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APRIL 1986

Prabuddha Bharata

OR

AWAKENED INDIA



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

ADVAITA ASHRAMA
MAYAVATI, HIMALAYAS



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Prabuddha Bharata

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RAMAKRISHNA ORDER

APRIL 1986

CONTENTS

Integral Vision of Vedic Seers	165
About this Issue	166
Ramayana and Indian Ethos —(Editorial)	166
Inaugural Address at the Youth Convention 1985, Belur Math —Swami Gambhirananda	173
Welcome Address at the Youth Convention 1985, Belur Math —Swami Hiranmayananda	175
The Youth Convention at Belur Math —Sanjoy Mukherji	182
A New Altar for the Modern Youth —Simanta Mohanti	190
The Second Chapter of the Gita —Swami Sridharananda	195
Reviews and Notices	200
News and Reports	202
Notes and Comments	204



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No. 4

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

INTEGRAL VISION OF VEDIC SEERS*

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

शान्ता द्यौः शान्ता पृथिवी
शान्तमिदमुर्वन्तरिक्षम् ।
शान्ता उदन्वतीरापः
शान्ता नः सन्त्वोषधीः ॥

May the sky be peaceful, may the earth be peaceful, may the vast atmosphere be peaceful, may the running waters be peaceful, may the plants be peaceful.

Atharva Veda 19.9.1

शान्तानि पूर्वरूपाणि
शान्तं नो अस्तु कृताकृतम् ।
शान्तं भूतं च भव्यं च
सर्वमेव शमस्तु नः ॥

May the *samskaras* (latent impressions) of my past life be peaceful. May whatever has been done or not done¹ be peaceful to us. May my past life and future life be peaceful. May everything be peaceful to us.

Atharva Veda 19.9.2

इयं या परमेष्ठिनी वाग्देवी ब्रह्मसंशिता ।
ययैव ससृजे षोरं तगैव शान्तिरस्तु नः ॥

May that supreme goddess Vāk (the Word or Speech), who is inspired by Brahman² and whose misuse produces terrible reactions,³ be peaceful towards us.

Atharva Veda 19.9.3

* One of the most comprehensive *Śāntimantras* (peace chants) from the Atharva Veda is given here. What is peace? Sāyaṇa's definition of peace is: 'The feeling of happiness which comes from the riddance of undesirable factors.' (*anistaparihārena sukhakārirūpatā*).

1. Sāyaṇa quotes an ancient verse: 'By not doing what is ordained, by doing what is

prohibited, and by not controlling the sense organs man undergoes a fall.' (*Vihitasya-ananusthānāt, ninditasya ca sevanāt, anigrahāt ca indriyānām narah patanam ṛcchati.*)

2. *Brahma-samsita* refers to the inseparable relation between Brahman and *Śabda-brahman*, between consciousness and language.

3. A well-known fact.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This month's EDITORIAL shows the influence of the *Rāmāyaṇa* on the development of several aspects of the Indian ethos.

In the INAUGURAL ADDRESS AT THE YOUTH CONVENTION 1985, BELUR MATH, Srimat Swami Gambhiranandaji Maharaj, has placed before the youth all the essential ideals necessary for their development.

The WELCOME ADDRESS AT THE YOUTH CONVENTION 1985, BELUR MATH, by Swami Hiranmayanandaji Maharaj is a stirring call to the youth of India to take up Swami Vivekananda's work in right earnest.

Sanjoy Mukherji, a final year B. Com. student from Barasat, West Bengal, who

was a delegate to the YOUTH CONVENTION AT BELUR MATH, gives an appreciative account of the day-to-day proceedings of the Convention.

In A NEW ALTAR FOR THE MODERN YOUTH Simanta Mohanti, another delegate from Orissa, who is now a first year M.A. (Political Science) student at the Hyderabad Central University, gives his impressions of the Youth Convention.

Swami Sridharanandaji continues his lucid commentary on the SECOND CHAPTER OF THE GITA transcribed from his tape-recorded talks at the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Lucknow.

RAMAYANA AND INDIAN ETHOS

(EDITORIAL)

The power of virtue

Hanumān who had been sent by the monkey king Sugrīva as a scout to find out the whereabouts of Sītā, reached Laṅka. After searching in vain in the inner apartments of Rāvaṇa, he came to the beautiful Aśoka Park in the small hours. Jumping to a large tree, he sat on one of its branches and looked all round. In the dim moonlight he saw below, on the golden platform around the tree, a divinely beautiful woman sitting pensively. It was Sītā. What was her condition? Vālmīki sums it up in one telling phrase: *rakṣitām svena śīlena*, 'Protected by her own virtue.'¹

Disconsolate and friendless, Sītā sat

alone in that park surrounded by fierce ogresses, far away from the protecting arms of her beloved Lord Śrī Rāma. Yet she was perfectly safe from the evil intentions of the demoniacal king Rāvaṇa who had abducted her. Rāvaṇa already had a harem full of women, many of whom he had similarly abducted. He was the most powerful and prosperous king in that part of the globe. Yet, he could not force his demands upon Sītā. He entreated and threatened her and did everything in his power to win her over, but he never dared try to molest her. Every time he went to see her he had to retreat in humiliation. She appeared as if protected by a wall of fire around her. Sītā boldly faced the tyrant, rebuked him for his wickedness, and admonished him to mend his ways. She had the courage to do all this because

1. रक्षितां स्वेन शीलेन सीतामसितलोचनाम् ।

Vālmīki, *Rāmāyaṇa*, Sundara Kāṇḍa, 17.28

she knew she was well protected by her own virtue—*rakṣitām svena śīlena*.

It may not be an exaggeration to say that the central message of Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* is contained in the above phrase. What protects a person under all circumstances is his *śīla*, virtue. People tend to depend upon physical prowess, wealth, friends or their own cleverness, but situations often arise in life in which none of these is of any help. In such circumstances virtue alone protects a person. Virtue never fails.

What is virtue? In the Judeo-Christian tradition virtue is to obey God's commandments. In the Indian tradition virtue is to live in accordance with the laws of the universal moral order known as Dharma. Right from very early times it has been observed that there is a close connection between a person's conduct and his outer circumstances, that is, between psychological factors and material factors. It is this correlation that is known as the law of Karma. This shows that there is one cosmic order governing both physical and mental universes. The common, universal psycho-physical order was known in Vedic times as *ṛta* and, in later periods, as Dharma.

The microcosm and the macrocosm are built on the same plan.² When an individual attunes his life to the universal order of Dharma, he comes under the protection of Dharma. This belief is an important point in Indian (Hindu, Buddhist and Jain) ethos. In the codes of the ancient Hindu law-giver Manu it finds expression through the dictum, 'Dharma destroys the person who violates it and protects the person who honours it'.³

2. A clear exposition of this point is found in Swami Vivekananda's lectures on *Jnana Yoga*.

3. धर्म एव हतो हन्ति धर्मो रक्षति रक्षितः ।

Manu-Smṛti 8.15

Every person exerts a positive or negative influence on those people with whom he lives or works. It is not difficult to see how our actions affect other people and produce various reactions, good or bad, in them. Less obvious, but equally certain, is the influence our mental life exerts on the minds of others. All minds are parts of the Cosmic mind, and our thoughts, attitudes and motives are constantly shaping the attitudes and ways of behaviour of other people towards us. When we complain of the humiliating treatment of the boss, selfishness of relatives, antagonism of colleagues, eve-teasing, etc. we forget that in most of these instances it is our own wrong approach that has invited the wrong reactions of other people. There is no denying the fact that there are in this world plenty of bad people, even diabolical people hell-bent on harming or giving sorrow to others. This does not, however, mean that such people will always be against us. And if some of them do turn against us once in a while our own inherent virtue is capable of protecting us. Nay more; virtue has such a power that it can even transform those wicked people. This is the lesson that Sītā Devī's life at the Aśoka Park teaches us.

The belief in the power of morality was in ancient India a part of its social and religious traditions. Women especially were believed to acquire great psychic powers simply by the strict observance of chastity which itself was regarded as *tapas*, austerity, for women. Hindu epics and mythologies contain stories of women who accomplished extraordinary feats by exercising this power of chastity. Damayantī burnt to ashes the hunter who tried to molest her; Sāvitrī could follow and confront the King of Death who had taken away the soul of her husband; Anasūyā, wife of the sage Atri, changed the great gods Brahma, Viṣṇu and Śiva into babies,

Sītā herself tells Rāvaṇa: 'I have so much power (*tejas*) in me that I can reduce you to ashes. But I refrain from doing so because I want to preserve this *tapas* of mine, and also because I have not received an order from Rāma (to defend myself in this way)'.⁴

There may be exaggeration in these stories but they emphasize the power of virtue. There are many people who claim to be virtuous but have no faith in the power of virtue to overcome evil. They blame Dharma for all their misfortunes, sufferings, failures and disappointments. It is not uncommon to hear statements such as: 'I am good, so everybody is trying to exploit me', 'I work selflessly, so I am given more work', 'I am honest, so my corrupt colleagues want to eliminate me', 'I speak plain truth, so people don't like me', 'I am humble, so people are bossing over me', 'I don't flatter my boss, so I am not getting promotion', and so on. These statements often appear to be true, but unbiased investigation is likely to reveal the truth that, barring a few exceptions, most of these instances of injustice, ill-treatment, failure and suffering have been caused not by the victims' alleged goodness or purity but by their own inherent weaknesses, ignorance, stupidity or hidden evil tendencies.

Strength and forgiveness

It is not enough to be virtuous, but virtue must be combined with strength, wisdom and love. To be good and to be weak is to be miserable. One notable feature of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is that none of the characters in it, with the possible exception of the uxorious king Daśaratha,

is weak. Everyone tries to make the best of the situation he is in. Sītā Devī did not lose her presence of mind when she was kidnapped by Rāvaṇa. While travelling through air she noticed a group of 'monkeys' on the top of a hill and, tearing off a piece of her clothes, she made a bundle of some of her ornaments and dropped the bundle for those 'monkeys' to pick up. Later on, from these ornaments Rāma got vital clues to her whereabouts.

Virtue, when not combined with wisdom and strength, leads to failures in life. Failure leads to frustration, and this produces resentment which in virtuous people gets repressed and operates beneath their surface consciousness. Many so-called virtuous people harbour deep feelings of hostility towards their colleagues or relatives or towards life as a whole. This is clear from the fact that they are unable to forgive those who have done them wrong. Here again Sītā Devī has set an example. After Rāvaṇa was slain and the battle was over Hanumān went, at the behest of Rāma, to the Aśoka Park to break the happy news to Sītā. After telling her about Rāma's victory, Hanumān looked at those Rākṣasīs who had tortured Sītā till then, and sought her permission to kill them. It was justice that he sought and those cruel women deserved it. But Sītā told him gently and firmly: 'There is none who has not erred (*na kaścit na aparādhyati*)'. She pointed out, 'A noble-hearted person should treat all with compassion.'⁵ People often show compassion out of attachment or fear or some other weakness. Sītā Devī's compassion was based on both strength and wisdom.

Millenniums later these words of Sītā were echoed by another great woman, Śrī Sārādā Devi, who closely resembled her.

4. असन्देशात्तु रामस्य तपसश्चानुपालनात् ।

न त्वां कुर्मि दशग्रीव भस्म भस्मार्हतेजसा ॥

Vālmiki, *Rāmāyaṇa*, Sundara Kāṇḍa, 22.20

5. कार्यं कर्णम् आर्येण न कश्चिन्नापराध्यति ।

ibid, Yuddha Kāṇḍa, 116.45

The Holy Mother once remarked: 'Can a person who has no compassion be regarded as a human being? He is a veritable beast. Sometimes I forget myself in compassion. Then I do not remember who I am.'⁶

Dharma

The whole universe is governed by a moral order known as Dharma, and the main current of universal life is virtue. Evil and suffering are only the eddies, waves and tidal waves that appear on this main stream; they do not last long and are swept away by the force of Dharma. A wicked man like Rāvaṇa or Hitler may succeed in upsetting the moral equilibrium of the world, but very soon Dharma reestablishes itself by its own power.

In the Indian tradition morality has never been regarded as a rigid set of commandments to be followed for fear of divine wrath. Rather, it has been understood as the attunement of an individual's life to the universal order of Dharma. Since human nature is diverse and society is based on division of labour, there are several ways of attuning oneself to Dharma depending upon one's station in life and maturity. This was the understanding that gave rise to the institution of four castes and four *āśramas* (stages in life).

