myself. To the three of us were attached two Tibetan guides with whom we could not converse in any language we knew. We were off into the east, a little after daybreak, the only object of our interest, Mānasarovar, lying to our right as we did a clockwise circuit.

On the back of a pony then—a large, black temperamental stallion, really—I had, for the first time, no need to watch my step. My attention, therefore, focused almost entirely on the lake-surface for most of the two-day circumambulation. With the source of light, the sun, moving in a circle perpendicular to the lake-surface and with us, the pilgrim-observers, in a circle more or less at a right-angled concentricity to it, the subtle changes I observed on its surface—of shade and texture, reflectivity and colour, of opacity and limpid formations—were a captivating kaleidoscope. I would turn my head away momentarily to relieve the muscles of my neck only to gaze again at the wondrous lake. Soon, within me, a lake of emotions, thoughts, feelings and memories which were in an ever-changing harmony with the lake without, came into being. So, when there was a break in our pace—to cross a stream, or to have lunch—I felt as one who comes out of a trance. There is, therefore, little I can say about the topography around the lake, except that it was in general conformity with the rest of the area; with hardly any vegetation growing around the lake there was little wildlife to look out for—small burrowing animals and, on the surface, an occasional flight of ducks. I do remember sharply that at the intermediate camp where we had bedded down for the night, I had sat outside our tent,

fascination still unabated, to catch the delicate sounds from the lake. The mesa was shrouded in darkness, there were stars twinkling above appearing brighter than when seen from the plains, and then, on the north-west horizon my eyes looked on to the glowing tip of Kailās, its snow stoked red by the eventide fires of our Star.

According to Pranavananda there used to be eight monasteries around Mānasarovar. But the time we got back to Chaiti, or Tseti as he spells it, we had seen the ruins of the three which fell on our route. They must have been massive edifices. At Tseti, late in the afternoon of August 23, we rejoined the '*daśavatārs*' (ten incarnations) who had been with us in Tārchen. Most had been collecting stones by the banks of the lake, and there was the usual gabble when a group of our species waits out for action.

The next morning, I took a dip in the lake—my second—and to do my *vidāi pranams* (salutation to bid goodbye) and there was a wait for the truck to come back with the 12 pilgrims from Tārchen. We slept that night on the comfortable beds in Taklakot.

For me the pilgrimage had come to an end when I bathed in Mānasarovar. As we were leaving, a very strange feeling came over me. Hitherto, in all my travels, whenever the return began, I had looked forward to going back home. But upon climbing on that truck, as I gazed at the lake, I felt as if I was travelling away from my home, never to return. I therefore, carried within me the sadness of an exile.

There is little to relate of the return journey. The weather at the Lipulek Pass had been less clement on the 26th than it had been on the 15th. At Būdhi we were stranded due to a landslide but on the 30th I and a fellow-pilgrim left the rest and trekked through Malpa and on to Jipti to make up for the extra day in Būdhi. From Pithoragarh, where my companion waited



for the rest of the group, I left alone for New Delhi where, on the 3rd of September, I was lucky to meet Pranavananda and tape an interview with him. On the 5th of September, late in the evening I was back in Sambalpur. At the crack of dawn, September 6, I climbed up the Būdhārāja Hill as

usual. In the east, under the Morning Star, I saw the red light on the radio station tower in Māneshwar. It seemed to point to the eternal aspiration of the human soul and to the timeless, all-pervading, unbroken Divine Presence in which Kailās and Mānasarovar are two seemingly discrete points.

## REVIEWS AND NOTICES

**SPIRITUAL IDEAL FOR THE PRESENT AGE.** BY SWAMI VIRESWARANANDA. Published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras 600 004. 1983. Pages 167; price Rs. 12.

**SPIRITUAL IDEAL FOR THE PRESENT AGE** is a very appropriate title under which some eleven of the speeches of His Holiness Srimat Swami Vireswaranandaji Maharaj, the Spiritual Head of the Ramakrishna Order and the General President of the world wide Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission since 1966, have been published in book form, including in it three articles relevant to the topic contributed by him in earlier years to the journals of the Order—to *Prabuddha Bharata* in 1926 and 1943, and to *Vedanta Kesari* in 1954—and two brief Notes on the *Gita* and 'The Aim of Religion'

The talks included in this book were given at different times from 1967 to 1979 at the Centres of the Order: three at Bombay, two at Bangalore and one each at Madras, Mysore, Trivandrum, Nagpur, Patna, and Jalpaiguri. The last one was given originally in Bengali.

As the blurb informs us, Swami Vireswaranandaji joined the Order in 1916 at the age of 24 and worked in different capacities, held several responsible positions in the organization, and was its General Secretary from 1961 till he became the President of the Order in 1966. He is a disciple of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and had the privilege of intimate contact with most of the great direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Beside being a deep student of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda thought, traditions, and literature and their significant role in shaping the life of mankind in the present times, he is also versed in the Hindu scriptures and Indian philosophical literature—some works of which he has rendered

into English either in full or in condensations. Moreover he is a perspicacious thinker on problems facing the modern world and their root causes to which he had to apply himself being placed in positions where he had to spiritually guide and solve the difficulties of large numbers of people from different parts of the world with varied temperaments. Hence he is competent to speak on the subject. He has found, as many other eminent people too have recognized, that the malady of the modern world is primarily spiritual, of understanding man in his true nature, and it needs a broad spiritual ideal which can harmonize the modern aspirations with the deeply felt spiritual hunger innate in man.

