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Prabuddha Bharata

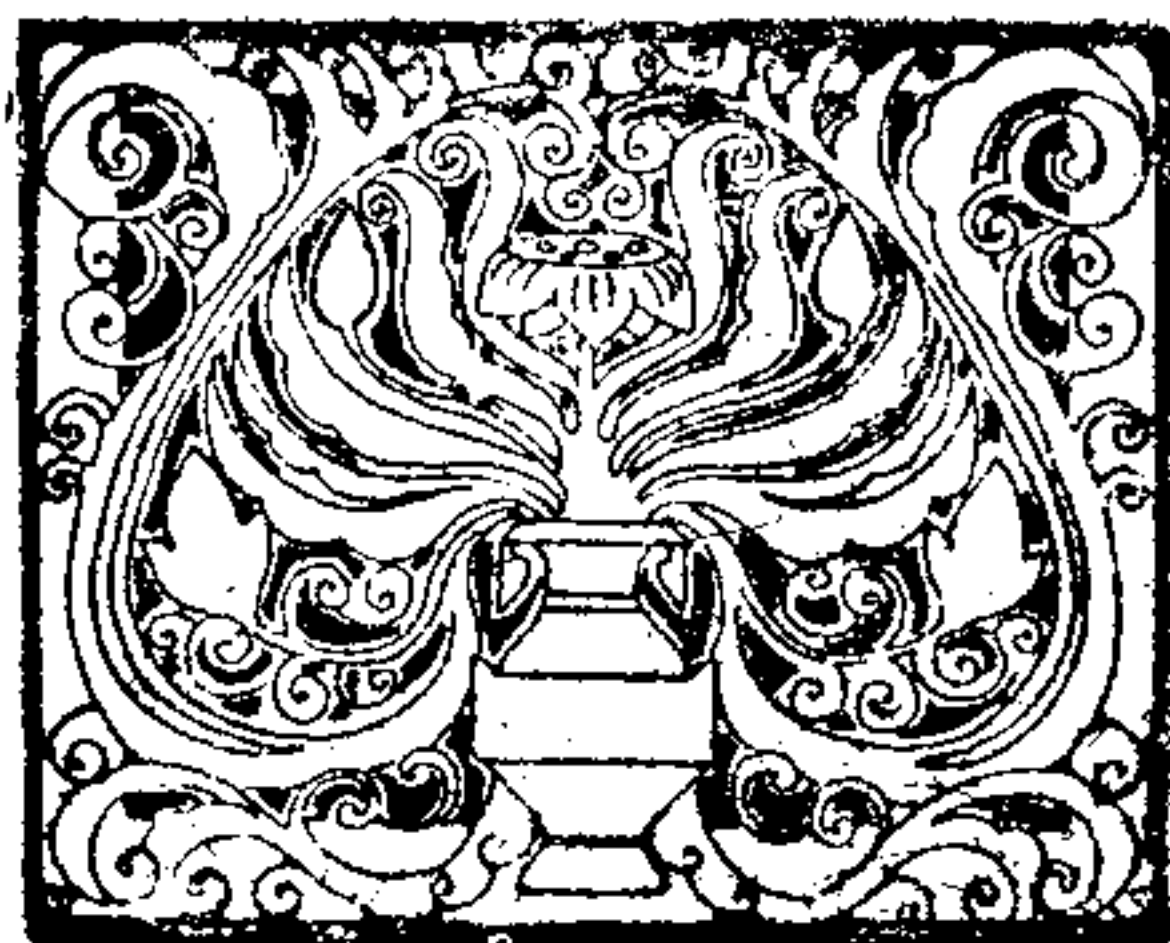
OR

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



Prabuddha Bharata

Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

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Prabuddha Bharata

VOL. 91

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No. 1

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

INTEGRAL VISION OF VEDIC SEERS*

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

संसमिद्युवसे वृषन्नग्ने विश्वान्ययं आ ।
इळस्मदे समिध्यसे स तो वसून्या भर ।

O Agni, the Lord (*aryah*), the showerer of [benefits], may you unite (*ā sam sam¹ yuvase*) all beings. You are kindled on the earth (*iḍa*) which is your altar.² May He bring prosperity to us.

Rg-Veda 10.191.1

*Begun here is the famous *Samvanana-sūktam* which is the last hymn of the *Rg-Veda*. It is named after its seer Samvanana who is perhaps only a personification of integral will (*sam* = common; *vanana* = will). What is called the Vedas, the seed which gave rise to the indestructible civilization of India, is the record of the experiences of about 300 poets. An intellectual activity of such magnitude cannot but introduce an equally immense diversity. Such a diversity would not have become intelligible, or would not have spawned a great culture, had it not been based on one central philosophical principle: harmony. Diversity need not mean conflict, contradiction or confusion. It can mean harmony, integrality. The whole history of Indian civilization has been, as it

were, a demonstration of this fundamental principle of harmony and its outer or pragmatic aspect, acceptance. The Vedic sages accepted everything: life and death, joy and sorrow, virtue and vice, light and darkness; above all, the existence of innumerable gods. In the *Rg-Veda* harmony and acceptance are referred to by the word *ṛta* which also stands for Truth, for harmony is the ultimate Truth of the universe. This central principle is brought to a moving finale in the last hymn. Its first stanza is a prayer to Agni for harmony.

1. *sam* is repeated twice to emphasize that no being should be excluded.

2. Sāyaṇa identifies Agni with universal life, Vaisvānara or Virāt.

TO OUR READERS

With this issue *Prabuddha Bharata* or *Awakened India* enters the ninety-first year of its publication. On this happy occasion we send our greetings and good wishes to our subscribers, readers, contributors, reviewers, publishers of books, friends and sympathizers for their continued support. May the new year bring them peace, prosperity and spiritual fulfilment!

No amount of earthly knowledge and skill can bring peace and fulfilment to the human soul or make life meaningful. It is obvious that the fast advancement of secular knowledge and the extensive social changes of the past few decades have been achieved at the expense of moral values and spiritual tranquility. If the disastrous

consequences of the present information explosion and unprecedented boom in the multiplication of mass media are to be avoided or kept in check, they are to be counterbalanced with a dedicated and organized effort at spreading spiritual knowledge. In the Indian context cultural integration and communal harmony have become equally important issues. These are precisely the areas in which *Prabuddha Bharata* has been rendering silent service during the ninety years of its existence. You can make your participation in this noble task closer and more vital by enrolling more subscribers for this journal or by popularizing it in other ways. Thank you.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This month's EDITORIAL discusses how work, ideal, love and spiritual disciplines bring about a transformation of the ego.

In THE VEILED DIVINITY Swami Brahmeshananda of the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Varanasi, expounds three aspects of the personality of the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi.

In the first part of AMERICAN WOMEN ENCOUNTER VEDANTA Ann Myren discusses the social conditions and roles of American women in the last decade of the nineteenth century and Swami Vivekananda's assessment of them. Ann Myren teaches social

sciences at the College of Alameda, Alameda, California.

In the second and concluding part of THE SONGS OF ORPHEUS John L. Dobson skilfully weaves several neglected strands of Greek and Indian traditions into a valuable tapestry of historical document. A versatile genius, the author is the founder-director of San Francisco Sidewalk Astronomers.

With the third instalment of SWAMI SHUDDHANANDA Swami Muktinathananda of Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, concludes his meticulously researched biographical account of one of the great disciples of Swami Vivekananda.

TRANSFORMATION AND TRANSCENDENCE

(EDITORIAL)

Abraham Maslow, a pioneer in humanistic psychology, has narrated a beautiful anecdote about a small American-Indian boy:

He was about seven or eight years old, and I found by looking very close that he was a kind of rich kid, in a Blackfoot way. He had several horses and cattle in his name, and he owned a medicine bundle of particular value. Someone, a grown-up, turned up who wanted to buy the medicine bundle, which was the most valuable thing that he had. I learned from his father that what little Teddy did when he was made this offer—remember he was only seven years old—was to go into the wilderness by himself to meditate. He went away for about two or three days and nights camping out, thinking for himself. He did not ask his father or his mother for advice, and they didn't tell him anything. He came back and announced his decision.¹

How many grown-ups make decisions, even important decisions which may have far-reaching consequences in their own lives, in the way that little boy did? When confronted with difficulties, most people would rush here and there and try to influence this person or that, failing which they would either go about blaming the world or sit brooding over their misfortunes. What that boy did was to seek a solution to his problem in the depths of consciousness. Being small, his physical and mental capacities were limited, but he knew how to transcend his limitations. Abandoning all external help, alone in the wilderness, he just let the Great Spirit open the door of his heart to the source of infinite knowledge.

Many of the problems of life, especially existential problems like insecurity, unfulfilment, loneliness, meaninglessness, etc. have no lasting solutions in the external world. This, however, is not the only difficulty. A more serious difficulty is that our present state of consciousness is itself too limited and inadequate to solve the basic problems of life. It is this awareness that induces people to practise prayer, worship and meditation. In critical situations some people may achieve a certain degree of transcendence through prayer or meditation and thus succeed in getting inner solace and strength to face the problems of life. But this kind of transcendence is usually a temporary experience and its beneficial effects wear off in a short time.

Is there a way by which man can attain permanent transcendence? The answer given by the saints, sages and mystics of all religions is that man can gain permanent possession of higher levels of transcendence by transforming his consciousness. This is one of the basic presuppositions of yoga, mysticism and spiritual life in general.

Transformation of the conscious into the superconscious

As mentioned in last month's editorial, human consciousness undergoes three types of transformation: transformation within the unconscious, transformation of the contents of the unconscious into the conscious, and transformation of the conscious into the superconscious. The first two types were discussed there and so only the third type need be dealt with here. The first two types really belong to the province of moral life, and it is only

1. Abraham H. Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (New York: Esalen/Penguin, 1982) p. 221

the transformation of the conscious into the superconscious that is the chief concern of spiritual life.

The unconscious² is the storehouse of impressions (*samskaras*) of past experiences, whereas the conscious deals with the immediate present. The unconscious is also the fountain-head of all good and bad instinctual drives, emotions and creative power. At the beginning of our spiritual life the conscious remains mostly under the control of the unconscious. As a result, we find that our actions and thoughts are to a great extent determined by our inherent tendencies and are going on more or less automatically. In other words, we have very little inner freedom and self-awareness. Much of the early struggle in spiritual life is to free the conscious from the hold of the unconscious.

As the conscious gets freed more and more from the hold of the unconscious, we feel great inner freedom, alertness and tranquility, our work efficiency increases, and our creative urges find finer modes of expression. Many people remain satisfied with these improvements. They, however, remain conditioned by their present level of awareness. Spiritual life is an attempt to go beyond the limitations of our present state, and this can be achieved only by transforming the conscious mind and illuminating it with superconscious wisdom.

It should be noted here that the conscious and the unconscious are to be regarded not as inert chambers but as functional configurations of the self. They

represent two different ways the self functions. If the ego is visualized as a tree, the unconscious will be represented by the roots and the conscious by the trunk. The transformation of the conscious means the transfiguration of the ego—the metamorphosis of the human self into the divine Self. In the Vedas this has been described through the well-known imagery of the two birds. ‘Two birds of beautiful plumage, closely related and friendly, cling to the same tree. Of these one eats the fruit of different tastes, while the other looks on without eating. On the same tree (i.e. the body) the lower self grieves, being immersed (in worldliness), deluded and powerless. But when it sees the other (the higher Self), the adorable Lord, and His glory, it becomes free from sorrow.’³

It is the light of the higher Self, the Atman, that transfigures the ego. There is a point of contact between the Atman and the conscious mind; it is known as the *buddhi* or heart. It acts as the centre of control in spiritual life. The impulsion for the transformation of the conscious must come from this centre, and it will come only if the centre is awakened. We may read books on meditation or listen to the talks of wise men but, unless the spiritual centre starts functioning, our basic awareness will remain unchanged. If the first struggle in spiritual life is to free the conscious from the hold of the unconscious, the next struggle should be to awaken the spiritual centre. Once this higher centre starts functioning, every action and thought will become a means of transforming consciousness. There are, however, several special techniques or processes which accelerate this transformation and some of these are discussed below.

2. The term ‘unconscious’ used by western psychologists is somewhat misleading in as much as every part of the mind has its own consciousness. What it really means is absence of self-awareness. ‘Subliminal’ or ‘depth’ consciousness would be a more appropriate term than ‘unconscious’; nevertheless the latter term is retained for some technical and historical reasons.

3. *Munḍaka upaniṣad* 3.1.1. The original version occurs in *R̥g-Veda* 1.164.20

Transforming power of work

We generally tend to look upon work as a means of achieving something in the external world. Rarely do we regard it as a means of transforming consciousness and yet, this transformation is the central aim of Karma Yoga. The popular notion that Karma Yoga only means doing good to the world is not wholly correct. For one can do good to the world in various ways and with various motives. Our actions become Karma Yoga only when they are converted into a technique of transforming consciousness. This also implies that even actions done for one's own good such as eating, dressing, cleaning etc. can be done as Karma Yoga. The type of work one does is irrelevant to Karma Yoga; what is important is how the work transforms consciousness.

Here it is necessary to clarify what the word 'karma' really means. In science any movement that involves the expenditure of energy is considered work. It is in this sense that a waterfall, motor car, stomach or lung is said to be 'working'. This, however, is not what 'karma' really means. Work to become karma must have three components: a conscious agent (*kartā*), action which has a moral implication, and an effect (*karmaphala*) which is the fulfilment of a desire (*iṣṭasādhyata*). The only English word which connotes all these three aspects of karma is perhaps 'labour'. Karma is goal-oriented work done by an agent who owns, or has the obligation to own, moral responsibility for his actions. Sri Ramakrishna's parable of the Brahmin who killed a cow but claimed that it was his hand which did the crime and that, therefore, the sin belonged to the presiding deity of the hand, Indra, illustrates the importance of the agent. The agent who owns moral responsibility is the ego.

Why does the ego do karma? To fulfil

its needs. Human beings have a hierarchy of needs—physical, physiological, emotional, intellectual, social, creative and spiritual. The lower needs like food, clothing and shelter are called 'basic needs'. The higher needs are called 'values'.

The hierarchical nature of needs has created a major problem for man: it calls for total fulfilment. The satisfaction of biological needs alone cannot bring complete fulfilment. There is in man the urge to seek and express higher truths, to share love, to create beautiful things and to experience higher forms of happiness. This has been called 'self-actualization'—a term introduced by Goldstein and Karen Horney and popularized by Abraham Maslow. Millions of people in the world are unhappy not because of lack of food and clothing but because of failure in self-actualization. The creative urge in man seems to reach no end. Says Paul Tillich, 'Man's productivity moves from potentiality to actuality in such a way that everything actualized has potentialities for further actualization. This is the basic structure of progress.'⁴

It is with the hope of attaining fulfilment that people do work. But most people find that work brings them only partial fulfilment: it may satisfy some of their physical or social needs, but does not touch the core of their being, the true Self. They find work mostly a horizontal movement: if their aim is to earn money, work enables them to get more and more of it; if their aim is to get fame, work enables them to get more and more of it. Doctors, engineers, social workers and businessmen find that their work only enables them to move further in their own fields, and that this progress takes them away from the core of their true being, alienates them from their true Self. Work

4. Paul Tillich, *The Courage To Be* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1970) p. 107

can bring higher fulfilment only if it enables them to move vertically upward and realize the higher levels of being and ultimately the true Self.

This upward movement can be effected only through a transformation of consciousness. Can work bring this about? Work produces two types of change: a subjective one and an objective one. It changes the object of work: a carpenter produces changes in a block of wood, a farmer produces changes in the land, a doctor produces changes in the body of the patient, and so on. The objective changes alone are usually noticed and regarded as work. But work has also a subjective effect: it changes the consciousness of the worker. However, this inner change is often so small that it is seldom noticed. Why is it that the inner changes produced by work are so small? Why is it that people find that even after doing work for several years they have derived little inner spiritual benefit from their work? This is one of the fundamental problems of life to which Karma Yoga addresses itself.