In order to attune oneself to Dharma one should know what Dharma is. What is the source of Dharma? Where can we learn about true Dharma? The ancient law-giver Manu accepts four sources as authoritative: the Vedas, the tradition of Smṛtis, the conduct of virtuous men and

the satisfaction of one's own conscience.⁷ Another law-giver, Vasiṣṭha, says: 'Dharma is that which is in accord with the Vedas and the Smṛtis. Regarding matters not discussed in these scriptures, we have to accept the conduct of virtuous people.'⁸ In the *Mahābhārata* Yudhiṣṭhira is asked, 'What is the way?', and the King answers, 'True path is that which was followed by great men.'⁹

These authoritative statements make it clear that the only safe and practical way of leading a moral life is to observe the conduct of virtuous people and follow it in one's own life. This raises the question, 'Who is a virtuous man?' The answer given by the law-givers is, 'A virtuous man is one who is completely selfless.'¹⁰

In the Indian tradition no man has been regarded as more virtuous than Śrī Rāma, none more accepted as such, none more adored by millions of people for his uncompromising adherence to Dharma, than Śrī Rāma. And what was the guiding principle of Rāma's life? What was the message that Rāma taught through his life? Selflessness. He was India's first and greatest Karma Yogi. Centuries before Buddha was born there walked on this part of the globe an extraordinarily virtuous man carrying a bow and demonstrating through his life how to discharge one's duties of life in a spirit of selflessness and

7. वेदोऽखिलो धर्ममूलं स्मृतिशीले च तद्विदाम् ।
आचारश्चैव साधूनाम् आत्मनस्तुष्टिरेव च ॥

Manu-smṛti 2.6

8. श्रुतिस्मृतिविहितो धर्मः । तदलाभे शिष्टाचारः
प्रमाणम् ।

Vasistha Dharma Sūtra 1.4.6

9. महाजनो येन गतः स पन्थाः ।

Mahābhārata, Vanaparvan 313.117

10. शिष्टः पुनरकामात्मा ।

Vasistha Dharma Sūtra

6. *Śrī Śrī Māyer Kathā* (Bengali) (Calcutta: Udbodhan, 1380 B.S.) Vol. 2, p. 12

non-attachment. Like Buddha, Rāma too renounced his wife and kingdom. But whereas Buddha renounced them for his own sake, Rāma did that for the sake of other people.

Selfless work

Śrī Rāma was a fully liberated Karma Yogi, and it is in the light of this understanding that his actions are to be judged, and not by the standards of those people who are the slaves of lust and greed. He was utterly free from worldly desires, and yet he worked unceasingly for the welfare of other people. For the sake of truth, in order to fulfil his father's promise, he went into exile for fourteen years, and none could dissuade him from doing that. But when the stipulated period of exile was over, he returned and ruled the country so well and wisely that the memory of those golden years still haunts the minds of 20th-century Indians as the utopian ideal of 'Rāma-rājya'. Even during those fourteen years, when he lived almost like a tribal in the forest, he zealously discharged the duties of a Kṣatriya by protecting the sages and hermits from the depredations of Rākṣasas. When Sītā remonstrated with him against this, he brushed aside her objections.¹¹ It was with the attitude of non-attachment and selflessness that he fought and killed Rāvaṇa and rescued Sītā, as he himself makes it clear to Sītā.¹² Even the heart-rending episode of the banishment of Sītā becomes meaningful when understood in the proper light.

Swami Vivekananda said that selfless work itself should be regarded as *tapas*, austerity. Śrī Rāma's entire life was one long performance of *tapas*, unrelieved by

worldly enjoyments and selfish pursuits. It was a *mahā-yajña*, a great sacrifice, in which wealth, pleasure, fame, power and even love were offered as oblations for the welfare of the people.

If there is anything else in Rāmāyaṇa which matches Rāma's *tapas* of selflessness, it is Sītā's *tapas* of one-pointed devotion to her husband. On the bedrock of marital fidelity alone can stable family life and enduring social relationships be built up. Chastity and spirituality go hand in hand and, as Swami Vivekananda pointed out, cultures which do not value chastity are incapable of producing spiritual giants. The blazing ideal of absolute *pātivratya* set by Sītā Devi has guided the lives of Indian women for several centuries and has contributed in no small measure to the continuing vitality of this nation's culture.

Brotherly love and family solidarity

According to a story, probably apocryphal, current in some parts of India, the famous emperor of medieval India, Vikramāditya, wanted to know the most important verse in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and, not finding any of the verses suggested by the court pandits satisfactory, told his chief minister to solve the problem or face dismissal from office. The minister went into a forest and there it was revealed to him in a miraculous way that the most important verse in the whole of *Rāmāyaṇa* was Sumitrā's parting advice to Lakṣmaṇa. Sumitrā, the third wife of Daśaratha, keeps a low profile in *Rāmāyaṇa* but she is unquestionably the wisest, and the most sober and humble of the women characters depicted by Vālmīki. She had two sons: Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna. The former became a devoted follower of Rāma, and the latter an equally devoted attendant of Bharata. Sumitrā was happy and contented at the humble life of service chosen by her sons. When the time came

11. Cf. *Rāmāyaṇa*, Aranya Kāṇḍa, 9.24. ff.

12. Cf. *Rāmāyaṇa*, Yuddha Kāṇḍa, 118.2 ff.

for Lakṣmaṇa to leave Ayodhya and accompany Rāma and Sītā to the forest, he saluted his mother and sought her blessings. Sumitrā knew that her beloved son was going on voluntary self-exile to face the hardships and risks of fourteen long years. Yet not a sigh of agony escaped her, not a word suggestive of personal attachment, not a hint at a son's obligation to his mother. Instead, she gave him a simple advice, the most beautiful advice ever given by a mother to her son: 'Look upon Rāma as your father, Sītā as your mother, and the forest as your homeland. Go, my son, with joy in your heart'.¹³

It is doubtful whether in the whole range of Indian literature there occurs any other passage with greater sociological significance than these two lines. They contain some of the central values and ideals of Indian ethos. This advice of Sumitrā did not remain merely as a sermon. Vālmīki shows how Lakṣmaṇa carried out his mother's advice to perfection. Giving up sleep and comforts, he served Rāma and Sītā with undivided attention and devotion as Sītā herself testifies to Hanuman.¹⁴ When the 'monkeys' brought the ornaments that Sītā had dropped from the sky, Rāma asked Lakṣmaṇa to see whether he could identify them. After examining the jewelry, Lakṣmaṇa said, 'I do not know what she wore on her arms or ears, but I can easily recognize her anklets as I had seen them while worshipping her feet every day.'¹⁵

13. रामं दशरथं विद्धि मां दिद्धि जनकात्मजाम् ।

अयोध्यामटदीं विद्धि गच्छ तात यथासुखम् ॥

Rāmāyaṇa, Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa, 40.9

14. Cf. *Rāmāyaṇa*, Sundara Kāṇḍa, 38.60

15. नाहं जानामि केयूरे नाहं जानामि कुण्डले ।

नूपुरे त्वभिजानामि नित्यं पादाभिवन्दनात् ॥

Kiṣkindha Kāṇḍa, 6.22

To love and obey one's elder brother, to treat one's sister-in-law with filial respect—these attitudes have been so deeply impressed upon the collective unconscious of the people of this country by the example of Lakṣmaṇa that every Indian introjects them in childhood without the aid of a padre's sermons. If mutual trust and love among brothers has for centuries remained a characteristic feature of social life in India, it is not a little due to the influence exerted by the lives of Śrī Rāma and his brothers. To appreciate the uniqueness of this aspect of Indian culture it is necessary to study the myths and legends of other cultures. It should be remembered that the Old Testament opens with Adam's disobedience to his Creator (his 'Father') and Cain's murder of his younger brother Abel (both children of Adam and Eve). When stories of this kind are dinned into the ears of children, generation after generation, its cumulative effect on a race or people cannot be salutary. The contrast that *Rāmāyaṇa* provides is striking. Rāma could have easily avoided the exile and occupied the throne simply by ignoring his father's promise to his step-mother, but he didn't do it. Even when his brother Bharata, who had been declared the crown prince, offered the kingdom to him, Rāma refused to accept it. Did that make Bharata occupy the throne? What he did was to install the sandals of Rāma on the throne and look after the affairs of the State as Rāma's regent. After the stipulated period of fourteen years when Rāma decided to return to Ayodhya, he sent Hanumān in advance to inform Bharata about his coming and to report back to him Bharata's reactions. If Bharata showed the slightest sign of reluctance to give back the kingdom, Rāma would not occupy the throne. Each brother thought of the welfare of his brothers before thinking of his own.

Rāmāyaṇa as a living force

For the people of India *Rāmāyaṇa* is not a mere epic as Homer's works are to the people of the West. It is a living force still shaping the cultural life of Indians. *Rāmāyaṇa* for them is not merely a record of the past but also a promise of the future. Even now there are people who hope to live for ever in 'Rāma-rājya', if not in this world, at least in the higher worlds. Rāma, Sītā, Hanumān, Lakṣmaṇa and the other brothers are not mythological characters but living realities moulding the spiritual and temporal lives of millions of people. The socio-political consciousness of Indian masses is derived not from the theories of Rousseau and Marx but from the way moral issues are dealt with in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. The common people in this country do not judge their political leaders by comparing them with the leaders of Russia or America. In the lives of Rāma and Bharata, Bhīṣma and Yudhiṣṭhira the common people have a wholly indigenous standard of judging political leadership and administration.

To judge the culture or people of India solely on the basis of the Upaniṣads or books on yoga will be a serious mistake. Vedantic scriptures and the laws of Manu influence the lives of only a very, very small number of people in India. Almost all the moral and spiritual ideas of the vast majority of people in India are derived

from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. Without a critical study of these works it is impossible to understand the real India. In this context it is worth citing the observation made by Lin Yutang, the well-known modern Chinese scholar and thinker who was a Protestant Christian by faith. In his book *The Wisdom of India* he wrote:

My love and true respect for India were born when I first read the Indian epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, in the present (R. C. Dutt's) translation in my college days. In these two masterpieces we are brought closer to the atmosphere, ideals and customs of ancient Hindu life than by a hundred volumes of commentary on the Upanishads, and through them Hindu ideals as well as Hindu men and women become real to us.

When Vālmīki was about to compose the epic, the god Brahma appeared before him and, after blessing his venture, made this prediction: 'As long as mountains stand and rivers flow on the earth, so long will the story of *Rāmāyaṇa* remain a living force'.¹⁶ Three thousand years of socio-political changes in India have not falsified this prediction, nor is the present nuclear age likely to do so. As long as Indian culture endures, Ramayana too will endure—or, perhaps, it may be the other way round.

16. यावत् स्थास्यन्ति गिरयस्सरितश्च महीतले ।
तावद् रामायणकथा लोकेषु प्रचरिष्यति ॥

Bālakāṇḍa, 2.36-37

Truth, purity and unselfishness — wherever these are present, there is no power below or above the sun to crush the possessor thereof. Equipped with these, one individual is able to face the whole universe in opposition.

—Swami Vivekananda

INAUGURAL ADDRESS AT THE YOUTH CONVENTION 1985, BELUR MATH

SWAMI GAMBHIRANANDA*

My young sisters and brothers,

You sit on holy ground where the whole atmosphere is surcharged with spirituality. On your left stands the big, beautiful and tall temple of Sri Ramakrishna enshrining his marvellous image and sacred relics. On your right flows down Mother Ganga, with the temples of the Holy Mother, Swamiji and Swami Brahmananda on her banks, together with the last resting place of seven of the great saints who came with Sri Ramakrishna. And in front stands the monastery erected by them under Swamiji's leadership. They and other direct Sannyasin disciples of the Master lived here and walked on these grounds. There is also in front of you the room of Swamiji where he entered into Mahāsamādhi. The whole place is vibrant with spiritual life.

But this is not all. As you enter the Ramakrishna Mission Road from the Grand Trunk Road, you find on your left an educational complex comprising a Polytechnic, a Mechanical Section, the Tattvamandira and the Vidyamandira. And then as you enter the main gate of Belur Math, on your right stands the Ramakrishna Mission Charitable Dispensary, and further south the B. Ed. College and Hostel, as also the Janashiksha Mandira and some other smaller educational institutions. In front of the main temple stand some buildings housing the Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, with several sections dealing with correspondence, accounts,

relief work, welfare work, rural work etc. So you are in the midst of dynamic spirituality, where spiritual life is combined with secular activity based on holiness.

The motto of these twin Organizations, selected by Swamiji, is, *Ātmano mokṣārtham jagaddhitāya ca*, 'For one's own Liberation and for the good of the world.' The last phrase, 'for the good of the World', must be understood in the sense in which Sri Ramakrishna interpreted it. You know that when he was one day talking about compassion, he stopped suddenly and said, 'How can you be compassionate? It is God alone who can be so. You can only serve the *jīvas*, creatures, as Śiva'. This gave a new dimension to our idea of Karma-yoga, which is not mere social service, but a spiritual discipline undertaken for the purification of the mind, and consists in doing good to others as a dedication to God, without any idea of egoism. Sri Ramakrishna took this idea a step further, and moved it away from its dualistic basis to a non-dualistic foundation. God is not separate from the benefactor or the beneficiary, and one has not to offer the results of his work to God. On the other hand, in the idea of service enunciated by Sri Ramakrishna one's work itself becomes worship. No selfish result accrues from this work, except spiritual progress. One is not to expect any 'thanks' from the beneficiary, but is to be thankful to him for offering one an opportunity for serving him for one's own benefit. Once Sri Ramakrishna asked Krishnadas Pal, a political leader of those days, 'What is the aim of your life?' The gentleman replied, 'Doing good to the world!' Sri Ramakrishna asked him in wonder, 'Doing good

* President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math.

to the world? How big do you think the world is, and what good can a puny man like you do? No, no, you can only serve others!' That is the idea which inspired Swamiji, the harbinger of Indian Renaissance to build up this Organization, thereby bridging the gulf between the sacred and the secular, so that spirituality became combined with social dynamism.