Over long years of more than half a century, Swami Vireswaranandaji has deeply pondered on the prevailing situation and its varied manifestations in the light of the ancient Indian thought and the luminous lives and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda who worked on the world stage, and how they can help solve the problems facing humanity and lead men and women to a higher sphere of life with noble ideals harmonizing the secular and spiritual aspects of existence. The fruits of his deep contemplation in this respect have been given out in these highly practical and lucid expositions filled with brilliant insights. The talks were given to devoted audiences at the Centres of the Ramakrishna Order and hence they are couched in a simple and direct language, but effective and convincing. Though the talks were meant for the devotees of the Centres, their inner spiritual appeal in the context of modern life is universal for such were the lives and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda. Hence the title, *Spiritual Ideal for the Present Age*, is apt and



refers not only to the Indian scene but to the whole world.

The talk on Sri Ramakrishna and the Religion for the Present Age sets the tone and should have been placed first. Some of the other talks too delineate the modern problems and throw light on how they can be solved harmoniously in the context of a universal spiritual ideal. Such are: 'Sri Ramakrishna and the World Problem'; 'Sri Ramakrishna and the Evolution of the Spiritual Ideal'; 'What is Religion'; 'Religion and National Integration'; 'True Socialism'; and 'The Message of Vivekananda'. The problems of modern women are covered under 'The Holy Mother—Ideal of Womanhood'.

In these talks and writings, the viewpoints of Science and Religion are compared and contrasted as well harmonized and shown that both are complementary. Similarly, it is shown that true Socialism is not only not contrary to the spiritual ideal but flows from it. In 'Religion and National Integration' and other talks, the modern ideas of fundamental rights as against the ancient ideals of fundamental duties of every section of society and individuals are contrasted, and it is shown how the emphasis on the former and neglect of the latter has led to much mischief and selfishness, individual and social. In the article on 'Holy Mother and Ideal of Womanhood', it is pointed out 'that Ultimate Reality has two aspects, the Divine masculine and the Divine feminine', and that woman can reach her greatness and fulfilment by developing her innate potentiality rather than by imitating man.

The book makes an interesting and enlightening reading throughout, with brilliant flashes and comparison of ideas and ideals in the secular and spiritual fields and their harmonization made by a mature and illumined mind experienced in dealing with persons from different parts of the world. All those interested in the evolution of a happy new world will benefit greatly by reading it and will find practical ideas to work upon.

The printing and get-up are fine and the price is moderate.

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VASTUSUTRA UPANISAD: ED. ALICE BONER, SADASIWA RATH SARMA AND BETTINA BAUMER; Published by Motilal Banarsidass, Bungalow Road, Jawaharnagar, Delhi 110 007. 1982. Pages 192, Rs. 150.

*Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad* is a unique work in Indian literature in general and that of Vāstusāstra in particular. It is the first text dealing with sculpture to claim the status of an Upaniṣad. It is ascribed to Pippalāda, the seer of the famous Prasna Upaniṣad. The credit for discovering this manuscript goes to Sadasiva Rath Sarma a traditional Hindu scholar. Alice Boner was a distinguished indologist who became famous all over the world by her well known books like *Principles of Composition in Hindu Sculpture, Śilpa Prakāsa* and *New Light on the Sun Temple at Konark*. It is rather unfortunate that she passed away when the present work was in the press. This unique work is a fitting finale to the dedicated work of a perceptive scholar and true lover of Indian art.

The text has been edited with the help of five manuscripts. Dipak Bhattacharya has in his introductory note examined the position of this text in the Atharvavedic literature and has rightly concluded that the text in the present form can not be earlier than C 1750 which seems unusually late. This, however, does not minimize the importance of its contents. It should also be noted that the book devotes more space to iconography than to temple architecture.

The work is divided into six *prapāthakas* (chapters) on the model of *Prasna Upaniṣad* of the Atharvaveda. Three disciples, Atharvāngirasa, Śilpakāsyapa and Kuvitsa ask different questions to which Pippalāda gives replies which constitute the subject matter of this Upaniṣad. It deals with knowledge of stones (*sailam*), the compositional diagram (*khilapañjara*), the carving of stones (*sailabhedanam*), the disposition of limbs or parts (*anga prayoga*), the determination of character (*bhāvanānyasa*) and integration of all forms (*sambandha-prabodhana*). In explaining this he gives importance to line and circle and to *yūpa*. Pippalāda asserts that line and circle with their further developments into second and third dimensions like plane, cube and sphere actually embrace the whole display of visible forms in the universe. In essence the *pañjara vidyā* or the science of composition is the profoundest professional secret and hence it requires the highest degree of initiation. 'In Pippalāda's doctrine space directions and also symbolic forms are considered to be the bed-rock of all form figuration, the very ground on which art creation stands. In the hands of the architect or the sculptor north-south becomes the vertical or Agni (fire)-line with an upward direction. East-west becomes the āpa (water)-



line with a horizontal, even with a restful position or at times with a powerful expansion to both sides. The diagonals south-west to north-east or south-east to north-west are the wind lines (maruta) which engender dynamic movements. These lines all cross or converge at a central point, which is called the *brahmabindu* or *marma*, matrix of the entire display of forms.' Thus many things which cannot be explained by mere words can be explained in the language of forms with the help of images. The present text shows a marked precedence over the already known silpa texts. This is the uniqueness of the *Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad*.