In ordinary work almost the whole of mental energy is directed towards seeking the results of work, and little of it is used consciously to deal with the mind and its problems. Therefore Karma Yoga prescribes as the first step the freeing of the will from attachment to the fruit of work (*phala-saṅkalpa tyāga*). That is why Karma Yoga is often described as *niṣkāma karma*. But the renunciation of the fruit of work is only the first step in Karma Yoga. The second step is to deal with the ego. The clinging of the ego to the fruit of work is egoism. When egoism is given up, what remains of the ego is simple 'I'-consciousness. This self-awareness can be intensified by cultivating the attitude of an inner witness while one is engaged in work. When the ego is isolated

and sufficient self-awareness is built up, one gains tremendous inner strength.

The primary reason why the work that people do does not produce any significant transformation of consciousness is that they lack this inner power born of self-awareness. The ego is not free to deal with itself. There is not enough self-awareness to check the automatisms of the unconscious. There is not enough self-awareness to be focussed upon different parts of the mind and bring about necessary changes there. Another reason is that work is seldom done as an expression of the soul's creativity or, in the words of Swami Vivekananda, as a manifestation of the potential divinity of the soul. It is the outer objects that draw out work from most people, not the inner creative urge. Many people find it difficult to work without some external stimulus or incentive. It is of course true that people have their own specific fields of creative activity like scientific research, music, painting, dance, business enterprises, but any work can be done creatively if there is enough dynamism in the soul. Uncreative work done mechanically without self-direction will not produce any significant transformation in the worker.

When properly done, Karma Yoga transforms consciousness in different ways. It creates new good *samskaras* which counteract and check the activity of impure *samskaras* already present in the mind. It gives a higher direction to instinctual energy and sublimates lower instincts into higher sentiments. It enables us to understand the workings of the ego, especially its tentacles of egoism and selfishness which are put forth when the ego is brought into interpersonal relationships through work. The most important way Karma Yoga brings about transformation is by opening the ego to the stream of universal life. Other than the simple

'I'-consciousness everything else that appears as ego and egoism is the creation of the society of which the person is a part. The very structure of the ego has been determined by the experiences of love and hate and fear gained from childhood. When through Karma Yoga we free ourselves from this triangle of attitudes and reestablish a new, spiritual relationship with others, it will radically transform ego-consciousness. As a matter of fact, Karma Yoga brings into existence a new, purified, liberated, spiritual ego open to universal life.

Such a liberated ego alone can offer all work as worship to the Supreme Self who is all-pervading and is the ultimate source of all activity in the universe. This worship is a participation in *virāt-yajña*, cosmic sacrifice of the Divine which, as the Gita assures us, speedily transforms the conscious into the superconscious.⁵

Transforming power of ideals

Another agent of transformation of ego-consciousness is the ideal. An ideal is a psychological phenomenon which serves as a model of perfection and stimulates goal-oriented activity in the soul. Ideals are of two types, subjective and objective.

A subjective ideal is a model or template which the self uses to shape itself. It is the prefiguration of the possibilities of the soul. In the ideal the self finds fulfilled all that it wants to achieve in life, all that it wants to become.

The subjective ideal itself is of two kinds, the ego-ideal and the spirit-image. If you ask a small boy about his future,

he will say, 'I want to become so and so.' He may regard his father, elder brother, a bigger boy or a well-known sportsman as the personification of all that he wants to realize in life, and he uses this image to mould his own ego. That becomes his ego-ideal. There is nothing wrong in having such an external ideal to start life with. In fact children need such ideals during the early stages of development, and one of the functions of epics, mythology and fiction is to provide such ego-ideals to dream about. The elimination of such ideals from childhood through rationalization and overemphasis on scientific knowledge is one of the main causes of rootlessness and vulgarity that characterize many modern youths. About this trend Abraham Maslow writes: 'Every age but ours has had its model, its ideal: the saint, the hero, the knight, the mystic, the gentleman—all these have been given up by our culture. About all we have left is the well-adjusted man without problems, a very pale and doubtful substitute.'⁶

One may accept the image of another person as model for one's own self-development but everyone will sooner or later realize that no external image can serve as a perfect model for oneself. Everyone has to evolve his own ideal of perfection out of his own soul. 'Eric Fromm has shown that, apart from superego which we acquire from our parental environment, there is also an *intrinsic conscience* in us which is based on the unconscious or preconscious perception of our own nature, our destiny, capacities, etc. It insists that we be true to our inner nature.'⁷

It is this search for a perfect self-ideal that leads a person ultimately to spiritual

5. यतः प्रवृत्तिभूतानां येन सर्वमिदं ततम् ।

सदकर्मणा तमभ्यर्च्य सिद्धिं विन्दति मानवः ॥

Gītā 18.46

6. Abraham H. Maslow, 'Personality Problems and Personality Growth' in *The Self*, Ed. Clark Moustakas (New York: Harper & Bros. 1956) p. 231

7. Maslow, *ibid*, p. 234

life. Spiritual life is based on the belief that man is the spirit, the Atman, which transcends the ego. This understanding gives rise to the spirit-image by which is meant an idealized concept of the Atman through which one can establish an intimate relationship with the Deity. One may thus visualize oneself as a child of God, as the mother of the Divine Child, or as an angel or simply as a luminous being. This spirit-image by its very sublimity produces changes in one's consciousness, transforms the ego and finally supplants the ego-ideal.

But a subjective ideal, however high or sublime, is not enough to bring total fulfilment. Most people—though not all—need an objective ideal to adore, to centre their love upon, to bring a sense of completeness or wholeness into their lives. The attitude towards such an objective ideal may be described as, 'I do not want to become one like him, nevertheless I need him as an inseparable part of my life.' A man may have his own ego-ideal, yet he may feel his life incomplete without a wife. Parents need children to complete their sense of parenthood.

Experience, however, teaches us that no ordinary human being, however good and virtuous, can serve as a perfect objective ideal. Ordinary human beings may satisfy some of our emotional needs but not the higher needs of the spirit. Only the great incarnations of God like Kṛṣṇa, Buddha, Christ or some of the archetypal divinities worshipped in Hinduism can really measure up to the lofty standards of the human spirit. That is why they have been universally accepted as perfect objective ideals. Such a universal objective ideal is known as the *iṣṭa-devatā*.

There is a close relationship between one's spirit-image and *iṣṭa-devatā*. A spiritual aspirant should choose as his objective ideal only that divine Being who is in harmony with his own spirit-image

and, if possible, one who is in harmony with his ego-ideal.

It is a mistake to look upon the *iṣṭa-devatā* merely as an aid in concentration, *dr̥ṣṭi-saukaryam*, for even when a person is not practising meditation, the objective ideal continues to influence his thoughts, emotions and actions. There is a lot of difference between meditating on a black dot or gazing at a crystal and meditating on *iṣṭa-devatā*. The former may intensify one's awareness, but the latter transforms the ego. Even if one regards the *iṣṭa-devatā* as a mental projection (as in Tibetan Buddhism) or as an 'archetype' (as the Swiss psychologist Carl G. Jung did), still the objective ideal has a great power of transforming the ego. Dr. Jung has shown that the archetypal symbols of God play two important roles: transformation of consciousness and integration of personality.⁸ He regarded the self as a centre with the power to integrate the conscious and the unconscious and believed that, if this centre was not occupied by the Image of God, it would lead to disharmony and mental illness.

If mere symbols can produce such great changes in the mind, how much more powerful must be Reality itself! In Hinduism an *iṣṭa-devatā* is regarded not as a symbol but, as a living manifestation of Divine Reality. According to the Tantras, meditation on a deity automatically purifies the mind. Simply by adoring a divine Personality one's ego gradually gets transformed by absorbing to some extent his divine attributes. A person who has established firmly his *iṣṭa-devatā* in the core of his heart will find his whole personality getting naturally integrated around that centre.

8. See, *Symbols of Transformation in The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, Bolligen Series XX (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

Transforming power of love

Another transforming agent which has a powerful influence on the ego is love. Unlike knowledge which is acquired from outside, love is supposed to be inherent in the soul. Since it is generally assumed that everyone has enough love in him, everyone is expected to love everyone else. This assumption is, however, seldom found corroborated in actual life. A good many human problems and sufferings are caused by inadequate or mis-directed love. This shows that love is not a simple emotional experience. Rather, it is a complex psychological phenomenon associated with different levels of personality. At the level of the body love takes the form of physical attraction or fascination. At a higher level it becomes an expression of the unity of Prāṇa. An intense form of this love is found in the mother with a newborn baby. At a still higher level love manifests itself as the ego's fellowship with other egos. This is the type of love that characterizes relationships among friends, colleagues and members of societies. At the highest level love is an expression of the oneness of the Atman with Brahman. This is the transcendent love or *bhakti* which the soul feels for God.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition love is regarded as I-Thou relationship. Even God is the 'wholly Other', an eternal Thou. Love is not a subject-object, I-it, relationship—like the relationship between a carpenter and timber or between a butcher and sheep—but a direct subject-subject relationship. The person who is loved is not treated as an object. Human relationship is a mutual exchange, a dialogue.⁹ Clearly, love in Judeo-Christian

tradition is conceived as an encounter between two egos. Egos are discrete entities with barriers separating them. The function of love is to overcome these barriers—a negative function.

This dualistic conception of love has two drawbacks. In the first place, it makes love an obligation—not a free and natural attribute of the soul but a duty imposed by God's commandment, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' This view is based on the belief that man by nature is selfish and sinful and that love is a divine gift. Secondly, it regards love for one's own self and love for others as mutually exclusive and contradictory. By treating love for oneself as a sin it encourages self-hatred and taking recourse to selfless service as a form of escape from oneself.

According to Vedanta, love is an expression of the non-dual nature of Reality which is nothing but the Supreme Self of whom all individual selves are parts. Love is not a supernatural gift but a natural attribute of the human soul. There is nothing to separate two selves except ignorance—ignorance of the true nature of the self—and ignorance is removed only by knowledge. When ignorance vanishes, true love already inherent in the soul, manifests itself spontaneously.¹⁰ The natural relationship between human beings is not that of 'I-thou' but of 'we'. It is not necessary to hate oneself or escape from oneself in order to love others. Selfless service is not a special kind of activity but the natural way an enlightened soul acts. What one does for oneself should conduce to the welfare of others and what one does for others should conduce to one's own welfare. In brief, love is the progressive integration of other selves into

9. A forceful expression of this view is found in Martin Buber's famous books, *I and Thou* and *Between Man and Man*.

10. Cf. 'He who sees all beings in the very Self and the Self in all beings, is freed from hatred'. *Isa upaniṣad*, 6

one's true Self. The only authentic way to love others is to integrate their selves into yours.

An unavoidable step in this integration process is the transformation of ego-consciousness. The limited 'I' must change into an ever-expanding 'we'. In a natural way this takes place to a limited extent in the family, in the friendship circle and in the monastic community, but it usually goes on as an unconscious process interrupted and distorted by instinctual drives like fear, hate and greed. If freed from these lower obstructions, and if cultivated consciously as a spiritual discipline, love becomes one of the most potent means of transforming ego-consciousness. However, love can accomplish this task only if it is genuine. Merely imagining that one has love for others or cultivating polite and pleasing manners can bring about no inner transformation. Genuine, unselfish love is found only in spiritual people.

Meditation and other spiritual techniques

Prayer, worship, Japa, meditation and similar spiritual disciplines form another class of ego transformers. These disciplines, unlike work, ideal and love which operate during the normal course of everyday life, are usually practised at specific times. They produce significant results only when they are practised with great intensity and steadfastness. Their basic principles and effects on consciousness were discussed in these columns on several previous occasions and need not be repeated here.

Encountering the ego

Though the methods discussed above bring about transformation of ego consciousness, they do not deal with the ego directly. The most effective way of chang-

ing the ego is to get hold of it, understand its workings and re-educate it. For this the ego must first of all be encountered in the depths of one's consciousness. Most of the time we are driven into various activities without ever encountering the driver, the ego. We encounter so many people but seldom the ego. The ego has no visible configuration; it is not even a mental image. Nevertheless, its lineaments can be understood by encountering it directly.

This encounter is not a meditation of the ordinary kind which is usually concentration of mind on an object such as a divine image, name or concept. Nor is it thinking about one's past or present actions and reactions. Encountering the ego is a direct communion with oneself. It is an immediate experience which may be best described as a kind of self-revelation. The ego generally puts on several masks, and much of our ordinary understanding of ourselves is based on self-deception. Encountering the ego is to know the ego without its masks. This self-revelation gives us a true picture of ourselves, a deep insight into our present problems and their causes which lie buried in the past.

Lack of self-knowledge is one of the basic causes of our failures and sufferings. It is also the main obstacle to spiritual progress. Many spiritual aspirants do not realize that before they begin their meditation if they spend at least fifteen minutes in encountering the ego, it will greatly improve their concentration and make meditation more realistic. The ego can be truly encountered only in the silence and stillness of the depths of one's consciousness. The daily practice of this kind of interior encounter will soon bring about a great transformation of the ego and one's total awareness.

THE VEILED DIVINITY

SWAMI BRAHMESHANANDA

Among the trinity of the Ramakrishna Movement—Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother Sri Saradadevi, and Swami Vivekananda—the Holy Mother is most difficult to understand. Even the great Swami Saradananda, a monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, and himself an illumined soul who wrote the spiritual classic *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* and who served the Holy Mother for more than a decade, found it difficult to measure the profound mystery of the Holy Mother's life and character. When asked to write a detailed life of the Holy Mother, he replied by humming a Bengali song which rendered into English would read as follows:

Bewildered am I witnessing the tricks of the great Enchantress,
I sit pondering whether to laugh or to weep.
Living with her, following her always
Yet unable to fathom, I accept defeat.
Wondrous is her world-play,
Whence she makes and breaks night and day.
This much have I learnt:
This indeed is her divine play.¹

If such was the predicament of Swami Saradananda, how difficult it is for an ordinary individual to comprehend the real nature of the Holy Mother! The most important reason for this difficulty is that her life and personality had always remained hidden. She was herself very shy and never liked to come out in public. She kept herself covered with a veil and the devotees who came to pay their respects could see only her bare feet. Even the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna found it difficult to see her face.

Sri Ramakrishna who considered modesty

a virtue in women encouraged and helped her to remain hidden. In fact he protected and guarded her like a precious jewel. After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, his disciples hardly ever talked about her and never displayed in public her picture. It was difficult even for her own initiated disciples to procure a copy of her photo in those days. And finally, although a number of books have been written about Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, the literature on the Holy Mother is scanty. Rightly has she been called *lajjāpatāvṛtā*, 'covered by a veil of modesty'. In fact, concealment was one of her most important characteristics, recognized even by Sri Ramakrishna who, to highlight this aspect of the Holy Mother, gave the illustration of a cat which when covered with ashes cannot be easily spotted out. On deeper analysis, more than one veil or covering will be found obscuring the various aspects of the Holy Mother.

Various aspects and coverings of the Holy Mother

In the absolute sense or at the *pāramārthika* level, the Holy Mother is regarded as *paramāprakṛti* or the supreme creatrix of the universe, known in Vedānta as *Māyā*, the mysterious power of Brahman inseparably united with it. Swami Saradananda has spoken of the Holy Mother as the power in Sri Ramakrishna inseparable from him just as the power of burning is inseparable from fire.² She herself once admitted that she was *Māyā*. Once a few ladies went to meet the Holy Mother when

1. Swami Ishanananda, *Mātr Sānnidhye* (Calcutta: Udbodhan 4th Edition, 1984) p. 214

2. यथाऽग्नेर्दाहिकाशक्ती रामकृष्णे स्थिता हि या ।

she was at Varanasi. They found her extremely busy looking after her young nieces and nephews, and asking Golap Ma to stitch her torn cloth. Seeing the familiar worldly scene, one of them said, 'Mother, we find you deeply entangled in Māyā.' To this the Holy Mother replied almost inaudibly, 'How can I help it, since I am Māyā myself?'