And this gives the lie to the sinister propaganda that religion makes a man passive. If that were so, how have the followers of Ramakrishna built up these twin institutions? And they are still spreading all over the world. You have open minds and can see things for yourselves. Even in the West, where this false idea was first propagated, you know that only the other day Poland invited the Pope to see for himself that religion was not being suppressed in that country, and Russia and China now grant freedom of worship to their citizens. The prosperous Western countries like America, England, Germany and France did not become so by rejecting religion. Those among you who are students of history know that India was not lagging behind any other country as it is at present, but rather it was at the forefront of civilization—not by rejecting religion but by holding on to it. This was so during the Aryan, Buddhist, the Gupta, the Chola and Chalukya periods. And Shivaji freed the Western parts of India with the *gerua* flag of Ramdas flying over his armies. No, my sisters and brothers, do not be misled by designing people, but look at things with open eyes and move forward with the belief that you are not treading a wrong path.

You are young, who have open minds and can actualize the high ideals being propagated by the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. Swamiji has demonstrated that ideals can be actualized, and they are meant to be so. I remember

an incident in Ranchi where we used to read the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* in the evening and have some discussion after the reading. One day, three old men joined us, and when the reading and discussion were over, one of them asked, 'So, these are all ideals! Are they not so?' I replied, 'Yes' in short, and they left. It struck me that by *ideals* they meant something to be kept hanging in the air, and not actualized in life. But the message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji were not meant as idle ideals, but ideals that had to be put into actual practice. And for this they depended mainly on young people. Sri Ramakrishna chose Narendranath and other young men for the propagation and actualization of his ideas. Swamiji also called upon the youth of India to take up his banner for their personal good, for the good of India, and for the good of humanity as a whole. I hope you will all fulfil the task set before you by him.

And what is this task in concrete terms? Before any politician thought about the masses and the women, Swamiji declared that India could not forge ahead so long as the masses and the women were not uplifted. And this had to be done through education and freedom of choice, without disturbing their inherent religious tendencies. For Swamiji real religion consisted in reliance on the Self or Brahman, the Cosmic Reality. For one's own good and advancement one should not depend too much on others, but believe that within oneself lives the Self or Brahman which is a storehouse of infinite energy and possibility. Swamiji himself was intensely spiritual, and yet dynamism personified. He has left his impression on various fields of activity, not by shunning religion but just by being religious. So, one of the tasks to be undertaken by you is the uplift of the masses and the women through education, without injuring their *dharma*.

This education, again, must not be merely theoretical, but should be able to bring social and economic peace and development. Swamiji said, 'I do not believe in a religion that cannot wipe the tears of a widow !' Then there are a lot of prejudices and wrongful practices like untouchability, casteism, etc. which must be uprooted, not through any revolution but through an evolutionary process. Swamiji remarked that while other reformers work on the surface and achieve superficial results, he himself was 'a root and branch reformer'. And that kind of reform comes from a deeper outlook on life as a whole which comprises both secular and spiritual improvement. Swamiji was angry at persons who in the name of religion would

stand in the way of the people's economic upliftment. He went to the extent of declaring, 'You will be nearer to heaven through football than through the study of the Gita'. You have to build up your bodies and minds strongly on a basis of dynamic spirituality. He wanted 'muscles of iron and nerves of steel, gigantic wills which nothing can resist'.

I conclude my short speech with a few lines from a Bengali song of Tagore, translated into English:

O Conquering Hero!
At the dawn of a new life
You have in your hand the sword of new hope.

Demolish doubts;
Let victory be yours,
Let victory be yours.

WELCOME ADDRESS AT THE YOUTH CONVENTION 1985, BELUR MATH

SWAMI HIRANMAYANANDA*

Revered President Swami Gambhiranandaji Maharaj, Revered elder Swamijis, brother monks, my young friends, and devotees and admirers of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to this Youth Convention, to the most sacred of our places of pilgrimage, where Swami Vivekananda installed Sri Ramakrishna and where he is ever present. Sri Ramakrishna had told Swamiji that he would be always there wherever he would install him, and this is the hallowed place where Swamiji installed Sri Ramakrishna's relics, and later a temple was built to house Sri Ramakrishna, the prophet of harmony,

and a marble statue was installed. Sri Ramakrishna is ever present and, as Swamiji has said, 'The Lord has not yet given up the Ramakrishna Form. Some see Him in that Form even now and receive instructions from Him, and all can see Him if they so desire.'

We have assembled here to discuss mainly the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda. But this cannot be done without considering the formative influences on Swami Vivekananda's life. These, according to Sister Nivedita, are three in number: (1) His intensive study of the Śāstras as well as his vast knowledge of Western Philosophy. (2) In his Guru Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Vivekananda found the key to life. (3) He walked through the length and breadth of India,

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from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin, mixing with saints and scholars and simple souls alike, learning from all, teaching all, and living with all, seeing India as she was, and so grasping in its comprehensiveness that vast whole, of which his Master's life and personality had been a brief and intense epitome.

Thus Sister Nivedita concludes:

These, then—the Sastras, the Guru, and the Motherland—are the three notes that mingle themselves to form the music of the works of Vivekananda. These are the treasures which it is his to offer. These furnish him with the ingredients whereof he compounds the world's heal-all of his spiritual bounty. These are the three lights burning within that single lamp which India by his hand lighted and set up, for the guidance of her own children and of the world, in the few years of work between September 19, 1893 and July 4, 1902.

So in order to understand Swami Vivekananda's life and teachings it is absolutely necessary to understand the formative influences of Sri Ramakrishna on Swamiji.

It is absolutely clear that the idea of incarnation or prophet which is extant in whole humanity appeared in human form as Sri Ramakrishna and the medium through which he worked was a great Rṣi who was born as Swami Vivekananda. Sri Ramakrishna had written down on a piece of paper, 'Naren will teach; when he will be at a distant place, he will shout forth', and that is what actually happened at the Parliament at Chicago when the lion of Vedanta roared and gave a new message to the whole world, a message he had learnt from his great Master. The message in brief was: (1) the scientific approach to religion which in every other religion is generally based on books and dogmas only; (2) the message of harmony of religions and also about other conflicting problems that face the world; (3) the message of practical Advaitism.

Sister Nivedita in one place has written,

Often it appears to me, in studying all these lives, that there has been with us a soul named Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, and that, in the penumbra of his being, appear many forms, some of which are with us still, and of none of whom it could be said with entire truth that here ends, in relation to him, the sphere of those others, or that there begins his own.

In the above quotation 'certain souls' refers to the brother disciples of Swamiji who carried out Swami Vivekananda's message and built up and nurtured the infant Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, which was left behind by Swami Vivekananda.

Now we should refer to another personality who is one of the Trinity of Ramakrishna Organization. That is Sri Sarada Devi. She had long been kept hidden till 1953-54, that is the birth centenary of hers. She is really the woman counterpart of Sri Ramakrishna. Without her, who is one with Sri Ramakrishna, the picture will not be complete. Very truly, she has been referred to in Bengali as *Kṣamārūpiṇī tapasvinī*—an ascetic lady who was Forgiveness Incarnate.

We shall now take up the discussion of Swami Vivekananda's life and teachings. Before his death Swami Vivekananda had uttered a very significant sentence and that was,

It may be that I shall find it good to get outside of my body—to cast it off like a disused garment. But I shall not cease to work! I shall inspire men everywhere, until the world shall know that it is one with God.

Swamiji further had said that his ideas would continue for 1,500 years and we are just 83 years away from Swamiji. It took 300 years from Buddha to Ashoka to see the development of Buddhism. It took 300 years from Christ to Constantine for the spread of Christianity. The seed of Swamiji's ideas is now in a crucible,

fuming and bubbling, and it will take many years for the crystallization to take place. We may not be here to see this culmination, but all of us, specially the young men, should gird up our loins to spread the message of Swamiji not only in India but all over the world, to bring into fruition the idea of one world. But in order to bring this about you must be imbued with the correct interpretation of Swamiji's ideas about spirituality in the context of national and international vision. Referring to Swamiji's death Romain Rolland said:

But the flame of that pyre is still alight today. From his ashes, like those of the phoenix of old, has sprung anew the conscience of India—the magic bird—faith in her unity and in the Great Message, brooded over from Vedic times by the dreaming spirit of his ancient race—the message for which it must render account to the rest of mankind.

About Sri Ramakrishna's life Romain Rolland remarked, 'Holy is the source, holy is the course, holy is the estuary'. The source is Sri Ramakrishna himself and the course of the spiritual river is the message of Swami Vivekananda who set up the Mission which is now called Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. These are the estuaries through which now the message of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda is still flowing. But what is the message that Swami Vivekananda has left behind for his Organization to carry out? It is not any reformist movement. Swami Vivekananda did not believe in any partial reform. He said:

To the reformers I will point out that I am a greater reformer than any one of them. They want to reform only little bits. I want root-and-branch reform. Where we differ is in the method. Theirs is the method of destruction, mine is that of construction. I do not believe in reform; I believe in growth.

So the Ramakrishna Mission is not a movement for reform. We give sustenance

to the whole body of the nation by supplying nutrition which purifies the blood and removes all the impurities that might have crept into the veins of the nation. We educate and through education we want to bring about what Swami Vivekananda said 'root-and-branch reform', and this is the method that Swami Vivekananda taught us. As Swami Vivekananda has said, each individual nation has its own characteristics. Other nations have other ideals; some have liberty, some order, some democracy, some socialism—all based on politics. But Swami Vivekananda never believed in these methods. He has said, if anything is to be done in India, it must be done on the basis of spirituality. That is the backbone of our nation and Swamiji wanted the whole of our national endeavour to promote Dharma—spirituality. I am not using the word religion purposely because religion is normally understood as something dogmatic and fanatic. Swami Vivekananda wanted *that* religion which will allow man to use his intelligence and reason and come face to face with truth. So now we have to understand what the religion is that Swamiji preached and that had been exemplified in the life of his Guru. Swamiji in a succinct way has defined this religion in his book *Rāja Yoga*. He says,

Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy—by one, or more, or all of these—and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details.

In another place he says, 'The teachers of the science of Yoga, therefore, declare that religion is not only based upon the experience of ancient times, but that no man can be religious until he has the same perceptions himself'. So this is what we find exemplified in the lives of Sri Rama-

krishna and Swami Vivekananda. They had experienced the truth of spirituality and they had the firm conviction that spiritual life alone was real. All else was unreal and ephemeral.

But the real difficulty lies in the fact that religion is individualistic. So how to make it applicable to the whole society and the whole world? Again, there is amongst the Hindus quarrel about their different philosophies and religion. But in the life of Sri Ramakrishna as interpreted by Swami Vivekananda we find that though accepting all the religious forms and philosophies he believed that Advaita or Monism was the acme of spiritual realization of India through millennia. So while not criticizing other philosophies like dualism, qualified monism or non-dualism, Swami Vivekananda remarked that we travel from truth to truth and never from falsehood to truth. We travel from lower truth to higher ones and finally to the realization of unity of all existence. But can this be applied to society? Advaita was a sylvan deity and Swami Vivekananda wanted to domesticate it. He wanted to spread broadcast the idea of Advaita Vedanta all over the world. He knew that this was a revolutionary idea. He said: let everyone believe that he is the immortal soul, the only reality, and look upon others in the same way. And as there cannot be two realities, so the reality which is in me must be the same reality in others, and this reality is ever pure, ever conscious, and ever existent. It is sinless, it is without blemish. It is only the film of ignorance that clouds our vision which makes us think ourselves as impure and as sinners. And Swamiji challenges the world to adopt practical Advaita as life's philosophy. He says that mankind will do much less evil by adopting this philosophy. This is completely a new idea and not even Śaṅkara, the great propounder of Advaita

philosophy, has proclaimed this. Śaṅkara reserved the Advaita philosophy only for a few. But Swami Vivekananda wanted this ancient knowledge of the unity of all existence to be spread broadcast all over the world. He believed that this alone can raise the whole of humanity to a higher level of existence. He has said that a fisherman who believes in this philosophy becomes a better fisherman; if a lawyer believes in this philosophy he becomes a better lawyer; everyone who believes in this becomes a better man. This is the pragmatic utility of the practical Advaita. Our lives are to be built upon this philosophy and that will be the panacea for our individual, national and international troubles. But what will be the form of this highest transcendental philosophy when given expression to in our ephemeral existence? Its manifestation will be in the form of 'love'—*prema*. In one place Swami Vivekananda has said, 'I cannot hate, I cannot shun anybody, because I see myself in them'. This is the love which will actuate every individual being to serve Jīva as Śiva. This faith in one reality will make us fearless, *abhih*, as Swami Vivekananda put it. This is the quintessence of the teachings of the Upaniṣads. It was said of Janaka in the Upaniṣads, *abhayam vai Janaka prāptosi*—'O Janaka, you have realized that fearless principle'. In the same strain Swami Vivekananda has said:

क्षीणा स्म दीना सकृष्णा जल्पन्ति मूढा जना
नास्तिक्यन्तिवदन्तु अहह देहात्मवादातुराः ।
प्राप्ताः स्म वीरा गतभया अभयं प्रतिष्ठां यदा
आस्तिक्यन्तिवदन्तु चिन्तुमः रामकृष्णदासा वयम् ॥

'I am weak, I am lowly, this is how fools speak out. This is atheism. Those that confuse themselves with their physical body speak like this, We the servants of

Ramakrishna, who have realized that fearlessness, are established in real faith.' Swamiji remarks, 'The old religion said that he who does not believe in God is an atheist. The new religion says that he who has no faith in himself is an atheist.' So this is the new gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. And this, my young friends, you have to assimilate, practise and propagate by serving humanity as an expression of divinity. And by disseminating the grand idea of monism you grow spiritually and make others spiritual. Go forth and preach this gospel throughout the length and breadth of the country first and then throughout the world. Have faith in yourself, faith in Guru, and then power will come, strength will come and all that is good and great will come.