The text is edited with rare erudition, typical of Alice Boner. The introduction by her is highly analytical and brilliant. The translation is highly competent and contains many useful compositional diagrams. The text in Devanāgarī is followed by a list of sūtras. The copious notes enhance the value of the book. The work has a preface by Bettina Baumer, one of the co-authors of the work. In conclusion it must be said that this is a highly scholarly edition of a unique silpa text ably edited by Boner, Sarma and Baumer. The printing and get-up are excellent; Motilal Banarsidass deserves our compliments.

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**YOGIC MANAGEMENT OF ASTHMA AND DIABETES**, 3rd edition 1982, Pp. 184, Rs. 30/- and **THE PRACTICES OF YOGA FOR THE DIGESTIVE SYSTEM**, 2nd edition, 1980; Pp. 177, Rs. 30/-.

Both written by Dr. Swami Shankardevananda Saraswati and published by Bihar School of Yoga, Monghyr.

Written by a medical graduate of Sydney, Australia, under the guidance of a well-known Yoga teacher, the two books under review have a two-fold purpose: firstly to serve as a therapeutic guide for those who are suffering from Asthma, Diabetes and digestive disorders and, secondly, to open the door to the higher aspects of Yoga and a more harmonious way of life. The books do not aim at a criticism of the modern Western system of medicine which has saved so many people from suffering and malnutrition and has been effective as a large-scale preventive measure against infectious diseases. There are

several systems of medicine prevalent each of which has faults as well as good points. The author attempts to combine the good points of yoga and modern medicine. Such an approach is most suited for psychosomatic diseases like asthma and many digestive disorders, which manifest on the physical level but have their roots in the mind.

Both the books are written on an identical scheme. First there is information about the disease, its cause and symptoms. Together with this, elementary knowledge of the anatomy and normal functioning of the respective organs of the body is given in simple non-technical language so that lay-people can understand it. This is followed by suggestions for correct living, scheme of yogic exercises for cure, and practical programmes. The last section describes with illustrations a number of cleansing procedures, Asanas, Bandhas and Pranayama.

An acute attack of asthma is characterized by severe breathlessness, marked anxiety and tension. The author suggests a number of yogic techniques which can relax the body and mind and prevent the attack. The phase in between attacks is associated with increasing deformity of the chest, and faulty posture. This can be corrected by regular practice of Asanas. Yoga-Nidra, a state of inner awareness combined with complete relaxation, brings to surface and finally eliminates deep rooted psychic tensions and mental conflicts, which are the main causes of Asthma. A balanced nutrient diet, fasting and avoidance of constipation contribute much to prevent further attacks.

The relatively small section devoted to diabetes gives a resume of carbohydrate metabolism, the two types of diabetes and signs and symptoms of hypo- and hyper-glycemia. Meditation and Hatha-Yoga exercises form the yogic treatment. Though a four-week course of treatment is outlined, it should never be attempted without the direct guidance of an experienced teacher.

The digestive system is the one which suffers most from psychological stress and food-abuse, so common in the present-day society. Many of the digestive disorders can be prevented if one is educated in the digestive process and dietetics. The first section of the book *The Practices of Yoga for the Digestive System* provides information about the physiology of digestion—modern and Ayurvedic. The second section deals with the how and why of common digestive disorders,



with special references to psychological factors. After giving information about symptoms, the yogic treatment of ailments like 'ulcer', 'dyspepsia' 'constipation', 'wind', 'piles', etc. is suggested. Several chapters in both the sections are devoted to the various aspects of diet and eating habits and their role in causing disease.

Although the author has taken great pains to highlight the role of emotions and mental stress and strain in causing physical illness, the overall emphasis is on the practice of Hatha-Yoga, which may make one more body-conscious. Body-awareness, if not sublimated through higher aspiration and spiritual techniques, may defeat the very purpose of Yoga. Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Jnana Yoga are merely mentioned. A few chapters on these, preferably written by Swami Satyanandaji himself could have made the books more comprehensive and balanced—truly a doorway to higher Yoga.

The two books provide much-needed health education for lay people, and an insight into the subtle workings of the human mind, and can serve as guides to holistic living. Physicians can recommend them to their patients suffering from asthma and digestive disorders. But it must be remembered that none can become a doctor or a yogi merely by reading books. Disorders like 'wind', 'constipation', 'dyspepsia', are symptom-complexes, and may be the early indications of sinister internal diseases. The books must be read keeping these limitations and warnings in mind.

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**SAMKARA ON THE ABSOLUTE:** By A. J. ALSTON. Published by Shanti Sadan, 29 Cheptow Villas, London W11 3DR. 1980. Pp. 259. £3/50 (Soft Cover).

The book under review is the first volume of a 'projected series of six, already in draft form, which aims to bring together the most important texts of Samkara in a systematic and digestible form.' The material in these volumes has been extracted from the commentaries in which it had for the most part been lying embedded, and has been rearranged into topics. The resulting six volumes cover six basic themes of religious philosophy, namely (1) The Absolute, (2) God and the World, (3) God and the Soul, (4) Polemics, (5) Spiritual Discipline and the Role of Revelation

and (6) the Spiritual Path itself, culminating in 'Enlightenment' or 'Liberation'. When all these volumes are published they will together constitute an important landmark in the study of Vedanta in general and of Samkara in particular. It is a difficult and novel project. It goes to the credit of Dr. A. J. Alston to strike out a way through a wide range of texts commentaries to produce this erudite and admirably readable volume. The whole project covering all the six volumes is entitled 'Samkara Source Book'.