From the *ādhidāivika*³ point of view, or at the level of Personal God, the Holy Mother is regarded as one of the several aspects of the Divine Mother such as Sarasvati, Kālī, Lakṣmi and Bagalā. Śrī Ramakrishna recognized her as Sarasvati, born to impart knowledge. He said in one context, 'She is Sarasvati; therefore she likes to adorn herself' and, in another context, 'She has come this time hiding her beauty.' Swami Vivekananda once spoke of her as (the terrible goddess) Bagalā in the guise of Sarasvati. Once while going to Dakshineswar from her village, she met a Bagdi dacoit and his wife in the dreaded stretch of land known as Telo Bhelo. Surprisingly, far from causing her any harm, the couple accepted her as their daughter because, as they said later on, they saw her as the goddess Kālī. On her return from the pilgrimage to South India she inadvertently revealed her identity as Sītā when she said that she found Rāmeśvar Śiva exactly as she had left Him (ages ago).

Gods and goddesses are supposed to have a subtle, luminous body, special powers and greater amount of knowledge and bliss than ordinary human beings. But when for the good of mankind they embody themselves as human beings, it becomes necessary for them to conceal their divine nature. For, otherwise, neither

can ordinary mortals withstand their splendour nor can their purpose be served. Arjuna could not withstand the vision of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's Universal form, nor could Hriday, Sri Ramakrishna's nephew, maintain his composure when shown the realm of divine beings. The incarnate Divine therefore covers his or her true nature by what the Gita calls *yogamāyā*, the mysterious divine power of concealment.⁴ In the case of the Holy Mother this took the form of her intense concern for Radhu, her niece. It is on record that before the coming of Radhu, the body of the Holy Mother had a divine glow and it was difficult to approach her. But after that her complexion became dull.

However, the divine power in these incarnate beings is so great that it bursts forth now and then even through the veil of *yogamāyā* and startles people around them. Therefore, they resort to many other means to hide their real nature. The Holy Mother, through her modesty and rustic simplicity tried her level best to conceal her divinity. If people addressed her as goddess, she would either leave the place or would express her disapproval. Although she was worshipped as Lakṣmi, the goddess of wealth, she lived in poverty throughout her life. She was illiterate, yet was recognized as Sarasvati, the goddess of learning. She was timid like an ordinary woman. The police vigilance on her house at Jairambati occasioned by the political unrest then prevalent in Bengal made her nervous. Who could conceive that she was Kālī, the dispeller of fear? She was very affectionate and sweet towards every one. This concealed her terrible Bagalā aspect.

From the *ādhyātmika* or the spiritual point of view the Holy Mother is recognized as a spiritual teacher par excellence and a

3. The terms *ādhidāivika*, *ādhyātmika* and *ādhibhautika* are not used in this article in the conventional sense but to mean the divine, the spiritual and the physical aspects respectively.

4. Gita 7.25

saint of the highest order. She had the capacity to detect the chosen ideal, the *iṣṭa devatā*, of those who came to her for initiation, without difficulty. She would guide each individual according to his or her temperament. She had attained all the high spiritual states like *bhāva*, *savikalpa samādhi* and *nirvikalpa samādhi*. But she kept all these concealed. It was extremely difficult to understand the sterling spiritual qualities of her character owing to her conduct which was apparently like that of an ordinary woman. Many householder disciples of Sri Ramakrishna had considered her simply the wife of their guru and had totally neglected her until they came to know of her high spiritual attainments. Even Yogin Ma, one of her close companions, was at first confounded by her undue worldly involvements. The Holy Mother's attachment to Radhu puzzled many. She would weep bitterly at family bereavements and at times would get irritated and angry. Thus an onlooker may often miss in her some of the well-known marks of a saint like detachment, equanimity, fearlessness and freedom.

Lastly, even the physical being or the *ādhibhautika* aspect of the Holy Mother was concealed during her life time. During the Dakshineswar days she would enter her room at Nahabat after a very early morning bath, and would come out only at night or when all the visitors had left the temple premises. She lived in such secrecy that the cashier of the temple garden could not see her even once during the many years of her stay there. Even in later life she was extremely reserved and never came out in public. Moreover, Swami Saradananda and her close companions guarded her, and access to her presence was not easy.

Unveiling the Divinity

How can we, the children of the Holy

Mother, unravel her mystery and have her divine vision? Before we undertake this difficult task of separating the veils from her real nature, we must remember that there are similar coverings on us too. But while in the Holy Mother they are voluntarily accepted and add further charm to her personality, they are blemishes in us. The *Māyā* which is a bondage for us, is the means by which the Holy Mother performed her divine play, *līlā*. Shyness or *lajjā* is, according to Sri Ramakrishna, a defect in a spiritual aspirant and, along with fear and hatred, should be got rid of. But in Holy Mother this *lajjā* itself takes the form of praise-worthy modesty. The Holy Mother carefully concealed all her saintly qualities, while we struggle our utmost to hide our vices and to appear virtuous.

According to Vedanta, the real nature of each soul is pure divine consciousness but this divinity is concealed by three veils called *mala*, *vikṣepa* and *ajñāna*, or impurity, restlessness and ignorance, respectively, which correspond to the three *guṇas*, namely, *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattva*. In the Gita lust and anger born of *rajas* are said to conceal knowledge like smoke enveloping fire and dust covering a mirror. These are the veils on us. How can we expect to know or understand the Holy Mother if our vision is misty, judgement biased and intellect vitiated by these defects? Only by removing these veils from our mind and intellect and by ascending to the level of divinity through spiritual practice can we expect to know the real, divine nature of the Holy Mother. Swami Adbhutananda used to say that to understand the Holy Mother and her grace, great austerity was required. This is the reason why Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples like Swami Vivekananda, Swami Brahmananda, Nag Mahashaya and some others alone could truly recognize her.

But most of us cannot even dream to rise to such spiritual heights. So the only pragmatic course open to us is to believe in those who understood the Holy Mother and to try to catch some fleeting glimpses of her divinity through the thick human masks which she had put on. It is like identifying an actor in a drama from the hints given by those who personally know the actor or by the glimpses of the actor's face visible behind the mask or by spotting his original garment under the make-up costume.

Sri Ramakrishna confirmed the divinity of the Holy Mother by worshipping her as Sodasi (the Divine Mother as a sixteen-year-old maiden). He was always very careful not to offend her even by mistake. If the Holy Mother ever felt offended even a little, Sri Ramakrishna would get nervous. He used to say that perchance one could be saved if he became angry. But if she got angry, there was no hope. Swami Vivekananda was seen to have a wash repeatedly with Ganga water to purify himself before going to meet the Holy Mother. Swami Brahmananda and Nag Mahashaya found it difficult to control their emotions whenever they approached her.

Readers of her biography will find plenty of instances of her divinity expressing itself through word or deed, momentarily tearing the thick veil of humanity. For example, on one occasion she told a devotee, 'Call on me', instead of her customary instruction to call on Sri Ramakrishna. Sivaram, Sri Ramakrishna's nephew, was once escorting the Holy Mother when he suddenly stopped on the way and refused to proceed until she revealed her true identity. Finally the Holy Mother admitted that she was the goddess Kāli. Once, after being harassed too much, she warned her sister-in-law (known to others as the 'mad aunt') that

if ever she got angry, not even Brahma, Viṣṇu and Śiva would be able to save her. Such statements made by her and others who understood her are of great help to faithful devotees in understanding the Holy Mother's divinity.

How can we reconcile the poverty of the Holy Mother with her Lakṣmi-nature, illiteracy with Sarasvati-nature, timidity with Kāli-nature and meekness with Bagalā-nature? The fact is that in spite of her external poverty, ignorance and fear, she had the power to bestow prosperity, wisdom and fearlessness on others. The prosperity and all-round growth of the Ramakrishna Order is the result of the Holy Mother's blessings. Even without book-learning she bestowed spiritual knowledge upon thousands. Even Swami Vivekananda, who was himself an intellectual and spiritual giant, had his doubts cleared by her and sought her blessings. And to her innumerable disciples this timid woman had bestowed fearlessness by reassuring them: 'Fear not. Remember always that there is someone behind you. Remember always that you have a mother to fall back upon.' The most difficult to recognize, however, is her terrible Bagalā nature, for it manifested only on rare occasions. At all other times she was all love and compassion.

Let us now try to solve the mystery shrouding the Holy Mother's *ādhyātmika* or spiritual nature. The most misleading trait is her attachment to Radhu, which had confounded even Yogin Ma. However, the latter had her understanding set right when Sri Ramakrishna revealed in a vision that the Holy Mother's character could not be tarnished by her apparent attachments, just as the holy Ganga could not be defiled by the touch of an infant's dead body floating on its surface. The Holy Mother herself has provided an explanation for her so-called attachment: the mind of

a person who meditates upon God becomes extremely sensitive, and whatever it holds, it holds with such an intensity that it looks like attachment. The very fact that she could give up her attachment for Radhu when she decided to do so, shows that it was not like the ordinary worldly attachment of common people.

On deeper analysis it will be found that the weeping and mourning of the Holy Mother were really an expression of her compassion for others, of her motherly concern, or a human response to an intensely human situation. Many can sympathize but very few have the capacity to actually share the sorrows of others. The sufferings and sorrows seen in the Holy Mother were in fact those of others which she had voluntarily taken upon herself. She was the very embodiment of patience and forbearance and the signs of annoyance which on some rare occasions appeared in her were always momentary like lines drawn on water. Rightly has it been said that in exalted beings engaged in dispelling the sufferings of the world even defects become adorable.⁵

While some of the saintly virtues of the Holy Mother were hidden by ordinary human traits, certain qualities were never over-shadowed. Her compassion and love for all creatures, her immaculate purity, her superhuman patience and forbearance, and her humility and absolute absence of ego were never concealed. It seems that there is a special purpose behind hiding some virtues and not others. It is to demonstrate to the world that real saintliness consists in the expansion of heart and in the capacity to feel for others. And one can do it without making a display of one's virtues. This is the special

significance of the *lajjāpaṭāvṛtā* aspect of the Holy Mother.

Her living presence—an allegorical view

The *ādhibhautika* or the physical aspect of the Holy Mother which she kept concealed during her lifetime is no more accessible to the devotees. Even if one were to visit Jairambati, Nahabat at Dakshineswar, or Udbodhan, hundreds of times now, one would not be able to see the Holy Mother with one's physical eyes. Now she can only be seen in her spiritual form within the sanctuary of the devotee's heart. She has now become the *antaryāminī mā* or the indwelling divine mother whose coverings now stand for the coverings of the soul. Such a spiritual and allegorical interpretation becomes all the more relevant as time rolls on, and as we move historically more and more away from the lifetime of the Holy Mother and the events thereof.

If the Holy Mother is thus considered the Supreme Consciousness dwelling within every creature, we may allegorize the three concomitants of her life, namely, her residence, her caretakers and her veil, as the gross, subtle and causal bodies covering it. The journey to her residence at Jairambati or Udbodhan would then symbolize the efforts of the spiritual aspirant to overcome the first hindrance namely, one's body consciousness. The Holy Mother always preferred to stay in the free, peaceful and pure atmosphere of the village, where she was more easily accessible. Similarly, the divine is more easily attainable by a pure and peaceful mind, free from the restraint of social etiquette rather than by a materialistic, sophisticated, restless mind of which the city of Calcutta is a symbol.

The Holy Mother was guarded by her close companions, Golap Ma, Yogin Ma

5. विकारोऽपि श्लाघ्यो भुवनभयभङ्गव्यसनिनः ।
Śiva-Mahimnāstotra, 14.

and others, and at Udbodhan Swami Saradananda acted as her door-keeper. These saintly persons are like our spiritual qualities and virtues which, although they lead us to God, can also act as subtle obstacles. If one can brush aside even these, like the devotee who pushed aside Swami Saradananda in his eagerness to see the Holy Mother, one can have the vision of the indwelling Mother. Simple and pure like Latu (later Swami Adbhutananda) and Rammoy (later Swami Gauriswarananda) had free access to the Holy Mother. Before them she never felt shy. But the cashier of the Dakshineswar temple and many grown-up householder devotees of Sri Ramakrishna could never see her. Interpreted spiritually, this would mean that the vision of the indwelling Mother is easy for a person who is simple, innocent

and pure like a child, but for a calculating, worldly-minded person it is impossible.

Finally, none could see the Holy Mother unless she herself lifted the veil covering her face. Similarly, the indwelling Spirit can be known by him alone to whom it chooses to reveal itself. As a parable of Sri Ramakrishna states, Rama, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa were walking on the forest path. Rama who is God himself was only two and a half cubits ahead of Lakṣmaṇa but Lakṣmaṇa could not see him because Sītā stood between them. Lakṣmaṇa can be compared to the individual soul, and Sītā to Māyā. And unless Sītā stepped aside, Lakṣmaṇa could not see Rama. Let us pray to the Holy Mother, the Sītā incarnate, to step aside a little and bless us with the vision of the Divine, for she holds the key to the Divine.

AMERICAN WOMEN ENCOUNTER VEDANTA—I

ANN MYREN

All of us who are familiar with Vedanta have heard many times of the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893 where Swami Vivekananda made his masterful presentation of Vedanta at the Parliament of Religions. We know that because of his lectures there, he soon became widely known and attracted thousands of people who were interested in religion. But what we probably do not know about the World's Fair is that women also played a prominent role in it. There was actually a whole building, the Woman's Building, designed by a woman architect, dedicated to woman and her spheres of endeavour. Besides the exhibits there were lectures by many women on various subjects. And it was here at the Woman's Building that

Swami Vivekananda lectured on Indian women. And also here at the outset of his mission in America, Swamiji came into close contact with American women, their interests, and their work. Shortly after the Fair, Swamiji wrote in a letter that American women were the 'most advanced in the world.'¹ Obviously he was impressed by the women of this new nation, their character, activities, and position in society.

As far as we know, the first person to offer Swami Vivekananda the hospitality

1. Swami Vivekananda, *Complete Works* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1959 edition), Vol. 5, p. 22. (Hereafter referred to as CW with date of edition, volume and page.)

of a home was a woman, Miss Kate Sanborn. When Swamiji arrived in Chicago in July about six weeks before the Parliament of Religions began, he found expenses there too high and was advised to move to the East coast to live until the Parliament opened. So he boarded a train and started for Boston. On the train he was befriended by an American woman, Miss Kate Sanborn, who invited him to stay at her house, 'Breezy Meadows'. He accepted the invitation, and stayed with Miss Sanborn, a lecturer and author, energetic, lively and witty. Although he referred to her as 'an old lady' she was only fifty-four. It was through Miss Sanborn that Swamiji met Professor John Wright who provided him with letters of introduction to the officials of the Parliament of Religions. While the Swami was in New England he formed strong friendships with both Professor Wright and Mrs. Wright. He also stayed with Mrs. Kate Tannatt Woods who arranged for him to speak several times in Salem. One of his talks was given to a women's group, the Boston Ramabai Circle, which had been organized to raise funds for Indian child-widows.²

Mrs. Woods provided Swamiji with an excellent introduction to the type of woman he would meet at the Fair and in his travels. She was an editor, author, poet, and social leader. She was one of the original organizers of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, a national organization of considerable size and importance. And further she was active in groups dedicated to the rights and privileges of women.³ Thus at the very beginning of Swamiji's American work he

was introduced to American women who had keen interest in the activities and problems of women.

Swamiji often lived with American families, and so he established many lasting and deep friendships with American women. In each family he followed the Indian village custom of establishing a relationship with various members of the family such as son or brother, while the family members became father, mother, sister or brother. This method of relationship not only put the Swami at ease but also brought him right into the heart of the family. More often than not it was within a family that he formed a friendship with a woman. These friendships were close, and it was from these women friends that he generally received help in organizing classes and lectures.

The close acquaintance of the Swami with many American women is a matter of record. They were his main helpers in his mission, his friends in work and play, and often his advisors. However, an analysis of these relationships will neither indicate the scope nor the depth of the significance which Swami Vivekananda has for American women. To appreciate this critical significance, it is necessary to review briefly the Swami's training and understand his mission.

