

VOL. 91

OCTOBER 1986

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



Editorial Office

P.O. Mayavati, Via Lohaghat
Dt. Pithoragarh 262 524, U.P.

Publication Office

5 Dehi Entally Road
Calcutta 700 014
Phone : 29-0898



[Rates inclusive of postage]

Annual Subscription

India, Nepal & Bangladesh	Rs.	20.00
U.S.A. & Canada	\$	14.00
Other Countries	£	6.00

Life Subscription (30 years)

Rs. 300	\$ 200	£ 60
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Single Copy

Rs. 2.00	\$ 1.00	50 P.
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Prabuddha Bharata

Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE
RAMAKRISHNA ORDER

OCTOBER 1986

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Prabuddha Bharata

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No. 10

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

INTEGRAL VISION OF VEDIC SEERS*

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

येन देवा न वियन्ति नो च विद्विषते मिथः ।
तत् कृण्मो ब्रह्म वो गृहे संज्ञानं पुरुषेभ्यः ॥

ज्यायस्वन्तश्चित्तिनो मा वि यौष्ट
संराधयन्तः सधुराश्चरन्तः ।
अन्यो अन्यस्मै वल्गु वदन्त एत
सध्रीचीनान् वः समनसस्कृणोमि ॥

समानी प्रपा सह वीन्नभागः
समाने योक्त्रे सह वो युनज्मि ।
सम्यञ्चोग्निं सपर्यतारा
नाभिमिवाभितः ॥

सध्रीचीनान् वः समनसस्कृणोम्ये-
कश्नुष्टीन् संवननेन सर्वान् ।
देवा इवामृतं रक्षमाणाः
सायंप्रातः सोमनसो वो अस्तु ॥

I pray that in your home the members of the family may have such mutual understanding (*saiñjñānam*) as the gods have who do not hate or hold themselves away from one another.

Atharva-Veda 3.30.4

Following one another as elder and younger (*gyāyasvantah*), being of one mind (*cittinah*), worshipping together (*sairrādhayantah*), speaking sweet words to one another (*valgu vadantah*)—thus live (*carantah*) without ever becoming disunited (*mā vi yaushta*). Come (*aita*), I will make you united in work and united in mind.

Atharva-Veda 3.30.5

Eat and drink together ; I bind you all with the cord of love. Aiming at a common goal (*saiñyañcah*) assemble together for the worship of the sacred fire—like spokes around a hub.

Atharva-Veda 3.30.6

Through love (*sairvananena*) I make you all united in work (*sadhrīcīnān*), united in mind, united in partaking food. As the gods guard immortality, so should you guard good-will day and night.

Atharva-Veda 3.30.7

* The Atharva-Vedic 'Hymn of Harmony', *Sammanasya-suktam*, begun last month, is concluded here. The hymn represents the exhortations of a family preceptor or patriarch to the members of a family.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This month's EDITORIAL deals with education and its functions.

In SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND THE BODHISATTVA IDEAL Swami Atmarupananda gives a clear exposition of the Bodhisattva ideal and shows how this ideal was exemplified in the life of Swami Vivekananda. The author is a monastic member of the Vedanta Society of Southern California. The present article is intended to serve as an introduction to a new series on Buddhism which will appear at intervals in this journal.

Dr. Ardhendu Sekhar Ghosh concludes his study of VEDIC SYMBOLISM by pointing out the deficiencies in western scholars' interpretation of the Vedas.

Dr. Ram Shankar Bhattacharya, M.A., Ph. D., Vyakaranacharya, an eminent scholar of Varanasi, brings to the attention of scholars a linguistic irregularity in the received editions of *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*.

Baal Shem Tov is the honorific title of Israel ben Eliezer, a Jewish mystic and teacher who founded in Poland in the 18th century Modern Hasidism, a pietistic movement within Judaism which stresses simple faith and joyous worship. An authoritative account of the life and personality of this great saint is given in this month's PROFILES IN GREATNESS column by Rabbi Asher Block, a distinguished scholar and rabbi of New York who has rendered much help to Vedanta movement.

EDUCATION AND LIFE

(EDITORIAL)

Foundation of civilization

Among the Records of the Yale University Corporation the following anecdote stands out as strikingly significant:

In 1881 in the Yale University the College of William and Mary had to close its doors for seven years during the Civil War in America. The college was deserted and fell into ruins. It was finally overcome by financial catastrophe. But every morning during these seven years President Ewell used to ring the chapel bell. There were no students; the faculty had disappeared; rain seeped through the leaky roofs of the desolate buildings. But President Ewell still rang the bell. It was an act of faith; it was a gesture of defiance. It was a symbol of determination that the intellectual and cultural

tradition may be kept alive, even in a bankrupt world.¹

Six hundred years before the Yale incident, a more poignant anecdote relating to the great university at Nalanda, Bihar, was recorded by the Tibetan scholar Dharmasvāmin (his Indian name) who had come to India seeking knowledge. Bhaktiar Khalji and his group of marauders, who had entered India along with the invading hordes of Mohammed Ghori in the twelfth century A.D., made Buddhist monasteries their main targets of attack.

1. Cited in *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries in India* by Sukumar Dutt (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1965).

The university of Odantapuri was sacked and the university of Nalanda was burnt down. But in the midst of the ruins a very aged Buddhist monk by name Rāhula Śrībhadrā carried on his teaching work. A watch was kept for the Afghan vandals and, at the sound of horses' hoofs, the Tibetan student would carry the old man on his shoulders and scamper for safety.

There have been hundreds of such instances of courageous men trying to keep the lamp of knowledge burning in different parts of the world under most difficult conditions. But for the efforts of these wise men, humanity would have reverted to barbarism long ago. Daṇḍin, a famous writer on Sanskrit rhetoric wrote in the 7th century A.D., 'The three worlds would have been steeped in the darkness of ignorance had not the light of the Word illumined the whole universe.'²

Education is not merely a personal problem of the student community or an economic problem of the State, as it is often taken to be. It is primarily a civilizing and socializing process. All civilizations have been built on the foundation of a system of education, formal or informal, and it is chiefly to the strength of education that civilizations owe their continuity. The survival of Jewish culture, in spite of the Jews' remaining scattered over different parts of globe for centuries, was made possible only through a system of carefully cultivated religious education. When Islam first rose like wild fire in Arabia, its frenzied adherents at first destroyed every pagan book they came across. But soon they realized their folly,

2. इदमन्धं तमसः कृत्स्नं
जायते भुवनत्रयम् ।
यदि शब्दाह्वयं ज्योति-
रासंसारं न दीप्यते ॥

Dandin, *Kavyadarsa* 1.4.

and began to study with equal zeal Greek, Latin, Hebrew and Sanskrit works. And within a hundred years Islam produced one of the most splendid civilizations the world has ever seen. All the stupendous achievements of modern technology and the unprecedented material prosperity of modern society had their origin in the intellectual awakening of the Europeans and the founding of the universities in Europe in the 13th and 14th centuries. Through education alone can underdeveloped countries like India ever hope to catch up with developed countries. Robert Heilbroner describes the journey to economic development undertaken by a traditional society as 'the great ascent' and points out that the essential condition for its success is 'human change on a grand scale.' He observes:

The mere lay-in of a core of capital equipment, indispensable as that is for further economic expansion, does not yet catalyse a tradition-bound society into a modern one. For that catalysis to take place nothing short of a pervasive social transformation will suffice—a moral metamorphosis of habits, a wrenching reorientation of values concerning time, status, money, work, and an unweaving and reweaving of the fabric of daily existence itself.³

It is obvious to any thinking person that the only way to bring about this 'metamorphosis' in underdeveloped societies is through education.

According to Alvin Toffler, the famous author of *Future Shock*, even the highly developed western societies are now in need of another kind of metamorphosis. He says:

All the evidence to me is that our society is out of control... The society has changed so rapidly, has become so complex, that those who are nominally in power are really powerless, and

3. Robert Heilbroner, *The Great Ascent* (New York; Harper and Row, 1963) p. 66

therefore the system is out of control in many, many respects. That is why I see a connection between the breakdown of the Japanese commuter transport system, the breakdown of the postal system in Italy and the breakdown of the education system in New York. All these are part of an overall pattern of breakdown, which is the result of a society reaching the end of its line.⁴

Toffler believes there are only two ways of dealing with the above situation. One is to control the change by controlling technological development. The other is to use education as a way of enhancing adaptability.

All that was great in ancient India was achieved almost entirely through a rigorous system of education centred on the institution of the guru. During the Upaniṣadic period so great was the importance attached to education that one Ṛṣi by name Nāka Maudgalya emphatically declared: 'Learning and teaching—this alone is austerity, this alone is austerity.'⁵ An entire caste, the Brahmin caste, was set apart only for the cultivation and propagation of knowledge, and society took great care to protect this caste from starvation and hardship, on the one hand, and the temptations of wealth and power, on the other. This delicate social structure broke up with India's loss of political power in the twelfth century. It is an irony of history that just when Europe started awakening, India went to sleep. India's present backwardness and lack of power are directly traceable to centuries of neglect of education in this country. And, as Swami Vivekananda has repeatedly pointed out, through education alone can India raise herself.

4. Alvin Toffler, in an interview published in PHP (Tokyo) April, 1974, p. 21

5. स्वाध्यायप्रवचने एवेति नाको मौद्गल्यः ।

तद्धि तपः तद्धि तपः ।

Taittirīya Upaniṣad 1.9.1

Meaning of education

Education should be seen not as a specialized activity of a small group of people but as an inseparable part of a most essential attribute of humanity: communication. Communication is the basis of community. Says John Dewey, the great American educationist: 'Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common.'⁶ Animals too communicate among themselves; indeed in the lives of social insects like bees and ants communication plays a vital role. But in the case of man communication is not merely an exchange of information or expression of feelings but something more important: the transmission of culture. Culture is the sum total of knowledge, beliefs, customs, skills, values and symbols that form the common heritage of a society and are available to its members. Culture is, as Clyde Kluckhohn puts it, society's 'complete design for living.'⁷ It is education that makes this social heritage possible. In other words, education is the fundamental process by which the components of a culture are transmitted from generation to generation.

It is this transmission that has given an unprecedented tempo to human evolution. Evolution operates in all living systems but in man it has acquired an altogether new dimension, the psycho-social. The chief instrument of this higher evolutionary progression is the rapid transmission of culture through education. Through education the achievements of thousands of people over several centuries can be

6. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1916)

7. Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture and Behaviour* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1962) p. 289.

quickly transmitted to vast numbers of a new generation within a short span of time.

This transmission itself is a uniquely human process. It is not an instinctive behaviour like a mother-cat's teaching her kittens how to catch mice. The transmission that education effects is a creative process. Every teacher augments what he himself has received, and the student interprets what he receives. Teaching and learning together constitute a participation which is enriched by the creativity of both the teacher and the student.

This, then, is what education really means: the communication of culture through creative participation. The Harvard realist philosopher Ralph Barton Perry explains it as follows:

In a fundamental sense education is the cultural process by which successive generations of men take their places in history. Nature has assigned an indispensable role to education through the prolongation of human infancy and through the plasticity of human faculties. By nature man is not equipped for life but with capacities that enable him to learn how to live. Since it is generally agreed that acquired characteristics are not inherited, education assumes the full burden of bringing men 'up to date', creating 'the modern man' of 1953 or any other latest, model. Through education men acquire the civilization of the past, and are enabled both to take part in the civilization of the present and make the civilization of the future. In short, the purpose of education is three-fold: inheritance, participation and contribution.⁸

Education, training, guidance

The meaning of education discussed above is indeed a broad definition of education. It is certainly important as a guiding principle in understanding the role of education in human life. But, for

practical purposes, education has to be defined in a more restricted way.

Education is primarily concerned with knowledge. What is knowledge? As Immanuel Kant showed, human knowledge is not mere experience, but a synthesis of the experiences of sense-organs on the one hand, and of the workings of certain inherent powers of the mind, on the other. To eat a ripe mango and know that it is a delicious fruit is simple experience; even the squirrels and monkeys have that experience. Human knowledge is more than experience; it is a knowledge of relationships. To know the relationship between the mango fruit and the other parts of the tree or its environment, to relate the fruit to one's health and the happiness of others etc—that is the *knowledge* of the mango, not the mere eating of it.

Relationships belong to the realm of values. Values refer to the manifestation of certain powers or faculties of the human mind. That fire burns is a fact; when the child learns this fact, it becomes a piece of knowledge for him. But when he conducts himself in such a way that he is not harmed by fire, what was originally a fact has now become a faculty. This is what is meant by the saying, popular among educationists, 'fact must become faculty'. That is why Swami Vivekananda defined education as the development of a faculty. He said:

True education is not yet conceived of amongst us.... I never define anything, still it may be described as a development of faculty, not an accumulation of words, or as a training of individuals to will rightly and efficiently.⁹

So then, education is a process of awakening. There are certain powers or

8. R. B. Perry, *Realms of Value* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968) p. 411

9. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1973) Vol 5, p. 231.

faculties in all human beings, but they remain dormant. Through education these powers get awakened. A teacher is in truth an awakener: a spiritual teacher or guru awakens the spiritual faculties whereas an ordinary pedagogue awakens the rational faculties.

The awakened faculties are to be brought under an overall control. This second aspect of education has been covered by Swami Vivekananda in another definition: 'The training by which the current and expression of will are brought under control and become fruitful is called education.'¹⁰ Swamiji has used the word 'training' in the sense of inner discipline. But in popular usage it refers to external discipline or manual skill. Knowledge becomes useful in practical life only when it is associated with some kind of skill. In modern times with the multiplication of gadgets and machines the acquisition of skill has become the chief consideration in educational planning. Therefore training has assumed great importance, and all other aspects of education are being subordinated to it.

The enormous complexity of modern life has brought into prominence a third aspect of education known as 'guidance'. Guidance is based on the concept that education must promote the efficient and happy life of the individual student. Advancement in technology, improvement of the quality of life and expansion of communication facilities have opened innumerable avenues for the attainment of material prosperity, excellence and creativity, and it is becoming increasingly difficult for students and trainees to choose the right vocation without proper guidance. A young man with a diploma in engineering who may not seek, under normal circumstances, anything more than the post of a foreman in

a factory, may be able, with guidance, to secure financial help and start his own firm. Guidance is needed not only in choosing a job but also in dealing with psychological problems arising from the student's inner conflicts and maladjustments with the other members of his family or community. To meet these needs, in all developed countries, the government, universities, churches and private organizations operate bureaus for vocational and psychological counselling and guidance. The concept of guidance itself is now becoming a specialized field of human endeavour.