This does not mean that we should negate all other forms of worship. All forms of worship, from fetishism of primitive people to Advaita Vedanta, are various expressions and different stages of religious experience. All should be there to meet the need of different natures of human beings. But a man should be made to understand that his is not the only correct path and that the highest realization is the realization of Atman or Brahman.

Swami Vivekananda has been called the patriot saint of India. He was no doubt a patriot. As Sister Nivedita has remarked, 'the queen of his adoration was his Motherland'. But what was the patriotism of Swamiji? It is not a patriotism for gaining political power or for accumulation of wealth. But it is a deep feeling for the country. And he said in his Madras address:

One word more and I have finished. They talk of patriotism. I believe in patriotism, and I also have my own ideal of patriotism. Three things are necessary for great achievements. First, feel from the heart. What is in the intellect or reason? It goes a few steps and there it stops.

But through the heart comes inspiration. Love opens the most impossible gates. Love is the gate to all the secrets of the universe. Feel, therefore, my would-be-reformers, my would-be-patriots! Do you feel? Do you feel that millions and millions of the descendants of gods and of sages have become next door neighbours of brutes? Do you feel that millions are starving today, and millions have been starving for ages? Do you feel that ignorance has come over the land as a dark cloud? Does it make you restless? Does it make you sleepless? Has it gone into your blood, coursing through your veins, becoming consonant with your heart-beats? Has it made you almost mad? Are you seized with that one idea of the misery of ruin, and have you forgotten all about your name, your fame, your wives, your children, your property, even your own bodies? Have you done that? That is the first step to become a patriot, the very first step. I did not go to America, as most of you know, for the Parliament of Religions, but this demon of a feeling was in me and within my soul. I travelled twelve years all over India, finding no way to work for my countrymen, and that is why I went to America. Most of you know that, who knew me then. Who cared about this Parliament of Religions? Here was my own flesh and blood sinking everyday, and who cared for them? This was my first step.

You may feel then, but instead of spending your energies in frothy talk, have you found any way out, any practical solution, some help instead of condemnation, some sweet words to soothe their miseries, to bring them out of this living death? Yet that is not all. Have you got the will to surmount mountainhigh obstructions? If the whole world stands against you sword in hand, would you still dare to do what you think is right? If your wives and children are against you, if all your money goes, your name dies, your wealth vanishes would you still stick to it? Have you got that steadfastness? If you have these three things, each one of you will work miracles.

So that was the idea of patriotism given by Swamiji. But in present day India, specially after independence, we have become too selfish running after wealth and pomp and glamour which we see in western civilization, which is a decadent and dying civilization. Try to imbibe the

patriotism of Swamiji and work not for name or fame or money but for the regeneration of the whole country. But at the same time you should remember that Swamiji did not come only for India. He wanted that India must be regenerated because India alone has the fountain of spirituality which will give man the nectar of immortality. But he had cautioned in one place saying:

As for me, mind you, I stand at nobody's dictation. I know my mission in life, and no chauvinism about me, I belong as much to India as to the world, no humbug about that. I have helped you all I could. You must now help yourselves. What country has any special claim on me? Am I any nation's slave?

Thereby he meant that you, young friends, you will have to rise above the western idea of nationalism and be imbued with the idea given by Swamiji. Swamiji gave a clarion call to you by saying, 'Up India and conquer the whole world with your spirituality.' So don't be exclusive but be inclusive. Don't be selfish but give away whatever you have for the regeneration of the country, for the regeneration of the whole world and save the world from annihilation. This is the great message of Swami Vivekananda and this is the great burden that has been left to us by Swamiji.

I have delineated the fountain-head of the Ramakrishna Movement. We have seen that Swamiji wanted Vedanta to be practised by everybody. But how can this idea of practical Vedanta be introduced in our social life and what will be the impact of this on our social structure? Swamiji has said that what is called social policy or politics has arisen out of the difference in the right to enjoyment, out of the struggle between those that have privileges and those that are deprived of them. There are in other countries methods which have been applied to bring about equitable distribution of wealth but they all follow the path of materialism. But in the

words of Tennyson, 'if death is the end of life, why should life all labour be?' Besides, that is based on competition which has led to arms race and also class war which has inundated many countries with the flow of human blood. But even after more than 60 years what has been achieved there? So Swamiji said, 'I am a socialist not because it is a perfect system. But half a loaf is better than no bread'. In another place he said, 'Something like socialism is coming on the boards.' But this socialism he wanted is to be based on the great spiritual realization which India has proclaimed unto the world. If you teach the idea of one reality which is the self of all, there will not be any strife or bloodshed. Can blood be washed by blood? Can mud be washed by mud? So it is only on the basis of India's spiritual values culminating in the realization of the same Atman indwelling in every being that any real progress can be made. It will be a slow process. But it is the only process which can bring about economic equality and political stability and free the world from the danger of extinction which looms large before us.

Swamiji spoke about four types of privilege: (1) the privilege based on physical prowess (2) the idea of privilege based on wealth (3) the still subtler and more powerful privilege of intellect (4) and the last of all, and the worst, because it is the most tyrannical, is the privilege of spirituality. None can be Vedantists, and at the same time admit of privilege to anyone, either mental, physical or spiritual; absolutely no privilege for anyone. The only privilege a Vedantist can have is to serve mankind, for this is the worship of God. Here, we find the social application of Swami Vivekananda's practical Advaita. All our economic, political, social troubles will be eliminated if we accept this great doctrine of the same self in everybody and

serve everybody without demanding privilege, and distribute the objects of enjoyment to all equally.

But who will carry the banner of this great message of Swamiji—the eternal message till now kept hidden in darkness and which was revealed by the lamp of Sri Ramakrishna? Swami Vivekananda was short lived and all his brother disciples are gone. In our vast Organization we are only 1,000 or more carrying on the administration of 123 branches. We need many more thousands to spread the message, this new gospel of the great Swami Vivekananda. Swamiji said, 'My faith is in the younger generation, the modern generation, out of them will come my workers. They will work out the whole problem, like lions. I have formulated the idea and have given my life to it.'

In Madras he said:

My child, what I want is muscles of iron and nerves of steel, inside which dwells a mind of the same material as that of which the thunderbolt is made. Kshatra-Virya plus Brahma-Teja. Our beautiful hopeful boys—they have everything, only if they are not slaughtered by the millions at the altar of this brutality they call marriage. O Lord, hear my wails! Madras will then awake when at least one hundred of its very heart blood, in the form of its educated young men, will stand aside from the world, gird their loins, and be ready to fight the battle of truth, marching on from country to country.

In Calcutta he said:

I have faith in my country, and especially in the youth of my country. The youth of Bengal have the greatest of all tasks that has ever been placed on the shoulders of young men. I have travelled for the last ten years or so over the whole of India, and my conviction is that from the youth of Bengal will come the power which will raise India once more to her proper spiritual place. Aye, from the youth of Bengal, with this immense amount of feeling and enthusiasm in the blood, will come those heroes, who will march from one corner of the earth to the other, preaching and teaching the eternal spiritual

truths of our forefathers. And this is the great work before you.

India is no longer under foreign domination. Swami Vivekananda said in 1897:

For the next fifty years this alone shall be our key-note—this, our great Mother India. Let all other vain gods disappear for the time from our minds. This is the only God that is awake, our own race, everywhere His hands, everywhere His feet, everywhere His ears, He covers everything. All other gods are sleeping. What vain gods shall we go after and yet cannot worship the God that we see all round us, the Virat?

In response to this call, through the sacrifice of young men all over the country there was a great movement initiated by young men imbued with Swamiji's ideas and inspired by the sense of patriotism, and we achieved Independence in 1947. But where are they now? Have you got that patriotism? Remember the country is not yet out of the woods. You, the youth of India, give up everything and dedicate yourself for this great work that has been left for you by Swamiji. But for being the fit instrument, for carrying out the ideas of Swamiji, you must be *āśiṣṭho draḍhiṣṭho baliṣṭhaḥ*, 'most swift and alert, very firm in body and strength'.

You have to take up this great burden left behind by the great Swami Vivekananda. Swamiji once said, 'Mother India wants the sacrifice of a 1,000 young men, men and not beasts.' So be pure, be strong and give up the desire for name and fame. Take up the work of Swamiji not only for India but for the whole world.

For the next few days you will discuss various aspects of Swami Vivekananda's life and teachings. I have set the trend for the discussion which you should use as a guideline. Do not think that you are weak and do not weep sitting in a corner saying

that you have no power to do anything. Remember the following exhortation of Swamiji:

किन्नाम रोदिषि सखे त्वयि सर्वशक्ति-
 रामन्त्रयस्व भगवन् भगदं स्वरूपम् ।
 त्रैलोक्यमेतदखिलं तव पादमूले
 आत्मैव हि प्रभवते न जडः कदाचित् ॥

'What makes you weep, my friend? In you is all power. Summon up your all-

powerful nature, O mighty one, and this whole universe will lie at your feet. It is the Self alone that predominates, and not matter.' Have faith in these utterances of Swamiji, the great Messenger of modern era. And get acquainted with the thoughts given by him and practise them yourself and preach them unto the whole world. Then only there will be fruition of convening this Youth Convention. May Brahman who resides in all be manifest in everyone of you is my constant prayer.

THE YOUTH CONVENTION AT BELUR MATH

(A Delegate's Report)

SANJOY MUKHERJI

The dawn of 24th of December, 1985, looked unusually auspicious and holy when I left my home and, in the company of 34 young delegates, set out for Belur Math, the venue of the Youth Convention organized by the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. Earlier when I had enrolled as a delegate at the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur, I had had only a vague idea of what the Convention would be like. But the first signs of the immensity of the event became apparent when we reached the gates of Belur Math. There a long queue of about 6,000 youth delegates were waiting eagerly for entry into the sacred precincts on the banks of the Ganga.

The unique diversity of Indian culture was clearly visible in that disciplined column of youths who had come from all parts of the country. All of them, however, had the beautiful delegate's badge pinned prominently on their shirts, and it seemed to symbolize the unity of India's culture

and the basic solidarity of her people. Later on I was to learn that besides 9,000 youth delegates (belonging to the age group 16-30), nearly 1,500 elders also participated in the Convention as 'observers'. Those who belonged to distant areas of Bengal and other parts of India had arrived the day before and had been accommodated in the hostels of the Mission in Belur locality. The three large Pandals with their festoons and buntings, the massive Ramakrishna Temple and other smaller shrines, and the large concourse of people should have given the impression of a Hindu *mela* (religious fair) but all activities and movements were conducted in such an orderly, regulated and disciplined way that participation in that event became a new and unique experience in community life for all of us.

The detailed programme and the inaugural address of the President of Ramakrishna Order were handed out to us at the entrance of Pandal no. 1 where the

inauguration was to take place. The beginning of the Convention was signalled with a touch of pageant by the band march conducted by the students of the Ramakrishna Mission School, Along, Arunachal Pradesh. Punctually at 9 a.m. Srimat Swami Gambhiranandaji Maharaj, the President-General of the Ramakrishna Order and Ramakrishna Mission stepped into the Pandal, followed by a line of distinguished monks of the Order. The whole audience stood up as a mark of reverence. After an invocatory chant and song by the Brahmacharins of the Order, Swami Hiranmayanandaji, the General Secretary of the Order and Mission (he was also the Chairman of the Committee which organized the Youth Convention) welcomed Revered President Maharaj and requested him to inaugurate the Convention.

The inaugural address of Revered President Maharaj was inspiring but simple and put the essential points directly into the young hearts. The main point he stressed was the need to combine spiritual life with secular life through the medium of holiness. The very place, Belur Math, stood for this possibility. The success of the twin institutions, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, gave 'lie to the sinister propaganda that religion makes a man passive'. Maharaj then placed before the youths their life's main task: 'the uplift of the masses and women through education without injuring their Dharma'. He concluded his speech with a quotation from Tagore which was obviously Maharaj's way of pronouncing his benediction upon the congregation. The President Maharaj then released the Souvenir published by the Youth Convention organizing Committee.