Swami Vivekananda was a monk, the chief disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, the great prophet of religious harmony. Of the spiritual experiences which Swamiji had while being trained by Sri Ramakrishna, two are of great importance to our subject. First, after tremendous resistance, the young man, Naren, as he was then called, came to accept God as a Person in the form of Kālī, the Divine Mother of the universe, a Goddess with whom he developed a personal relationship. The second experience, that of *nirvikalpa samādhi*, is especially significant because

2. Burke, Marie Louise, *Swami Vivekananda in the West, New Discoveries* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 3rd. edition, 1983), Part 1, pp. 23-4

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 64-5.

this is the full realization of Brahman, the Absolute; it provided the underlying principle for this teachings. Thus when the Swami arrived in America, he had with him the knowledge and perception that all persons were divine, and he also was a devotee of the Divine Mother of the Universe. Accordingly we can see that Swami Vivekananda was uniquely fitted to teach American women who were tempered by the democratic ethos, and hence capable of accepting the divinity of all persons, the impersonal divinity. And further he understood divinity in the personal sense, not only in the traditional way as masculine, but also as feminine, a wonderful new way for the West. In these two ways his own spiritual experience fitted him perfectly for the mission he undertook in the West.

However, before we can examine his impact on the women of America as well as his relevance to them, we must consider the nature of his mission. We often speak of persons who feel that they have some special work to do as having a mission. In the case of the Swami his mission had a divine source. Thus he could be called a prophet.

The criteria by which we judge whether a person is a prophet are numerous, but here we will consider only four. First, a prophet must have reached or very nearly reached spiritual perfection in his lifetime. Swami Vivekananda had had the very highest spiritual experience, *nirvikalpa samādhi*, and he had practised an unusual number of spiritual disciplines which resulted in many spiritual experiences. Second, to be a prophet a person must have a direct and personal relationship with God; that is, Communion with God, and knowledge that God is the moving force in the universe. One need only read the letters of Swamiji that he wrote from America to understand his relationship to God. In these letters he constantly referred to the Lord as his

source of direction and guidance. He was conscious of being the instrument of the Lord of the universe, and he felt, in the deepest sense, that he had a mandate from God, which is the third criterion of a prophet. Furthermore, a prophet must have a powerful personality so that people will come to know and feel that he is the messenger of God; he must be able to make individual men and women spiritualize their lives. Swamiji was, according to first-hand observers, unusually charismatic. Once he said, "Do you think I lecture? I do not lecture, I give." The effect was that many in his audience would forget the manifold world and would feel the one Being everywhere.⁴

It is easy to see why a prophet of Swami Vivekananda's authority would immediately appreciate the character of American women. If we are to understand why the Swami paid them such high tribute, we should consider the historical development of the American women's character. When the colonists came to America in the early 1600's, they were motivated by religion. The early New England colonies were strictly Puritan, and in the other colonies also religion played a dominant role. The impact of the frontier on these religious people was to forge an exceptionally strong, hard-working, disciplined person. One of the reasons for the success of these early colonies was the fact that women came as colonizers. Had they not come, there would have been no one to establish families and consequently there would have been no coming generations to carry on a permanent civilization. Women are culture bearers, and when colonization was undertaken without women in North America, it generally failed to become either enduring or extensive. As the colonists pushed

4. Swami Ashokananda, 'The Great Lie' *Prabuddha Bharata* (April 1978) 83:175.

westward, women faced the same hardships which men faced: wild, untamed lands, Indians, and isolation. Furthermore, they faced the pain and suffering of childbearing under starkly primitive conditions. Frequently women were widowed and had to take care of their families without the help of men. The harsh, unrelenting experience of the frontier left its mark on the American woman's character. She had to become self-reliant and independent. Inevitably the openness of the frontier enabled women to experience a new freedom which they came to love. One of Swamiji's earliest remarks about women in America is on this very point. 'Oh, how free they are!', Swamiji wrote.⁵

The frontier had, with its relative lack of cultural restrictions, encouraged and stimulated this love and expression of freedom which Swami Vivekananda admired. After all, it was Swamiji who said that the first condition of growth was liberty. And to a large degree it was this freedom which allowed American women to become the most advanced in the world. Yet in this frontier life there was a natural restraint on the freedom of the individual in that a sort of spontaneous renunciation was necessary for the survival of the society. The Swami wrote before he had been in America a year that 'Nowhere in the world are women like those of this country. How pure, independent, self-relying, and kindhearted!'⁶ All of these qualities had been nourished by the frontier experience.

According to the United States census, the frontier did not actually close until 1890, so it is clear that the frontier played an enduring role in the formation of the American woman's character for nearly three centuries. Actually the announcement

of the closing of the frontier was made in 1893 at the Fair in an important paper by the historian Frederick Jackson Turner. Thus, when Swami Vivekananda arrived in America in 1893, the frontier had just been officially declared closed; the old era was now giving way to the new industrial era, one of great social upheaval and change. And as the old era was fading, a new woman had evolved, an activist, who had social concerns as well as family and who was also moral and pure. It was this new type of woman that the Swami admired. Prophets appear and speak their new message at such times as these, when the tides of history are being swept by new currents. The Swami wrote in November of 1893 that 'Europe developed man, and America is developing the woman and the masses'.⁷ He saw that there was a new type of woman in America formed mainly by the American experience of the old frontier.

As the old frontier gave way, women met the challenge of a new frontier. This new frontier was society itself. From the point of view of many women, society needed much change and reform. It is not surprising that, as the eastern part of the United States became more settled, women became very active in their communities. This new frontier was their own backyard, and active women took up a number of reforms to improve their communities and society at large. The nineteenth century was rich in women active in the following causes: abolition of slavery, women's rights, insane asylum reform, temperance, education and moral reform. All of these activities were in the public domain. Therefore, it was necessary for these reformers, whose energies had previously centred almost exclusively on domestic concerns and who had been generally

5. CW, 1959, 5:25.

6. CW, 1956, 6:252

7. CW, 1959, 5:22.

inactive in public life, to learn how to carry on the business of public activity. Paradoxically the very exclusion of women by men from roles of responsibility in the churches helped women gain the necessary skills. As they could not rise in the church hierarchy, they were forced to create their own auxiliaries to carry on good works such as aid to the poor, missionary activities, and abolition of slavery. By learning how to lead and organize within the churches, they prepared themselves for broader tasks in the community.

By the 1830's women were beginning to join slavery-abolition societies, the women's wing, that is. They spoke out for the freeing of the slaves and often met with fierce animosity from the public. Now in our present era of participation by women in public life, this may not seem like an advance. But in the 1830's it was not even considered acceptable to have an audience of both men and women listening in the same hall to a speaker, much less to have a woman speaker. Stimulated by their drive to abolish slavery, women were inspired to agitate for woman's rights. National organizations were formed and many conventions were held to promote woman's rights such as property rights, rights to custody of children, divorce rights, in general, rights which would bring about equality between men and women. By the end of the nineteenth century the active women had narrowed their demands to the single issue of suffrage. The suffrage battle was a 'century of struggle' and involved women from all over the United States in all kinds of activities, from organizing conventions to agitating for a change in the laws. Women became leaders of other women, and by the 1850's they were able to stand up and speak before conventions. From participation in reform these activist women became influential in society and set a standard of

public activity for women. Thus it is easy to understand why Swamiji remarked shortly after he arrived, 'It is they [women] who control the social and civic duties.'⁸ By this time women had had six decades of experience in social reform, community activities and, since the Civil War (1861-1865), increasing participation in the working world. They were indeed 'advanced' because the acceptable sphere of activity for many women had grown to include 'social and civic duties'.

There were two other significant reforms of the nineteenth century in which women participated: temperance and education. We are not so much concerned with the character of these reforms as with the kind of activity that women undertook and the effect that this had on the character of women. The temperance crusade, which resulted in the organization of the Women's Christian Temperance Union in 1874, involved the leadership of women and the support by women until 1920 when prohibition was made a part of the Constitution. Thousands of women gave generously of their time and talents in this movement to ban liquor, showing their strength as workers, leaders, and moral agents. Although prohibition was not a successful social reform, it showed once again the real capacity of women to achieve a goal, or as the Swami observed, to 'control social and civic duties.'

Another goal of the middle nineteenth century was the improvement of education for women. Still barred from almost all institutions of higher learning, by mid-nineteenth century, women undertook two actions. First, they began to insist on acceptance in professional schools such as medical and theological, and second, they established many colleges for women. By the time Swamiji arrived much had been

8. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

accomplished in education for women. Women's colleges had been established and were filled with eager female scholars. As Swamiji noticed, 'women snatch every opportunity to improve themselves.'⁹ He wrote in December of 1893, after he had been in America for about six months, that 'schools and colleges are full of women.'¹⁰ As Swamiji noted, 'Nowhere on earth have women so many privileges as in America.'¹¹ The growth of woman's education in the nineteenth century is certainly evidence for his observation. And as usual, Swamiji was the astute observer when he wrote in January of 1894, '[women] represent all the culture of the nation, for men are too busy to educate themselves.'¹²

Considering this very creative response of women to the American environment, it is not surprising that Swami Vivekananda observed that 'the number of cultured women is much greater than that of cultured men.'¹³ And that the 'average American woman is far more cultivated than the average American man.'¹⁴ Women were considered the moral agents of the country. While men had energetically absorbed themselves in developing the economy, many women had used their energies to improve society. As Swamiji said, 'They are slowly taking everything into their hands.'¹⁵ They were thought to be purer than men, better than men, more moral than men and actually to occupy a pedestal of moral superiority. Thus it is not surprising that women were observed by Swamiji to be a significant social force in American society. What Swamiji observed in American women was

their capacity for energetic action directed towards social, civic and humanitarian improvement. America, with its loosely organized society, which lacked rigid class restrictions, was the perfect setting for such activity. As Swamiji said, Americans were fast becoming 'liberal',¹⁶ meaning tolerant and broad-minded. Swamiji saw America as a 'paradise of the poor and women.'¹⁷ They were not ground down, but helped up. Of course these women activists were not in the majority; they were the visible minority. The majority of women in America, those who did not participate so obviously or openly in society, lived lives centred in home and family.

In the period 1820-1860, four cardinal virtues composed the concept of 'true womanhood', the ideal that directed the upbringing of girls. This tradition held that girls were to be taught piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness.¹⁸ It hardly seems from the previous discussion that these virtues could be dominant in the active women that Swamiji met, but it is highly unlikely that the active women were not trained in these virtues. For example, women were raised to be religious. In fact it was thought that religion belonged to woman as she was naturally pious. Further, because of her restless nature she was in need of religion. The premise of this belief is not being disputed. In that society, piety was in the heart and mind of woman, and nothing should be allowed to disturb this natural tendency. Even much of the higher education of the nineteenth century was developed so that it was consistent with the goals of religious training. Swami

9. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

11. CW, 1955, 4:361.

12. CW, 1959, 5:28.

13. CW, 1956, 4:361.

14. CW, 1959, 5:22.

15. CW, 1955, 4:361.

16. CW, 1959, 5:22.

17. CW, 1955, 8:325.

18. Barbara Welter, *Dimity Convictions, The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1976), p. 21.

Vivekananda's own experiences was indeed with religious women. His lectures attracted more women than men, and he at various times remarked on the number of women interested in religion. Of course anyone coming into his presence was sure to perceive something of his powerful spirituality. So it is natural that women, trained to be religious and pious, would flock to Swamiji as a source of religious inspiration.

Women, furthermore, were thought to be purer and stronger than men. They must not give in to men or allow men to take liberties. There was absolutely no compromising this virtue, for if a woman did not maintain her virtue, she might, it was thought, become deranged. One of her tasks in society was to save man from himself by her superior purity, which exerted considerable influence over man. Chastity for women was the ideal, and although men were also taught to be pure, their failures were tolerated because of their sensual nature. In one of Swamiji's letters in December, 1893, he said, 'I have seen thousands of women here whose hearts are as pure and stainless as snow.'¹⁹ He wrote of 'daughters and pure maidens, "pure as the icicle on Diana's temple..."' He further said, 'it is the pure mirror that catches the reflection.'²⁰ Thus the combination of piety and purity made American women the object of Swamiji's veneration because they were especially suited to understand his message. They were pure and 'better judges of character and soul' and thus could reflect the spirituality which poured forth from Swamiji.²¹

It is not surprising that domesticity, the third virtue, was prized. Women were needed at home to do the necessary work

for the family. And as a family member woman was most valued as wife and mother. Home was a place where purity was protected and piety could be given full expression in service to others. For many women the home was a refuge from the world, a place where they could develop their best qualities, one of which was domesticity. This virtue was expressed in 'faithful and cheerful performance of social and family duties.'²² She was to give comfort, promote happiness, nurse the sick, and practise the 'complex art' of being a good housewife. Swamiji's early experiences in America landed him right in the hearts of households. It was American women who befriended him. They gave him shelter and food, took him into their homes and treated him as their own son or brother.²³ This was not on just one occasion, but was his continuing experience while in the United States. He could not express his 'gratitude for their kindness.'²⁴ He saw the virtue of domesticity expressed in the wonderful, open hospitality that American women offered him.

The fourth virtue in the 'cult of true womanhood' was submissiveness. The women whom Swami Vivekananda knew hardly seemed submissive even though the cultivation of that quality was an important part of a girl's training. In general girls were taught to be passive, dependent and obedient, to bear disagreements calmly, to expect little, to accept the death of children submissively.²⁵ This virtue, submissiveness, was supposed to permeate the other cardinal virtues, piety, purity, and domesticity. Thus, ideally, the woman of this time was expected to be passive. But even though this submissiveness appears to have been

19. CW, 1959, 5:25.

20. CW, 1956, 6:248.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Welter, *Dimity Convictions*, p. 31.

23. CW, 1956, 6:248.

24. CW, 1959, 5:28.

25. Welter, *Dimity Convictions*, pp. 27, 30-1.

the cultural norm of the era, there was another type of woman, the reformer, activist, artist, scientist, writer, educator, who stepped out into the main stream of society with strength and vigour. This does not mean these more independent women did not suffer conflicts about their own aspirations and the dictates of society. For that matter, it may have been that the women attracted to Swamiji were attracted because of his message of strength, initiative, and independence. After all, Swami Vivekananda was from a very foreign culture, and in teaching Vedanta he introduced a new religious stream to America. Those women who were attracted to him, who helped him with his work, and who became his disciples were surely

setting convention aside. Whether this caused conflicts within their families, we do not know. But by taking this step, these women were in no way being submissive. Perhaps they actually sought to be free from the submissive role assigned to them, and they purposely acted in defiance of that nineteenth century virtue. These 'new' women were the harbingers of the new age. Many demanded equality and a better society. They challenged the past mores and traditions. They were like a fresh sea breeze in their independence and initiative. There can be no question that the power of woman had been awakened.

(To be concluded)

THE SONGS OF ORPHEUS

JOHN L. DOBSON

(Continued from the November '85 issue)

To the reader, familiar with the early accounts of the Argonautic expedition (that of Pindar or Apollonius of Rhodes), a word of explanation is probably in order. The earliest, extant account of our story (containing some detail) we owe to the Fourth Pythian Ode of Pindar, who traces his descent from the Argonauts themselves, and a question naturally arises as to why my account varies so markedly from his and from the others.

Although Pindar may have been born in the family of the Argonauts, and may even have received the story as an heirloom, nevertheless the events recounted in his story took place some thousand years before his time, and during that thousand years two very important changes had

taken place which, in my opinion, grievously affected his telling of the story.

Only a few hundred years after the time of Orpheus the Vakṣu (the Oxus), the Crooked River of our story, changed its course, cutting off the inland water route from India to Greece. The traders no longer came that way. The river no longer flowed into the Caspian but into the Aras Sea; so that by Pindar's time, hundreds of years later, all track of the Argonauts' route would have become difficult to trace.

The second great change had taken place, not in the geography, but rather in the Greek understanding of the geography of the lands between India and Greece. Shortly before Pindar's time Anaximander had drawn up a map of the world, a map

in which the Caspian Sea opens into Oceanus. This map would have had the effect of cutting off, in the Greek mind, the expectation of land beyond the Caspian. It is to this map, or rather to the state of knowledge embodied in this map, that I attribute the fact that in the early accounts the Argonauts seem to make two entries into the Euxine (the Black Sea). The second entry is made only after an enquiry as to how they could pass the Symplegades, the islands crashing together in the sea. The crashing islands I interpret as icebergs, but no icebergs occur in the Black Sea. The icebergs are in the Caspian. Icebergs are usual in the northern end of the Caspian Sea for nearly four months of the year. It is my opinion that the geography of the Argonautic story became foreshortened by Anaximander's map before it fell on Pindar's ears. It would not augur well for a storyteller's knowledge if he spoke of lands beyond Oceanus.