Cultivation of knowledge, training, guidance—these are the three dimensions of education in the modern world. Every educational venture, whether individual or collective, whether private or governmental, must now include all these three aspects.

Philosophy of education

The 18th-century German philosopher Kant wrote a small book, *On Pedagogy*, in which he asserted: 'A man can become a man only through education. He is nothing more than what education makes him.' This statement shows the inseparable relation between education and life. Although millions of people have received education, for the vast majority of them education is more or less an unconscious process and has little value beyond the financial. They fail to appreciate the intrinsic worth, meaning and purpose of education because the intimate relation between education and life is not clear to them. To understand this connection it is necessary to understand the theoretical principles which underlie the educative process. The educative process has two distinctive but inter-related components: learning and teaching. The theoretical

10. Ibid, Vol. 4, p. 490.

foundations of these two components of the educative process now constitute a separate branch of knowledge known as the Philosophy of Education. Its chief aim is to explore the common ground between education and life.

In modern times Swami Vivekananda made significant contributions to the philosophy of education. His famous definition, 'Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man', is his theoretical formulation of the learning process. This definition is only an interpretative restatement of the ancient Vedantic theory of knowledge. According to Vedanta, the soul is intrinsically pure and good and all the elements of perfection are potentially present in it. Only ignorance and its products prevent the manifestation of this inner perfection. Education is the process of removing these obstacles. The function of education is purely negative; it does not add anything new to the soul. When ignorance is removed through education, self-realization spontaneously takes place.

An identical doctrine was held in ancient China by the Confucian thinker Mencius (C. 380-289 B.C). According to him the original nature of man is good and the function of education is to develop the 'seeds' of goodness already present in the soul.

In the West educational thinking had been dominated for more than seventeen centuries by the Judeo-Christian view of man. According to this view man is a born sinner and his soul is intrinsically evil. The first educationist to repudiate this view was the French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-78). He held that Nature was good and the purpose of education was to teach people how to live a life of spontaneity in harmony with nature. When *Emile*, Rousseau's book on education, first appeared, it was considered

to be too radical and dangerous and hundreds of its copies were burnt. Rousseau also discarded the prevalent view of Plato and Aristotle that reasoning was the only true means of arriving at knowledge. He emphasized experience as the best means of learning. Early in the seventeenth century Francis Bacon (1561-1626) had proposed a new method (*novum organum*) of knowing the truth through experiment and verification. This is the 'scientific method' which, although it was not incorporated in school curricula for another two hundred years, corrects and authenticates the process of learning through experience taught by Rousseau.

Rousseau's revolutionary concept of education as a technique of helping children to grow and develop in the natural way profoundly influenced three great European educationists—Pestalozzi, Froebel and Herbart—in the 19th century and, later on, John Dewey in the U.S.A.

Born in Switzerland, Pestalozzi (1746-1827) made education child-centred. His main doctrine was that education should be organic (i.e. intellectual, moral and physical education should be integrated) and that education should draw upon the faculties or 'self-power' inherent in the human being. Education should be literally a drawing out of this 'self-power', a development of abilities through activity—(1) in the physical field by encouraging manual work and exercises, (2) in the moral field by stimulating the habit of moral actions, and (3) in the intellectual field by eliciting the correct use of the senses in observing concrete things accurately and making judgements upon them.

The German educator Froebel (1782-1852) was a pantheist and nature mystic. Like Pestalozzi he too stressed self-development and thought that the role of the teacher was only to remove the hindrances to the

child's 'self-activity'. But Froebel's unique doctrine is that the realization of the unity of creation should be the aim of education. According to him man is a child of God, of nature, and of humanity, and

education consists of leading man, as a thinking being growing into self-consciousness, to a pure, conscious and free representation of the inner law of Divine Unity, and in teaching him ways and means thereto.

Froebel put great emphasis on play, and founded the kindergarten system.

The German psychologist Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841) made important contributions to the psychology of learning. He rejected the old concept of faculties and focused attention on mental processes. According to him, feeling is not a separate faculty but the result of an interaction of ideas, and so feelings can be controlled by controlling ideas. Herbart's educative method consists in building up a 'circle of thought'—a closely knit body of knowledge taught in such a way that it will strengthen the pupil and direct it into moral channels. If a child has a powerful 'circle of thought' operating within him, his mind will always be oriented to a particular goal. In building up the 'circle of thought' two points are to be considered: (1) the child's natural 'interest',¹¹ and (2) the amount of knowledge or experience that he has already acquired, known as the 'apperceptive mass'. The ultimate goal of education for Herbart was character formation, and he believed that this could be effected by intelligently planning the curriculum.

The contributions of the American

philosopher John Dewey (1859-1952) to the field of education are numerous and varied. Only two of the most original of these may be mentioned here. He regarded the school as a miniature community where children could learn the art of living. Secondly, whereas his predecessors had regarded education as a preparation for life, Dewey regarded education as life itself. What does this mean? It means that, for the child, education is not a preparation but an actual living here and now, an unfolding of his nature and capacities day after day. Even in the case of the adult, Dewey considered education to be a tool which would enable the citizen to integrate his culture and vocation effectively. It may be mentioned here that Swami Vivekananda's definition of education as 'the manifestation of the perfection already in man' may be interpreted in terms of this concept of Dewey that life is a continuous series of inner unfolding.

At the turn of the present century Sigmund Freud propounded his ideas of the unconscious, repression, libido, the effect of childhood experiences on adult life, etc. which brought about a Copernican revolution in western psychology. But his influence, although powerful, has not brought about drastic alterations in the theory or practice of education. He has, however, succeeded to some extent in depriving childhood of its image of innocence and motherhood of its sanctity in western society, and this has changed the emotional climate in which the child grows.

Purpose of education

¹¹. Note that whereas Rousseau and Froebel spoke of 'natural impulses', Herbart spoke of 'natural interests'. According to Herbart, children should be taught to bring their natural impulses under the guidance of a higher 'circle of thought'.

Until the beginning of the 18th century education in Europe (in fact, all over the world including India and China) had been nothing more than an intellectual training and had been restricted to small groups of

people. The curriculum—originally devised by Isocrates (436-338 B. C.), the Greek orator and contemporary of Plato—consisted of the 'seven liberal arts': the three literary arts (called the *trivium*) of grammar, rhetoric and dialectic, and the four mathematical disciplines (called the *quadrivium*) of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music. Even the founding of universities from the 13th century onward did not alter this pattern. When, however, the intimate connection between education and life came to be recognized in the 17th century, progressive thinkers began to ask: What is the purpose of education? How to make education relevant to the all-round development and social needs of the common man?

One among the early social philosophers to develop a systematic scheme of educational goals for 'complete living' was Herbert Spencer (1820-1903). In his book *Education: Intellectual, Moral and Physical* he wrote: 'To prepare us for complete living is the function which education has to discharge; and the only rational mode of judging of an educational course is to judge in what degree it discharges such function.' The goals of education that Spencer proposed (in their order of importance) are:

- (1) healthful living which is directly concerned with self-preservation;
- (2) vocational training which is indirectly necessary for a person's survival;
- (3) preparation for marital and parental duties;
- (4) harmonious social life and citizenship;
- (5) worthy use of leisure time.

During the Depression of the 1930s the National Education Association (NEA) of America appointed the Educational Policies Commission. In its report of 1938 the Commission stated the purposes of education under the following headings. 1. Self-realization. 2. Human relationships. 3. Economic efficiency. 4. Civic responsibility.

This list represents the views of progressive educators who hold that education becomes meaningful only when it fulfils certain social functions and prepares a student to become a 'fully functioning individual.' The chief exponent of this functionalist approach was John Dewey.

Some of Dewey's followers went one step further and argued that the school is not a static institution but a dynamic one and must take an active part in changing the existing social order. This view gradually gained momentum, and has now become a creed of the student community all over the world. Student demonstrations and unrest in college campuses that rocked U.S.A., France, Italy, Japan and other countries in the 1960s were motivated by the belief that the school should be the vanguard of social change. Mao's Cultural Revolution in China and Khomeini's Islamic revolution in Iran have shown what an awesome social power educational institutions can create.

In recent years another, more moderate, view is also gaining ground that technological advancements and international cultural contacts are already bringing about spontaneous changes in society and the chief function of educational institutions should be to prepare students for the new society. The great German philosopher Kant foresaw the need for such an orientation as early as 1803. In a small book, already referred to, Kant wrote:

Children should be educated, not with reference to the present conditions of things, but rather with regard to a possibly improved state of the human race—that is, according to the ideal of humanity and its entire destiny.

What we have described above pertains to the 'progressive education' movement in the U.S.A. and Europe. It has undoubtedly contributed much to the material prosperity of those countries and to the adaptation of

the people to industrialization and urbanization. However, it has some serious drawbacks the most noteworthy of which are: (1) neglect of traditional values, (2) neglect of classical heritage, and (3) neglect of religion. These defects naturally roused social reactions and gave rise to the neo-conservative movement. Since these neo-conservatives argued that the chief function of education was to transmit from generation to generation certain unchangeable 'essentials' of culture, they were called 'essentialists'. As regards the precise nature of the 'essentials' there is difference of opinion. One group of neo-conservatives headed by Robert M. Hutchins, Mortimer Adler and others stressed the need for teaching Greek and Latin classics and Judeo-Christian values. This group also includes neo-Thomist educators of the Catholic Church. The other group led H.H. Horne, H. Broudy, Arthur Bestor, Admiral Rickover and others stress only certain 'basics', like humanistic values and ideals, rather than ancient culture.

The neo-conservatives denounce 'progressive education' for its vocationalism, anti-intellectualism and stress on activity. They believe that the chief purpose of education is the cultivation of the mind and the acquisition of a philosophical outlook on life. A.N. Whitehead defined education as 'the acquisition of the art of the utilization of knowledge.' The neo-conservative view-point was clearly stated by Gilbert Highet, a distinguished president of Columbia University, when he spoke of the 'three errors' in the popular conception

of education. The first error is to suppose that the main purpose of school is to train boys and girls to be sociable. The second mistaken notion is that education ends when one leaves school. The third error is to suppose learning ought to show profit or lead to success.¹²

Education in India

It is obvious that the present-day educational scene in India has some similarities to that in the West and the people here have much to learn from the western experience. The Indian government is trying to make education progressive and vocation oriented. On the other hand, India has its own brand of neo-conservative movement, and we often hear people talking about the *gurukula* system and the need to get children rooted in the ancient culture of the land. However, whereas both the theory and practice of education in the West underwent several centuries of evolution, trial and adaptation, subjugation under alien powers prevented India from developing her own indigenous system of education. Furthermore, educational ventures in this country have been hamstrung by poverty, communalism, lack of national unity and various other factors. Indeed, education in India is an enormously complex affair, and it is beyond the scope of the present article to discuss it in detail.

12. Gilbert Highet, *Man's Unconquerable Mind* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954) pp. 75ff. This book was reprinted twice in a condensed form in the *Reader's Digest*.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND THE BODHISATVA IDEAL

SWAMI ATMARUPANANDA

Once Swami Vivekananda said to his rather orthodox disciple Sharatchandra Chakravarti:

What is the good of that spiritual practice or realization which does not benefit others, does not conduce to the well-being of people sunk in ignorance and delusion, does not help in rescuing them from the clutches of lust and wealth? Do you think, so long as one Jīva [individual soul] endures in bondage, you will have any liberation? So long as he is not liberated—it may take several lifetimes—you will have to be born to help him, to make him realize Brahman. Every Jīva is part of yourself—which is the rationale of all work for others. As you desire the whole-hearted good of your wife and children, knowing them to be your own, so when a like amount of love and attraction for every Jīva will awaken in you, then I shall know that Brahman is awakening in you, not a moment before. When this feeling of the all-round good of all without respect for caste or colour will awaken in your heart, then I shall know you are advancing towards the ideal.

The disciple, who was well-read in traditional Vedānta, said with surprise:

Sir, it is a most tremendous statement that without the salvation of all, there shall be no salvation for an individual! I have never heard of such a wonderful proposition.

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

Then the disciple objected, giving the traditional view of Advaita Vedānta which says that liberation is an individual affair: an individual may attain perfect and eternal liberation even though billions of other souls remain in bondage,

Swamiji: Yes, what you say is right, and most Vedāntins hold that view, which is also flawless. In that view, individual liberation is not barred. But just consider the greatness of his heart who thinks that he will take the whole universe with him to liberation!

Disciple: Sir, it may indicate boldness of heart, but it is not supported by the scriptures.¹

The class of Vedāntins referred to are the followers of Appayya Dīkṣita, a significant figure in the history of Advaita Vedānta who taught the doctrine of Sarvamukti, or 'liberation of all', 'universal liberation'. Appayya Dīkṣita taught through this doctrine that individual liberation is not the true and perfect freedom. Rather, the aspirant should seek the liberation, not of himself alone but of all beings. For if all souls are indeed one in the Supreme Self, then as long as one soul remains bound, we all remain bound with him.

Appayya Dīkṣita was a philosopher following the tradition of Śaṅkarācārya and claimed that he was merely developing a line of thought adumbrated in the works of the great Ācārya himself. There seems to be little justification for his claim.

Śaṅkarācārya was a man of compassion, which is shown by his life of intense activity in reviving the Vedānta and in purifying and invigorating the religious consciousness of India. It is also shown by such of his verses as: 'There are pure souls, calm and magnanimous, who do good to others as does the spring, and who, having themselves crossed this dreadful ocean of birth and death, help others also to cross the same, without any motive

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

whatsoever.² But compassion is one thing and teaching the doctrine of universal liberation is another.

Perhaps Appayya Dīkṣita realized that without the support of Śaṅkarācārya's name his doctrine had no hope of acceptance among Vedantins. Śaṅkarācārya was such a towering figure in Indian philosophical history that all later thinkers had to contend with him, taking support from him or countering him. Being a follower of Śaṅkara's tradition, Appayya Dīkṣita naturally sought to recruit help from the Ācārya's fame for his own doctrine.

Not only was the doctrine not found in Śaṅkara's writings, however, but also it lacked explicit support in the three scriptural pillars of the Vedantic tradition—the Upaniṣads, the Brahma Sūtra and the Bhagavad Gītā. And therefore Appayya Dīkṣita's doctrine of Sarvamukti never gained acceptance. In fact, it is doubtful whether any orthodox Vedantins held the doctrine during the time of Swami Vivekananda.³

As we see from the conversation cited, Swami Vivekananda recognized the philosophical and scriptural problems with the doctrine, but added, 'Consider the greatness of his heart who thinks that he will take the whole universe with him to liberation!' To the Swami, that greatness of heart was enough to make it good and beautiful, and hence desirable as a true ideal.