Hardly had the applause died down when Swami Hiranmayanandaji rose to welcome the delegates. His forceful speech was chiefly devoted to the message and

mission of Swami Vivekananda. It concluded with an earnest appeal to the youths to 'take up the work of Swamiji not only for India but for the whole world'.

The next speaker was Swami Lokeswaranandaji, said to be the main brain behind organizing the Convention. As the Secretary of the Youth Convention Committee, he outlined the chief aims and tasks of the Convention. Swami Atmasthanandaji, one of the Assistant Secretaries of the Ramakrishna Order and Mission, and chairman of the Reception Committee, then read out the procedure to be followed in the Convention and expressed his hope that the Convention would provide the thousands of dedicated young followers that Swami Vivekananda had wanted.

Two youths, Tarun Goswami and R. V. Bhavani, then addressed the vast congregation expressing the gratitude of the delegates to the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission for hosting this Convention as a fitting response to the International Year of the Youth thereby affording an opportunity to thousands of young people to meet, discuss and voice their problems and possibilities. After the vote of thanks proposed by Swami Asaktanandaji, Convener of the Programmes and Entertainment Committee of the Youth Convention, the first session came to a conclusion with a devotional song.

It may be mentioned here that each day every function began and ended with Vedic chants and devotional singing by Brahmacharins clad in their customary white garments and sporting a tuft of hair on their otherwise clean-shaven heads. A few of these Brahmacharins gave inspiring talks in some of the sessions, and their very presence represented another dimension of India's youth power.

After a sumptuous lunch began the afternoon session consisting of panel discussions. Each panel was constituted

by a selected group of youth delegates, the remaining delegates and observers acting as the audience. The discussions were guided by moderators. There were three panels in three Pandals each devoted to a different theme. I attended the discussions in all the Pandals, though I concentrated mostly on Pandal no. 1 where the theme was 'Vivekananda's Approach to the Uplift of the Masses'. The discussion of this panel seemed to me to be the most lively and beneficial. It began with Swami Prabhanandaji's lucid and masterly presentation of 12 simple principles for the uplift of the masses. The youth delegates, hailing from different parts of India, then gave out their individual views on Swamiji's plan for social regeneration. All of them stressed the importance of education and the cultivation of spiritual awareness. Several practical suggestions were also made. The chairman Dr. Anil Baran Ray, a professor of Political Science from Burdwan University, encouraged the panelists, while Swami Satyarupanandaji, who acted as the moderator, elucidated some of the points raised by the participants.

In the second Pandal the theme of discussion was 'Youth Leadership to Consolidate National Integration'. It was chaired by Swami Gahanandaji, Assistant Secretary of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. Prof. Shankari Prasad Basu delivered the keynote address while Dr. Kshetra Prasad Sen Sharma and Swami Brahmeshanandaji acted as moderators. In the third Pandal discussion centred on 'The Role of Youth in Rural Reconstruction'. Swami Atmanandaji of Raipur was the chairman while Swami Gokulanandaji of Narottamnagar, Arunachal Pradesh, was the moderator. Sri Shib Shankar Chakraborty of Narendrapur, an experienced authority on rural work, gave the keynote address. He pointed out that the best way to help the villagers was to enable them

to help themselves. Pouring money into the villages would only spoil the villagers and make them dependent.

I tried to follow carefully, as far as I could, the different discussions. It was obvious that most of the speakers had done their homework well. They appeared to possess a commendable knowledge of Swamiji's works and were able to analyse the problems of society. But I also noticed that most speakers overlooked one important aspect: a comparative study of Swami Vivekananda's social ideas with the ideas of other great thinkers. None of the delegates attempted to show the relative merits of Swamiji's system over other systems, though Swami Prabhanandaji touched upon this point briefly.

In all other systems like Marxism and Capitalism human welfare is achieved solely by manipulating socio-economic forces. But this very process of manipulation makes man a slave of those forces. On the contrary, Swami Vivekananda's system is based on the manifestation of the divinity potentially present in man. His chief aim was to free man from slavery to socio-economic forces and make him free to serve others. Only a free person can give freedom to others. By divinity Swamiji meant the Spirit, the Atman, which is the true Self of man. This Spirit, he believed, was the source of infinite knowledge, power and joy. Swamiji never advocated that type of social revolution which destroyed the past or the goodness in man. He believed in inner spiritual revolution and the speeding up of social change through collective effort. Now-a-days the word 'development' is frequently used. Swami Vivekananda would have used the word in the sense of development from within, and not acquiring something—wealth or knowledge—from outside as it is commonly understood now. The new social order that Swamiji envisaged would be based on

a judicious combination of democratic concern for individuality and socialistic concern for common good.

Every year Christmas Eve is celebrated at Belur Math in the main prayer hall. This year it was done in Pandal 1. A big picture of Madonna was kept on a tastefully decorated altar in the evening. After the singing of some Western songs by the Indian Brahmacharins and reading from the Bible by an American Brahmacharin, Swami Ananyanandaji, President of Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, delivered a short sermon. For many of the young delegates this was a novel experience. It was a beautiful example of the principle of *dharma-samanvaya* preached and practised by the Ramakrishna Order. The whole scene created an indelible impression on the minds of all of us.

The second day

On the second day (25-12-85) those delegates who had come from outside Calcutta was taken on a visit to Narendrapur and Rahara, where the Mission's two most prestigious educational institutions are situated, and also to the internationally famous Institute of Culture at Golpark. They went in 60 buses divided into two batches. Each batch of 30 buses followed a different route and was led by a police car equipped with siren. Delegates like me who did not join this group enjoyed the *Yātrā* (folk drama) conducted by a troupe from Shibpur at the main pandal in the afternoon. In the evening this was followed by an English play 'Swami Vivekananda, the Young Prophet', written and directed by Swami Jitatmanandaji of Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad. It elicited the unstinted praise of the packed audience and was favourably reported in the next day's newspapers.

The third day

The morning session of the third day (26-12-85) was devoted to panel discussion on three subjects in three different Pandal. I spent most of my time in Pandal 1 where the topic of discussion was 'Problems of Modern Youths: Programme for their solution.' The discussion began with the keynote address of Sri Nabaniharan Mukhopadhyay, Secretary, Akhil Bharat Vivekananda Yuva Mahamandal. The chairperson was Dr. Indiraben Patel and the moderators were Dr. K. Ganeshan and Mrs. Chandana Guha Sarkar. The lively discussion brought to light some of the serious problems facing the youth: First of all, there is the problem of unemployment. The present social situation favours moral degeneration and produces feelings of guilt and conflict in young minds. Progressive erosion of social and familial values lead to improper socialization during the formative stage of life. Unceasing competition coupled with inadequate or wrongly oriented education has created deep-seated insecurity in youths. A sense of frustration and alienation from society is being felt by an increasing number of young people. The generation gap is becoming wider day by day. 'In such a situation what positive options do we have? What practical steps should we take?', asked one of my anxious fellow-delegates from Raipur. The Swamiji to whom the question was put replied cryptically: 'Follow the Convention carefully, and you will get your answer'.

Yes, we did get the answer. The Convention made me listen, observe, participate, discuss, think and ponder over the basic problems of life with an intensity I had never experienced before. For me the two cardinal points in Swami Vivekananda's teachings which offer a solution to youth problems are: the need for

proper socialization and faith in one's own Self. Swamiji wanted our whole attitude towards society should change. Instead of thinking how to exploit the society for one's maximum advantage, young men should think how best they can serve the society. Swamiji wanted that type of education which would enable young people to stand on their own feet. This meant vocational training coupled with tremendous *śraddha*, faith, in the inherent powers of one's soul.

One question which had troubled me from the beginning and which was not the topic of discussion in any of the panels was: why should we do good to others? I found the answer in Swami Vivekananda's teachings: it is necessary for our own good. By doing good to others the potential divinity in us gets manifested more and more.

The topic of discussion in Pandal 2 was 'Place of Values in Individual and Collective Life'. The chairman was Dr. P. Sreekumar and the moderator Prof. Dwijadas Banerjee. The keynote address was given by Dr. Nirod Baran Chakraborty who referred to the relevance of the four values *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa* in modern times.

'What the Youth can do to eradicate Illiteracy, Casteism and Untouchability': this was the theme of panel discussion in Pandal 3. Dr. R. Ananthan, Professor of English at Vivekananda College, Madras, gave the keynote address. Swami Amritanandaji took the chair while Swamis Virupakshanandaji and Sasankanandaji acted as moderators.

The afternoon session that day was devoted to answering the written questions collected earlier after the panel discussions. The answers were given by the youth delegates themselves who were members of the panels. This question-answer session was conducted in the three Pandals

under the chairmanship of Swami Shivamayanandaji of the Ramakrishna Mission College, Rahara, Swami Gautamanandaji of the Ramakrishna Mission School, Along, and Swami Jitatmanandaji of the School of Languages, Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad. The moderators, who helped the youth delegates in framing their answers, were Swami Viswatmanandaji, Dr. Narendranath B. Patil, Sri Pranabesh Chakraborty, Sm. Sharmistha Guha, and Sm. Cindrilla Sen.

I had personally put two questions. 1. Inefficiency, selfishness and corruption which characterize the present socio-political situation in India tend to generate only more inefficiency, selfishness and corruption. The question of human resources development arises only when this vicious circle is broken. How can this be done in the light of Swami Vivekananda's teachings? 2. Socio-economic conditions in Third World countries like India are determined by the world economic order dominated by the developed countries. The educational policies formulated by the government in the Third World countries are not aimed at changing the existing socio-economic order but are a concession to it. Under such circumstances what should be the correct educational policy and how to implement it?

To be frank, the answers provided by the youth delegates did not satisfy me. As a matter of fact, several of the answers appeared to be superficial. However, listening to the talks, thinking and discussions enabled me to discover what to me were satisfying answers. Let me present them briefly here. The way to break the vicious circle of corruption, selfishness and moral degeneration in which the society is caught is to raise the consciousness of its members. A sense of higher destiny and self-respect must be

created in man. When the consciousness of hundreds of individuals is raised, it will have a catalytic effect on society which will begin to change. The only means of raising the consciousness of people is education, as Swami Vivekananda has pointed out. Under the existing conditions, voluntary social agencies alone can formulate such a policy of consciousness-raising education and implement it. Hundreds of dedicated young men should go to every nook and corner of India and spread the new spiritual awareness even in the remotest villages. The collective awareness of the whole society can be raised by decentralizing education through voluntary initiatives and activities of its educated members, especially of the youth. Cuba provides a supportive example. This Latin American country was economically backward and politically unstable thirty years ago. But it succeeded in overcoming its economic and political crises by raising the consciousness of its people by mobilizing their collective energy through a common ideology. So, by implementing on a national scale Swamiji's ideal of 'renunciation and service', I believe, the whole Indian society can be changed.

The evening of the third day was set apart for a musical soiree which turned out to be one of the most memorable events of the whole Convention. The famous Sarod player Ustad Amjad Ali Khan captured the hearts of the large audience, who occupied all available space in the Pandal, as much by his humility and devotion as by his virtuosity. After paying his homage to Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji, the Ustad sang a Hindi song he himself had composed in their honour. Sarod is an Indian instrument whose tonal qualities have some resemblance to the timbre of the human voice. The audience listened spellbound as the maestro played some of the *rāgas* (melodies) believed to

be the favourite ones of Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji. At the end of the performance Swami Hiranmayanandaji garlanded the Ustad.

The fourth day

On the morning of the fourth day (27.12.85) we had a general session under the chairmanship of Swami Smarananandaji, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Saradapith, Belur. Coordinated résumés of panel discussions were read out by the rapporteurs which enabled us to understand the general trend of thought behind those discussions. Dr. K. Ganeshan, Principal, Vivekananda College, Madras, then offered some useful comments and suggestions.

The afternoon was devoted to a pleasant programme which provided a welcome break to the rigorous routine. It consisted of recitation of poems, singing of songs in regional languages, chanting of Sanskrit hymns and mimicry by some of the talented delegates in the three Pandals. I visited all the Pandals by turns. The performances which delighted me most were the singing of Saroj Das (Bengali songs), Ravishekhhar (Tamil songs) and Nich Raju (Hindi) and recitation by Aninda Chatterjee of Belur and N. Bindu of Madras. The three chairpersons, Swami Ramanandaji, Swami Umanandaji and Sm. Sakuntala Dutta gave short talks.

The evening was devoted to a spectacular display of gymnastics by Viswashree Manotosh Roy and party. The inclusion of this thrilling event, which was very much appreciated by all the delegates, was one more evidence of the thoughtfulness of the elders. It was clear that the Youth Convention had been planned to serve as a multi-sluced storage tank to bring home to youths the different dimensions of youth—its power, glory and responsibilities.

The fifth day

The fifth day (28.12.85) was one of the most important days of the Convention. The morning was taken up with three symposia, each of two hours' duration, in three Pandal.

In Pandal 1 Dr. Kshetraprasad Sen Sharma presided over the symposium on 'Swami Vivekananda and National Integration'.