The Argonauts' apparent second entry to the Euxine I take to refer to their entrance to the Caspian through the icebergs at the mouth of the Kuma River. (The prehistoric trade route went down the Kuma River, and no enquiry would be required before entering the Euxine from Greece.) The broad flowing Phasis on the eastern shore I take to be the Vakṣu, and the land of Aea I take to be Āryavarta (India). After the second entry, the story refers to islands in the sea. There are many large islands in the Caspian, none in the Euxine south of the Crimea, nor any broad flowing river on the eastern shore.

The 'Golden Ram' I have taken to be a camel. The animal is said to have 'risen in the air', and to have gone by the 'land route' to 'Aea'. Camels are mounted in the crouched position, then, with the riders on their backs, they lunge fore and aft while rising to their feet. The camel belongs to the same family as the ram but

the colour of its fleece is very close to gold, and I have always thought that the meaning of this passage was transparent to anyone who ever rode a camel. If 'rising in the air' meant flying, the animal would not have taken the 'land route'.

The story refers to a land route as well as an inland water route to Aea. The water route, skirting the southern shore of the Black Sea, passes Cape Jason, and the land route through Asia Minor crosses the Anti-Taurus mountains through Kuru's Pass. Now Kuru is the family name of the Stranger in our story, and the great war (in the Mahābhārata) was fought on Kurukṣetra (Kuru's field).

Some may wonder why Eurydice does not figure in my story. That is because, in my opinion, she never existed. She does not occur in the early stories and vase paintings. The story of Orpheus and Eurydice appears first in Italy a thousand years after his death. The story of Eurydice is totally out of keeping with the older accounts and the vase paintings of Orpheus in which he is depicted as singing and dancing in pursuit of the religious life, and avoiding the company of women. It is my opinion that the name Eurydice is a corruption of Parīkṣit, in whose court I believe Orpheus was raised, and I believe that the story has leaked into the story of Orpheus as so many stories from the Sanskrit epic, the Mahābhārata, have leaked into Homer. Parīkṣit is said to have been born dead, to have been revived from the dead by Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and then, finally, to have died of snake bite. (Nothing more is known of Eurydice than that she died of snake bite and was revived from the dead.)

The earliest depiction of Orpheus is on an ancient Greek vase. He is depicted only at the *end* of the Argonautic expedition standing in the Argo playing the Kithara. Another figure is similarly depicted, also

playing the Kithara, but his name is no longer legible. In the early accounts, Orpheus is said to have lived in a cave in Thrace and to have 'civilized the wild inhabitants'. He is said to have taught the arts of war to Jason's sons, and to have been the inventor of the heroic metre in which Homer's poems are written. Apparently also (as we learn from the teachings of the Orphics) he taught a doctrine of reincarnation, and stressed chastity to an 'extraordinary degree'. To quote Macchioro (*From Orpheus to Paul*), 'Orphism thus became a primary element in Greek culture, and constituted one of the most important spiritual upheavals which history ever witnessed.'

It is interesting to compare the stories from the Mahābhārata with the Greek versions as they occur in Homer. Perhaps the most outstanding, in this context, is the story of Draupadi's Svayamvara (self-choice). (See Annie Besant, *The Story of the Great War*.) It was customary in India, in those days, for a princess to choose her own husband from the assembled princes. The Sanskrit epics abound in such stories. Often there would be a contest. She might choose the most handsome, the strongest, the best versed, or the best in the arts of war.

In the hope of getting Arjuna (the Stranger in our story), Draupadi and her father, Drupad, chose a contest in archery. Arjuna (the Wielder of Gāṇḍīva) was known to be the best Bowman in the land. At Drupad's request a very strong bow was prepared which, it was hoped, Arjuna alone could string. The target was the eye of a fish, to be hit through a revolving wheel of twelve spokes, but the archer was not allowed to look directly at the target but only at its reflection in a pool of water. Arjuna came, disguised as a beggar, after years of wandering in exile. It was unknown to Draupadi at that time whether

or not he still lived. Unrecognized, he came to string the bow, which before him only Karna had been able to string. But Karna, at Draupadi's request, was not allowed to shoot. She didn't want him for her husband. Arjuna came, strung the bow, and was allowed to shoot. Looking in the pool of water, he hit the eye of the fish through the revolving wheel.

Similarly, in the Greek story, it is unknown to Penelope whether or not Odysseus still lives. Beset by suitors, asking her hand in marriage, Penelope, to ward them off, sets up a contest in archery which she hopes Odysseus alone could win. To win her hand the suitor must string the bow and shoot through twelve axes (*pelekon*) and hit the mark. (The significance of the twelve axes is never made clear in the Greek story.) Odysseus comes, disguised as a beggar, after twenty years of wandering (twelve years in the Sanskrit story), strings his old bow, which none of the suitors had been able to string, and, shooting through the twelve axes, hits the mark. Then, with the help of his son and two friends, he proceeds to kill the suitors. In the Sanskrit story too there is a battle following Draupadi's Svayamvara. The assembled princes complain that Arjuna (still unrecognized in his disguise), being a Brahmin and a beggar, cannot claim a princess of the royal house. A battle breaks out between the Pāṇḍavas (Arjuna and his brothers) and the other princes, but it is quickly stopped by Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Many such similarities occur between the Mahābhārata stories and the stories of Homer. Achilles is dipped in the River Styx to make him invulnerable, but he remains vulnerable in the heel by which he was held, and dies of an arrow wound in that heel. In the Sanskrit story Śrī Kṛṣṇa is given the Prasāda of a holy man and smears it over his body, and thus

becomes invulnerable. But holy things are not touched to the feet. He therefore remains vulnerable in the feet and dies of an arrow wound to the foot, inflicted by a hunter who mistook his feet, while he was resting, for the ears of a deer.

Again, the strong man of the Mahābhārata is Arjuna's younger brother, Bhīmasena. He is called Vṛkodara, Tiger-bellied, because he eats so much. The strong man in Homer is Herakles who wears a lion skin around his waist (more often depicted as a leopard-skin). Such similarities are so numerous that after Alexander's time the Greeks said that the Hindus had a 'translation' of Homer.

My suggestion is that the Mahābhārata stories were known to Orpheus, and leaked into Greek tradition through him. (Macchiore claims that several Orphics sat in the committee which was appointed to select, from the vast 'Homeric tradition', those poems which should be used on state occasions.) My contention is that if the Argonauts did not reach India, or at least bring back Orpheus who was raised there, it becomes much more difficult to explain these similarities, and much more difficult also to explain the outstanding figure of Orpheus, singing and dancing in religious fervour, dressed in a garb unfamiliar in those parts, and playing a Kithara. According to the Greeks, Orpheus' instrument is not of Greek origin, its name is not Greek, and the music he played is not Greek. According to Strabo, they got their music from the East.

The word Kithara I take to be a corruption of the word Kinnara, the Sanskrit name for the celestial musicians. (Our word guitar is derived from Kithara. The Hebrew word is Kinnor or Kinura.) The early Greek Kitharas had four strings and no fingerboard. Now what can you do with a four-stringed instrument without a fingerboard? You can use it to accompany

song. From early times until now, this has always been the most popular use of the guitar and all its ancestors. In Greek mythology there is the tale of Marsyas and Apollo. The old Greek music was pipe music. The music they got from the East was the music of the Kithara or Lyre. Apollo played the Lyre. According to the tale, Athene threw away the pipes (Auloi) because they disfigured her smile. Marsyas picked them up and, becoming an expert, challenged Apollo to a musical contest which he was about to win till Apollo joined his voice to the music of the Lyre, won the contest, tied Marsyas to a post and flayed him alive. To me this appears to be a clear record of the influence of the songs of Orpheus on the music of Greece.

The Greek Auloi, with equidistant finger holes, played scales reminiscent of our minor scales. But the Kitharoedi preferred the diatonic major scale, and it took some inventive genius on the part of the pipers to produce it on the pipes. (Here, for simplicity of description, I shall use the language of our major scale of C.) The pipers could easily produce the notes *c, d, e, f*, then, by biting off the reed two thirds from its end, they could continue up the scale with *g, a, b, c'*. Actually, with equidistant finger holes, the notes do not exactly correspond to the notes of the major scale but they are about close enough to do. (See, Miss Schlesinger, *The Greek Auloi*. You may have to calculate the pitches for yourself.)

To anyone familiar with the physics of a vibrating string, and with the derivation of the major scale, it is a very simple matter to figure out how the strings would be tuned on a four-stringed Kithara without a fingerboard, and why, when the number of strings was increased, it went to seven. When I was young, I read in a book on the history of music, that the early Kitharas played the tetrachord *c, d, e, f*, and that

the major scale was derived by adding to it a second tetrachord g, a, b, c' . Had it been so, the number of strings would have gone from four to eight, not seven. That is indeed how the major scale was derived on the auloi, to accommodate the Kitharoedi, but that is not the way the major scale was derived on the Kithara. The scale of c is derived from the note F. There are three root notes in the scale of c ; F and its third partial C, and finally G, which is the third partial of C. The early Kitharas were tuned to $c, f, g,$ and c' . This is the minimum number of strings for easy accompaniment of singing in the major scale of C, or minor scale of C for that matter. The high c (c') is needed with the f to accompany the overtones of F (namely $f, a,$ and c). Both c 's together with the g are used to accompany the overtones on C ($c, e,$ and g). But the g must be used alone to accompany the overtones of G (namely $g, b,$ and d). It is, then, the loneliness of the g string which drives the instrument-maker to increase the number of strings to seven; first a d string to go with the lonely g , and then a low g and a low f to fill out the accompaniment for the overtones of F and G. (In the minor scale the 5th partial on each root note is replaced by the 19th partial on the same root. One of the scales very popular in India replaces the 9th partials by the 17th partials in like manner.)

Perhaps in passing I should briefly describe the nature of the scales arising from the auloi with equidistant finger-holes. For simplicity we shall consider first the sequence of notes arising on an instrument having the reed end separated from the first hole by only the distance between consecutive holes. The sequence of notes is then very simple. Closing the first hole drops the pitch by an octave. Closing the others consecutively drops the pitch by a fifth, a fourth, a major third, a minor third,

etc. It is exactly the same *sequence* of intervals which we get between the partials on a vibrating string, except that here the sequence is turned *upside down*. Instead of *rising* first by an octave, then by a fifth, etc. we *drop* first by an octave, then by a fifth, etc. It is undoubtedly for this reason that it was said in my book on the history of music that the minor scale was derived by turning the major triad upside down. And it is certainly true that, in this way, scales reminiscent of our minor scales arose on the auloi. However, it would be wrong to think that the minor scales, as used in classical European music and embedded in the European harmonic system, are derived in this way—historically, yes, but harmonically, no. Unquestionably, in ancient Greece, the minor scale, accompanied by the root notes played on the Kithara, owed its popularity, at least in part, to its similarity to the scales arising on the auloi.

Although, as I said, it is a simple thing to figure out the tuning of a four-stringed instrument without a fingerboard, we are fortunate to have here a supporting evidence from Pythagoras. Pythagoras was an Orphic and a numerologist, and took the trouble to leave us a written account of the pitch ratios of the notes to which the Kithara was tuned. We owe him that. They are the pitch ratios of F, C, and G.

The old Greek nomenclature is based on the scales of pipes with equidistant finger holes. The old Hindu nomenclature is based on the partials of vibrating strings. It is the exact correspondence between the Sanskrit musical nomenclature and the underlying physics which compels me to believe that the musical system under discussion was both widely used and thoroughly understood in ancient India. I know of no other musical nomenclature on the earth, either ancient or modern, which corresponds so exactly to the

physical facts underlying the tonal system here discussed.

Thus far I have spoken mostly of the Greek evidence that the Argonauts actually reached India, or at least that they transported Orpheus from India to Greece. I have said almost nothing about the evidence found outside of Greece that Arjuna, while following the horse, reached that distant land of the Yavanas (the Greeks).

The first evidence relates to Egypt and the legend of Sesostris (sometimes Sesosis). That conqueror is said to have traversed the whole continent of Asia and to have conquered also Scythia and Thrace. But such conquests, by their own reports, are denied to all the great Egyptian monarchs. Who, then, was Sesostris? And from what country did he come if not from Egypt? He is said to have conquered some countries without fight and to have referred to those countries as nations of women. In the Mahābhārata a similar thing is said of Arjuna. Like Arjuna also Sesostris is said, during the period of his conquests, to have left the kingdom in the hands of his brother. We must add to this that he is depicted in the rock carvings of Asia Minor shooting his bow left-handed as Arjuna is said to have done. And finally we must add the fact that a horse-riding people appear suddenly on the scene of history in the mountains east of the Caspian, about 500 B.C., claiming to be descended from the army of Sesostris and calling themselves by Arjuna's name, Pārtha (the Parthians).

The second evidence relates directly to Asia Minor and Mesopotamia. I refer here to the Boghazköi tablets, a cuneiform record of a treaty between the Mittannians (who spoke a non-Sanskritic language) and the Hittites. The tablets date from about 1400 B.C. and, in the Mittannian side, refer to four generations of Mittannian rulers

with Sanskritic names (Artatma, Righteous-souled, was one of them). In the treaty the Mittannians also invoke the Vedic gods Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa and twin Aśvins, grouped in traditional Indian fashion. Perhaps the Mittannians also were invited by Arjuna to the Aśvamedha Sacrifice of Yudhiṣṭhira.

The Boghazköi tablets are sometimes taken as an indication that the Aryans entered India as late as 1500 B.C. (see Pigott). But this view is contradicted by the carbon dates for the burning of the cities of Afghanistan and western India, which indicate that the Aryan invasion took place some five or six hundred years earlier. Also, Jacobi, on the basis of astronomical evidence, places of the Vedic Age in northern India at between 1500 and 3000 B.C. I, therefore, take the Sanskrit in the Mittannian treaty, not as evidence for the late movement of the Aryans from west to east, but rather as an evidence for the movement of Indo-Aryan influence from east to west, after the establishment of the Aryans in India several centuries earlier.

There is good evidence that Egypt was in contact with India even in pre-Aryan times, through traders from the Indus Valley civilization moving along the caravan route. Some four hundred years before the time of our story, a group of such traders is depicted in Egypt as metal workers, and possibly horse traders, bringing stibium from the north. They look like the original gypsies. They appear to be dressed in cotton clothes decorated in the same manner as are the clothes depicted on the figures which we find in Harappa and Mohenjodaro dating from before 2000 B.C. They are dressed in the same way and wear their hair in the same way (with a single band around the forehead). These traders, depicted in Egypt in 1892 B.C., carry also a stringed instrument.

The third evidence relates to India itself

and the Sanskrit epic, the Mahābhārata. There it is said that, during the period of exile, Arjuna spent six years 'north of the Himalayas'. Now in the Mahābhārata, the expression 'north of the Himalayas' seems always to refer to those lands reached by crossing the Hindu Kush, i.e. the regions towards and beyond the Caspian.

There is good evidence that Kashmere, Caspian, Hindu Kush, and Caucasus all come from the same Sanskrit name Kaśyapa. (Kashmere appears to be a contraction of Kaśyapamīra.) Ptolemy, about 150 A.D., calls Kashmere 'Caspēria', and in his map, puts the Caucasus Mountains around the source of the Oxus; i.e. he calls the Hindu Kush the Caucasus.

From Hastināpura, the capital city of the Pāṇḍavas, the road to Greece lay to the north, threading through the mountains near modern Khyber Pass. For the first four hundred miles or so the road went north; then, for several hundred miles, it went northwest, before finally turning west and sometimes south of west, approaching Greece essentially from the east. It was natural, therefore, for the Greeks to speak of going to east to India, and just as natural for the Hindus to speak of going north to Greece. Thus, in the Mahābhārata, Arjuna, while following the horse, is said to have gone 'north of the Himalayas', where he fought with the Greeks (Yavanas) 'who were excellent bowmen'.