Being a painstaking research scholar noted for clarity and meticulousness, Alston has incorporated the views of different authorities and textual evidences to establish his thesis that Samkara was a Vaiṣṇava. The reviewer had an opportunity to teach his other scholarly work *Naiṣkarmya-Siddhi* of Suresvaracharya, published under the title *The Philosophy of the Absolute*, to post-graduate students of philosophy in Bangalore University for more than three years. In the present volume the author expounds a clear-cut metaphysical position and has brought together selections from Samkara's works to provide a comprehensive picture of the ontological views of Samkaracarya.

On the question whether Samkara was a Saiva or a Vaiṣṇava, an assessment has been attempted in this volume from pages 10 to 13 and from pages 45 to 46. The author is not at all unfair in stating that the commentaries of Samkara and the works of his pupils and followers show Vaiṣṇava and not Śaiva leanings. As a matter of fact, such a distinction never existed during the time of Śamkara. The one doubtful text *Manasollasa Vārttika*, attributed to Suresvara, on the Dakṣiṇāmūrti hymn seems to the author uncharacteristic of Suresvara, especially the absence of any obeisance to Śamkara in it. There is no reason, however, why, as an Advaitin, Samkara should not have paid equal honour to Viṣṇu and Śiva. Incidentally, there is a lot more to support the thesis of Dr. A. J. Alston connecting Śamkara with Vaiṣṇavism in G. V. Budhakar's excellent article in the Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society, Bangalore, 1933, entitled 'Is the Advaita of Śamkara Buddhism in disguise?' One may also refer to another remarkable article by R. D. Karmakar in the Annals of the Bhandarkar Institute, no. 39, 1958, Pp. 365-371, where he argues quite convincingly that the works of Śamkara are the products of a Vaiṣṇava, but he goes too far when he argues that the *Gītā-Bhāṣya* attributed to Śamkara was not written by Śamkara Bhagavatpāda! The Japanese scholar

Prof. Mayeda has shown by meticulous arguments that *Gītā-Bhāṣya* must have been written by Śamkara alone.

A. J. Alston seems to subscribe rather too easily to the views of Swami Saccidanandendra Sarasvati of Holenarasipur on the question of nescience (*ajñāna*). All the immediate disciples of Śamkara and most of the great stalwarts of the Advaita school accepted the existence of primordial cosmic ignorance (*mūla-avidya*). To set at naught such a strong tradition and massive evidence is not in keeping with the authenticity of such a scholarly work.

Alston is a master logician and proves his points in crystal-clear language to the satisfaction of all. On page 225, he argues on the lines of Yājñavalkya's dialogue with his wife: 'One might raise the question why it should be held supremely dear. For the principle of Vital Energy and the complex of body and organs are most intimate possessions than such evidently external entities as sons and wealth. But the Self as the primal metaphysical principle is more intimate even than those intimate possessions. Whatever in the world is supremely dear is sought after with every effort. And this Self is supremely dearer than anything dear belonging to the empirical world. So it follows that very great efforts indeed should be made to attain it, to the exclusion of efforts to attain any other good, eventhough the latter may seem to be enjoined as

a duty'. Throughout the book we find the author putting forth such fine interpretative arguments which keep the reader saturated in the philosophy of Śamkara.

In Chapter IV, 'The Absolute as Being, Consciousness, Bliss', the author discusses very clearly the central Vedantic doctrine of the Divine that it can never be described or defined. In the usual sense of knowledge, Brahman cannot be known. He or rather it, is to be described only as *neti, neti*: 'It is not this, It is not this'. There is no science of God; and ordinary knowledge, of either the empirical or the strictly rational or mathematical type, may be a hindrance rather a help. 'By whom It is thought, by him It is not thought; he by whom It is thought knows It not. It is not known by those who know It: It is known by those who know It not.' I have rarely come across any one discussing the basic concepts of Advaita in such an excellent way as Alston does.

This is a reliable 'Source Book on Samkara' not only for the professional philosopher but also for wider circles of readers interested in Vedanta. In view of the excellence of Volume I the reviewer is desirous of reading the other volumes of the same author.

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## NEWS AND REPORTS

### RAMAKRISHNA MISSION GOVERNING BODY'S REPORT FOR 1982-83

*Issued by the General Secretary,  
Ramakrishna Mission, on 10 January 84*

Under the Chairmanship of Swami Vireswarananda, the President of the Ramakrishna Mission, the 74th Annual General Meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission was held at the Belur Math premises at 3.30 p.m. on Sunday the 15th January, 1984. The Governing Body's Report for 1982-83, placed before the meeting, is given below.

Notwithstanding several difficulties and problems cropping up in some of the Mission's Institutions, the dedicated workers remained firm in their ideals and steadfastly carried on the selfless service activities of the Mission including strenuous relief and rehabilitation programmes in places devastated by flood, cyclone, drought and such other natural calamities.

In the period under report a sum of Rs. 82,68,939/- was spent by the Mission towards (a) Flood Relief in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Orissa; (b) Cyclone Relief in Assam, Gujarat and Orissa; (c) Drought Relief in West Bengal; (d) Disturbance Relief in Assam and West Bengal; (e) Medical Relief at Ganga Sagar Mela in West Bengal; (f) also Rehabilitation Work in Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and West Bengal. Out of the above amount different gifts valued at Rs. 27,30,531/- were distributed.