2. शान्ता महान्तो निवसन्ति सन्तो
वसन्तवह्लोकहितं चरन्तः ।
तीर्णास्स्वयं भीमभवाणं वं जनान्
अहेतुनान्यानपि तारयन्तः ॥

Vivekacūḍāmaṇi 37.

3. Since his time such figures as Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan have upheld the Sarvamukti ideal.

Though it never gained acceptance among Vedantins, for two thousand years now the doctrine has been the very life and soul of Mahayana Buddhism, where it is known as the Bodhisattva ideal. (He who follows the doctrine in practice is known as a Bodhisattva, and the path is known as the Bodhisattvayāna.) One of the most beautiful fruits of man's religious consciousness, it has spiritually nourished countless individuals and culturally nourished several countries of Asia for many centuries.

During the centuries of Mahayana's growth in India, details of the Bodhisattva doctrine changed: interpretations differed, certain ideas evolved, others lost in importance, refinements were made in the stages of the path. In other words it was dynamic, living, not a fossilized structure to be studied by the historian of religion. And if it is to remain a living and dynamic force in the spiritual life of modern man, it will again have to adapt itself to modern needs. Of course, the heart of the ideal, its essence, will always be the same, and that essence is stated in the above quotation of Swami Vivekananda. But its detailed elaboration must speak to modern men and women.

In modern times the Bodhisattva ideal has already received new life, new expression and new authority through the birth of one who was its very embodiment, not a Buddhist, but the Hindu monk Swami Vivekananda. So in this adaptation of the ideal to our own times, the life and teachings of the Swami are invaluable. (A detailed comparison between Swami Vivekananda and the Bodhisattva ideal, though of great interest and importance, is beyond the scope of this article; here we are only interested in indicating the similarity of spirit.)

Of all the names of great spiritual teachers found in the Swami's *Complete*

Works, that of Buddha probably appears most frequently and is mentioned with the most consistent reverence. And what the Swami adored most in the Buddha was, not his philosophy but his boundless heart.⁴ Often he said that the ideal is to combine the intellect of Śaṅkara with the heart of the Buddha. He thought that one cause of India's decline was the loss of Buddha's heart from Hinduism.

Each of the many different schools of Buddhism embodies some aspect of the Buddha's personality and teaching. His heart is enshrined in the ideal of the Bodhisattva, which runs like a thread of unity through the diverse schools of Mahayana Buddhism. (In fact, this ideal is the key to understanding the Mahayana.) The Mahayana directed its genius and energy for hundreds of years to the development and practice of this ideal which is paralleled so closely by Swami Vivekananda's life and teachings. A study of one illumines the other; each becomes more comprehensible in the light of the other. And this, in spite of the fact that Swami Vivekananda was a thorough Hindu, not a Buddhist. For though the doctrine of Sarvamukti never gained acceptance among Vedantins before his time, Swami Vivekananda felt it to be consistent with Vedantic truth. Indeed, he felt that in essence the Bodhisattva ideal was the logical goal of Vedantic ethical development.

In order to understand the Bodhisattva ideal, we must first trace it back to its source: Gautama Buddha.

According to Buddhist legend, the Buddha was the condensed compassion resulting from hundreds of previous births spent in self-sacrifice. Birth after birth

the soul that was to become the Buddha sacrificed all for the sake of man and animal. The result of this continual sacrifice was a personality so great that it conquered most of Asia without the use of any force other than its own power of attraction.

Ages before his final birth as Gautama the Buddha, he had been born as the brahmin Sumedha. In that birth he had clearly perceived the miseries of life, which most of us try to ignore by the fabled ostrich method. He furthermore realized that all other being felt pain and misery in the same way that he felt them. Most of us are so obsessively preoccupied with our own pains and pleasures that we remain insensitive to the experiences of others. In this Sumedha was most unusual. The resulting compassion for all beings welling up within his heart drove him to vow: 'Let me, having risen to the supreme knowledge of truth, enable all men to enter the ship of truth, and thus I may bear them over the Sea of Existence, and then only let me realize freedom myself.'

Then, after hundreds of births in which he sacrificed all for the sake of man and beast, perfecting his compassion and selfless identification with all beings, he was born as Prince Siddhārtha. As a result of his many births of self-sacrifice, Siddhārtha was born without selfish desires, and the vow he had once taken ages ago to ferry all beings across the Sea of Existence still resounded in his heart. It remained dormant, however, due to his father's efforts to protect him from the pains of life.

After his acquaintance with old age, sickness and death, however, the devas reminded him of his great vow: 'Recollect thy vow to save all living things; the time is at hand; this alone is the purpose of thy birth.' Thus the call for which he had

4. See *Complete Works*, vol. 8 (1977), p. 103.

taken birth became conscious and insistent, making him impatient to fulfil it.

The traditional accounts idealize the Buddha's life to the point of making it mythic. So it is said that his father had kept him in such emotionally 'sanitized' conditions that Siddhārtha attained full maturity without ever knowing that such things as sorrow, sickness, old age and death existed. It is true, however—seen in the lives of most spiritual aspirants—that childhood surroundings often suppress and keep unawakened the aspiration that is to become the dominant note of one's life (i.e. the purpose for which one has taken birth). Siddhārtha's father consciously worked to assure this.

It also happens that a sudden direct acquaintance with the stark realities of life jolts that forgotten purpose into awareness. That is what happened to the future Swami Vivekananda on the death of his father and consequent indigence of his family. It even happens at times that this awakening enters consciousness as a 'voice of the devas'.

Having left the palace and family to go in search of the supreme enlightenment, it was always for the sake of all being that the Buddha searched for the way beyond misery. As Swami Vivekananda said:

All my life I have been very fond of Buddha, but not of his doctrine. I have more veneration for that character than for any other—that boldness, that fearlessness, and that tremendous love! He was born for the good of men. Others may seek God, others may seek truth for themselves; he did not even care to know truth for himself. He sought truth because people were in misery. How to help them, that was his only concern.⁵

That is what set him apart from other men, that is what made his power irresistible,

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 103-04.

that is why even now, 2,500 years after his life, the world still worships him.

So he sought enlightenment only for the welfare of others. And after his enlightenment, the Buddha spent the rest of his long life in the service of all beings, leading all who would hear to the freedom of Nirvāṇa.

Compassion is thus seen to have been the centre, the motive power of the Buddha's life. Even his wisdom was founded in compassion. And it is of this that the Bodhisattvayāna reminds us. Several centuries, however, intervened after the Buddha's passing before his compassion bore its fullest fruit in the Bodhisattva ideal.

The ideal man of early Buddhism was the Arhat, and the ideal state, Nirvāṇa.⁶ Arhat literally means 'worthy one' or 'venerable one' and signifies one who 'has done what had to be done', who 'has laid down his burden'. That is, he has attained Nirvāṇa and laid down the burden of the *āsrāvas* or afflictions which are sense-desire, thirst for existence, and ignorance.⁷ Nirvāṇa literally means 'blown out', and many of the early Buddhists seem to have understood the term in that literal sense. For them it was an indescribable state in which there was no self-awareness, no desire or thirst for life, and which was completely unconnected with Samsāra, the world of becoming. Whether one continued in any sense to exist in that state was left untold.

The Arhat had killed all passion, rooted out all attraction for life, perfected himself

6. Actually there was probably more diversity in early Buddhism than we have been led to believe by our assumption that the extant Pali Canon represents early Buddhism. It is more likely that the seeds of Mahayana as well as Theravada were present in early Buddhism.

7. *Kāma*, *bhava*, and *avidyā*, respectively. Sometimes a fourth is named: speculative opinion or *drsti*.

in all virtues, mastered his mind, emotions and senses perfectly. He knew that he had accomplished his purpose and had come to the end of his journey. For him there was to be no rebirth. He wandered alone on the face of the earth, caring for neither friend nor foe. He knew that he was eternally freed from all earthly bondage. And then, out of compassion, he went out even as had the Buddha to teach other beings the saving dharma. Indeed, the Buddha had charged the Arhats with the duty of teaching others, of leading them beyond misery.

In time, however, a spiritual selfishness seems to have crept over the followers of the Arhats. The duty of preaching was more and more neglected, and the fire of compassion which was the glory of the Buddha's life seems to have dwindled to a flicker. Emphasis on the negative aspects of the teaching—on hatred of the world and on the desire to save oneself from misery at all costs by completely severing connection with the world—seems to have grown. This is evidenced by the development of the Pratyekabuddha doctrine. The Pratyekabuddha, as the name implies,⁸ is one enlightened by himself, who doesn't proclaim the truth to others. He is solely concerned with his own liberation from pain.

There was, however, a reaction within the fold of Buddhism against this slow dying of the fire of love and compassion. The group that reacted was to develop into the Mahayana over the course of several centuries. They were not so in sticking to the letter of the law as in revivifying what they thought to be the spirit of the Buddha's life and teaching.

Their reaction against the increasing negativity and arid philosophy of the

Arhats was to produce a revolution in Buddhism. Mahayana, the 'Great Way', was truly to open a great new way which found room for all, not just for the handful who required no emotional support or human society. It was a path for men and for women, not just for the handful who were prepared to root all human values out of their hearts.

In place of the old Arhat ideal, the Mahayana propounded the ideal of the Bodhisattva, and in place of Nirvāṇa: *bodhi*, 'illumination'; or *anuttarasāmyak-sambodhi*, 'unexcelled supreme enlightenment'. The Mahayana scriptures are fond of contrasting the Arhat and the Bodhisattva ideals. In the *Pañcaviṃśati-sāhasrikaprajñāpāramitā-sūtra* the Arhat and Pratyekabuddha are compared to fireflies, which never imagine that their glow will light up the world; but the Bodhisattva is like the sun, which effortlessly lights up the whole earth when it rises. The Arhat is described as mean-minded, seeking his own escape from pain, while the Bodhisattva sacrifices everything—even liberation—for the welfare of all beings.

As was mentioned previously, Nirvāṇa for the Arhats meant total and eternal disconnection with the world. They could render no service to living beings once the body was dropped in Parinirvāṇa. It was a state in which passion, sense and thought were snuffed out; what remained, if anything, was not told. Contrasted with this was the positive ideal of the Bodhisattva: Bodhi. Bodhi is illumination, experiential awareness of the ultimate Reality, wisdom, which is one with Karuṇā or compassion; that is, true wisdom, when turned to Samsāra, expresses itself as compassion. The Bodhisattva's was an ideal of perfection of head and heart, and not self-annihilation. The noblest human values were elevated to transcendent ideals, and not negated. The

8. *Pratyeka* means single or alone, and *buddha* means awakened.

Bodhisattva shunned Nirvāṇa in order to be of service to all living beings. For him this was the greatest sacrifice: to relinquish final emancipation in order to help others escape misery.

The Arhat, though of great self-control and purity, is like a lonely wanderer in a frozen country scarce in fuel. Through diligent and tireless effort he builds a blazing fire at which he warms himself, telling only those other sufferers who happen his way. He comforts himself but doesn't think to leave the warmth to search out others and bring them to the fire.

The Bodhisattva is one who likewise builds a fire, but who out of his great compassion relinquishes his own opportunity of warming himself and goes to search out all other suffering men in the frosted countryside. He refuses to take his place by the fire until all other men and women, their dogs and cattle, have come round it. His joy is in the universe, and not limited to his insignificant individuality.

Those familiar with the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda cannot fail to note the similarity of spirit. As the Swami said in a lecture on Śrī Kṛṣṇa:

There is a certain ideal. At the same time there must always be a large majority of the human race who cannot come up to the ideal, not even intellectually....The strong ones carry it out and many times have no sympathy for the weak.... Of course, we see at once that the highest position to take is to be sympathetic and helpful to those who are weak. But then, in many cases the philosopher bars the way to our being sympathetic. If we go by the theory that the whole of this infinite life has to be determined by the few years' existence here and now,...then it is very hopeless for us,...and we have no time to look back upon those who are weak. But if these are not the conditions—if the world is only one of the many schools through which we have to pass, if the eternal life is to be moulded and fashioned and guided by eternal law, and

eternal law, eternal chances await everyone—then we need not be in a hurry. We have time to sympathize, to look around, stretch out a helping hand to the weak and bring them up.⁹

Over and over again the Swami said that to seek one's own liberation selfishly is wrong, that one should also seek the well-being of others. On the eve of his departure for the West in 1899, he said to the junior Sannyāsins of the Belur Math:

Those of you who are Sannyāsins must try to do good to others, for Sannyāsa means that.... Let all our actions—eating, drinking, and everything that we do—tend towards the sacrifice of our self. You nourish your body by eating. What good is there in doing that if you do not hold it as a sacrifice to the well-being of others? You nourish your minds by reading books. There is no good in doing that unless you hold it also as a sacrifice to the whole world.... In our country, the old idea is to sit in a cave and meditate and die. To go ahead of others in salvation is wrong. One must learn sooner or later that one cannot get salvation if one does not try to seek the salvation of his brothers.¹⁰

The essence of the Bodhisattva's path is to develop a sense of unity with all beings, such that their pains and pleasures are felt as one's own pains and pleasures, which leads one to seek enlightenment not for oneself alone but for all beings. The Bodhisattva holds himself as a sacrifice for the well-being of the whole universe, springing out of a compassion founded on identity with all that is.

It's such a noble concept that we can hardly imagine it at present. In fact, it even frightens many spiritual aspirants, for it seems to threaten their security, it challenges the very foundation of their spiritual life. This need not be. For one thing, Swami Vivekananda admitted in the

9. *Complete Works*, vol. 1 (1972), p. 437.

10. *Complete Works*, vol. 3 (1973), pp. 446-47.

conversation quoted at the beginning that the way of individual liberation has its merits, even though the Bodhisattva ideal was one very dear to him. But more importantly, people's fears of the path are largely, or perhaps completely, based on misunderstandings.

Some are afraid that by following the path of the Bodhisattva they will be victimized by every bore, by every lost and lonely soul, and by every cheat that comes along. They imagine that the next time the neighbourhood bore comes along they'll no longer be able to quieten him but will have to listen to his endless chatter and, what's worse, they'll even have to look interested! No, the Bodhisattva doesn't have a crucifixion complex, and he doesn't let himself become victimized, because he knows that it does neither him nor the other person any lasting good. He never slips into passivity or a position of weakness.