It is interesting to note, in this connection, that India is the only ancient nation (at least to my knowledge) that puts its sacred mountain, marking the 'centre of the world', outside its own domain. Mount Meru is said to be 'north of the Himalayas' and is, in all probability, Mount Demavend in the Elburz Mountains, south of the Caspian and midway between India and Greece. Although not a truly solitary mountain, Mount Demavend nevertheless towers high above all the surrounding peaks

to more than 19,000 feet. It is a beautiful and spectacular sight, standing some six thousand feet above the surrounding peaks, snow-capped in solitary grandeur. Had Mount Meru been in the Himalayas, the Mahābhārata would not have referred to it as 'north'. Mount Everest is almost due east from Hastināpura, and the traffic did not go that way.

I should say something more about the date of our story. Orpheus is said to have lived one or eleven generations before the Trojan War. According to the Hindu chronologists, the Kurukṣetra War took place about 1500 B.C. The Boghazköi tablets are dated after 1400 B.C. And, finally the explosion of the volcanic mountain on the island of Thera, north of Crete, is set by modern investigators at 1490 (\pm 10 years) B.C. If my interpretation of the Mittannian document is correct, then the Kurukṣetra war must have preceded the document by about a hundred years, since the treaty mentions four generations of rulers with Sanskritic names. This corresponds very well with a date of 1500 for the appearance of Arjuna (the Stranger) in Greece. It also corresponds very well with the date for the volcanic explosion. In the Mediterranean, on their return voyage, the Argonauts are said to have been three days in total darkness, after which they 'did their worship on an island in the sun'. It is unlikely that the three days of darkness point to some other event. Such events are scarce. In more recent times, toward the end of the last century, a similar explosion took place on Krakatao, claiming 138,000 human lives. From all appearances the Thera explosion was much more devastating, and all but destroyed the Minoan civilization, then ruling the Mediterranean basin with an iron hand. The only city on Crete which was ever rebuilt was the capital city, Knossos, but

it was rebuilt, not by the Minoans, but by the Mycenaean Greeks, the Greeks of our story. (See Galanopoulos, *Atlantis; The Truth Behind the Legend*.)¹

Perhaps in passing I should say briefly how I came to tell this story. Actually I stumbled on it entirely by accident while looking for something else. Several decades ago, in a course of study in Greek philosophy, I had occasion to study, rather carefully, the Greek notions of the 'five elements'. That is where my story begins. By then I had already become deeply versed in the five element theory as presented in Sanskrit, some one or two thousand years earlier. Comparison was inevitable, and I soon came to the conclusion that the Greeks, rather than inventing the five element theory, had borrowed it from elsewhere.

From the association, in the Sanskrit, between the five elements and our five senses of perception, it is a simple thing to re-translate the Sanskrit terms to English. The five great elements are five forms of energy, perceivable by our five senses as follows: Ākāśa (space or matter) by the ear, Vāyu (energy or wind) by the skin, Tejas (that which shines) by the eye, and Ap and Pṛthivi (water and earth) by the tongue and the nose. In the Sanskrit account, the energies of the material universe are said to run from Ākāśa through Vāyu and Tejas to Ap and Pṛthivi. Now we know, from our knowledge of astronomy, that the energies of the material universe begin with gravity and do run from gravitation through kinetic energy and radiation to electricity and magnetism, and that, because of entropy considerations,

the direction of flow does not reverse itself. (See Dyson, 'Energy in the Universe', *Scientific American*, September, 1971.) We also know from our knowledge of physiology that our orientation in the gravitational field is perceived through the ear (the saccule); kinetic energy, as temperature, is perceived through the skin; radiation, as visible light, is perceived through the eye; and electricity and magnetism are perceived through the tongue and the nose—hydrated protons taste sour, and molecular configurations, determined by magnetic coupling of electrons, are detected through smell. (In Sanskrit, Ap and Pṛthivi are said to be twins.)

The correspondence between the ancient Sanskrit account of the five elements, and our modern knowledge of astronomy (and physiology) I found quite compelling, and, persuaded that the Greeks most probably had borrowed the theory from the Sanskrit, I began a search for early contacts between India and Greece. It was then that I found how many others had preceded me in this investigation. (I mention here only a short paper by Swami Ashokananda, 'The influence of Indian Thought on the Thought of the West') It was then that I found that the farther I looked, the more the evidence seemed to point to a very early contact, apparently connecting Orpheus with India through the story of the Golden Ram and Argonautic expedition in pre-Homeric, prehistoric times. It was thus that my story began.

Now there is one other evidence to which these investigations led me, but which, for fear of being misunderstood, I have thus far hesitated to mention. That is the similarity, or perhaps the identity, of Śiva and Dionysus. (Śiva is called Paśupati, Lord of the beasts.) Orphism is associated throughout with the worship of Dionysus. Orpheus is depicted surrounded by animals; so, too, is Dionysus in Mycenaean Greece,

1. Largely it is the evidence for the explosion of that volcano which Velikovsky appears to be trying to explain in his *Worlds in Collision*. The details of that explosion had not yet been unearthed when he wrote that book, and the evidence was still crying for an explanation.

as was Śiva, in ancient India, in the Indus Valley civilization, at least as early as the third millenium B.C., long before the arrival of the Aryans in that land. All three figures are associated with a religion centred in a belief in the transcendental oneness underlying the perceptions of the physical world. All are associated with a religion whose worship and sacrifice are based on austēry, chastity, and the renunciation of worldly enjoyments. All believe in the purification of the mind through suffering. I quote Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*.

The tradition is undisputed that Greek tragedy in its earliest form had for its sole theme the sufferings of Dionysus himself. With equal confidence, however, we can assert that, until Euripides, Dionysus never once ceased to be the tragic hero; that in fact all the celebrated figures of the Greek stage—Prometheus, Oedipus, etc.—are but masks of this original hero, Dionysus. There is godhead behind all these masks... In reality, however, and behind this appearance, the hero is the suffering Dionysus of the mysteries, the god experiencing in himself the agonies of individuation, of whom wonderful myths tell that as a boy he was torn to pieces by the Titans and has been worshipped in this state as Zagreus: whereby is intimated that this dismemberment, the properly Dionysian suffering, is like a transformation into air, water, earth and fire, that we are therefore to regard the state of individuation as the origin and prime cause of all suffering, as something objectionable in itself...

In India it is said that long, long ago the gods churned the ocean in search of the nectar of immortality (*amṛta*), but first came poison, terrible black poison, and there was no escape but that the poison be consumed. Thereupon, Śiva stepped forward, and, taking on himself all the sufferings of the world, drank the poison, which left a blue mark in his throat. It is therefore that he has the name Nīlakantha (Blue-throated).

Dionysus has often been identified, by

modern scholars, with this Śiva, and according to the ancient Greeks themselves, Dionysus came from India. Music and dancing and a plethora of animals have always been associated with the worship of both Śiva and of Dionysus, and with the life of Orpheus. In fact, one of the names of Śiva is Naṭarāja (King of dancers), and often he is depicted in the posture of dance.

Touching on Nietzsche's remark quoted above, '...whereby is intimated that this dismemberment, the properly Dionysian suffering, is like a transformation into air, water, earth and fire, that we are therefore to regard the state of individuation as the origin and prime cause of suffering...', there is an interesting passage in one of the Upaniṣads which says, 'As rain water, falling on a mountain peak runs down the rocks in all directions, even so he who sees the Dharmas as separate runs after them in all directions.'² All through those ancient Sanskrit texts, the absolute oneness of the reality is stressed, and all suffering is traced to the misperception of that transcendental oneness as a plurality which we run after in all directions. Our fragmentation results from running after an apparently fragmented reality. 'He goes from death to death who sees in It the slightest differentiation whatsoever.'³ 'Where, in truth, one sees all beings as Self, there what delusion, what sorrow, when seeing follows that oneness?'⁴ (i.e., when the experience of that unity precedes and underlies one's perception of the world). It is this misperception of the one as many which gives rise to the notion of the five elements. The changeless, infinite and undivided, seen through this misperception, is called in Sanskrit *astībhāti-priya*, the existence, the luminosity

2. *Katha upaniṣad* 2.1.14.

3. *ibid* 2.1.10,11.

4. *Iṣa upaniṣad* 7.

and the dearness of every object in the world. These are the Dharmas mentioned above. Dharma means that which makes something what it is. It is the reality shining through, which gives rise to *asti-bhāti-priya* (the changeless shows through as existence, the infinite, as luminosity and the undivided as dearness); and we, seeing them as separate, 'run after them in all directions'. It is this individuation which is the root cause of suffering, whether in Vedanta or in Orphism and the Dionysian mysteries. In Vedanta, however, it is always made clearer than daylight that this individuation is only an appearance. Nothing happens to the rope when we mistake it for a snake.

There is one other outstanding similarity between the ancient figures of Śiva and Dionysus (and this is the part which I hesitate to mention); they are sometimes depicted with a certain postural feature (as is the central figure on the Grundestrup Bowl in northern Europe at a later date) that has given rise to a great deal of misunderstanding. Often it has been taken as a symbol of worldly enjoyment. No! It was *never* so used. These figures represent divinity, not man. Never, in the ancient figures, is an object of enjoyment at hand. Always it is the figure of an ascetic; often in India, seated in meditation. (Śiva is usually depicted either dancing or seated in 'eternal meditation'.) Always it is a symbol of the yearning of the soul for that underlying oneness. Always it is a symbol of the yearning of the individual for the state beyond individuation. 'He from whom all works, all desires, all sweet odours and tastes proceed, who embraces all this, who never speaks, who is never surprised, he, myself within the heart, is that Brahman (the Vast). When I shall have departed thence I shall obtain him.' Always it is a symbol of the soul alert, like the virgins with their lamps

alight. Always it is a symbol of the ultimate fulfilment, beyond the seeming fulfilment of the fleeting pleasures of this world. 'He who drinketh of this water shall thirst again.'⁵ Always it is a symbol of the yearning for the infinite. 'The infinite alone is happiness; there is no happiness in the small.'⁶ 'Who would have lived and breathed had not that sky of bliss existed?'⁷

It is a symbol of the determination of the heroic mind never again to turn, for its fulfilment, to the enjoyment of the senses. It is like the mythical Cātaka bird which will never drink, however great its thirst, any water but the water of unfallen rain. It is that heroic determination which is the fountain-head of monastic life and which alone makes possible the realization of the Supreme. 'There are eunuchs who are born eunuchs, there are eunuchs who are made eunuchs of men, and there are eunuchs who make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.'⁸

To misinterpret that symbology is to give the lie to the entire tradition of both Śaivism and Orphism. Nowhere is chastity more stressed than in Orphism and Vedanta (Buddhism and Christianity came later). While Śiva sat in meditation, Kāma ('cupid') came to shoot him with an arrow. Śiva caught sight of him in time, and, with a glance of his watchful eye, burned the poor boy to ash. Need I say more? Śiva, the friend of all, burned the god of sex desire to ash.

One who knows Vedanta sees parallels to Orphism too numerous to mention. The Orphics, for instance (like the Vedantins) believed in a 'circle of birth or becoming' (*kyklos tes geneseos*). They believed that

5. The Gospel according to St. John 4:13

6. *Chandogya upaniṣad* 7.23.1.

7. *Taittirīya upaniṣad* 2.7.1.

8. The Gospel according to St. Mathew 19:12.

the soul becomes purified through a series of embodiments, that through the practice of austerity and renunciation (avoiding the seeming fulfilment of desires in worldly enjoyments), and through devotion to the ultimate transcendental unity or reality, the soul, in the end, will regain its lost perfection.

Against this there stands, both in India and in Greece, a higher teaching. Nietzsche quotes Silenus, the companion of Dionysus, as saying, 'Oh, wretched ephemeral race, children of chance and misery, why do ye compel me to tell you what it were most expedient for you not to hear? What is best of all is beyond your reach forever: not to be born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. But the second best for you—is quickly to die.' How like Ajātavāda this sounds! According to the non-dualistic Vedantins, who hold the doctrine of Ajātavāda (the doctrine of

not-being-born), the soul is never born. The Self is never mixed up with the products of Māyā. In fact, 'What products? Rub your eyes!' Nothing happens to the rope when we mistake it for a snake.

In closing let me say that gradually, as I continued this investigation, the conviction grew in my mind that long, long ago, in prehistoric Greece, something had happened to render the Greeks enthusiastically susceptible thereafter to influence from India. And gradually the impression grew that the Argonautic expedition had actually reached India, and that Orpheus himself knew Sanskrit. A rather far flung set of evidences has driven me to this view and I set it forth in writing as a suggested corrective to the accepted story, begging the reader to investigate it for himself.

(Concluded)

SWAMI SHUDDHANANDA

SWAMI MUKTINATHANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

Six months later, in December 1902, Swami Trigunatitananda left for United States in order to take charge of the Vedanta Society of Northern California at San Francisco. Swami Shuddhananda became the editor of *Udbodhan* and, to the delight of all, continued to publish the magazine with great distinction for a period of ten years. It was during this time that Shuddhananda brought out in several volumes the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* in Bengali.

Shuddhananda was elected a Trustee of Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math, on the 7th May, 1903. Swami Saradananda, the

then General Secretary of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission had implicit faith in Shuddhananda. Once an appeal relating to the relief work of the Mission was sent to the press without the consent or knowledge of Swami Saradananda, who became offended when the appeal was published. But when it was explained to him that much time would have been wasted if one had to run from the Relief Office at the Belur Math to Swami Saradananda at the Udbodhan Office to get his approval, and that this would have slowed down the work, the latter sent word: 'If Sudhir (Shuddhananda) edits

this, I shall have no objection.' Swami Saradananda had such confidence in Swami Shuddhananda, whom he himself had trained and who had sat at the feet of Swami Vivekananda to learn his first lesson in monastic life.³⁰ Gradually Swami Shuddhananda, though a young monk at that time, became the right-hand man of Swami Saradananda regarding administrative affairs of the Ramakrishna Order, and afterwards started functioning as its Joint Secretary.³¹

Shuddhananda's field of activity, however, was not confined to the Ramakrishna Math and Mission alone. He left no stone unturned in order to propagate Swami Vivekananda's ideas and ideals especially among the youth. It was owing to his inspiration as well as the patronage of Swami Saradananda that the youth of Calcutta formed the Vivekananda Society after the demise of Swamiji with a view to spreading his message.

The Vivekananda Society used to conduct various kinds of humanitarian service and organize study circles and weekly meetings, besides maintaining a Students' Home for the moral and spiritual training of young boys. In addition, the Society had a publication division which used to bring out booklets on Swamiji's message. However, after functioning smoothly for about 14 years since its inception in 1902, the Society reached an almost moribund state. At this critical point Swami Shuddhananda stepped in to save it.

With the permission of his monastic authorities, Swami Shuddhananda temporarily gave up the normal activities of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and moved to Calcutta so as to devote his full attention to reviving the activities of the Vivekananda

Society. Since there was paucity of workers in the Society, he approached the Belur Math authorities and got a couple of monastic brothers to assist him. It was the year 1915. He transferred the Society from Shankar Ghosh Lane to a house at 78/1 Cornwallis Street. Then he reorganized the lay devotees of the Society and rules of the Society. With great zeal and proficiency he looked after all the activities of the Society like the establishment of a library, getting more readers and adding new books to it, enrolment of fresh members for the Society, collection of monthly subscriptions, meeting the house rent and so on. Within a very short time the Society became invigorated with new life and its activities expanded many-fold. Gradually a band of young men were attracted to his noble character and started staying with him in the premises of the Society. Many of these young people later became monks and rest led exalted lives as lay devotees.