In Pandal 2 the subject was 'Swami Vivekananda and Modern Youths'. Since I was one of the 21 delegates who had been chosen to speak on this subject, I could not attend the other two symposia. In our Pandal Swami Mumukshanandaji, President, Ramakrishna Math, Bombay, occupied the chair. All the speakers dealt with the problems of modern youths and their possible solutions in the light of Swami Vivekananda's teachings. Though we, the participants, had come from different parts of the country (I may mention here that there were at least three or four Muslim and Christian delegates) we all had more or less the same problems. This awareness helped to break the barriers and to understand the universal dimension of Swami Vivekananda's message. The creation of this awareness was in itself one of the most significant achievements of the Youth Convention. Swami Mumukshanandaji rounded off the discussion with a brief but clear talk in which he pointed out the significance of Swami Vivekananda's life and message to modern youths and expressed the possibility of a new renaissance taking place in our society along the lines chalked out by Swamiji.

Participation in the symposium produced a remarkable change in my outlook. Earlier, at Narendrapur, those of us who had been selected to speak at the symposium had been told that the success of the proceedings would depend upon our

performance. But looking at those hundreds of bright, intelligent faces in front of me, I realized that the real success lay not with the talkers but with the performers. It is not enough to talk about high ideals and principles but we must put them into practice in our own lives. If there is no correlation between what we talk and what we do, our youth will be spent in vain. I tried to stress this point while concluding my paper.

'The Man-making Mission of Swami Vivekananda' was the subject of the symposium in Pandal 3.

The general meeting in the afternoon was a most memorable event. It was presided over by Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. The speakers included some of the most distinguished men in the world today. Swami Lokeshwaranandaji welcomed them in a graceful speech befitting the occasion. A. L. Basham, the famous British Indologist (whose untimely death barely a month later I was to read with a shock in the newspapers) was the first speaker. In his short speech he stressed the need for Sri Ramakrishna's message of tolerance and harmony in the global struggle to eliminate distrust and fear from the hearts of men, especially the fear of nuclear war. Prof. Danilchuk of USSR, who is a professor of Bengali, sprang a surprise on the audience when he began his address in good literary Bengali. He, however, changed to English as the majority of the delegates were from outside Bengal. He spoke of the influence of Swami Vivekananda on Tolstoy. He added that Swami Vivekananda was loved and respected in Soviet Russia because he inspired the freedom movement and also because he believed in man and in the strength of the people. India's topmost nuclear scientist Dr. Raja Ramanna was

the next speaker. He pointed out how the harmony between science and religion could be achieved by adopting Swami Vivekananda's perspective. Kenneth Carl Wimmel, Director U.S.I.S., spoke feelingly about Swamiji's visit to America and his sacrifice to the cause of spreading spirituality in that country.

Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji in his presidential address showed how the message of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda could solve the problems and doubts of the modern age. The meeting, which had created an elevating atmosphere, came to a close with the thanks-giving speech of Swami Hiranmayanandaji.

In the evening the delegates were entertained by Dr. Nataraja Ramakrishna and his troupe who performed a vigorous form of traditional dance popular in Andhra Pradesh.

The sixth day

In the morning of the sixth day of the Convention, which was a Sunday, the people of Calcutta witnessed a unique sight: a two-kilometre-long column of educated young men and women from every part of India wending their way to Dakshineswar singing in a variety of languages and melodies. The mammoth procession of nearly 9,000 youth delegates started from Belur Math at 8.30 a.m. led by a chariot with a big picture of Swami Vivekananda mounted on it and drawn by the delegates themselves. Monks formed the head of the procession; its rear was brought up by a police band. After paying their respects at the different holy spots in Dakshineswar, sanctified by the life and Sādhanā of Sri Ramakrishna, the processionists returned to Belur Math around 1 p.m.

In the afternoon the delegates listened to lectures on the lives and messages of

Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother and Swamiji at a meeting in the main pandal with Swami Somanathanandaji, President, Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore, in the chair. Swami Harshanandaji, head of Allahabad centre spoke on Swami Vivekananda, Swami Vyomanandaji of Rajkot centre spoke on Sri Ramakrishna, and Swami Nihswanandaji of Delhi centre spoke on Sri Sarada Devi. All the speeches were instructive and inspiring.

In the evening the boys of the Ramakrishna Mission Boys' Home, Rahara (West Bengal), staged a Yātrā (folk drama) recreating the immortal life of Sri Caitanya Mahāprabhu so vividly that the audience remained entranced.

The seventh day

With the seventh day we reached the last day of the Youth Convention. The morning was devoted to a Conference which was addressed by Dr. Nemaï Sadhan Bose, Vice Chancellor of Visvabharati, Santiniketan. In his thought provoking speech on the 'Relevance of Swami Vivekananda in the Present Day' he dealt with the problems of developing countries and the importance of the messages of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in finding solutions to them. He stressed the unavoidable necessity of harmonizing science and spirituality.

There followed a question-answer session with Swami Ranganathanandaji, President Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad, taking upon himself the duty of answering the questions put by the delegates. Swami Ranganathanandaji's insightful and effortless answers kept the proceedings lively and joyful. At the end he gave a stirring talk exhorting the youth to dedicate their lives to the service of God in man. His words had a ring of power which seemed to penetrate into the depths of one's heart.

The afternoon saw the valedictory session. In his brief but inspiring address Srimat Swami Gambhiranandaji Maharaj, President-General of the Ramakrishna Order and Ramakrishna Mission, advised the young participants to practise prayer and meditation regularly and to discipline their lives in accordance with the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji, who spoke next, reminded the youth of the spiritual traditions of India and the need to uphold them in individual and collective lives.

The hearts of the youth delegates were really too full for words. Their collective feelings found utterance through four of their representatives who held the stage one after the other. After referring to the invaluable experience they had gained during those unforgettable seven days, they thanked the authorities of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission for organizing the Youth Convention for the benefit of such a large number of young people. The statement of one of the youth representatives, Pankaja Kulabkar from Golpark, Calcutta, echoed the conviction of many of us. "The real Youth Convention has not yet started", she said. "It will really start only when we

reach home and resume our normal routine. If there is a positive change in our thoughts and actions, the aims of the Convention will become a living reality.'

The next speaker was Swami Lokeshwaranandaji. He reviewed the activities of the seven days of the Convention and attributed the spirit of love, cooperation and discipline shown by all the 10,000 participants to the power of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda animating their hearts.

Swami Hiranmayanandaji then rose to bid a touching farewell to all of us. He urged us to be pure, to help the poor, to follow the life-giving ideas of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda and spread them all over the world.

Swami Atmasthanandaji's vigorous speech thanking the delegates and other dedicated workers for making the Convention a success, followed by a devotional song, marked the close of the Youth Convention, and the sacred grounds of Belur Math reverberated with shouts of 'Jai'.

As I walked to the bus-stop to return home, the words of Swami Mumukshanandaji were ringing in my ears: 'None left this Belur Math without gaining something.'

A NEW ALTAR FOR THE MODERN YOUTH

(A Delegate's Impressions of the Youth Convention at Belur Math)

SIMANTA MOHANTI

In the twenty-first year of my life I made my first pilgrimage. It was to Belur Math, where I reached in the company of my delegate friends in the morning of 23 December 1985 to attend the Ramakrishna Math and Mission Youth Convention, 1985.

The first things we noticed at the entrance of the Math were the stately welcome arches that had been erected for the Convention. Teeming crowds of enthusiastic delegates were everywhere, especially around the reception counter, a small

building near the Math office. The grass on the lawns of Belur Math glistened a golden green in the sun and the specially erected refreshment camps were besieged by people.

The delegate stepping down at Belur Math doesn't notice the main temple of Sri Ramakrishna at first. The crowds, the loud-speakers blaring instructions to delegates, the din of the people—all these distract him. In fact the delegate is more likely to notice the Ganga flowing on the far side of the shrine, even though it is mist-shrouded. A few tall coconut and mango trees too block the delegate's view of the main temple. But soon enough the temple comes into the focus of his vision—first the golden-spired domes, and then the facade, with a gallery at its centre below which is the magnificent entrance to the shrine. Carved on the wall between the gallery and the entrance, is the mystical emblem of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, depicting a swan, the sun, sea-waves, a lotus and an encircling snake—symbolizing the eternal spirit, enlightenment, karma, devotion and meditation, respectively. As the delegate looks on and moves closer to the temple, its colossal proportions loom large before him. His thoughts get hushed in an interior stillness as he reminds himself that in this massive sandstone monument, enshrining the relics of the Prophet of the New Age, has been invoked the Spirit of ancient India with all its splendid possibilities by Swami Vivekananda. And as his mind wanders from the stillness of this awareness to the commotion outside, he realizes that a new altar is being built here for the awakened youth of modern India. A thrill passes through his frame as he visualizes the flame of the Spirit passing from the primeval altar to the new one. He is indeed on a unique pilgrimage, a pilgrimage to the fount of eternal youth...

We had actually been in Calcutta three days before we came to Belur. Nearly 200 delegates had arrived at Howrah from all over the country by the evening of 20th December and had been taken by special buses to the Ramakrishna Mission School and College campus at Narendrapur, on the outskirts of Calcutta. These 200 delegates were the 'Core Group' delegates selected by Ramakrishna Math authorities from the many hundreds of delegate-applicants at the various Mission centres in India. This Core Group comprised speakers, debaters, writers, singers, musicians, actors and dramatists who were to play active roles in the proceedings of the Convention. They were taken to Narendrapur in order to have their final training and briefing by senior monk-guides of the Order. For many delegates the trip from Howrah to Narendrapur was in itself an experience. Many were awed by the thought that they were in Calcutta, the sprawling megalopolis with its endless streets and slums pulsing with a random hectic life that immediately marked it out. Our bus was held up quite a few times in Calcutta's, by now familiar, traffic jams and many delegates took off to explore the street they were stranded in, the long and exhausting rail journey that they had just undergone having failed to damp their excitement at being in Calcutta.

At Narendrapur the next morning (21st of December) we attended the inaugural session of the Core Group camp which was addressed by Swami Lokeswarananda, Secretary of the Youth Convention Committee. 'I see before me young India, brilliant and dynamic. Out of the nearly fifteen thousand delegates to this Convention, you have been chosen for the various literary and cultural activities at the Convention. You are, indeed, the chosen ones and it is a privilege for me to be with you', he said in his soft, dulcet voice which

charmed the 'young India' gathered there. After that began rounds of speech workouts, talent contests, drama rehearsals and preparations for the symposia and question-answer sessions of the Convention. The halls and auditoriums of the Narendrapur Ashrama resounded with Ciceronian exhortations to fight socio-economic and political evils, with songs, with the music of the harmonium and with a medley of voices. Already, the signs of the real impact that the Convention would have were visible there as the delegates from Uttarkashi to Kanyakumari, and from Assam to Gujarat, struck immediate rapport with one another and found warmth in group discussions in the chilly Calcutta night.

From Narendrapur to Belur is from one end of Calcutta to the other, and offers you a kaleidoscopic view of Calcutta. Most core group delegates were found peering out of the windows of their coaches taking in the variegated Calcutta sights, with no signs of monotony. A sizable part of the morning of 23rd December was taken up by this trip to Belur. Once there, we got busy settling ourselves in our assigned accommodation in the hostels of Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, near the main Math. We unpacked and unwound ourselves. Some of us lazed and some went for a swim in the pond near our 'home'. By nightfall nearly all the expected 7,000 'resident' delegates (delegates who were to stay at Belur) had reached Belur. The whole atmosphere of Belur seemed to be charged with meaning, exhilaration and freedom.

The Convention was inaugurated at 9 a.m. on the 24th of December. From 8 a.m. a line of delegates stretching well over a kilometre had begun filing silently into the Convention arena. Each delegate was required to show his 'Delegate Card' to gain entry into the arena. Nearly 12,000

delegates and 'observers' crowded into Pandal 1 to hear Swami Gambhiranandaji's inaugural address. In the course of that gentle, well-articulated speech rang out the exhortation: 'You are young, you have open minds and can actualize the high ideals being propagated by the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission... For your own good and advancement you should not depend too much on others, but believe that within each one of you lives the Self or Atman which is a storehouse of infinite energy and possibility'.

That speech set the tone for the entire Convention which, as we look back at it, was a saga of energy and action. It was a sight for the gods. 10,000 young men and women explored every avenue of thought, sitting or walking on the same grounds that Swami Vivekananda, Swami Brahmananda, Swami Premananda, Swami Shivananda and other great direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna had walked. They worshipped at the main shrine and at the shrines of Vivekananda, Holy Mother and Brahmananda. They stood spellbound in front of Swami Vivekananda's room—the cot, the tiger skin on which he meditated, the tanpura on which he played, the low stool on which he sat, vivifying in their minds the great life that had been lived out there. The young people were a bundle of energy which exploded in all directions. At every time of the day you could see young people from every part of the country seated on the lawns or crowding around tea-stalls, exchanging addresses for correspondence or animatedly discussing what they had heard at the Convention.