To the contrary, some think of the aspiring Bodhisattva as a busy-body, running around town looking for little old folks to help across the street, boyscout fashion. Well, that's a false image too, for this path requires self-control, a calm and spiritual outlook; furthermore, one soon comes to see that one can help others more through silence and interior activity than by being a gadabout.

Another objection comes from those with a contemplative nature. They feel that the contemplative life is by necessity contrary to the Bodhisattva's path, which they see as a form of Karma Yoga. What, they ask, is the necessity of meditation for one vowed to seek the well-being of others?

As both the traditional Buddhist texts and Swami Vivekananda point out, meditation is very essential on this path. In fact, *dhyāna* or meditation is one of the perfections that the Bodhisattva has to develop. For one thing, deep knowledge

of the mind, personal acquaintance with the mind is necessary before we even begin to see human problems in the right perspective. And then, without a very highly developed sense of detachment and interiority we cannot really help another: instead of helping we will be pulled down to their level through emotional involvement. Finally, the more we help others, the more we see that the only true help is through spiritual identity with others, so we seek that identity not just through service, but through meditation, and we even find that meditation itself is a higher form of service, as Vivekananda pointed out in various ways.

So even a pure contemplative can be a Bodhisattva; and there have been many such, especially in Tibet, and even among Hindus and Christians. Swami Vivekananda said that even if one enters a cave and there thinks one good and true thought before death, that thought will penetrate the walls of the cave and spread over the whole world as a benediction to humanity.

Perhaps there will always be a few who wish to follow the pure path of the Bodhisattva, with its responsibility of seeking the liberation of all beings before entering final freedom oneself. But a modified form can easily be followed by a wide variety of spiritual aspirants. By a modified form is meant the worship of God in man which Swami Vivekananda taught in so many ways, or seeking identity with the whole world out of love and without the idea of delaying one's own liberation, which the Swami also taught.

Only a few, perhaps, will be able to take to the pure path of the Bodhisattva. Like Swami Akhandananda who imbibed the Swami's spirit. On his deathbed Swami Akhandananda wanted to have a Sanskrit verse read to him which translates: 'I don't covet earthly kingdom, or heaven, or even salvation. All that I desire is the removal

of the miseries of the afflicted.¹¹

This was the verse he wanted read to him on his deathbed, that most important moment in a person's life, when he is expected to fix his mind on God and forget the world. Think of the greatness of his heart: at that hour when most are terrified, a few others are absorbed in

11. न त्वहं कामये राज्यं
न स्वर्गं नापुनर्भवम् ।
कामये दुःखतप्तानां
प्राणिनामातिनाशनम् ॥

God, at that hour Swami Akhandananda identified himself with suffering humanity and sought their well-being. This he could do not because he was a humanitarian, not because he enjoyed bathing in a pool of sentimentality, not because he sought to distract his mind from his own pain, but because God, world and self were no longer three distinct realities competing for his attention.

Such is the true Bodhisattva. We may not have the nobility or courage to take that attitude now, but the path of the Bodhisattva is a graduated path which promises to take us eventually to that.

VEDIC SYMBOLISM

DR. ARDHENDU SEKHAR GHOSH

(Continued from the previous issue)

European Scholarship

After Sāyaṇācārya, Vedic scholarship passed into the hands of rationally minded European orientalists. The European point of view has been summarized by Sri Aurobindo as follows:

The hymns of the Veda are the sacrificial compositions of a primitive and still barbarous race written around a system of ceremonies and propitiatory rites, addressed to personified Powers of Nature and replete with a confused mass of half-formed myth and crude astronomical allegories yet in the making. Only in the later hymns do we perceive the first appearance of deeper psychological and moral ideas—borrowed, some think, from the hostile Dravidians, the 'robbers' and 'Veda-haters' freely cursed in the hymns themselves—and, however acquired, the first seed of the later Vedantic speculations.¹²

Sri Aurobindo continues, 'In spite of the

hardiness of its speculation and its freedom in discovery or invention, Vedic scholarship of Europe has really founded itself throughout on the traditional elements preserved in Sāyaṇa's commentary.' For example, 'The ritualism which Sāyaṇa accepted as part of a divine knowledge and as endowed with mysterious efficacy, European scholarship accepted as an elaboration of old savage propitiatory sacrifice offered to imaginary superhuman personalities.' Similar observations would also apply to the naturalistic and historical theories in European Scholars.¹³

13. Regarding the historical interpretation, it may be pointed out here that the ancient Indian view of history has been presented in the Epics and Purāṇas. But here again the problem of interpretation of symbolism arises. On this problem see, G. S. Basu, *Purana-prabes* (Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, 1358 B.S.); S. K. Chakravarty, *Purāṇa-bhārati* (Calcutta: A. Mukherji and Co, 1389 B.S.). Both the books are in Bengali.

12. Sri Aurobindo, *The Secret of the Vedas* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashrama, 1971), Ch. 'Modern Theories'.

European investigation has undoubtedly had its positive contributions. It has, for instance, initiated a more thorough, systematic and free handling of the problem of Vedic interpretation. It has, moreover, succeeded in breaking the centuries-old seal of final authoritativeness which Sāyana had fixed on the ritualistic interpretation of the Vedas.

None the less, some of the postulates on which European conclusions are based seem to be of questionable validity. In the first place, although it is true that Vedic hymns constitute the earliest known literary work of mankind, it does not follow unequivocally that they constitute the work of a race of primitive culture. It is quite possible, as pointed out by Aurobindo, that our actual Samhita represents the close of a period, not its commencement, nor even some of its successive stages, the still earlier works having been completely assimilated in the form in which we find it now. The Veda itself speaks of 'ancient' and 'modern' ṛṣis. In any case, from the few hymns quoted earlier it is obvious that Vedic poetry forms part of a literature that can be ranked as highly developed in view of its depth, richness and subtlety.

Secondly, as most Europeans are obsessed with Judeo-Christian monotheism, they tend to take it for granted that monotheism is better than pantheism, and that the people who follow pantheism must be primitive and less cultured. Since the Veda is pantheistic in outlook, its authors must be primitive people. There is, however, no logic behind such a way of thinking. Why should one assume that monotheism as a religious doctrine is superior to pantheism? The Veda is rooted in harmony. According to it, all the different gods are manifestations of one God. 'The Existent is One, but the sages speak of It variously' (*Rg-Veda* 1.164.46). The Vedic Rsis did not find any contradic-

tion between pantheism and monotheism, which are but different ways of seeing the same Truth. The Rsis pointed towards a mystic state of consciousness, in which all theistic concepts were transcended and thereby harmonized.

Thirdly, it is a fact, unfortunate though, that western scholarship in its dealings with the Veda derived an excessive prestige and authority from its association with western science. However, what is often ignored is the fact that the success story of modern western science lies in physics and the application of physical laws and principles. Techniques and concepts developed to explain outer physical phenomena cannot obviously be applied as such to psychological and spiritual experiences. For the latter altogether different techniques and standards are called for.

So far as the interpretation of symbolism is concerned, granting that all symbol systems—be it linguistic, mathematical, pictorial, musical or mystic—are creations of the mind, symbols belonging to one particular discipline would be meaningless to those who are not initiated into, or do not have some practical experience of, that particular discipline. Musical symbols, for instance, are not only not valid, say, in mathematics, but also meaningless to anybody else other than a musician; they are not comprehensible even to an ordinary music lover. It is thus obvious why a merely rational or 'scientific' analysis of religious and mystic symbolism, as the Veda is concerned with, is likely not only to prove meaningless but also to create confusion in unsuspecting minds. For unravelling the secrets of the ancient mystic symbolism, one should have some mystic experience for which the awakening of intuition and refinement of emotion are indispensable. Rationality has the limitation

that it cannot freely look beyond the world of the senses.

Of course the scholastic competence and conscientious involvement of the European orientalist cannot be doubted in the least. Among them there have been genuine admirers of Indian philosophical thought. But their main attraction towards Indian philosophy centred on Vedanta, particularly the monistic school of Śaṅkara. The spiritual and moral values contained in Vedanta are relatively easier to comprehend, not only because of its more pronounced rational approach, but also because its language is more modern as compared to the more ancient language of Vedic hymns which offer really formidable difficulties.

The fourth serious deficiency in the European theory is that it is not able to offer a coherent interpretation of all the Mantras taken together. To assume 'that the Sacred Books of the East are full of rubbish, and that the same stream which carries down fragments of pure gold, carries also sand and mud and much that is dead and offensive'¹⁴ does not sound fair. The argument that the 'sand and mud' are later interpolations has been refuted at least in so far as the Saṁhita part of the Veda is concerned.

Significance of Vedic sacrificial rites

Were the Vedic hymns originally meant to be offered to imaginary superhuman divinities? Are the sacrificial rites just meaningless formalities devoid of any practical effect? Were the Vedic Ṛṣis so foolish as to believe that clouds gave rain and the sun rose preceded by dawn only as a result of their prayers? Such questions come naturally to the modern mind.

It is worthwhile to attempt to answer such questions.

Note that the Ṛg-Vedic text is replete with terms like *satyam* and *ṛtam*. The Ṛṣis were seekers of Truth and the universal rhythm of law governing this universe consisting not only of the outer world of matter but also of the inner world of mind, ideas, symbols etc. Now, to grasp the truths of the outer physical world, intellectual objectivity is recognized as an indispensable requirement. Regarding the truths of the inner world, the requirement is still more exacting: one has to transcend even the mind and intellect, and for this the first and most essential step is to make them one-pointed. The Ṛṣis were chiefly concerned from very early days with these subtle psychological problems.

Human psyche is known to be multi-centred; and each of such centres can be affected by a particular symbol system. A symbol, besides serving the purpose of objectively representing a subtle psychological phenomenon, can as well act as a source of inspiration, can create an emotional impact, can help in psychic unfoldment, and so on. For example, the national flag can readily influence the emotional centre and rouse patriotism. Again, for every form-symbol there is a corresponding sound-symbol: for one's national flag, for instance, the corresponding sound-symbol is the national anthem. The intimate relationship between different psychic centres, including those buried deep in the personality, and the different symbol systems formed the subject matter of intensive research by the ancient sages. Their investigations led to the discovery of various psychic centres along with the corresponding form-symbols and sound-symbols (that is, the deities and the corresponding Mantras). Gods and goddesses are thus associated with different psychic centres and their inherent psychic

¹⁴. Max Muller.

powers, which can be awakened by the prescribed forms of worship.

When a Sādhaka is able to concentrate his mind on a particular deity with the help of the proper Mantra, then he acquires the corresponding power known as *vibhūti*. The sage Patañjali in chapter III of his *Yoga-sūtra* enumerates various *vibhūtis*, like making oneself very light or heavy, seeing and hearing what is happening at a distance, and so on. But the aim of Yoga is not the acquisition of powers. The ultimate aim of Yoga is to unite one's individual consciousness with the supreme absolute Reality known as Brahman. In yogic practices, one attempts to make the mind and intellect one-pointed at first, and then make the mind-stuff completely free of ripples. In that state, the mind and the intellect, in the sense we ordinarily understand them, are just not there. What then remains is pure awareness from which the mind-stuff eventually springs. In other words, *vibhūtis* are only byproducts of the effort to attain higher consciousness and wisdom. Since, however, they prove to be hindrances for further progress in the spiritual journey, Patañjali cautions us (in *Yoga-sūtra*, 3.37,38) not to remain stuck with these psychic powers, but to go ahead towards the final step of transcending the intellect. Once, however, the Sādhaka transcends the intellect and becomes truly wise, these powers will no longer remain as hindrances, rather they may even become a help in serving humanity.

It is therefore justifiable to conclude that for Vedic Ṛṣis rites and rituals were not merely ceremonial formalities but a means for the acquisition of the supernatural powers of different planes, such as the physical, the astral etc. That is why the elite of those days were attracted to these sacrificial rites adding to the tremendous prestige the *Karma Kāṇḍa* was enjoying in

the Vedic age. Now, as cautioned by Patañjali, there are pitfalls in having such powers before attaining wisdom. Hence a plausible hypothesis would be that when complacency and decadence started creeping into the then affluent society, the powerful elite must have started misusing their powers so much so that they met the same fate as that of Rāvaṇa of Vālmīki's epic; and, therefore, they became eventually rare. Obviously, these people were more crazy about power than wisdom, in the same way as some modern elite are after technology ignoring the unifying principles taught by pure science.¹⁵ The relationship between *Karma Kāṇḍa* and *Jñāna Kāṇḍa* is somewhat analogous to that between technology and pure science of modern days. The same powers which prove to be obstructions on the way to wisdom can become extremely useful in the hands of the wise.

In the Vedic Age the tradition of living in harmony with both power and wisdom was common. However, this tradition got lost at a certain point in history, and there came to an end a glorious phase of India's ancient civilization. Fortunately, India's inner resources retrieved the situation by condemning psychic powers and laying emphasis on spiritual illumination and fulfilment. It was this emphasis that led to the rise of Vedānta, including the *Gītā*, as a substitute for Vedic religion. Despite the fact that the *Gītā* always regards the Veda as divine knowledge (cf. *Gītā*, 15.15), it 'severely censures the champions of exclusive Vedism, all whose flowery teachings were devoted solely to material wealth, power and enjoyment' (cf. *Gītā*, 2.42).¹⁶ But we must note that the *Gītā* is not against seeking of material prosperity

15. Cf. E.F. Schumacher, *A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Abacus, 1978) p. 66.

16. Sri Aurobindo, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

by ordinary people, provided such people remain on the path of Dharma (cf. *Gītā* 3.5,6 ; 7.11), but it certainly does not recommend them to those who are seeking wisdom, like Arjuna. The contradiction between the above two passages of the *Gita* is more apparent than real, the second chapter being meant for a *Sādhaka*, while the fifteenth chapter is for a more mature person.

In order to reach the depth of the symbolic language of the ancient Vedas,

one has to travel cautiously through later literature, like the *Upaniṣads*, the *Gītā*, the *Purāṇas* and the epics, which serve as a bridge linking the modern period with the ancient. If modern India wishes to derive any benefit from the ancient wisdom, then the most important requirement would be to foster active interest in our ancient literature and popularize its life-giving principles among the educated people.