After the rejuvenation of the Vivekananda Society, the next most important work undertaken by Swami Shuddhananda was the organization of the First Convention of the Ramakrishna Order and Mission. This was held during the first week of April, 1926, at the Belur Math. The Report of the Convention records, 'It was solely through the unbounded enthusiasm and unremitting labours of Swami Shuddhananda that the idea of the Convention materialized.' The Swami became the Secretary of the Reception Committee. Hence the real burden of the work naturally fell on him.³²

Hardly sixteen months after the Convention, Swami Saradananda passed away on the 19th of August, 1927. The loss was

30. Cf. *History of the Ramakrishna Math & Mission*, p. 290

31. Later on, the term 'Assistant Secretary' was substituted for 'Joint Secretary', *ibid*, 316.

32. Gambhirananda, Swami, *History of the Ramakrishna Math & Mission* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1957) p. 238.

irreparable and it was difficult to fill up the void. Finally Swami Shuddhananda, who was then the Joint Secretary, was elected the next General Secretary of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. He continued to work in this position till 1934 with the interruption of one year from March, 1930, when he temporarily retired owing to health reasons. Swami Virajananda became the acting General Secretary during this interim period.

Despite the pressure of work and heavy responsibilities imposed upon him by his new office, Swami Shuddhananda continued his habit of studying and teaching the scriptures. Everyday he would take two scriptural classes of one hour duration each for the brethren of the Math. His exposition of the Gita, Upaniṣads and Brahmasūtras in the light of the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda was a source of great attraction and inspiration to all those who had the opportunity of attending his classes. He kept a watchful eye on all the Sannyāsins and Brahmachārins of the Order so that each of them might develop an all-round personality capable of combining selfless work with devotion, contemplation and scriptural studies. Even a novice would find in him a friend, philosopher and guide.

Sometimes he would call the young Brahmachārins and start informal discussions. These discussions, which would often continue for hours together, invariably left an indelible impression on the minds of the hearers. One day he called a Brahmachārin to his side and enquired, 'How many years have passed since you joined the Order?' 'Four years', was the reply. Then he asked, 'Are you practising Karma Yoga?' The Brahmachāri instantly replied, 'Yes'. His next question was, 'Are you losing interest in your work?'

The Brahmachāri answered, 'No'. Then the Swami remarked cryptically. 'Then what you are doing is not Karma Yoga'. Evidently, what Swami Shuddhananda meant was that the young man's devotion and knowledge should increase and his attachment to work and its fruits should decrease.

Thus he would put personal queries to all around him and direct them along the right path. A venerable monk of the Order who had the opportunity to live closely with the Swami gives the following account in one of his letters:

I do not know of anyone—be he a Sannyasin, a Brahmachārin or a lay devotee—who visited the Math during the life time of Revered Sudhir Maharaj and was not inspired by him to move forward along the path of renunciation and dispassion. He possessed an unassuming and pure character, simple and frank behaviour and a life moulded in the ideal of Swamiji, full of zeal and enthusiasm, contented with little and devoid of any vanity.

Whenever he might stay or go, he was the centre of attraction for every member of the Math—young and old alike. I have never seen anyone else who could so lucidly expound the spirit of the scriptures in the light of the message of Thakur and Swamiji. He was a 'Book of Reference' for the senior monks. His deep devotion found expression in his intense absorption in formal worship which consisted of simple rituals performed with deep sincerity.

Therefore to me he was an object of devotion, love and attraction. Whenever I went to the Math, the visit would appear futile unless I sat with him and enjoyed his holy company for sometime. Perhaps this will be corroborated by almost all of those who came in touch with him. I believe he had nothing as his own other than Sri Ramakrishna, Swamiji and the eagerness to spread their ideals.³³

Another distinguished monk of the Order tells us about Swami Shuddhananda in one of his letters thus:

33. Swami Abjakananda, *Swamijir Padaprānte*, pp. 32-33.

Whenever I think of him (Revered Shuddhanandaji Maharaj), I remember only one thing and that is love; goodwill for everybody was as if personified in him. It is rare to find someone who can make others very own in such a short time. In particular, he was a great friend of the youth.... His advice to the students was: Be honest, be truthful and continent, practise *japa* and meditation devotedly...³⁴

The special characteristics of Shuddhananda were his strict regularity, exceptional boldness as well as outspokenness. Let us present an interesting anecdote in this context. Swami Atmananda, another illustrious disciple of Swami Vivekananda, was a member of the Working Committee in those days... Because of his greater inclination towards contemplative life, he would at times be absent in the meetings of the Working Committee. Being displeased at this, Sudhir Maharaj once told him, 'If you don't attend the meetings regularly, you should resign.' Swami Atmananda replied, 'Brother, you please write the resignation letter and I shall ~~sign~~ ^{sign} it.' However, the matter did not proceed any further owing to the deep love and reverence the two brother disciples had for each other.³⁵

Work and worship lost their distinction to Shuddhananda who used to be busy with lots of work. Once after spending almost the whole night in work, he remarked, 'I feel as if I had performed Kāli Pujā during the whole night'.³⁶

Shuddhananda was equally frank to the young and the old. His heart was as simple and unfettered as that of a boy. He could not keep anything hiding. If he committed any mistake, he had no hesitation in admitting it even to a novice.

His heart was full of love and sympathy for others. He would be extremely perturbed if he noticed any body's grief; he would not be comforted until he could do something to alleviate the misery of the person. If he received useful articles as gift, he would distribute them among the poor and the needy. He never claimed reverence from anyone. Nevertheless, everyone offered respects to him and regarded him as one's very own on account of his unbounded love and childlike simplicity.

Sri Prabhat Kumar Seth, a well-known devotee, who was extremely fortunate to have been blessed by the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and by Swami Vivekananda, wrote in his reminiscences:

Sudhir Maharaj's heart was filled with so much affection that the miseries and unrest of the devotees would disappear simply by a few words of his or by his company for a short while. Once, feeling mental unrest, my father left Calcutta and went to our house at Madhupur. However, the restlessness persisted there also. One day his mental agony became so much that he could no longer withstand it. Toward the afternoon suddenly Sudhir Maharaj paid him a visit. Perhaps at that time Sudhir Maharaj had gone to Madhupur to stay at the residence of Kiron Dutta. Both were very happy to see each other. They talked for more than an hour about bygone days. My father later told us that his terrible mental unrest disappeared after conversing with Sudhir Maharaj.

Once I too experienced the power of his love in the holy city of Varanasi. Then he was probably the Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. One day I went and sat near him; he was alone in the room. There was hardly any conversation between us, but I felt as if the peace and devotion of his heart were transmitted into me. In this context I recall the words of Sri Hari Maharaj (Swami Turiyananda). (One day) he was encircled by devotees and monastics. All on a sudden pointing to all he asked, 'Can you tell me how to recognize a saint?' None uttered anything in reply. After a while he himself said, 'If one comes near fire, he does not have to be told

34. Ibid p. 33

35. Prabhat Kumar Seth, 'Swami Shuddhananda Smriti', *Udbodhan*, Chaitra, 1391 B.S., p. 172

36. Ibid p. 171

about the proximity of fire; it is felt by the heat vibration. Similarly, if one comes near a holy person, one's mind is spontaneously filled with holy thoughts. This is the indication that the person is really a saint.³⁷

Shuddhananda dedicated his life to the consolidation and expansion of the activities of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. Once while he was on a visit to the Rangoon Centre of the Mission, he was asked how he liked the activities of the centre there. He replied emphatically,

'Wonderful! If these activities are really meant for preaching the message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, then what else can be better than this?' After a pause he continued, 'Look here, by the grace of Swamiji and through close association with him, I have realized that all our activities be it relief work or educational, medical or preaching work or taking classes—everything is worship of God, everything is the spreading of his glory. Every little work of the Mission is meant to reveal Sri Ramakrishna. By seeing our work let people be attracted towards Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and not to us. Our life, our Ramakrishna Mission, is nothing but a channel for the flow of the power of Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji. Otherwise, these activities, no matter how big they be, are neither Swamiji's works nor a Mission of Sri Ramakrishna.'³⁸

Shuddhananda was never tired of proclaiming the glory of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother and of course of Swamiji. In an article on Sri Ramakrishna he wrote: 'If Sri Ramakrishna's life is to be retold in one sentence then it may be said that he knew nothing but God.'³⁹ He further stated, 'If the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna are followed, an unprecedented religion of service will evolve

in this world which will resolve all problems and establish a reign of peace on earth. But for that each one of us must hear, cogitate and meditate upon his life and message.'⁴⁰

Shuddhananda himself would read the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* everyday for sometime after his bath. Once he told a young man,

Study the Gospel very intently. These are the words directly uttered by Thakur; hence the book is as it were living. Let me tell you an incident. Purna⁴¹ was once afflicted with great mental suffering; one day he decided to commit suicide on that day itself. After taking his bath, he got ready. But he thought he should read a little from the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* by turning a page at random, and then he would quit the world with the message of the Master whatever that might be. On opening the *Gospel* he came across that page where it was written: 'The Master is thinking about Purna.' That changed everything. He felt that the Master himself was thinking about him. Purna abandoned his plan of suicide.⁴²

Shuddhananda's observations regarding Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi are equally penetrating. In a letter he wrote:

The Holy Mother was a mother indeed, the visible Mother of the Universe. Such forbearance, greatness and spiritual power are possible in her alone. Externally she used to be busy like an ordinary woman in household work and service to kinsmen and sheltered ones. Her compassion and affection were showered upon one and all without any discrimination. Human beings and even birds and beasts—none was deprived of her love and kindness. She was extremely bashful. Always she used to have a long veil over her head. In order to demonstrate the ideal of Indian Womanhood, this time the Master brought with him the Holy Mother who was purity personified. What more can I say about her—

37. Ibid pp. 172-73

38. *Padaprānte* pp. 34-5

39. Shuddhananda Swami, 'Sri Ramakrishna-dever Jeevan Upadesh', *Udbodhan*, Phalgun, 1391 B.S., p. 89

40. Ibid p. 92

41. Sri Purna Chandra Ghosh, a lay disciple of Sri Ramakrishna.

42. *Padaprānte*, p. 37

in one word she was Mother—mother of all—a real mother.⁴³

It was no less a person than Swami Vivekananda himself who opened his eyes to the greatness of the Holy Mother. One day Swamiji together with Shuddhananda went into the presence of the Holy Mother. Having prostrated before her, Swamiji asked his disciple to do the same. No sooner had Shuddhananda finished his obeisance than Swamiji rebuked him saying, 'What is this? Don't you know yet how to offer *pranām* to the Mother? See how to do it!' Then Swamiji once again fell flat on the ground like a stick at the feet of the Holy Mother. Shuddhananda too followed his Guru at once and fell at the Mother's holy feet. After that Swamiji with folded arms earnestly prayed to the Holy Mother for her blessings so that his own dear disciple may attain enlightenment. Needless to add, this was one of the most significant events in the life of Shuddhananda.⁴⁴ It also shows Swamiji's deep love and concern for his disciples.

After the demise of the Holy Mother on the 21st of July, 1920, many felt the need to compile her holy teachings which had till then been stored in the hearts of a few monks and devotees. It was Swami Shuddhananda who persuaded Swami Arupananda to compile the reminiscences of her disciples into the two-volume *Māyer Kathā* (now published in English as the *Gospel of the Holy Mother*). For obvious reasons it was necessary to carefully edit and correct the manuscripts. When Swami Saradananda was requested to do the job, he agreed but said: 'If Sudhir assists me then only will it be possible for me to accomplish the task.' Ultimately the book was published after the thorough scrutiny of both the Swamis.

Shuddhananda's devotion to Swamiji and other direct disciples of the Master was too deep to be expressed in words. Once in reply to the enquiry of an earnest youth, he disclosed, 'The teachings and reminiscences of Swamiji and his brother disciples are the only support of my life.'⁴⁵ He further said, 'With the passing of days, Swamiji is appearing even greater. When we used to live with him and mix with him intimately, we could not comprehend that Swamiji was so great.'⁴⁶

Incessant work and increasing pressure of responsibilities of the Mission told upon his health. So he took leave in March, 1934, when Swami Virajananda assumed the office of the General Secretary. With a view to taking complete rest and spending the time in solitude, Shuddhananda together with his boyhood friend Virajananda went to the Shyاملatal Ashrama situated in the lap of the Himalayas. The two friends were extremely happy to get the opportunity of being together after a long time. They continued to stay there for an uninterrupted period of six months. It may be mentioned here that long ago when Virajananda was at Mayavati engaged in publishing the life of Swami Vivekananda in four volumes, Shuddhananda had encouraged him very much in that task. He wrote, 'I do not know whether anyone else can work so assiduously on and publish such a detailed biographical account of Swamiji as you are doing.'⁴⁷

Both Shuddhananda and Virajananda left their retreat and returned to the Math in order to attend the Monks' Conference which was held at Belur Math in April, 1935. 'Almost all who could extricate themselves temporarily from their duties

43. Ibid p. 40

44. Ibid p. 39

45. Ibid p. 42

46. Jagadiswarananda Swami, 'Swami Shuddhananda', *Udbodhan*, Ashad, 1356 B.S., p. 287

47. *Padaprānte* p. 31

attended it, and some came even from across the seas. It was altogether a very representative gathering, the first of its kind after the Convention of 1926.⁴⁸ Swami Shuddhananda was the President of the Conference. In his Presidential speech he said, 'In view of the expansion of the activities of the Math and Mission, it is necessary to see that the Rules framed by Swamiji are put into practice in conformity with the requirements of the time'. While narrating the history of framing the first rules of the Math, he quoted Swamiji's immortal words: 'Rules by themselves are of no avail unless we ourselves are good. Rules invite an attempt at breaking them. Monks should never take a wrong step. The purpose of establishing an organization and framing rules is to enable new-comers to imbibe through them the ideal which is: "For one's own salvation and for the good of all."⁴⁹

Sri Ramakrishna's Birth Centenary was another important event in which Shuddhananda actively participated. The Centenary celebrations commenced with the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna on February 24, 1936, and ended a week after the next birthday on March 21, 1937. Swami Shuddhananda presided over the inaugural function which was held at Belur Math and was attended by many distinguished savants. Besides, Shuddhananda was one of the Secretaries of the Executive Committee formed to carry on the year-long celebrations.

Although Shuddhananda was relieved from strenuous work, there was no substantial improvement in his failing health. Towards the beginning of 1937 he had a mild paralytic attack. However,

under the care of able physicians he soon came round. Whatever might have been the condition of his health, he was ever cheerful and full of contentment. One day a stranger suddenly asked him, 'Sir, why are you wearing the ochre robes, renouncing everything?' Quick came his reply, 'Everyone will have to quit this world. If one lives in home one feels grieved to go away on hearing the call from the other world. Therefore I have renounced everything and, having worn the ochre robe, am ready to depart at any moment.'⁵⁰

Shuddhananda was elected a Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Order in February, 1937. A year later when Swami Vijnanananda, the then President of the Order, attained Mahāsamādhi at Allahabad, he had to ascend to that post. He was the first to become the chief of the organization after the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Nevertheless, his elevation was welcomed by one and all. The period of Shuddhananda's spiritual ministrations as the Guru of the Order, though it lasted for six months only, left a deep impression on the minds of monks as well as the devotees. His modesty was patent to all. In spite of his suffering from high blood pressure and other ailments, he was ever eager to help everyone. Extolling the role of struggle in spiritual life he wrote to an aspirant:

Spiritual life is nothing but struggle of the internal forces with the environment. There are two ways of making progress. One is to forcibly transcend the environment and place oneself in a new favourable environment and the other is struggle as much as possible so as to attain internal strength and vitality. Otherwise if one makes a compromise with the environment, it will lead to sure death.⁵¹

Shuddhananda's health considerably deteriorated in the month of October, 1938.

48. *History of the Ramakrishna Math & Mission*, p. 332

49. *Ibid* pp. 333-34

50. *Padaprānte* p. 36

51. *History of the Ramakrishna Math & Mission*, p. 44

On the 18th of that month when he was attacked by high fever combined with hiccup and urinary troubles, he calmly declared, 'There is no need to take medicine any more. Now I shall only hear the name of God.' Nevertheless, even while he was in his death-bed, his mind was filled with sympathy for everyone. During this critical period when a blind lady wanted to approach him for initiation, the attendants dissuaded her. However, on the 20th of October, only 3 days before his Mahāsamādhi, Shuddhananda gave a patient hearing to the blind lady and directed her toward the life of peace and blessedness.