And they heard plenty. There were six panel discussions spread over four days on topics such as 'Swami Vivekananda's Approach to the Uplift of the Masses', 'Problems of Modern Youth: Programme for their solution', 'Role of Youth in Rural Reconstruction' and others, every

one of which drawing out some inspired speeches that flowed from the participants' inner convictions and motivation. There were three symposia too on three topics: 'Swami Vivekananda and National Integration', 'Swami Vivekananda and Modern Youth' and 'Man-making Mission of Swami Vivekananda'. Each word uttered in these meetings reinforced the ideal in the heart of every young person, uplifting his whole being.

And, what was most wonderful, the quiet, loving and enlightened monks of the Ramakrishna Order were there everywhere at Belur to talk to and draw inspiration from. One Swamiji with whom I developed friendship was adept at preparing the finest *pāns* (betel-leaf rolls) I had ever tasted. Very often, with our mouths full of *pān* we would discuss the ways to remould and remake man's character, the lessons of Sri Ramakrishna's life and other such edifying topics. When I left Belur on the last day he gave me a wonderful parting gift—five delicious *pāns*!

The evenings of the seven days of the Convention were filled with exciting programmes. On two of those evenings, I had the honour of playing a major role. And what a role that was!—the role of Swami Vivekananda himself in a drama staged by Core Group members from Andhra Pradesh in Pandal 1, under Swami Jitatmananda's (of the Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad) tutelage. The play, portraying five scenes from the Cyclonic Monk's life, was such a success when it was first performed on Christmas Day that it had to be staged again on 30th December evening after the valedictory function. Playing Swamiji was an ecstatic experience for me, and it left me utterly humble and thoughtful. And the goodwill and blessings I received that night and thereafter produced in me a new sense of responsibility. Blessed be the name of Sri Ramakrishna whose power

brought about such a transformation in me!

On the night of 26th December another ray of the light of Sri Ramakrishna seemed to be streaming towards us when Amjad Ali Khan played on the Sarod weaving melody after melody, enthralling the souls of that vast and distinguished gathering. The entire congregation rose to one man and applauded the maestro, and when Swami Hiranmayanandaji offered him a flower garland, it appeared to be the most appropriate gesture of appreciation. Then, in the afternoon of 28th December we got the opportunity to hear four eminent personalities, experts in their own fields, speak on the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement. The first speaker was the late doyen of Indologists, Prof. Arthur L. Bhasham, who spoke on 'Ramakrishna's Message and World Peace'. He had undergone a major surgery and looked very ill. Yet he was there, speaking in a halting and weak voice, telling us how Sri Ramakrishna's message holds out hope for the world. Swami Lokeswarananda looked after Prof. Bhasham with tender solicitude all the while the scholar sat on the stage. Prof. Danilehuk of Russia followed Prof. Bhasham to the lectern and promptly proved to the audience that he was a 'Russian Bengali' as Swami Lokeswarananda had described him. His opening remarks to the audience in Bengali drew forth a tremendous cheer from the gathering. He spoke on 'Swami Vivekananda in Soviet Russia'. He was followed by India's great nuclear physicist, Prof. Raja Ramanna who spoke on 'Swami Vivekananda and Modern Science'. After him Mr. Kenneth Carl Wimmel, Regional Director of the United States Information Service (USIS), spoke on 'Swami Vivekananda and the Religious Dimension in American Life'. It was a stimulating afternoon and for most of us it was made

more poignant by the fact that we saw Prof. Bhasham there for the first and last time. He died on January 27, 1986.

Another evening programme that stirred us all was the display of physical feats by a group of very agile and muscular young men. Equally impressive was the 'Śiva Tāṇḍava' dance by the Perini Dance troupe led by Nataraja Ramakrishna of Andhra Pradesh. There was also a deeply moving play on Sri Caitanya staged by the little boys of the Rahara Ramakrishna Mission.

When the delegates were not delivering speeches or listening to them or watching cultural shows or chalking out their future according to Swami Vivekananda's ideals, they were promising to meet again and assess what impact this Convention had had on them. One friend of mine had made it his hobby to give his address in exchange for the addresses of others and, by the time we left, he possibly had 300 addresses under his belt. Many delegates wanted to thrash out a life time's doubts and questions at the Convention. You could see them seizing every opportunity to discuss everything under the sun, ask and receive questions, answer and get answers. Did they feel that here, at Sri Ramakrishna's feet, their questions wouldn't go unanswered, their mind couldn't be chained any more, their being could express freedom? Certainly, everyone felt free at Belur. It was an exhilarating freedom, a freedom that comes in the presence of a liberating agent. You could see this freedom in every delegate's body language, in the way they left the doors of their 'home' unlocked as they roamed about, in the way they would accost every Swamiji who came across their way and buttonhole him, in the way they laughed, in the way they spontaneously sang 'Hari Om Ramakrishna' while sitting on the steps leading to the Ganga at the Math. Freedom reigned everywhere. Seeing all

the Swamijis at Belur, I was struck by an idea. Soon an orange-coloured notebook was in my hand and I was going around asking every Swamiji, 'Swamiji may I have a message of benediction from you?' That notebook is now my most prized possession, containing jewels of message from the saints. One from Swami Ranganathananda reads, 'It is good to be in the forefront of opportunity in matters of enterprise, as to be in the rear of opportunity in matters of indulgence'.

All too soon it was time to leave. The 30th of December, 1985, is here and people are packing their baggage, and bidding goodbyes. The valedictory session is on. Swami Gambhiranandaji is blessing us. Swami Hiranmayanandaji is telling us what we should do. We feel the misty moments of parting around us. When ever shall we see again the Ganga gurgling by the Math? When ever shall we experience such pure joy, freedom, and power? When ever shall we come together in such large numbers, so eagerly welcomed, admired, honoured? When ever shall we be united again by such unselfish love as we experienced on the grounds of Belur Math? For many of us it was the end of something like an apocalypse. There was also a vague awareness of the evanescence of youth.

Hans Keldermann, a sixteen-year old lad from Holland studying in Hyderabad, is with the Hyderabad Core Group. As we take leave of Belur, he shows me a bulging white paper packet. I ask him what it is. He unwraps it. 'The soil of Belur Math', he says. 'My guardian will be very pleased to receive this. She is a great devotee, you know'. I look at him. We are now all children of the soil of Belur Math.

On to Howrah then. We board our train to Hyderabad and begin the 32-hour journey. There is a lot of joy and singing

in the air. 'Why are you all here? You are here because Swami Vivekananda called you. He said "come" and you came. His eyes bewitched you. You couldn't resist his call. So you are here', Swami Lokeswaranandaji had told us during the Convention. Yes, we were called and we

were chosen. But now we have the work of the Prophet to do, in our own way, in our own time. We are Vivekananda's soldiers, and our march is long and arduous. We carry the flame, lighted at the altar of Belur Math, to build new altars for other youths, for the youth of the future...

THE SECOND CHAPTER OF THE GITA

(A Running Commentary)

SWAMI SRIDHARANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

'If the Atman is so uninvolved in existence-action, the knowledge of its nature is not relevant to my own level of being. The Teacher says that the Atman is indestructible, but I am more conscious of the body which is perishable. What is the working relation between the body and the indwelling Self?' Anticipating such a line of thought in the mind of Arjuna, Śrī Kṛṣṇa replies citing an example:

As a person discards his worn-out garments and puts on new ones, so the indwelling self also discards bodies when they become old and transmigrates into new bodies. (Gita, 2.22)

The embodied soul casts off a worn-out physical frame only when it is about to possess the new one. The soul never remains naked. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (4.4.3) compares the passage of the *jīvātmā* from one body to another to that of a leech or caterpillar (*jalāyukā*). It moves by fixing its hind legs on a leaf or stem and feels for a new hold with its forelegs. Only when it gets a new hold does it leave the old one. The *jīvātmā* only migrates when the new body is decided

upon in the shape of the *sūkṣma śarīra* or subtle body. The *sthūla śarīra* or gross body consists of the five sheaths (*kośa*) of *anna* (matter), *prāṇa* (vital power), *manas* (mind), *vijñāna* (consciousness), and *ānanda* (bliss). When the Atman decides to leave this gross body, it withdraws into the *sūkṣma śarīra* which is constituted by the seventeen components, namely, the five *jñānendriyas* (organs of knowledge), the five *karmendriyas* (organs of action), the five *prāṇas* and the *manas* (mind) and *ahaṁkāra* (ego). The term *indriya* does not mean the visible gross organ but one of the imperceptible powers of seeing, hearing, locomotion, manipulation etc. which merely have their seat in the gross organs. It is in this subtle body that the soul migrates in the manner of a caterpillar. It secures a lodgement in the *sūkṣma śarīra*, which is shaped for rebirth by past karma, before leaving the present *sthūla śarīra* and transmigrating to a new body.

The imperishability of the Atman is further stressed in the next verse (2.24) of the Gita. By weapons and instruments you can cut up a thing into pieces so that it

ceases to exist, but the Self cannot be cleaved by means of any weapons; fire burns up all kinds of matter but the Self cannot be burnt; water washes away everything, and even the rocks of the Himalayas are eroded by it, but water cannot wet the Atman; air has the capacity to evaporate anything, and even the granite of the Grand Canyon is blown away by wind blasts, but the Atman cannot be dried up by the wind.

The means of destruction and disintegration in the material world do not hold in the case of the Atman because it is not in the domain of the five elements of matter.

Furthermore (2.24), this Self is incapable of being cut; It cannot be burnt; It cannot be drenched nor can It be dried up. It is eternal, omnipresent or all-pervasive like ether. It is unmoving. Only a thing limited in space can be shifted about; movability is relevant only to the concept of space. Since Atman transcends space, it is immovable. Swami Vivekananda once recounted an incident: a young girl who was asked by her geography teacher as to what would happen if the earth fell down, replied, 'Everything falls on the earth, so where can the earth fall?' If space and everything in it is superimposed on the Atman, then where can the Atman move? And being immovable, it is constant or everlasting.

The transcendent nature of the Atman is stressed in the next verse (2.25) also. The Atman is said to be unmanifest. To be manifested is to be limited by time-space-causation, and the Atman is not limited. Nor can it be thought about. We can think of only a thing which has name and form or qualities. The Atman does not have these. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (6.1-4-6) states: 'Pots and pans appear to be different but they are all made of the same clay; ornaments appear to be different but they are all made of the same gold. All modifica-

tions (of clay or gold) are nothing but names based on speech; the basic material of clay or gold alone is real'. Only the modifications of clay are known but the real clay as such is not known. A particular name and shape makes that modification or thing limited and, therefore, knowable. As the unmanifest, the Atman does not become subjected to limiting adjuncts; hence it is spoken of as unthinkable. Nor does it have any transformations or modifications—it is immutable.

'Therefore, knowing this, you ought not to grieve.' What Śrī Kṛṣṇa means is: 'When I told you earlier (2.11) that you were sorrowing over what was not worth sorrowing over, you did not understand. But now having heard about the indestructibility and immutability of the indwelling Self, you have no reason to mourn. Being infinite and indivisible it can be neither the subject of action nor the object of action—neither the killer nor the killed.'

Till now Kṛṣṇa has been talking from the level of Absolute Existence and Truth, *paramārtha*, which is incomprehensible to Arjuna, who does not, however, argue since God is saying so. But the higher truth does not sink deep into his mind as it is not tuned to that level. Therefore, speaking from the level of phenomenal existence and truth, *vyavahāra*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa continues:

O mighty-armed warrior, even if you think, for the time being, that It constantly keeps on coming into being and constantly keeps on disintegrating, you should not grieve about it. (2.26)

That is, even if I grant the popular belief that the soul comes into life, time and again, and disappears from life, time and again, still you should not yield to sorrow. Why? The answer is given in the next verse (2.27)

For the death of one who is born is

certain, and the rebirth of one who is dead is also inevitable. Whatever is born in point of time will disintegrate sometime or other, and whatever is dead will come back to life by its own karma. This is the inviolable law of existence in this world. *Samsāra* is the cycle of birth and death, which does not respect your feelings. It does not become of you to grieve over the inevitable, for what can you do in this situation? The law is impervious to your likes and dislikes: can your affection and attachment stop anyone from dying? Or can your hatred and enmity prevent him from taking birth again? For those who are in bondage rebirth and redeath are inescapable because of the desires in their souls, *kālasya abādha gātih*, time has an absolutely unobstructed flow; it takes all things along with it and this movement cannot be halted. If you do not accept the *pāramārthika* standpoint, then this is the basic fact of *vyāvahārika* experience. Therefore do not mourn the destruction of the bodies of your kinsmen, since that is beyond your control, but try to end your own karma through performance of your duty as a warrior and thus go beyond birth and death. Continuing this line of argument, Kṛṣṇa says:

O Bhārata, all beings remain unmanifest before they are born, they become manifest only during the middle period of existence. When they are dead, again they become unmanifest. Why then should there be grief in this matter? (2.28)

That is, before their origin and after their dissolution creatures do not exist in *vyāvahāra*, which itself lasts only for a short duration and is really illusory. So he should not allow them to affect his mind.