During the year the following kinds of Pallimangal (Integrated Rural Development) Work were implemented for the villagers: Agro-Economic Service, Cottage Industry, Pisciculture, Dairy (A. I. Centre), Schools, Credit for Small Business, Projects for the Handicapped and for Destitute Women and Children, Seminars, Youth Conventions and several Mobile Dispensaries. On the whole, Pallimangal project spent Rs. 3,96,971/-.

During the said period the following new developments took place: Three completed floors of the multi-storeyed building for the Vivekananda Institute of Medical Sciences of Ramakrishna

Mission Seva Pratisthan, Calcutta, a mobile dispensary at Gauhati, a medical ward at Narottam Nagar, a dispensary and a library-cum-reading room at Cherrapunji, a kitchen and a dining hall at Midnapore and a Karmi Bhavan at Puri Mission were inaugurated.

A 'Monk's Quarters' at Jayrambati, a *Vimana* (tower) on the prayer hall at Mysore, a second floor including a prayer hall in the south block of the Probationers' Training Centre at Belur Math, three charitable dispensaries and three primary schools at Dinajpur (Bangladesh) were declared open.

In addition to the above, the Mission conducted 8 indoor hospitals and 60 outdoor dispensaries which treated 40,134 and 39,02,573 patients respectively; 11 mobile dispensaries which treated 3,97,460 cases; and 701 educational institutions which taught 1,00,823 students.

Ramakrishna Math, the sister institution of the Mission, had 7,836 students in its 28 educational institutions and served 7,78,193 patients through its 24 hospitals and dispensaries.

540 educational institutions and 45 hospitals and dispensaries including mobile units and a large number of libraries were conducted and various economic programmes were implemented in rural and tribal areas.

Under the direction of 'Sri Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Bhāva Prachār Committee' a good number of youth conventions (*yuva sammelan*) were held in different States.

A committee named 'The Committee for the Comprehensive Study of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement' has been formed to implement the ideas and ideals of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Accordingly seminars/conferences will be organized by the Committee throughout India.

The Math and the Mission foreign centres are engaged in conducting educational, medical, cultural and spiritual activities including worship, seminars etc.

Excluding the headquarters at Belur, the Mission and the Math had 74 and 66 Branch centres respectively spread throughout the world.

# NOTES AND COMMENTS

## *Crisis in Economics*

The birth centenary of John Maynard Keynes has brought to a sharp focus the crisis that is brewing in both the practical and theoretical fields of economics, the 'dismal science'. Points out Roy Jenkins in an article in *The Observer*, London: 'As a result we have been back, so far as wasted output and wasted lives are concerned, even if not absolute poverty, in the conditions of the thirties from which Keynes helped to rescue us. And approximately there, unless new policies are pursued, we show every sign of staying.'

Keynes's theory has for long remained the bastion of economic thinking, planning and activity in the Free World. Its one great drawback is that it is based, not on human values and realities, but on 'monetarism'—money and the manipulation of money—in striking contrast to Marxist economy which is based on values and labour. Nevertheless, the Keynesian view seemed to be successful in the practical world of macro-economics. It saved the Western world from the Great Depression of the 1930s, it made economy demand-oriented thereby promoting all-round development, and it laid the foundation for the conception of the Welfare State. In developing countries like India it gave governments the licence to nationalize industries, control private enterprise and indulge in deficit financing. But a number of factors like inflation, arms race, the rise of the Third-World countries, etc. have shaken the foundations of Keynesian economics.

Keynes believed that with the acceptance of his theory, 'the Ricardian foundations of Marxism will be knocked away'. This did not happen. On the contrary, several leading economists believe that the Keynesian emphasis on demand (that demand will automatically create supply) and the need for government interference in private enterprise have actually undermined the strength of capitalism. In his best-selling book *Free To Choose* Nobel Laureate Milton Friedman argues that the economic miracle that made the U.S. the world's greatest exporter of food and producer of industrial goods was made possible entirely through 'private initiative operating in a free market—the shame of slavery only excepted'. He attributes the cause of the present slow growth and declining productivity in the U.S. to increased government interference in the business-industrial sector. The economic policy of Reagan administration is based on this view.

In Third World countries the prime drive has been to produce more. But increasing evidence drawn from Afro-Asian countries shows that poverty, unemployment and inequality have increased *pari passu* with the growth in GNP. In a recent book Mahbub ul Haq, who was for many years the Chief Economist of the National Planning Commission of Pakistan, has shown the fallacy of the belief that 'the road to social equalities may inevitably lie through initial inequalities'. According to him, the divorce of production (supply) from distribution is false and dangerous.