(Concluded)

THE WORD 'JAGRATA' IN KATHA UPANISHAD

DR. RAM SHANKAR BHATTACHARYA

All the editions of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* read *jāgrata* in the famous exhortation, 'Arise, awake and realize the Truth from excellent teachers'.¹

But according to us, the reading *jāgrata* is incorrect. There are strong grounds to believe that the original reading was *jāgrta*² which in later times was changed into *jāgrata*. *Jāgrta* is the regular form of the root *jāg*³ of the *Adādi* group in the *lot lakāra* (plural number second person).

While commenting on the above passage, Śaṅkara (whose commentary is the oldest available now) says: *jāgrata, ajñāna nidrāyā ghorarūpāyah kṣayam kuruta*. From the mode of commenting, it is clear that Śaṅkara read *jāgrta* and not *jāgrata*, for, had he read *jāgrata* (an irregular form, the regular form being *jāgrta*), he would have used the regular form *jāgrta* also along with the word *jāgrata* as he is found to have done while commenting on similar

irregular words, or he would have stated expressly that the form *jāgrata* was Vedic in character.⁴

(Continued on page 439)

4. Vide Sankara's comment on the word *nāndana* (*Aitareya Upaniṣad* 1.3.12), *sikṣa* (*Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 1.2.1) and *aciram* (*Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 1.4.12). In *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 2.2.5 occurs the irregular word *विमुञ्चथ*; Sankara explains: *विमुञ्चथ विमुञ्चत परित्यजत*. It is clear that Sankara uses here the regular word *विमुञ्चत* along with the irregular word *विमुञ्चथ*. Similarly in *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.7.1 in which occurs the irregular word *आनन्दयाति*, Sankara remarks: *आनन्दयाति आनन्दयति सुखयति*. It is clear that Sankara uses the regular form *आनन्दयति* to show that the form *आनन्दयाति* is irregular. See also Sankara's commentary on *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 3.1.4, 3.2.6, 3.2.10; *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.1.1; *Aitareya Upaniṣad* 2.1.5. Sometimes Sankara adds the expression *इत्यर्थः* with the regular word used along with the irregular word; as for example, see his commentary on *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 2.1.1 *नान्तरात्मन् नान्तरात्मानम् इत्यर्थः* ।

1. उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत ।

Kaṭha Upaniṣad 1.3.14

2. जागृत ।

3. जागृ निद्राक्षये ।



THE BAAL SHEM TOV: A SAINT OF OUR TIME

RABBI ASHER BLOCK

In one of the early chapters of the Bhagavad-Gita, the disciple Arjuna asks Śrī Kṛṣṇa: 'How can one *identify* a man who is firmly established and absorbed in Brahman (God)?' This is a crucial question in all religious tradition, whenever we wish to deal earnestly with a sage or saint, a prophet or man of God. And, in a sense, the whole of the Gita teaching may be said to be dedicated, directly or indirectly, to the answering of that question.

In recent Jewish history, a challenge of this nature has arisen in connection with the extraordinary life and career of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, founder of the Hasidic movement. How account for his phenomenal influence? The historian S. M. Dubnow characterized this movement (at least in its early phases) as being 'among the most momentous spiritual revolutions.' How pinpoint the 'identity' of this most unusual personality?

To illustrate the urgency of this concern, I quote some passages from the introduction to a recently published work *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov*, in which the editor (S. Dresner) while discussing this subject presents the view of the author, Abraham J. Heschel, in the following manner:

Hasidism represents an enigma. It is first of all the enigma of the impact of one great man, the

Besht (acronym for Baal Shem Tov)... What was there about him that was not to be found in other great Jewish personalities like Maimonides or even Isaac Luria or Akiba?... The answers given are partly sociological, partly historical; (but) I believe there is also a 'Hasidic' answer to this Hasidic riddle... (in) in the following story.

(Rabbi Heschel then tells how in eighteenth-century Poland, whenever the need arose, many noblemen would assemble together to elect a king. On one such occasion, numerous princes from outlying territories sent their representatives to the conclave, and each proceeded to plead the case and expound the virtues of his particular prince.) This went on for days, and no decision was reached. Finally, one representative decided he would take his candidate, the prince himself, bring him to the people and say: 'Here he is, look at him, see how grand he is!' And that man was elected.

(By analogy) many Jews *talked* about God, but it was the *Besht* who brought God to the people. This is perhaps the best answer to the question of how to explain the unbelievable impact in such a short time of this great man...

In ancient times the sanctuary in Jerusalem had been the holy centre from which expiation and blessing radiated out to the world. But the sanctuary was in ruins, the soul of Israel in mourning. Then the Baal Shem established a new centre: the Tzaddik, the Rebbe—he was to be the sanctuary. For the Baal Shem believed that a man could be the true dwelling place of the Divine.

The Baal Shem helped mold into new types of personality: the *Hasid* (the disciple, or 'pious

one') and the *Tzaddik* (the master, or 'righteous one')... He who really wants to be uplifted by communing with a great person whom he can love without reservation, who can enrich his thought and imagination without end, that person can meditate about the life ... of the Besht.

With the *direction* of an answer (to the 'Hasidic enigma') thus set forth, we must now ask: What are some of the 'features' of a godly figure? What inner transformations take place, and what outwardly emerges, when God is brought into the life of a person? Modernists especially need to know more tangibly what the 'divine image' in man looks like, for even in the case of the Baal Shem many have somehow been led to conclude that he is not for them—except perhaps as poetry or legend.

A short biographical account

It would seem that in order to achieve a balanced and authentic view of the Baal Shem's life, one must consult both the *earliest* accounts, flowing from the subjective eyewitness reports of devotees, as well as those which are historically grounded and *objective* from our own modern perspective. In the latter category we take first an essay on 'The Chassidim' (from *Studies in Judaism*) written at the turn of our century by Solomon Schechter (then lecturer in Rabbinics at Cambridge University and later head of the Jewish Theological Seminary in America). This was among the first penetrating and fruitful efforts by a contemporary religious scholar to assess both the Hasidic movement and its eminent founder. Here are some excerpts:

Baalshem is the centre of the Chassidic world... To the Chassidim (Hasidim) he is not a man who established a theory or set forth a system; he himself was the incarnation of a theory and his whole life the revelation of a system...

Everywhere it seems to be suggested that Baalshem from his infancy was conscious of a

lofty mission. It is already in tender years that he is made to give evidence of an indifference to conventional restraints and accepted ideals ... The date of Baalshem's birth is about 1700; his birthplace is in (Ukop) Bukowina, then still belonging to Roumania (now in Ukraine, Russia). The child's mother died soon after he was weaned, and his father did not long survive her. But before Eliezer died he took his child in his arms, and blessing him, bade him fear naught, for God would always be with him.

This experience evidently left a lasting impression on the mind of this precocious child—as we learn in greater detail from another source. In one of the very fine books on the Baal Shem, the Hebrew *Kodesh Ha-Kodashim*, meaning 'Holy of Holies' and containing selected 'teachings and directions for worshipful living', the author Rabbi M. I. Guttman speaks of an encounter between Rabbi Israel (in his later life) and an important contemporary rabbi who opposed him. This rabbi posed several searching questions on the doctrines of the new Hasidic movement. Among the queries was a pointed, personal challenge: 'Who and what stirred you on to embark upon a new path? ... I would very much like to know something about the nature of your childhood education, as a basis for judging the fundamental validity of this whole enterprise of yours.' Rabbi Israel, of blessed memory, responded in the following manner:

This you should know, O Sir: My deceased father was a man who was eminently upright, and who was outstanding in noble qualities. While I was yet a young child I was wholly bonded and attached to him, and whatever integrity I possess has come from him. I remember vividly his calling me to his side, just before his passing away and instructing me in these words: 'My son, be sure to remember always that God is with you! Do not ever allow your mind to digress from this awareness. Deepen that consciousness within you every hour, every moment, and in every place...!'

These words have been treasured in my heart and engraven in my memory. After my father's

passing, it became my deliberate practice... to strengthen within myself the holy conviction that 'the whole earth is filled with God's glory', and that indeed He is actually with me... All the years (when I held various positions and had a variety of experiences), I had but one primary purpose—the *consecration of thought and the deepening of the will in fulfilling my father's legacy* (may his memory be blessed).

Accordingly, I utilized my studies, my prayers, and my work as means of attaining the higher and more worthy objective. And... (as our Tradition teaches) 'in the way a person desires to go, he is led'. At every single moment, I found that I was being helped in my search—with the result that I was privileged to see, to find, and to hear wondrous and awe-inspiring things. Through inner perception I beheld, at every step, that the Divinity is evident and visible! In every word I heard and in every matter that came my way, it was my feeling that all is ordained by a Higher Will and by an intense Personal Providence.

To return now to the Schechter account—(After holding positions as assistant to a schoolmaster and as beadle in a synagogue)...

Baalshem left his native village and settled as a teacher in a small town near Brody. Here, although his true mission and character were still unknown, he became much respected for his rigid probity, and was frequently chosen as umpire in disputes among Jews. On one of these occasions he arbitrated with so much learning and impartiality that not only did he satisfy both parties, but one of them, a learned man of Brody, offered him his own daughter in marriage. Israel, to whom it had been revealed that she was his predestined wife, immediately accepted the offer and the act of betrothal was drawn up....

(Shortly thereafter) Israel chose for his new home a spot on one of the spurs of the Carpathian Mountains. No Jews lived there, and Israel and his wife were thus separated from the society of their fellows in a life of complete and unchanging solitude. Israel dug lime in the ravines among the mountains, and his wife conveyed it for sale to the nearest town. (For a while they also managed an inn.) Their life at this period seems to have been one of great privation, but the harder Israel's outward lot, the more he increased in spiritual greatness. In his

solitude he gave himself up entirely to devotion and religious contemplation... (His own wife he revered as a saint.)

When nearly forty-two years of age, Baalshem first revealed his true character and mission to a few chosen spirits, afterwards his most fervent disciples.... We next hear of him discharging the functions of an ordinary Rabbi at Miedziboz in Podolia... He does not seem to have figured as a public preacher, nor has he left behind him any written work. He appears rather to have used the method, familiar to students of Greek philosophy, of teaching by conversation with his friends and disciples. These conversations, and the parables with which they were largely interspersed, were remembered and stored up by his hearers. By his neighbours the country folk, he was regarded simply as 'a man of God'.

Baalshem, in forming the little band of devoted followers who were destined to spread a knowledge of his creed, travelled considerably about the country. He at one time decided to make a pilgrimage to Palestine, but when he reached Constantinople he felt himself inspired to return and continue his work at home. He died at Miedziboz on the eve of Pentecost, 1761.

His view of humanity

Many events of a wondrous nature have been attributed to the Besht but, as Dr. Schechter rightly states, it is not as a worker of miracles but as a religious teacher that we should view him. The Baal-Shem's special province was 'the higher spirituality of life'—*faith in God and love of men*—in contradistinction to the legalism and casuistry which preoccupied the minds of so many of the Jewish leaders of his day.

In his teachings, the Baal Shem forcefully stressed the presence of God everywhere, and the potential good in everyone. Creation was not a single act in a distant hoary past, but an unending manifestation of God's power, wisdom, and love. Similarly Revelation was not an ancient isolated event, but a continuing vivid communion between God and man. Upon such doctrines as foundation, the Baal Shem fashioned an edifice of hope and regeneration for his people. Not

sin but redemption was his theme. No one has sunk so low as to be unable to raise himself to God—was one of his favourite sayings. It follows, therefore, (to use his own words) that ‘the ideal of man is to be Revelation himself; clearly to recognize himself as a manifestation of God.’ ‘The object of the whole Torah is that man should become a *Torah* himself.’ It is to this end that our prayer-life should be directed. The wise man does not trouble the king with petitions about trifles. His one desire is to be admitted into the king’s presence: that will be his highest good.

What follows also from this spirit is a wholesome, egalitarian view of man. ‘Let no one think himself better than his neighbour, for each serves God in his own way.’ The Baal Shem made it a practice to minister to the poor and to the illiterate men and women of the community; yes, even to the sinners and outcasts—those whom other teachers rejected. One account tells of a woman of shameful repute whose very life was threatened by her family, whom the Baal Shem rescued in body and soul, and who later turned out to be an exemplary person and devotee. This is but one of a host of loving deeds that generation after generation delighted to tell and retell in the name of their beloved Master.

A divinely inspired person

And now let us consider a view of the Baal Shem as stemming from the testimony and enthusiasm of his own lifetime followers. Here, as we shall soon observe, a certain ‘deciphering’ of their message is called for, but what is highly noteworthy is that the same essentials—devotion to God and service of man—come forth loud and clear.

One of the earliest biographical works to appear, shortly after his passing, was ‘The Praises of the Baal Shem’ (*Shivhei Ha-*

Besht). In this work there are over two hundred original incidents, experiences, and observations on the life of the Besht. In the introduction, the author states: ‘In each case, I wrote down the name of the person from whom I heard the account.’ It is certainly a most valuable resource to have this compendium at hand. However, even when dealing with such first-hand material, words of caution are in order. It seems to have been the literary climate of the time and place to stress the esoteric and supernatural in a religious leader’s life—and that, too, largely in material terms that most people will understand.

It is because of that pronounced predilection—in the early writings at least—that many distorted judgements of the Besht have been formed. Those who are favourably disposed look upon him as a kind of wonder-worker, a ‘miracle man’. Those who are opposed, see him as some opportunist ‘medicine man’. (Incidentally, a ‘Baal Shem’, in the popular mind of that time, often meant just that: one who can use the Name of God for magical purposes, as in amulets, incantations, and so on). There is little doubt but that the Baal Shem had what psychologists today would describe as ‘extra-sensory perception’ or psychic powers. Many spiritual persons have them. But these, in themselves, are not spiritual qualities. One does not have to be a man of God to possess them, nor do they ordinarily lead to Godliness. As a matter of fact, truly great souls frown upon the use of psychic powers, particularly when they distract us from the genuine goal.

The Baal Shem’s real work and power was that he was able to change men’s hearts and character and turn their thoughts to God. He saw himself very humbly as only an instrument to do God’s work. Hence, if we learn to play down the psychical element, which is only a facade, and begin to perceive what is behind it—namely, a

divinely inspired person, using his gifts and his energies, selflessly, for the help of others—then a truly majestic picture comes forth.