During the last few months of his life, Swami Shuddhananda was constantly engaged in holy discussions and listening

to readings from the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* or other holy scriptures. He continued this practice till the end. At last on the 23rd of October, 1938, he entered Mahāsamādhi at 8.40 a.m. He was then 66 years old.

Swami Vivekananda once told Shuddhananda, 'A day will come when you will realize that to serve someone by preparing a *chillum* of tobacco is far greater than millions of meditations.'⁵² Indeed this philosophy was the bed-rock on which Shuddhananda built his exemplary life—a life that became immortal through complete dedication and service.

(Concluded)

52. Jagadiswarananda Swami, 'Swami Shuddhananda', *Udbodhan*, Ashad, 1356 B.S., p. 287

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

SRI RAMANA—THE SAGE OF ARUNAGIRI BY AKSHARAJNA. Published by Sri Ramanashramam, Tiruvannamalai (S. India) 606603. 1984. Pp. 91 Rs. 7

This is a small book about a great sage, the sage of Arunagiri or Tiruvannamalai—Sri Ramana Maharshi. It contains a brief life of the sage and the quintessence of his teachings.

In his boyhood, Venkataramana did not show any aptitude for the acquisition of mere knowledge, though he was bright and could have taken a high rank in the class. He was not in favour of that kind of learning for which parents generally send their children to school—the learning intended only for the earning of a livelihood. (Compare here what Sri Ramakrishna said about learning as a means of obtaining rice and bananas.) At the threshold of youth Venkataramana had a spontaneous spiritual awakening which set him free for ever from worldly life. Hearing the word 'Arunachalam' from a relative he left his studies and home and set out for that sacred hill. There, after spending a few years absorbed in the experience

of the Self, he emerged as Maharshi Ramana. Without any effort on his part an Ashrama grew around him and people flocked to it from all over the world.

The brief biographical sketch is followed by a short essay by Sri R.V.A. Thampuran. Pages 46 to 91 of the book contain teachings of the Maharshi. These are gleaned from other publications of Ramanashramam. These teachings are classified under the following headings:

1. God, Guru and Grace.
2. Heart. Here, the Maharshi advises us to become *ātmaniṣṭha* by entering into the heart with one pointed mind, either through self-enquiry or by diving within or by breath-control.
3. Knowledge and devotion.
4. Work and wisdom.
5. Mind and its three stages.

This small book goes a long way in helping the *sādhakas* on their march towards the supreme goal of knowing their true nature.

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SWAMI VIVEKANANDA PROPHECY AND PATHFINDER BY SWAMI JITATMANANDA. Published by Ramakrishna Sarada Kutir, Kothagudam-507101, AP 1984 Pp 116 Rs 5

Published on the eve of the International Year of the Youth (1985) this book is a virtual anodyne for those who are sullen or downcast or have lost contact with the inner core of their being. The youth of today feel restless, goalless and frustrated, and suffer from a number of psycho-physical problems. Technocratic education has not integrated their personalities, chiselled them into complete men or taught them to live in harmony with themselves or with others. They have grown into schizoid persons—passive, withdrawn, depressed and idiosyncratic. Some of them have taken to drugs as a result of intrapsychic conflicts, others have turned into masochists or plain sadists. Like the mythical Sisyphus they keep on rolling the 'stone' (of their efforts) towards the hill top (of fulfilment), only to see it slipping down to the vale of frustration.

The book under review portrays Swami Vivekananda as a saviour, a pathfinder and a prophet. "The more we read him, the more we realize that like great music, his message 'grows and deepens in us with its repetition'", says Swami Jitatmananda. Vivekananda's message personifies the Truth for this age, 'and society can afford to neglect it only at its own peril'. And again, 'He remains and will remain an eternal symbol of youth—youth in the fullness of divinity and perfection'.

In the course of his narrative, the author dilates upon a number of facets of Swami's life and character—the prophecy of Sri Ramakrishna about him, his personal magnetism which won him many admirers and disciples, his scientific exposition of the Vedanta, his successful *Wanderjahre* in the west, his concept of social change, his vision of India's future, and his ennobling efforts to shake off the complacency of his countrymen.

'The world is burning in misery. Can you sleep?', Swami once told Sister Nivedita. 'Be not an imitation of Jesus, but be Jesus', he exhorted. 'India will be raised not with the power of the flesh but with the power of the spirit'. Swami defined the lines of India's growth, 'the way for her great rejuvenation', stressed the divinity of human nature, and preached the gospel of renunciation and service.

This booklet is rich in content and style, and gives ample proof of the author's vast erudition

in several fields of latest scientific research which corroborate the Vedanta philosophy. It is written in a prophetic mood with great verve.

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THE BHAGAVAD GITA (with Sanskrit Text, English Translation and Commentary) TRANSLATED BY SWAMI GURUDASANANDA. Published by the Author, Sri Janaky Nilayam, 15, Ganapati Nagar, Thanjavur 613001 1983. Pages 1 to xiv + 219 Price Rs 16.

The Bhagavad Gita, the sacred book of the Hindus, long ago crossed the borders of Bharata and is now read all over the world. There are a number of English translations, and yet a new addition is welcome. More so when the translation is supplemented with a commentary by a religious man of high standing.

According to Swami Gurudasananda, this divine song contains the philosophy for this age and for all ages to come. It contains the quintessence of the age-old Indian metaphysical thought. It synthesizes the sparkling wisdom of Vedanta, the soothing faith and tender devotion of Theism and the spiritual discipline of yoga. The author believes that the study of Gita is an abundantly rewarding experience in itself. It broadens and deepens the mind, strengthens and chastens our understanding. It leads to a 'clarity of mind' and 'charity of heart'. This may lead to perfection and enlightenment.

The translation by the author is faithful. The comments are relevant and brief. The author has added a few words to make the translation a continuous stream.

The book is complete with a brief introduction, meditative slokas and the Gita Mahatmya. The index to slokas adds to the value of the book as a reference volume.

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DEVOTIONAL SONGS OF NARSI MEHTA. TRANSLATED BY SWAMI MAHADEVANAND. Published by Motilal Banarsidas, Bungalow Road, Delhi 110009 1985 Pp 146 Rs 80

This compilation and translation of Narsi Mehta's devotional songs is the first of its kind to appear in the English language, and I have much pleasure in offering a few comments on it. The translator has done a great service to non-

Gujarathi people who are interested in the devotional songs of Narsi Mehta. An Englishman by birth, Swami Mahadevanand has gained mastery over the Gujarathi language. The present work is the outcome of the author's sincere devotion and deep study of Narsi Mehta.

The translator himself has mentioned that his translation of the songs of Narsi is a literal one. Yet in many songs the translator transcends the bounds of literal translation and gains the height of a transcreator. (As for example page 126, stanzas 3,4,5, page 129, stanzas 2,3.) Since Narsi's padas happen to be rhyming verses, their cadence could have been better caught had the rendering been in English metrical composition. However, Swami Mahadevanand has succeeded in conveying the mood of the original. His language is as simple and lucid as the style is elegant and graceful. Khalil Gibran, the great poet, has rightly said, 'Translation is an art in itself; it is the recreative process of transforming the magic of one language into the magic of another'.

The introduction by Sivapriyanandaji is comprehensive and includes a biographical sketch of Narsi Mehta, illuminating discussions on

Bhakti movement in India, and Bhakti as a spiritual discipline.

Narsi Mehta, perhaps the greatest medieval poet of Gujarathi, has left us three complete autobiographical works: *Samalsa no vivah*, *Kunverbai nu mamernu* and *Har māla*. Besides these he has also given us *Sṅgar na pado*, *Sṅgar māla* and *Bhakti, Jñāna ane Vairagya na pado*. I would like to request the readers not to misunderstand Narsi's use of erotic symbolism, for the base of these songs is not morbid sex but *līlā*, the highest type of divine love. In the present book 100 songs are given—40 songs from *Sṅgār na pado*, 30 verses from *Sṅgār māla* and 30 philosophical devotional songs. Each song is prefaced with a short note giving its meaning and context. Attractive photoplates add to the beauty of this book. Wherever necessary the translator has also given footnotes. A Bibliography and Index are also included. The printing and get-up of the book are quite satisfactory.

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NEWS AND REPORTS

RAMAKRISHNA MISSION SEVA PRATISHTHAN, CALCUTTA

REPORT FOR APRIL 1983 TO MARCH 1984

Begun in 1932 as a small antenatal and postnatal clinic with domiciliary maternity service and known then as the Ramakrishna Mission Shishumangal Pratishtan, the Seva Pratishtan is now a mammoth complex serving the public through the following four wings.

General Hospital: The total number of beds in the hospital was 535 and it had the following departments: General Medicine, General Surgery, Obstetrics, Gynaecology, Paediatric Medicine, Paediatric Surgery, Orthopaedics, Urology, Ophthalmology, E.N.T. Surgery, Dentistry and Dermatology. It has also special clinics for Anaesthesiology, Heart, Diabetes, Neurology, Nephrology, Psychiatry, Hearing and Speech Therapy, Physiotherapy, Post-partum (Family Welfare), Club-Foot, Glaucoma, Immunization

and Well Baby. The special needs of the departments are met by the departments of Radiology and Radiotherapy, Blood Bank, Infusion production, Pathology, Biochemistry, Human Genetics. The Community Health Service Unit conducts clinics for both urban and rural patients.

All the departments are well equipped. Worth mentioning are the hospital's nine air-conditioned Operation Theatres, seven X-ray Plants, a Deep X-ray Unit, two Image Intensifiers, six Cardiac Monitors, two Dialysers, five E.C.G. Machines, four Temporary Pace Makers, one Defibrillator, four Baby Incubators, an Oxygen Tent, a Bird Mark 8 Respirator, a Cardioscope, an E.M.G. Machine, an E.E.G. Machine and two Zeiss Surgery Microscopes. It has also an electrically operated hospital laundry.

The total number of patients treated in the departments during the year was: indoor, 18,959 (excluding 5,584 live births); outdoor, 1,37,439 (new cases) and 2,07,285 (old cases).

The total number of operations conducted was: 8,662. In the outdoor all patients were given free consultation facilities and a large number of them also got free treatment. In the indoor departments free and partly free treatment was given to 21.7% and 18.99% of the cases respectively.

School of Nursing: The school has a capacity to train 300 students. An entrant to the General Nursing-Midwifery Course lasting three years and six months is required to be a higher secondary school graduate between 17 and 28 years of age. Each student is given a stipend. After a course of three months an examination is held and successful candidates take part in an impressive 'Seva-Vrata Initiation' (capping ceremony) at which they receive their nursing caps and take vows of lifelong dedicated service to the sick and the suffering. All the 34 and 32 students who appeared in the final examinations in 1983 and 1984, respectively, passed.

The Multipurpose Health Workers' course (revised Auxiliary Nursing Midwifery course) of 18 months duration requires candidates seeking admission to it to be in the age group of 17-25 and to have passed the Madhyamik or an equivalent examination. The procedure of selection is the same as in the general nursing course and each student is given a stipend. All the 26 and 39 students who appeared in the final examinations in May 1983 and November 1983 respectively, passed.

The total number of students in the School of Nursing in the year 1983-84 was 199.

Vivekananda Institute of Medical Sciences: This service-oriented institute is recognized by the university of Calcutta as a unit of the University College of Medicine for postgraduate training and research in medicine. It is recognized also by the Indian Council of Medical Research as a research centre and by the Medical Council of India for compulsory rotatory training of fresh medical graduates, for postgraduate degree courses and for housemanship training. The Institute has now been conducting diploma courses in Child Health (DCH), Gynaecology and Obstetrics (DGO), Ophthalmology (DO) and Oto-Rhino-Laryngology (DLO). During the year under review, twenty students were on the rolls—six for DCH, six for DGO, four for DO and four for DLO.

During 1983-84 eight doctors were doing

their dissertation for postgraduate degrees—one for MD in Gynaecology, three for MS in General Surgery, one for MD in Paediatrics, one for MD in General Medicine, one for MS in Ophthalmology, and one for MS in Orthopaedics. Moreover, senior doctors in various departments also conduct research in different branches of medical science and the results are published in the Institute's half-yearly journal.

Community Health Service: As a part of the nursing training course, an area near the Seva Pratishthan and another near Sarisha in the 24 Parganas district of West Bengal were selected for the training of nursing students. Besides collection of necessary data from these areas, the people there were given free immunization, hospital facilities and domiciliary treatment including antenatal and postnatal care to the new and expectant mothers, and regular health check-up of local school children.

The medical mobile unit attached to the Community Health Service covered 38 villages and 12 semi-urban areas with a population of 46,000 in its rounds twice a week providing free treatment to some 450 patients each day, bringing the critically ill to the main hospital when necessary. It served 99,352 patients during 1983-84.

Present needs: To meet the increasing demands of the public and to render more efficient service to the patients the institution has undertaken the following essential development projects: (1) a multistoreyed building for Vivekananda Institute of Medical Sciences; (2) a Paediatric hospital with 150 beds; an emergency-ward of 20 beds; a post-operative ward of 10 beds; a psychiatric ward of 15 beds; a Plastic Surgery-cum-Burn Unit of 15 beds; a Physiotherapy department; and a building for the School of Nursing with a playground and staff quarters; (3) Endowment for the maintenance of a bed for the whole year Rs. 2,00,000; for six months: Rs. 1,00,000 and for three months: Rs. 50,000. Anyone may create an endowment for a bed in his or her name by contributing the above amount.

The generous public are requested to donate liberally to help the institution meet the above needs. Donations, which are exempt from Income Tax, may be sent as money orders, a/c payee cheques or bank drafts in the name of 'Ramakrishna Mission Sevapratishthan' to the Secretary at 99, Sarat Bose Road, Calcutta 700 026.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Women and Environment

It is generally believed that the majority of Indian women spend most of their time in household chores like cooking, sweeping, washing. This is not quite a correct picture, for large numbers of women in rural areas spend much time outdoors either in different kinds of agricultural work or gathering some of the essential things of life. In a thought-provoking article published in the *News Letter* (April-September, 1985) Dr. Anil Agarwal, Director, Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi, argues that women are more involved than men in the environment.

There is a growing conflict in India between two sectors of the country's economy: the modern sector with its cash economy and the traditional sector with its non-monetized, biomass-based subsistence economy. According to Dr. Agarwal cash economy is monopolized by men whereas women depend heavily on non-monetized economy. Men are interested in getting cash, and it is not uncommon to find men even in remote villages spending money in a care-free manner on radio, wrist-watch, foppish dress, cigarette and alcohol (which have all become status symbols) leaving women to manage the household as best they can. Male migration from villages to cities has put additional burden upon rural women.

The destruction of environment poses a big threat to all marginal cultures but its maximum impact is on women. In the culturally conditioned division of labour within the family the collection of household needs like fuel, fodder and water is left entirely to women. As the environment degrades, women have to spend more time in foraging for these necessities, which is of course in addition to the unavoidable domestic work, looking after children, agricultural work and caring for animals. Though statistical data are meagre, it is known in several parts of India, especially in the Himalayan regions, women—young, old or pregnant—work 14 to 16 hours every day.

The trend towards commercialization of firewood has been so rapid in the last fifteen years that it is now rare to find poor homes using firewood in the form of logs. Firewood is no longer a fuel of the poor but of the relatively rich. The poor now subsist on inferior sources of biomass fuel like crop wastes, weeds, twigs, cowdung etc. In a state like Kerala where every home owns at least a few coconut trees the work burden on women is much less. But in other parts of the country, especially in semi-arid and hilly tracts, women have to spend as much as 6 hours or more every day in collecting fuel and fodder. A study of three villages in the Kumaon region of Uttar Pradesh shows that the ratio of human energy spent in collecting fuel and fodder is already 2.5 times more than the energy spent on agriculture.

Women also constitute the most undernourished section of Indian society. Many women do not get even the minimum calories necessary to carry on their back-breaking labour. A study by the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad shows that men who seek treatment at primary health centres are five times more than women. Most women don't have the time to visit a health centre, and go there only when their children fall ill.

Though it is difficult to bring about sweeping socio-economic changes in a vast country like India, at least suitable development strategies can be evolved to mitigate the hardship of women caused by the depletion of environmental resources.