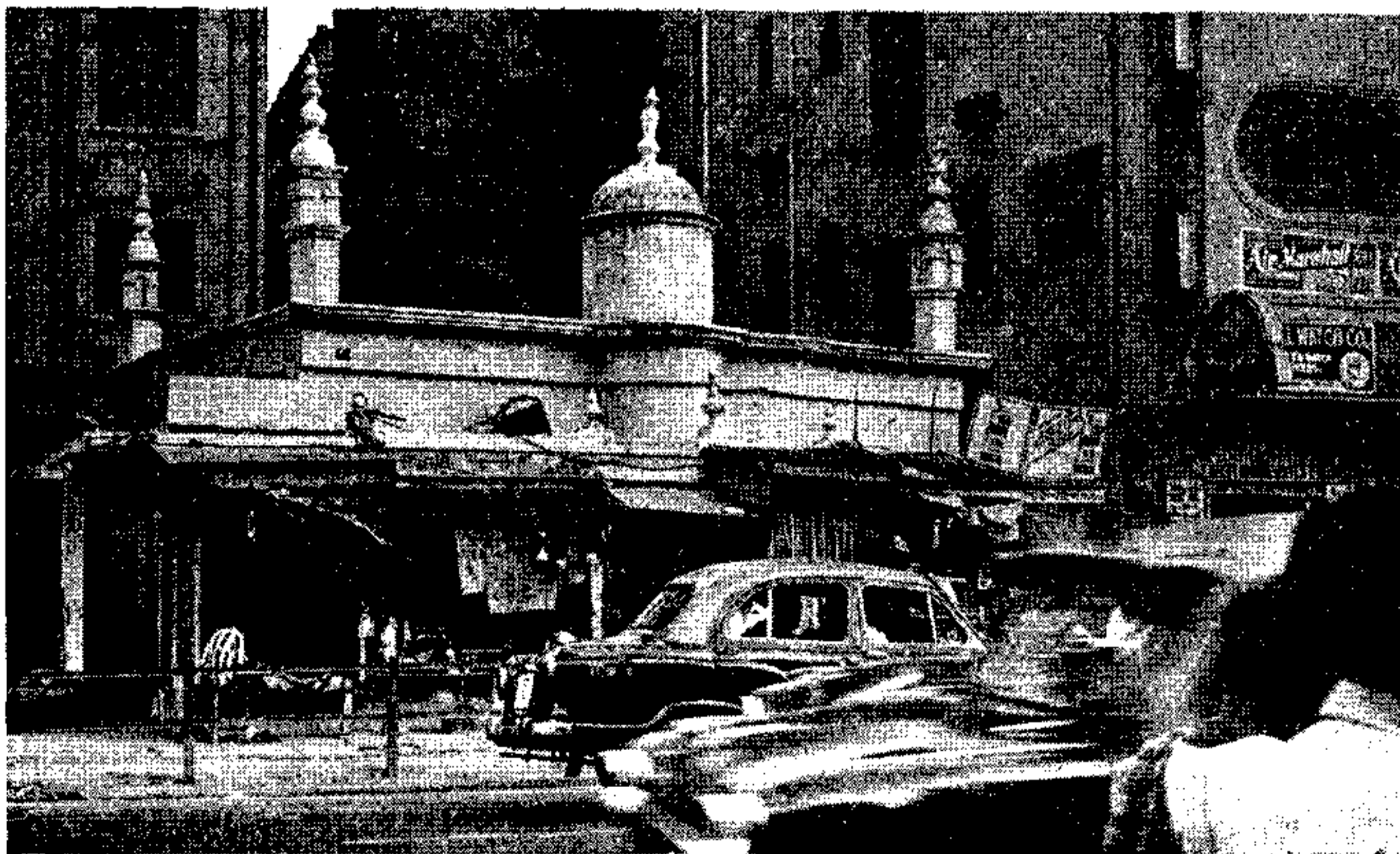
The inadequacy of demand-side economics in the West and of supply-side economics in the Third World has made economists ask themselves : where do we go from here ?

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Mosque at Mollapara, Dakshineswar



Mosque at Geratala, Calcutta



Sheikh Abdul Sobhan  
(front left)

Sheikh Barkutulla  
(back right)





Gazipir at Dakshineswar



Peepul tree near Kamarpukur (Standing under this tree boy Gadadhar had a divine vision)



Dargah of a Pir near Sarati Mayapur, Hooghly  
(Child Gadadhar sat quietly in ecstasy here)





Town of Khetri with Bhopalgarh hill fort in the background  
(Sketch by Col. J. C. Brooke in the Journal of the Asiatic  
Society in 1864)