What is really remarkable in the life of the Besht is the all-inclusive nature of his love and compassion. In almost all the biographical works that I have come across, this note is sounded. To mention a few—Martin Buber (in his *Tales of the Hasidim*) pointedly and succinctly states that ‘the term “Baal Shem Tov” signifies a man who lives with and for his fellowmen on the foundation of his relation to the divine.’ Louis Ginzberg (in *The Jewish Encyclopaedia*, Vol. II, p. 385) writes of the Besht’s career in terms of ‘unselfishness and high-minded benevolence, . . . of merciful judgement of others, and of fearlessness combined with dislike of strife . . .’ H. Rabinowicz (in *A Guide to Hassidism*) describes Rabbi Israel as ‘the kindest, the most approachable of men . . . Born and bred among the people, there were no barriers between him and the masses.’ Elie Wiesel (in *Souls on Fire*) asserts that ‘the Baal Shem was a man of the people in the true sense of the word . . . He did not occupy an exalted social position . . . he had no official titles . . . nor material possessions . . . His humble origins made it easier for the poor to approach him. In a way, he represented their sublimated selves.’

Now this type of ‘identifying virtue’ on the part of a saint almost everyone of us ought to be able to appreciate, for it is so *modern* in its sentiment. We like to associate modernism with democracy. Well, we only talk about democracy; the Baal Shem practised it. He literally lived it with every fibre of his being.

Many books point out that, at the time the Baal Shem lived, most Rabbis and religious leaders were chosen on the basis of their Talmudic-Halakhic ability alone. There had developed in Jewish community life a kind of aristocracy of learning, intellect and

scholarship. But the Baal Shem, from his very heart, disdained every type of aristocracy—whether it be of power, or of wealth, or of intellect. To him Judaism was a religion of respect for all as children of God, and therefore (said he) we must try to serve all—the weak as well as the strong; the poor as well as the rich; the unlearned as well as the learned.

I should like to quote two items (typical of many)—from the book *In Praise of Baal Shem Tov*, by Ben-Amos and Mintz—

Once at the third Sabbath meal the Besht taught Torah (to his disciples) and they remained at the table far into the night. Then, he called his attendant and told him to take several golden coins from his box and go to a certain house where a woman had delivered a child and did not have enough for a single meal. The attendant immediately went with the bag of money, and left it at the door according to the Rabbi’s order.

Once the Besht was standing (in the congregation) and praying before the Holy Ark. In the middle of his prayer he stopped and went out into the street before the synagogue, where he saw a gentile selling wood. He bought a wagon-load of wood, and the man then carried the wood to the beth-hamidrash (the study hall). Whereupon the Besht ordered that the man be paid for the wood and be given an extra gift for carrying it. . . . This gentile was so grateful that he exclaimed: ‘Blessed be the God of the Jews who has such a holy people.’

These items may begin to reflect the picture of the man. If, for the moment, we subtract those so-termed ‘super-natural’ elements of cognition, what emerges is the figure of a very devoted soul who, at every opportunity, is trying to help his fellow beings—whether they be Jew or gentile, man or woman, friend or stranger—and to help them on the level where they need help most, be it material (as in the cases cited) or spiritual (in relation to his teaching and worship).

We may call this particular virtue *democratic*, because that ‘rings a bell’ in the modern mind; and consequently may help

us to begin to identify with its possessor. For the Baal Shem himself, however, it was not that at all; it was simply the essence of his Judaism which teaches: 'Love thy neighbour who is as thyself; I am the Lord.'

A saint of the common people

Let us glance for a moment at the situation that actually obtained in the Jewish community at the time that Rabbi Israel came upon the scene. After several centuries of Talmudic study and erudition, religious power had become vested in the hands of the Halakhic (legal) scholars, the academic aristocracy of the society. With the ascendancy of the scholar to special status in the community, it was almost inevitable that the *am ha-aretz* would be looked down upon. This term has a double connotation. In popular language, it referred to the non-scholar: the peasant, the worker. In its literal meaning, it refers to the masses, the 'people of the land', the hoi polloi, the proletariat.

Despite the great emphasis on education in Jewish life, and despite the widespread reverence for learning, scholars were still a small minority of the people. The masses either could not afford, or did not have the time, to engage in scholarship. Also many did not have the mental capacity for it. Not everyone is endowed with intellectual or legalistic leanings. Still a person wants to be looked upon with respect. So, because of the social imbalance, there developed a smoldering dissatisfaction on the part of many people.

The Baal Shem, almost instinctively, rebelled against this religious hierarchy in Jewish life. By a deep spiritual tendency, he turned to the masses, to the common man—the ordinary labourer, the housewife, the child asking innocent questions. He was convinced that God is available to anyone who sincerely turns to Him. Indeed, is that not

what had been affirmed thrice daily throughout the generations: 'The Lord is near to all that call upon Him sincerely!' Why then should 'Torah' become the possession of only professional legalists, while all others should have to turn to them to find out what Judaism is, what is right and wrong, and even, how and when to serve God? The Baal Shem was stoutly opposed to such 'intermediaries' who hindered the direct access of any devout soul to God.

Of course, when put merely in these terms, the role of the Besht appears to be negative or confrontational. The truth is that he was anything but that, for he proceeded in another way altogether. He was not out to expose or to solve the 'problems of society.' In that sense, he was not a revolutionary and not even a social reformer. All that was only incidental to his main work. His main work was to help individuals, one by one, to come closer to God and to come closer to their fellowmen. Perhaps, in this context, the opposite of 'reformer' is 'teacher'.

An ideal teacher

The Baal Shem was an ideal teacher. Ideal teaching lends more weight to personal love and service than to impersonal counsel. Most teachers, preachers, and reformers are ready to give advice to the whole society. They have their blueprints for reorganizing the whole world, but in actuality they do not transform even one life (in most cases, not even their own!). The Baal Shem spent more than two-thirds of his life improving and perfecting himself! Only then, in the last third, was he so consecrated in his work, and so effective, that he literally changed hundreds of lives... Every true teacher knows that you cannot teach 'society', you cannot change 'the world', you can only change people. For this purpose, the personal relationship is very important. This was the first great characteristic in the teaching-art of the Baal Shem.

The second notable characteristic was that even when dealing with individual persons, his main appeal was not to the brain but to the heart. It is often pointed out that man stands above the animal, in that he has a brain wherewith to think. This is true, but it is only a half-truth. Man also stands above the animal, in that he has a heart wherewith to feel and have compassion. What good is it to have the intellect of a man, and the insensitivity of a beast? It is a matter of psychological fact, and also a point of common observation, that most people are motivated most of the time by their emotions rather than by their reason. Emotion is deeper than reason. Reason can deal only with the surface elements of life, such as law and ritual. If we want to get behind law and ritual to the essential basis of love of man and love of God, then we must deal with the discipline of the heart.

Here is a typical story that illustrates how important this element was in the life and teaching of the Baal Shem. It is told that a learned and religiously observant father once came to the Besht, deeply troubled because of the conduct of his son. 'Dear Master (this father pleaded), do tell me what I should do. My son is departing from the path of the Torah. He disregards many of the rituals, he does not recite his regular prayers, he even declares that he does not believe in God. I try to reason with him, I even chastise him, but nothing seems to help. Master, you must advise me, what shall I do with my son?' The Master answered the distraught man in a few simple words: 'Love him more'.

See how keenly and decisively the Baal Shem gets to the heart of the problem. It is a stroke of genius, one might say. Yet with all that—with all the insight and the wisdom that are implied in this kind of teaching—this is not the ultimate greatness of the Baal Shem. This is not what makes him the truly ideal teacher. Many before

him, and even more since, have gotten to the point of recognizing, and preaching, the necessity of kindness and love. Almost all religious literature, from the Bible down, has stressed the indispensability of mercy and compassion, of love of neighbour, of the Golden Rule, and so on.

In our day, this religious preachment has been 'seconded' by various psychological counsels. Many will recall the impact that was made, for example, by the book, *Peace of Mind*, one chapter of which was entitled 'Love or Perish'. That then sparked a whole series of works, whose general theme was the central and crucial role of the emotions of the heart.

That being the case, the supreme challenge is: How to educate the heart? No one may rightly be called an Ideal Teacher who cannot meet this highest need. Specific guidance is required on *how* one may change one's life—from resentment to love, from fear to faith, from tension to cooperation. For that more than beautiful preachments are called for. Prerequisites are the actual techniques of inner growth based upon well-tested experience. The Baal Shem was one of those rare, gifted souls who had achieved this type of 'education' for himself, and was able to guide others accordingly. He was 'master of the heart' because he had become Master of the Name!

In this respect too—as had been done earlier—it would not be amiss to associate the Baal Shem with the 'modernist' spirit or temper. A typical modern trait is the insistence upon practicality, upon exactitude or efficiency—in a word, a 'scientific' approach to things. Well, the Baal Shem had this attitude par excellence, except that *he* applied it to the higher realms of life—the pursuit of spirituality, the practice of magnanimity.

If, then, any modernists had hitherto been disheartened, or possibly repelled, by the general ambiguity or even obscurity that

pervades so much of contemporary religious life, the Baal Shem Tov can be—and ought to be—an antidote for their predicament. The very concepts of Faith, Prayer, Morality—which are so loosely and irresponsibly handled in so many circles—all take on a special vitality and exactness at the hands of the Besht.

Meaning of 'Baal-Shem'

All along we have been referring to Rabbi Israel as the BAAL-SHEM, Master of the Name of God, without stopping to consider what that really means. It had been indicated earlier that, in the popular mind, a Baal Shem was often taken to be some kind of 'faith-healer'. That he did rescue many people from a multitude of troubles is an incontrovertible fact of his life, but just how to understand that fact has been subject to endless confusion. In that regard let us consider one of several anecdotes along this line found in the text *Shivhei Ha-Besht* (referred to above).

There was a sick man whom a great Jewish doctor could not cure.... The 'Besht' was called in to see this ailing person. The Besht treated him, and in due time he recovered.... The doctor, in amazement, asked the Baal Shem how he was able to cure this patient, in view of the fact that there was no known medical remedy for his particular ailment... The Baal Shem explained—in effect—that whereas the doctor had been dealing with the man corporeally, he personally took the man's spirit into account, and that made the difference. (The Baal Shem then referred to a common belief that the various positive and negative precepts of the Torah corresponded to the limbs and sinews of the body; and that these are affected by the obedience or transgression of those precepts.)

Today we might call the above psychosomatic medicine or psychological healing. The fact is that, in case after case, the Baal Shem was able to cope with the requirements of the spirit in as precise a manner

as a physician handling the needs of the body.

This same sense of interdependence (as seen here between spirit and body) can and should be applied to the relation of thought to action, or of motive to *mitzvah*. A Mitzvah is a ritual or legal act, but traditionally the intention (*kavanah*) behind it is specially important. That element of the Bible or Talmud which concerns itself with that 'inner' side, is the *heart* of the Tradition.

Well, naturally, the Baal Shem was concerned about this area. He was eager—and showed himself able—to deal with Inwardness in Jewish tradition in as exact and 'scientific' a manner as the legalist or ritualist deals with the *Halakha*, the outward behaviour of man. This is a far more difficult task, but also a far more rewarding one.

The Baal Shem sought, in his day, the same sense of seriousness, the same sense of coherence and order, in the inner realm of Judaism, as had already been introduced into the external realm. Prayer and devotion—which are the essence of the religion of the heart—cannot and must not be left to chance and indecision. There are principles of prayer just as there are rules of ritual. There are laws and disciplines for mind and spirit, just as there are laws and disciplines for the body.

Herein is the real meaning of the special title *Baal-Shem*—literally, 'Master of the Name' (i.e. the Name of God). Jewishly or Biblically speaking, the name of something represents the essence of that thing. In an early chapter of Genesis we are told that the various animals that had been created were brought before Adam, and he 'named' them; he called each by its name. That is another way of saying: he identified the nature of each creature. On a higher level we find that when Abram's life was changed, he became Abraham. The change of name signified that the essence of his

life was now different. It was similar when Sarai became Sarah; and when Jacob became Israel, and so on. On a still higher level, differences in God's Name symbolize different manifestations or attributes of God. For example, we find in the Book of Exodus, that God appearing to Moses said: When I had appeared earlier to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, it was as El Shaddai, God Almighty—namely, as a God of manifest power; but now I appear to you as Yehovah, the Eternal—Pure Inner Being or Ultimate Existence.

Of course, with respect to God, we can never know Him fully; His attributes are infinite. Yet some of His attributes do reveal themselves to highly developed spiritual persons. Thus the Prophet Isaiah had three great visions; and when we examine these visions, we find that essentially three supreme attributes of God come forth: God Universal, God Spiritual, God Eternal. These are all summed up in the majestic pronouncement: 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts'! With regard to Moses, at the height of his prophecy, Tradition says that Thirteen Attributes of God were revealed to him: 'The Lord, the Eternal, God, Merciful One, Gracious One, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, abounding in truth, extending his love to thousands, forgiving iniquity, forgiving transgression, forgiving sinfulness, though not acquitting the impenitent.'

The number '13' here is significant. It enables us, symbolically, to correlate different attitudes toward the traditional forms and essences, the external and internal aspects of Torah, respectively. When the Rabbis of the Talmud and of succeeding generations wanted to deal with Mitzvot halakhically, they did so in a systematic, almost scientific manner. For example, one of the Talmudic sages, Rabbi Ishmael, taught: The Torah can, and should, be studied according to thirteen well defined

linguistic principles. This reflects the legal exactitude with which they approached their subject. They utilized thirteen propositions of logic to analyse and dissect appropriate Scriptural texts.

Well, here, with respect to the Self-Revelation of God to Moses, through thirteen modes of manifestation, we have an analogue to the above in terms of Inwardness. The Baal Shem, and others of a similar Hasidic or mystical attitude of mind, were moved to take a text like this *at least* as seriously as any text of a legal or ritualistic nature. For, whereas textual exegesis is largely a matter of human thought or inference, this was a direct inspiration or intuition that came to Moses as a man of God. Thinking about God and the inner life should be *no less* demanding of us than dealing with law and outer observance.

It was Moses who exhorted us 'to cleave to the Eternal thy God, for that is thy true life.' How is that to be done? How can we ascend to such ethereal heights? Israel Baal Shem Tov was characteristically *practical*, even to this supernal degree; and so he helped provide a 'ladder' for such an ascent. According to one interpreter (Eliezer Steinmann in *The Garden of Hassidism*), this is how the matter is to be understood—

'Ye that cleave unto the Lord your God' (Deut. 4:4) means you that cleave unto the divinity within you... According to the Besht's theory man is in the place where his mind is! When the mind is in *galuth* (exile), man as a whole is in *galuth* ... In man there is a divine soul ... (whereby) he rises above his corporeal and mundane existence, above his sufferings and ills ... Exile is forgetfulness (of God and soul); remembrance is Redemption.

In effect, then, the Thirteen Attributes of the Godhead must become for us, according to the Baal Shem doctrine, forms of meditation on the Reality of the Divine! The Lord, the Eternal, the Loving One, the Truthful One, the Forgiving One, etc—What are these but Names of the Lord? Names, as

was said, are essences ; and *we* are expected to emulate those essences, and strive to make them *our own*. The Baal Shem dedicated his life to achieving that Goal. Thus he became Master of the Divine Name . . . and each of us is to do the same.

A PEEP INTO THE RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF ASSAM

(A Review Article)

[EARLY HISTORY OF THE VAISHNAVA FAITH AND MOVEMENT IN ASSAM: SHANKARADEVA AND HIS TIMES. BY MAHESWAR NEOG. Published by Motilal Banarsidass, Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi 110 007. 1985. Pp. xx + 400. Rs. 200]

The treatise under review recounts the early history of the Vaiṣṇava faith and movement in Assam with special reference to the life and personality of Śaṅkaradeva, the great Vaiṣṇava saint, poet, dramatist, scholar and a social reformer of medieval Assam, who gave the medieval pan-Indian Bhakti movement a new content and character through the Eka-Śaraṇiya cult. The present work is a reprint of the doctoral dissertation submitted by author for his D. Phil degree to the University of Gauhati

In twelve systematic and well-documented chapters, Dr. Maheswar Neog, himself an erudite scholar of wide reputation especially interested in the study of religio-cultural life in north-eastern India in general and Assam in particular, has presented an authentic account of the Vaisnava movement that swept through Assam during A.D. 1450-1650 which was a period of tremendous creative activity in the fields of art and literature. In the introductory chapter the learned author acquaints us with the primary sources such as copper plates and stone inscriptions, poetical works of some pre-Śaṅkaradeva poets, the *gurucaritas*, the *rāja-vamśāvalīs* of the Koc kings of Kamarūpa along with some Islamic chronicles which are, according to the author, essential for a reconstruction of the life-history of Śaṅkaradeva and his times. A rich biographical literature both in verse and in prose concerning Śaṅkaradeva, his life, per-

sonality and the Bhakti movement came into existence during the lifetime of the saint. Since then there has been a steady growth of this literature including the more recent works authored by Lakshminath Bezbarua, Banikanta Kakati, Dimbeswar Neog, Maheswar Neog (the author), Bapchandra Mahanta and others.

To have a clear idea of the significance of this devotional movement and its wealth and beauty, the socio-political conditions of Assam prior to and during Śaṅkaradeva's times should be kept in view. In the second chapter Dr. Neog gives a commendable account of it, throwing new light on the ancestry of the saint which had genealogical relationship with the Śiromaṇi Bāra Bhuyā family of Assam. A graphic account of the social and economic background of the neo-Vaiṣṇava movement forms the subject-matter of chapter III of the present work. During the 15th and 16th centuries, the Bhakti cult, which derived its inspiration from the Vaiṣṇava movement inaugurated by Rāmānuja and other Ācāryas in South India, manifested itself as a powerful religious movement in North India. It introduced a new mode of worship—through devotional love (Prema Bhakti) in a spirit of total self-surrender. Chanting of Lord's holy names came to be regarded as an efficacious means for God realization. A robust humanism based on this new religion of love brought about significant moral

rejuvenation and unprecedented spiritual upheaval. Rāmānanda and his disciple Kabīr, Guru Nānak, Nāmadeva, Vallabhācārya, Caitanya Mahāprabhu and some other prominent religious leaders and saints gave Bhakti movement a new meaning and momentum. Śaṅkaradeva's Eka-Śaraṇiya faith was a part of this all-India Bhakti movement.

The socio-cultural scene of the period preceding the rise of Śaṅkaradeva was a lamentable picture of moral and religious decadence. Śāktism and Śaivism formed the dominant religious trend, and esoteric cults based on sexual passion and promiscuity exercised a demoralizing effect on the social and religious life of the people of Assam. *Yoginī-tantra* and *Kalikā-purāna*, two important scriptures of Assam Śāktism, belonged to the 'left-hand school' which encouraged blood sacrifices and various esoteric rites. Most of the Bārabhuyās and the ancestors of both Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva were staunch Śāktas. Scholars like Edward Gait and Anderson (in *Hasting's Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*) have given detailed accounts of the perverted Tantric cults and their influence on the common people and the royal families of both Koc and Ahom kings. Śaivism was also equally powerful in the region along with Tantric Vaiṣṇavism, esoteric Buddhism and other minor religious cults and practices such as Nāthism, and the cults of deities like Dharma, Manasā and Śītalā. Śaṅkaradeva's father was himself a worshipper of Śiva. Through his study of relevant authentic works the author has shown that the worship of Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa, though not wholly unknown, was not a pervasive phenomenon in the pre-Śaṅkaradeva days. On the whole, the socio-religious conditions of Assam were not very much different from those obtaining in Bengal before the advent of Caitanya (A.D. 1486-1533).

Śaṅkaradeva, the central figure of the new Bhakti cult, was born in a distinguished Kāyastha family of Śiromaṇi Bāra Bhuyās (landlords) at Batadrava or Baradewa village in the district of Nowgang in the Brahmaputra valley sometime in the latter half of the 15th century. Biographers and scholars are not unanimous regarding the exact date of birth of the saint, although Dr. Neog has placed the date of birth in the year A.D. 1449. Śaṅkaradeva had his early education in a Sanskrit school (*tol*) where he is supposed to have studied virtually all the branches of Indian learning — the Vedas, the Upaniṣads, the Epics, the Purānas, the Tantras, grammar, logic and literature (*kāvya*). After the death of his father and of his first wife, Śaṅkaradeva went out on a pilgrimage with seventeen companions including his teacher Mahendra Kandai. During this pilgrimage, which lasted 12 years, Śaṅkaradeva visited Puri, Rameswar, Varanasi, Prayag, Vrindavan, Mathura, Kurukshetra — almost all the sacred places connected with the life of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa. During his sojourn in these holy places, he came into contact with people of various shades of religious opinion and was impressed by the nascent Vaiṣṇava movement that was pulsating in the heart of Northern India. He felt convinced of the efficacy of the path of devotion (Bhakti-mārga) in popularizing religion among the masses. On his return from the pilgrimage, he came to possess a complete copy of the *Bhāgavata Purāna* with Śrīdharasvāmin's commentary, went deep into it and set himself to the task of propounding the cult of Bhakti.

Thereafter we find Śaṅkaradeva as a preacher, teacher and organizer of the faith, ably assisted by Mādhavadeva (A.D. 1489-1596), his chief apostle, who succeeded him as the head of the movement. In the face of many oppositions and hostilities from non-Vaisnavas and royal persecution,

Śaṅkaradeva went on preaching that 'simple singing of the tales of Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa and taking refuge in Him would be sufficient for the attainment of final beatitude'. The saint brought the message of the new religious creed to the doorsteps of the masses and saved them from the oppressive burden of sacerdotalism. During his life time the neo-Vaiṣṇava movement achieved tremendous popularity, and low-caste Hindus, and some of the tribals like Garos, Bhutias and Mikirs, and even the Muslims, embraced the new faith and sided with his mission. As a far-sighted organizer, Śaṅkaradeva established congregational prayer-houses called 'Nāmghar' which in course of time became centres of religious and social solidarity. Notwithstanding a very detailed account of the life and activities of Śaṅkaradeva given in the book, the author's silence about the formal initiation of the saint by any guru appears inexplicable. It seems therefore that Śaṅkaradeva was a self-initiated preceptor of the new sect.

Though essentially a religious leader of a very high order, more interested in the propagation of faith than in literary creations, Śaṅkaradeva was a literary genius too. He had to his credit a good number of works covering different areas of linguistic expression such as prose, poetry, drama, song, translation or adaptation, and compilation from different texts. Among Śaṅkaradeva's literary works in Assamese, devotional songs known as *bargīta* (great songs), of which only thirty songs are available now, and the two books of prayer, *Guṇamāla* and *Kīrtanaghōṣā* (choral songs), are worth mentioning. Dr. Neog gives an exhaustive account of the whole range of the saint's literary activities, analysing their contents, excellence and significance. Indeed, chapter V which delineates the potentialities and principal trends of the medieval Assamese literature is one of the most interesting chapters in the book.

Every religious movement in order to be intellectually convincing and emotionally satisfying requires doctrinal support. Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti-ratnākara* (written in Sanskrit) is a treatise on the theoretical foundations of Bhakti cult deriving its authority from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and other scriptures of the Vaiṣṇava sect. This basal work (discussed in Chapter VI) gave the neo-Vaiṣṇava movement a sound theoretical foundation. In chapter VII Dr. Neog traces the Vedantic background to the Vaiṣṇava movement. Śaṅkaradeva's philosophical views contained in his literary and religious works have been surveyed by the learned author with all earnestness, bringing into focus their agreement and disagreement with the basic principles of Ācārya Śaṅkara, Śrīdharaśvāmin and the school of Sāṅkhya. The conceptual framework of Śaṅkaradeva's philosophical views was evidently influenced by the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Dr. Neog's presentation of the philosophical views of the saint is praiseworthy, but he has left out from the purview of his delineation the influence of Rāmānuja's doctrines on Śaṅkaradeva's Eka-Śaraṇiya faith. Śaṅkaradeva and Caitanya were contemporaries, both hailing from the north-eastern region of India and expounding the cult of Bhakti. The reviewer therefore feels that a comparative study of the views of both the saints would have made the discussion more lively and philosophically more convincing.

Dr. Neog has treated in an admirable way the dramatic art, music and dance inspired by Śaṅkaradeva, as well as the fine arts like manuscript miniatures and calligraphy (Chapter VIII-X). Śaṅkaradeva along with some of his principal disciples were instrumental in introducing certain religious rites and practices for the new creed. These, along with the social implications of the Bhakti movement, receive the author's sympathetic appraisal in Chapters

XI and XII. Dr. Neog concludes : 'The great Śaṅkaradeva movement thus brought about a new and comprehensive outlook on life and a distinctly healthy tone to social behaviour'. (p. 378).

Admittedly, the present treatise is an outstanding one, highly commendable for the richness of data, broadness of perspective and clarity of understanding and expression. Dr. Neog has provided a thorough and useful documentation of the life and teachings of Śaṅkaradeva along with an impressive study of the entire neo-Vaiṣṇava movement against the backdrop of the socio-political scene of medieval Assam by utilizing relevant treatises and research works authored by oriental and western scholars, apart from a wide variety of old religious texts. The work is therefore almost indispensable for an understanding of the origin and development of the Vaiṣṇava faith and movement in Assam. The author's approach is historical-cum-religious. He makes no attempt at comparative valuation of the faith. In the preface of the book, the author has brushed aside Kennedy's view that 'Assam Vaiṣṇavism is an indirect but real result of the Caitanya movement' as preposterous, but nowhere has he endeavoured to establish his own conviction. Moreover,

the author has conspicuously avoided any mention of Śaṅkaradeva's possible meeting with Caitanya, although some scholars have categorically stated that such a meeting did take place at Puri, though no dialogue took place between the two. (Vide Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. 4, p. 202 and Dr. S. K. Dey : *The Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Bengal*, p. 101). Nevertheless, the treatise opens a hitherto untrodden terrain of religious history. An exhaustive bibliography and index will prove to be of great help to researchers and readers alike. The publishers, Motilal Banarsidass, have maintained their usual high standard in the printing and get-up of the book.

At a time when a successful political agitation and the capture of political power by activists have catapulted Assam to the front stage of Indian politics, it may be interesting to delve into the past history of that State. From this point of view Dr. Neog's book acquires additional importance.

PROF. RANJIT KUMAR ACHARJEE
Department of Philosophy
Ramakrishna Mahavidyalaya
Kailashahar, North Tripura

(Continued from page 426)

It may be noted here that the form *jāgrata* is not found in any of the Vedic works.

Unfortunately there is no living Vedic tradition of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*. That is why the original reading of this verse cannot be determined with the help of the traditional Vedic recitation.

As regards the cause of the change in the reading, we surmise that the corrupt reading is due to the mode of uttering the preceding word *uttiṣṭhata*. To be explicit: while uttering *uttiṣṭhata*, the first two syllables (viz. *ut* and *tiṣ*) are uttered with

some stress. This stress must have prompted the reciter to utter the next word with stress in the first two syllables. Thus *jāgr* came to be uttered in later times as *jāg-gra*.⁵ Consequently, the corrupt reading *jāgrata* came into existence in the place of *jāgrta*.

5. The traditional way of uttering जाग्रत is जाग्-ग्रत and not जाग्-रत (i.e. an additional ग् is to be uttered between ग् and र). Similarly वक्, अग्र etc. are to be uttered as वक्-क्, अग्-ग्र etc.

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

CHINESE THOUGHT—AN INTRODUCTION: EDITED BY DONALD H. BISHOP. Published by Motilal Banarsidass, Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi 110 007. 1985. Pp. 483. Rs. 175.

Though India shares hundreds of miles of common border with China, and though Indian thought in the form of Buddhism penetrated into China in the early centuries of the Christian era and brought about profound changes in the attitudes and thinking of the people of China, Chinese thought is very little understood or appreciated in India. For most Indians Chinese thought is nothing but Buddhism modified by Confucianism. Even in the West there have been few 'orientalists' with specialized knowledge of Chinese thought.

However, in recent years there is a growing realization that China has made its own unique contribution to world thought and other cultures have much to learn from it. And no other people would stand to profit from its study than Indians who seem to need, in the realities of present-day politics, a dose of Chinese humanism and pragmatism to temper Indian idealism and political naivete. Therefore, the publication of Donald Bishop's book in India by Motilal Banarsidass is to be welcomed.

To understand Chinese thought one must understand a little of Chinese history which, as in the case of India, was a history of dynasties until the dawn of the present century. There are six major epochs in the history of Chinese thought: primitive naturalistic thought (up to 600 B.C.), Confucianism (up to 200 B.C.), Early Buddhism, Chan Buddhism (under Tang dynasty), Neo-Confucianism (under Sung dynasty) and the eclectic thought of later centuries (after A.D. 1,000). The contribution of Buddhism to Chinese thought consisted chiefly of doctrines regarding the nature of the soul, life after death, meditation, belief in a Saviour, etc. But Buddhism never influenced the Chinese in the way it did the Tibetans. Within a few centuries after its introduction into China, it got so thoroughly Sinicized that it became a part of Chinese thought. The best fruit of this transformation was Zen (Ch'an in Chinese).