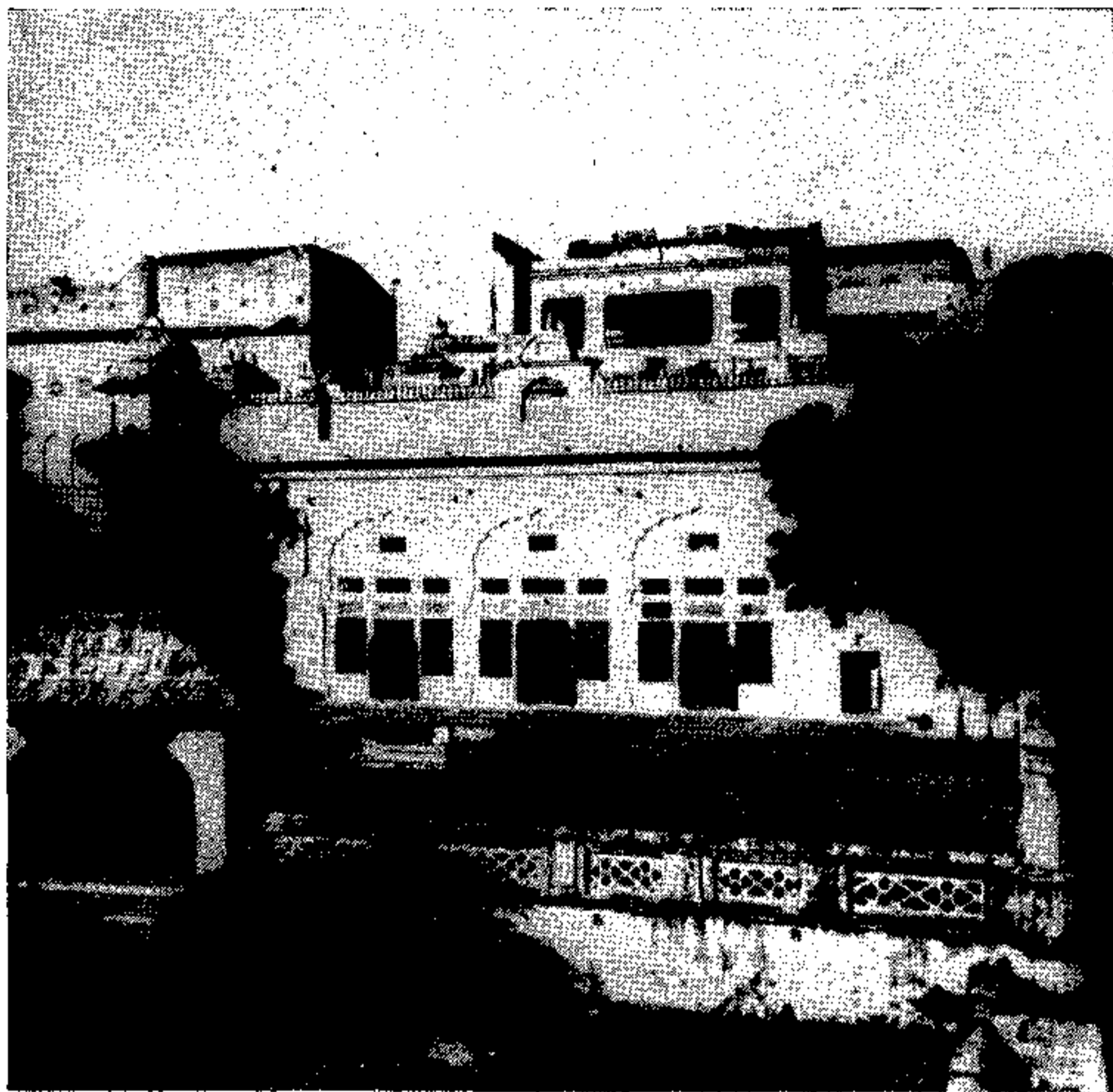


Raja Ajit Singh and his son Jai Singh whose  
birth in 1893 brought Swami Vivekananda  
to Khetri just before his first voyage to  
**America**



Munshi Jagmohanlal, private secretary to the  
**Raja**

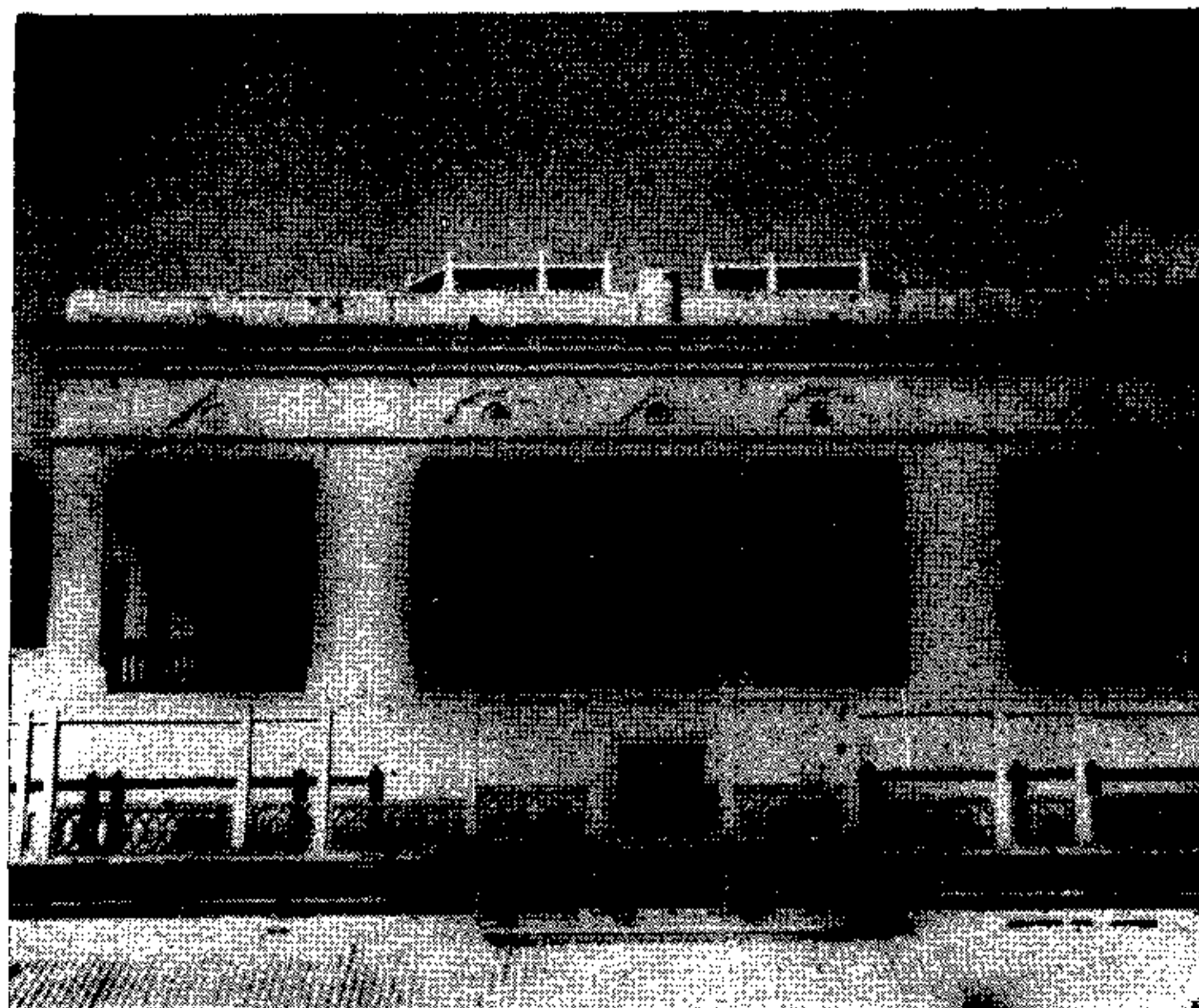




Khetri Palace, with the main entrance at left



Durbar hall where Swami Vivekananda addressed the court

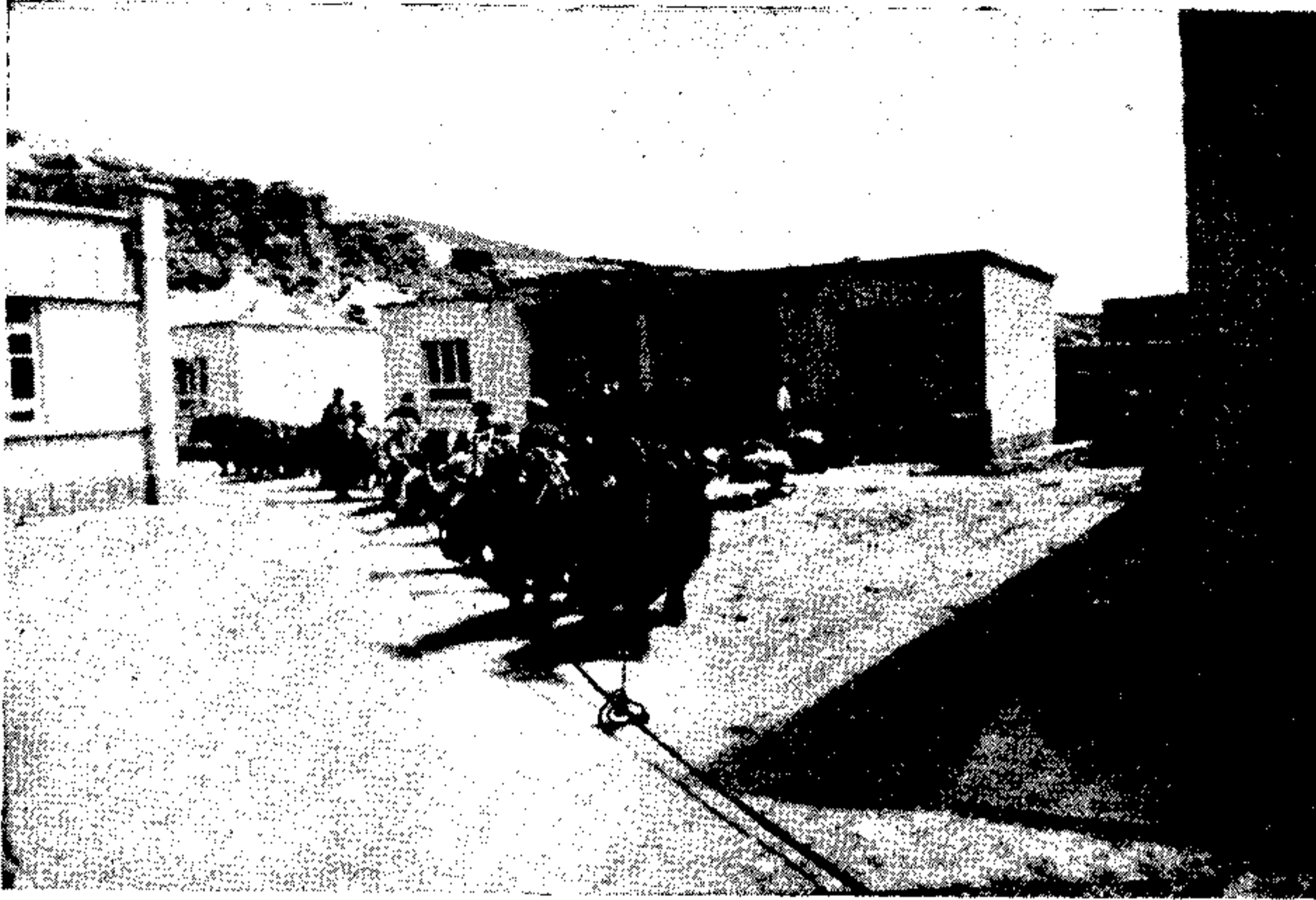


Room in Khetri Palace where Swamiji stayed



Balcony in front of Swamiji's room (He might have heard the nautch girl's song from here). Beyond is Khetri town





The yaks unburden at  
Taklakot



Sunset at Tarchen base  
camp  
(solitary tent at right)



The silent Lha Chhu Valley





Sāṣṭāṅga parikramā of the solitary Tibetan



Gauri Kund



The holy Mt. Kailas





Sri Bathija (extreme left)  
with the natives at the  
Hoare camp



Manasarovar—the Mind-  
Lake of Brahma



The return to Chaiti



Pilgrim atop a yak



Leisure at Manasarovar



Pilgrims at prayer on the banks of the holy lake