Apart from translations of original Confucian and Zen classics, a few books on Chinese thought as a whole have appeared in recent years. The best known among these is Fung Yu-Lan's two-volume *History of Chinese Philosophy* (also his

Short History of Chinese Philosophy). H.G. Creel's *Chinese Thought from Confucius to Mao Tse-Tung* is a more popular treatment. Donald Bishop's massive volume offers a more detailed treatment than Creel's work. Out of the 18 chapters in the book 8 have been contributed by Dr. Bishop himself. The remaining chapters are by eight other scholars six of whom are Chinese. The book has been divided into three parts: Ancient Period, Medieval Period and Modern Period. Each part begins with an introduction by the general editor who has taken care to give a brief history of China during that period. As is to be expected in a work of this kind, all the chapters are not of the same quality.

Important early thinkers like Confucius, Mo Tzu, Mencius and Wang Yang Ming have been allotted a chapter each. The others are discussed in the chapters on the different systems of thought (like Taoism and Neo-Confucianism). The treatment of Chinese Buddhist philosophy is better than that found in Creel's book, but is still quite inadequate. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of Dr. Bishop's book is the relatively large space given to modern period. Here separate chapters have been allotted not only to Sun Yat-Sen and Mao but also to less-known thinkers like Wang Fu-Chih and Kang Yu-Wei. The chapter on 'contemporary philosophers outside the mainland' is an interesting addition. The book is rounded off with the editor's excellent evaluation of Chinese contribution to world thought.

Chinese thought is centred on man. No other people raised humanism to such a high pedestal as the Chinese have done. And yet they do not view man in isolation but as a part of a natural ontological harmony. A most significant aspect of Chinese culture is that it teaches morality without the necessity of belief in a personal God. The Greeks dragged their gods into every petty human affair. The Judeo-Christian tradition makes every act or choice an occasion for confrontation with God, thereby making moral life an endless torture. But the Chinese have regarded morality as a spontaneous and natural phenomenon which does not call for divine intervention, and dealt with ethical questions at individual and social levels. It was this secular and pragmatic approach to morality that enabled China to absorb Buddhism once and

Marxism now. If the present developments in that country are any indication, the indigenous thought of China is likely to assert itself once again after assimilating the best elements of Marxism.

The present book has succeeded in presenting the spirit of Chinese thought in a readable and fairly coherent form. Original Chinese terms have been sparingly used in the book; nevertheless, a glossary of Chinese terms would have enhanced the value of the book. A brief outline or chart of the political history of China should have been given as an appendix.

Chinese Thought should be made compulsory reading for philosophy students in Indian universities at least to counterbalance the effects of western thought upon their minds. The book will introduce to the general reader wholly new perspectives and enlarge the boundaries of culture for him. For a book of this size and quality the price is quite reasonable, but a cheaper paper-back edition should bring it within the reach of a larger number of people in India.

S.B.

THE DEDICATED (A BIOGRAPHY OF NIVEDITA): BY LIZELLE REYMOND. Published by Samata Books, 10 Kamraj Bhavan, 573 Mount Road, Madras 600 006. 1985. Pp. x + 376. Rs. 60.

During his itinerary in the West Swami Vivekananda drew to him many pure-hearted and talented people through ties of life-long friendship and loyalty. The most important among them was Miss Margaret Noble, known to the world as Sister Nivedita. She was to Swamiji what St. Clara had been to St. Francis.

In the book under review Lizelle Reymond recounts Nivedita's life and work in a scintillating manner. The biography begins with Margaret Noble's life as an eighteen-year old intellectual. The second chapter gives a brief account of her training as a teacher, her years of work at an orphanage in Rugby, and at the Ruskin school founded by her. Margaret received her Biblical lessons from her grandmother and her father who was a Protestant minister in the Wesleyan Church. 'With her worship of the altar cross, with the flowers, the incense, the candles, she associated the whole of nature.' She used to feel 'a deep religious nostalgia' after leaving the altar. She approached the congregationalists, the Tractarians, and the members of the Church of England to find

answers to the why and wherefore of things. But none could satisfy her. When she met Swami Vivekananda at the house of Lady Isabell Mergesson (in November 1895) she was subjugated 'by a strange new force' that could lift her mind to broader and subtler regions. She discovered in him 'a powerful magician of faith' who knew the dialect in which the Almighty could be invoked.

However, to begin with, she was a bit sceptical about Swamiji's views on religion and philosophy; then she came to admire him, and finally she accepted him as her Guru. Margaret discovered a new religion which was both mystical and practical, esoteric and scientific.

Lizelle Reymond has given a lucid analysis of the stages in Margaret E. Noble's metamorphosis into Sister Nivedita—how Swamiji gave her 'moral initiation' before initiating her into sannyasa; how he introduced her to the intricacies of the Vedanta philosophy, made her grasp the problems of Indians, let her imbibe 'the sparkling joy' that emanated from Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, and led her on to the path of truth and self-sacrifice. Swamiji sensed the dynamism of her character and entrusted her with the task of serving the Indian people. Nivedita's total acceptance of her Guru and the inner transformation that she underwent were not, however, smooth processes. She had to go through periods of great mental tension and struggle.

Next follows a detailed account of Sister Nivedita's social and political activities after Swamiji's death. She was determined to ameliorate the lot of Indians and to instil in them the feeling of nationalism. She believed in the greatness of Indian culture, and did a lot to spread the message of the ancient sages. She was hopeful that India would, one day, emerge as a great nation, indissoluble and indivisible. 'I believe that the strength which spoke in the Vedas and the Upanishads, in the making of religions and empires, in the learning of scholars and the meditation of the saints, is born once more amongst us, and its name today is nationality', she wrote.

Lizelle Reymond does not leave a single aspect of her life uncovered: her work with Patrick Geddes in Paris, her relationship with Brahma Samajists like Jagadish Chandra Bose and Surendranath Tagore, her intense faith in Kālī, the Mother Goddess, her love for Gopaler Ma, an aged Brahmin widow, her deep reverence for the Holy Mother, her association with Aurobindo

Ghosh and others, her opposition to the reckless policies of the British Raj, and her contribution to the growth of Swadeshi movement. Nevertheless, the book gives a sense of compactness. There are no tedious philosophical discussions or prolix descriptions to detain the reader.

Well got-up and neatly planned, this book is

the most complete biography of Sister Nivedita. But it has no index, bibliography or footnotes to reference—a lacuna, which, I hope, will be filled in the next edition.

SATISH K. KAPOOR M.A. (PB) M.A. (LONDON),
PH. D.

*Reader, Postgraduate Department of History
Lyallpur Khalsa College, Jalandhar City (Punjab)*

NEWS AND REPORTS

RAMAKRISHNA MISSION VIDYALAYA COIMBATORE

REPORT FOR 1983-84

This centre, situated in Perianaickenpalayam in the Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu, is one of the largest educational institutions of its kind in the country. It celebrated its Golden Jubilee in 1982. On this occasion the Golden Jubilee Memorial building was opened by the President of India, and mini libraries and mini laboratories were presented to 50 schools. Furthermore, a protected water supply tank in a village and a mini health centre building at Vivekanandapuram were also constructed. The activities during the year under review were as follows:

Religious: In commemoration of the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna, the Ramakrishna Festival was organized as in the previous years on the first Sunday of the new year as a part of which an essay and speech competition and a scientific and cultural exhibition were organized.

Educational: College of Education: The college, which has been granted autonomous status by the University of Madras, offered courses for B. Ed. (roll strength 99), M. Ed.—regular, and separate integrated course for the visually handicapped—(16), M. Phil (5) and Ph. D. degrees (11). A new diploma course on the cultural heritage of India with special reference to the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda was started during this period.

Maruthi College of Physical Education: offering B.P.Ed. (roll strength 55), M.P.Ed. degree course (regular 23, summer course 20), and a higher-grade certificate course (14), the college is one of the ten such colleges in the country

offering postgraduate courses of study and has 100% result. A Play Festival involving 3,000 village children was organized. The Sports School for boys of 14 years of age (one of the 3 such schools in the State) functioning under this college had 96 students.

Arts College: 280 of the total 537 students of the college were resident. The college, granted autonomous status in August 1981, offered courses for B.A. (roll strength 139), B.Sc. (293), M.Sc. (45), M.A. (65), M. Phil (8), Ph. D (3).

The Polytechnic: 258 scholars (of whom 155 were resident) were pursuing three-year diploma courses in civil and rural engineering and mechanical and rural engineering. Engineering extension work, social work in the villages, intensive practical training in construction practice and workshop in summer holidays, project work related to rural problems in civil and mechanical engineering etc. are the distinguishing features of this Polytechnic.

Community Polytechnic: A wing of the Vidyalaya Polytechnic, this Polytechnic has six sub-centres supported by local agencies. During the period under review two sub-centres in the nearby villages with two Industrial Training institutes were started to run regular courses and non-formal courses suitable for the area.

Gandhi Basic Teacher Training Institute: had 34 trainees. Assisted by the UNICEF, the institute is participating in the Comprehensive Access to Primary Education (CAPE) project for school drop-outs and unschooled children in the 6 to 14 age-group. 8 schools were benefited from the mobile laboratory of the Institute.

Institute of Agriculture and Rural Development: which offered (i) a two-year certificate course in Agriculture (roll strength: regular 62; supplementary 2) and (ii) one diploma course (40), is

affiliated to the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University. Under social forestry scheme 25,000 forest plants were distributed among farmers who were provided with soil-testing and other facilities.

Industrial Institute: offered a two-year course in fitting and turning to 59 trainees.

Residential High School: Roll strength: 156 of whom 3 were visually handicapped. All the 21 students who had appeared for S.S.L.C. examination passed.

Swami Shivananda Higher Secondary School: out of the 476 boys and 36 girls in the school, 196 appeared for the S.S.L.C. examination as also 19 students from Sports School and 2 visually handicapped students. Vocational education formed a part of the curriculum. 95 Higher Secondary students were provided with hostel facilities.

T.A.T. Kalanilayam Middle School: 497 boys and 182 girls (including 3 visually handicapped students) were studying in the various grades from pre-basic to eighth standard. 280 of them were served under the nutritious noon-meal programme, and 32 of them were given free uniform.

Balwadi: 35 children of poor parents, 3 to 5 years in age, were looked after by a nurse-maid, a teacher and an attendant under the supervision and guidance of experts in the field. Short educational trips were arranged for the children.

Medical: Vidyalaya Dispensary: caters to the medical needs of the campus and also of the surrounding villages. 37,440 persons were given treatment during the year.

Mini Health Centre in Vivekanandapuram: Serving 14 villages, the centre has three outposts in the interior villages each of which is visited by a doctor and medical van twice every week. 6,011 cases were attended to during the year.

Industrial Section: Apart from giving intensive training to the students of the campus, the Vidyalaya Industrial Section also manufactures engineering products including 3-phase electric motors from 1 to 10 HP, single-phase electric motors (1/8 HP to 1.5 HP), domestic pumps, centrifugal pumps for use in farms, highspeed monobloc pumpsets etc. In addition to doing job work for a number of engineering workshops, this section helps Vidyalaya agriculturists in repairing their electric motors, pumpsets etc. through its service section.

The Vivekanandapuram Rural Centre: Situated 45 kms from Coimbatore, the centre has in its campus a Krishi Vigyan Kendra (under the ICAR), a dairy farm of pedigree cattle to help upgrade the milch cattle in the area, a mini-health centre, ten Balwadis run under the Nutrition Research Programme, a 'Lab to Land' programme for 100 farmers (ICAR), a branch of a nationalized bank for giving institutional support to farmers, and a nursery school. The centre provided all-round training in agronomy to 657 persons, in horticulture to 466 persons, in animal science to 466 persons, in poultry keeping to 44 persons, in piggery management to 23 persons, in calf and bull management to 17 persons, in agricultural engineering to 237 persons, in homescience to 1,130 persons, and in the tailoring craft to 19 persons.

Demonstration units: A cattlefarm with pure-bred and cross-bred cows, a veterinary health centre at Vivekanandapuram, a poultry unit, goat unit and stud bull stations in three villages served as demonstration units for trainees and for the villagers.

Library: The library had 53,869 books and received 250 periodicals; the average daily attendance was 125.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

The Girl Child—Victim of Neglect

Of India's 740 million people, 48 per cent are female; of the latter, 140 million are girls under 15 years in age and 92 million are not yet 10 years old. In the sociological field women are identified as 'pivotal change agents' and, by improving their condition and changing their attitudes, it is possible to quickly raise the levels of health, nutrition, education, family integrity, etc. in a society. And for the care and development of children women provide the main access. Much has been done in recent years to elevate the status of women, but most initiatives in this direction seem to have bypassed the female child.

It is well known that the girl child is the object of deliberate or unconsciously motivated neglect and indifference in India. In most Indian homes nutritious food and best care are given to men and male children while women and girls manage with whatever is left over. In addition, girl children in all poor and most lower-middle-class homes are burdened with household chores and the care of siblings. It may be true that this early 'training' enables the girl child to cultivate self-denial, forbearance, unselfishness and the other virtues of womanhood which are essential for the maintenance of marital harmony and family unity. But surely there are other ways of inculcating these qualities than through neglect and ill-treatment. Even in the affluent strata of society the birth of a son is welcomed with jubilation, while the birth of a daughter is usually accepted with undisguised disappointment. The female child is made to feel that she is unwanted. As she grows, she feels the emotional discrimination of her mother against her and, by the time she reaches adolescence, she will have gained the self-image of being more a liability than an asset to her family.

The most serious problems facing female children, however, are malnutrition and inadequate health care. According to UNICEF statistics, 18 per cent of female infants suffer from severe malnutrition against 2.3 per cent male infants; 30 per cent of female infants suffer from moderate malnutrition against 15 per cent male infants. The cause of this difference in figures is also known: male infants are breast-fed longer and given better and more food. Records at pediatric wards and child clinics show that boys invariably outnumber girls in admissions and in the out-door department. Why? Not because girls are healthier—in India, they are not—but because mothers feel more inclined to take boys than girls for treatment. A mother will do her best for the child she believes to be valuable. The rate of infant mortality is also much higher for girls than for boys.

Discrimination against the female child cannot be explained away on the basis of poverty or ignorance. The main cause lies in deeply entrenched wrong attitudes. One way to change these attitudes is to organize effective community education that can reach women and girls in their own setting. The State alone cannot do this. Non-government organizations have to take up a large share of this responsibility.