If Arjuna has difficulty in comprehending the Atman, it is quite understandable, for it is truly known only to a few people. As regards the others, says Kṛṣṇa:

Some people look upon the Self as something wonderful. Similarly some people speak of it as a wonder, and others hear of it as a wonder. Still others, even after hearing of it, are unable to realize its true nature. (2.29)

Sri Ramakrishna said that when a person had a first glimpse of the Atman, he would exclaim in astonishment, 'Oh! what is this, what have I seen, what has happened?', as it had never been imagined or experienced before. *Āścarya*, wonder and marvel are terms applied to some unknown, unthought, unheard, unfelt happening in the world, something surprising and new. Vedānta has already explained the world as *mithyā*; so it is no more an *āścarya*—anything can happen in the world. The real *āścarya* is the experience of the Self, which itself appears as a wonder only as long as a person is not fully established at the spiritual plane.

Even after hearing about the Atman directly from Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who has first-hand experience of it, Arjuna, who is not fully prepared in his background, fails to comprehend its true nature. So Kṛṣṇa concludes his discourse on the immortality of the Atman with the next verse.

O Bhārata, this Self dwelling in the bodies of all beings can never be killed. The whole world manifests this Self under various names and forms. Therefore it is not proper that you should mourn for all beings. (2.30)

First there was the statement about the *pāramārthika satya*—that there is neither taking birth nor dying—followed by the hypothetical statement about the *vyāvahārika satya*, that even if there were birth and death, since you have no control over them, why lament? At this point Arjuna's thinking must have taken a new turn, for though he has some intellectual understanding of the unassailability of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's arguments, he has no realization or translation of those truths in his being. He might have thought: 'I do not understand

pāramārthika satya; I also know that the events of the *vyāvahārika* world are not in my control, still my conscience does not allow me to fight. Now, the question is: What is the *samanvaya*, coordination or reconciliation, between this philosophy and certain convictions I have, as a man and a warrior, of my *svadharma*, of my obligations as a social being? I know what is moral and what is immoral, that it is a sin to kill anyone out of greed. How am I to resolve my moral conflict? Anticipating such a question, Śrī Kṛṣṇa states:

Even if you look at it from the viewpoint of *svadharma* you should not waver in your decision. For there is nothing better for a man of the warrior caste than fighting in the cause of truth and righteousness. (2.31)

The three crucial words in this verse are *dharma*, *svadharma* and *śreya*. The definition *dhāraṇāt dharmamityāhuḥ*, 'Dharma is so called because it upholds or supports everything', deals with *dharma* as a universal moral order. When applied to specific situations or individuals, it becomes *savadharma* or the performance of duty in accordance with one's station in life and surroundings. A Kṣatriya's main function is to uphold or support law and order and establish the rule of righteousness, justice, equity and fairplay in society. As such, Arjuna must act as a defender of faith. So Śrī Kṛṣṇa says that in spite of the heavy price Arjuna may have to pay for the performance of *svadharma*, there is no better way to salvation, that is, *śreya*, for him. This ancient social philosophy is an important theme in the whole *Mahābhārata*. Before the war, the *vāk-siddha*, Gāndhārī said to both Duryodhana and Yudhiṣṭhira: *yato darmastato jayah* 'Where there is Dharma, there victory is'. It was not greed but righteousness that prompted the Pāṇḍavas to fight the war. By fighting in the interest of their country, people and

religion Arjuna would ascend the ladder of *svadharma* to *śreya*s and ultimately, by the law of spiritual evolution, to *niśreya*s, the highest good and final beatitude of Self-knowledge, *Ātma-jñāna*.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa goads Arjuna further along the path of *svadharma* in the next verse.

O Pārtha, even without your seeking it, this war has come to you as an open door to heaven. Those Kṣatriyas are blessed and happy who obtain such an opportunity to fight the battle of righteousness. (2.32)

According to Hindu scriptures, the soul of a person who dies fighting heroically in a battle goes straight to heaven. A true Kṣatriya therefore rejoices at the prospect of a righteous battle, instead of weeping and wailing as Arjuna did.

After having encouraged Arjuna thus, Śrī Kṛṣṇa frightens him by telling him:

If on the other hand, you fail to take part in this righteous warfare, then you will be committing a sin for renouncing your duty and thus becoming bereft of fame. (2.33)

As a magnet attracts iron, so will Arjuna incur sin by his act: the sin of non-performance of duty by refusing to fight for *dharma*, and the sin of destroying the honour and reputation of himself, his family and clan. Thus Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna about both the positive gain of discharging *svadharma* and the negative loss of abandoning it.

Arjuna has a smattering of knowledge regarding *tyāga*, *vairāgya*, *jñāna* etc., but does not know the true meaning of these qualities. He has also some idea of his *svadharma* as a Kṣatriya, but being overpowered by *tamas*, grief, ignorance and inertia, he has mixed up the values belonging to the different strata of society. Śrī Kṛṣṇa is trying to disentangle his mind by telling him what the *pāramārthika* truth is, what the *vyāvahārika* attitude and what

the *dhārmika* (moral) standpoint are. These three perspectives ought not to be jumbled up but must be applied in practical life according to one's level of realization.

Nay, the whole world will dishonour you and declare your undying dishonour to your unending shame. For a person of respectable standing infamy is worse than death. (2.34)

It is difficult to redeem one's honour once it is lost. And in the case of people who occupy high places in society their stigma of dishonour becomes a part of history.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa hammers in the common-sense point of view, knowing that Arjuna understands it very well.

These generals will think that you have withdrawn from battle out of fear and, as such, you will lose face with the very people who had till now thought so highly of you. (2.35)

Your enemies will pass many impolite remarks against you in their attempt to tarnish your reputed skill in warfare. What can be more painful than this? (2.36)

Arjuna had earlier thought of only the agony of killing his kinsmen. Now he is asked to ponder the agony of being slandered by those very kinsmen.

On the contrary, if Arjuna chooses to fight, he has before him two possible ties—both glorious, says Śrī Kṛṣṇa:

If you are killed in battle you will attain heaven; if you become victorious you will enjoy the whole earth as its undisputed ruler. Therefore, O Kaunteya, stand up, resolved to fight.

Here the call to arise is not for the attainment of *pāramārthika*, supreme illumination, for that point has been set aside for the time being. But in the situation of the battlefield Arjuna must arise from his posture of dejection with a firm determination to fight. A subtle

distinction can be made between fighting a war based on *pāramārthika jñāna* and fighting a war based on the idea of *svadharma*. The *jñāni*'s functioning is based on total non-involvement—he has gone beyond the *kartā-ahamkāra*, the consciousness of doership, knowing that only the body is functioning owing to the contact between senses and objects and the consequent reactions, while he himself is totally detached, the witness Atman. But the *karma-yogi* retains his ego of doership, only he knows that, instead of functioning himself, he is merely the instrument for the operation of God's will. The end result of both is the same, but the paths to the goal of identity with Atman are different.

Arjuna is now faced with such unassailable arguments from the standpoints of both *paramārtha* and *svadharma* that all the ground is cut from under his feet except at one point—his inescapable feelings of happiness and sorrow. It is within his mind to ask, 'What about my feelings, how are my emotions to be placed in the scale of your teaching?' Śrī Kṛṣṇa understands this last obstacle in Arjuna's mind. Earlier (in verse 2.14) he had dealt with it by asking Arjuna to ignore the constantly changing and short-lived feelings arising out of the contact between the senses and their objects. Now he says:

By treating alike the feelings of pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat, get ready to fight. You will not be committing sin if you engage in war with this attitude of mind. (2.38)

These three pairs of opposites are to be treated according to the *madhya dīpikā nyāya*—the lamp placed on a slot in the wall between two rooms illumines both. The verb *samē kṛtvā* is placed in the centre of opposite experiences which are to be accepted with poise and equanimity

by cultivating an objective and detached outlook. Kṛṣṇa says: When work is done in this spirit, it will not add to your store of karma,¹ and thus it gives freedom from further karma or sin. However, if you hate Duryodhana and want to destroy him, then you will be at fault because you will be succumbing to a mental reaction. If you think yourself to be an eternal doer, *kartā*, the result, *phala*, will sit squarely on you. But if you do not desire one or the other pair of opposites and then act, you will not be bound by karma, nor will you attract sin. Earlier (in 1.45) you told me that you were on the verge of committing a heinous crime, thank God that you

stopped in time, as if I was forcing you into sin. But this is the way—even if you engage in war you will not fall into sin as long as you maintain mental equanimity.

(To be continued)

1. The *jīvātmā* undergoes rebirth by the force of his karma. Karmas are classified under three categories: *sañcita karma* is the accumulated store of past karmas continually replenished in jīvahood: *kriyamāṇa-karma* is the present activity which adds to *sañcita karma*; *prārabdha karma* is that part of it which has begun to bear fruit in the life of that *jīva* which, once started cannot be stopped until it works itself out.

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

KALAJNANA (*and Nada Brahmananda Naraeyana Satakam of Kaiwara Shri Naraeyana Yateendra*) Original Telugu text in transliteration, meaning and commentary in English BY PROF. N. NANJUNDA SASTRY. Published by Shri Yogi Naraeyana Yateendra Ashrama Trust, Kaiwara, Chintamani Taluq, Kolar Dist., Karnataka 563 128. 1984. Pp. 16+255. Rs. 12

One of the significant features of Hindu culture and tradition is the unbroken line of saints who made use of poetry to communicate experience which is essentially incommunicable. Whether they were rooted in the 'Great' or the 'Little' traditions, using either the *mārga* (classical) or *desi* (folk) styles, these realized souls regarded poetry as almost the only mode to both express and evoke deeper levels of human consciousness. Above all, they also laid down, in memorable verse, a code of ethical and moral growth which is a necessary precondition of any spiritual pursuit. For, as A.K. Ramanujan has put it, for such saints 'religion is not a spectator sport, a reception, a consumption; it is an experience of Now, a way of being.'

One such is 'the great seer, visionary, mystic saint and celebrated poet', Naraeyana Yateendra whose *Kālañāna* has justly been famous as 'a mine of *jñāna* and guidance to a mukti seeker.' Born to pious parents in A.D. 1726 at Kaiwara

in Chintamani Taluq of Kolar district in Karnataka, the Yateendra was known in his earlier days as Narayanappa. A bangle-seller by family profession, his honesty could hardly get him the wherewithal to support his family, to satisfy, specially, his cantankerous, greedy wife.

Release from the shackles of *samsāra* came slowly but unmistakably. The incipient spiritual stirring reached a definite stage when, caught in a fierce storm on his way back from a business trip to Chittoor, he saw a light beckoning to him. This proved to be the hermitage of an aged *ṛṣi* from whom he received the *astaksari upadesa*. The *siddhi* could be gauged, the sage told him, 'when a pebble popped into his mouth transformed itself into a sugar candy.' Driven away by his wife for his failure as a householder, Narayanappa took this as a blessing and for an unbroken period of three years did *sādhanā* in a cave.

The prophecy of his Guru came true and Narayanappa emerged as the celebrated Naraeyana Yateendra. Invited to Kaiwara, he settled there on the outskirts near Amara Narayana Swami dispelling the spiritual darkness of all those who came to him for succour. He attained *samādhi*, *icchāmarāṇa*, in 1836.

Naraeyana composed several hymns in

praise of the Hindu pantheon as also several *satakas*. His *magnum opus* is, naturally, *Kārajñāna*. Written in *desi* yet mellifluous Telugu—a language appropriately compared to Italian for its unique musicality—the verses reflect one of the most endearing qualities to the modern temper: their insistence on appropriate patterns of social, economic and political behaviour as a necessary precondition for spiritual growth. As such the holistic counselling, couched in aphoristic but eminently readable style, ranges from the several aspects of spiritual life—the nature of the liberated yogi, guru, maya, *sādhaka* and *sādhana*, advaita etc.—to the woe that is in marriage, the *vāsanās* that take a heavy toll of life, sectarianism, bribery, corruption etc. There are also several verses which communicate the intricacies of yoga, of *praṇava* etc. (*dasa vidha nāda* p. 113).

Inevitably, *Kārajñāna* reminds us of comparable texts such as *Tirukkural* of Thiruvalluvar and the verses of the Telugu sage Vemana (an excellent English rendering of the latter by C.P. Brown was reprinted in 1967 by the Andhra Pradesh Sahitya Akademi). But in any comparison, the *Kārajñāna* seems to have a deeper thrust so far as the mystical quest is concerned, since several verses illumine in depth the intricacies of *sādhana* (particularly, 106,113,114, 116,135,151,157,174,181 etc.)

Prof. Nanjunda Sastry's transliteration and translation of the meaning of the verses are models of impeccable scholarship. Especially valuable are his headings for each verse expressing succinctly the major motifs; and the elaborate explanations for each verse laying bare the implicit ideas of the highly suggestive style of Naraeyana arc of inestimable significance to the *sādhaka*. Everywhere there is evidence not only of maturity of scholarship but also an invariable concern to transform scholarly comments into aids to spiritual growth.

The trustees, specially Shri M.S. Ramaiah, of Shri Yogi Naraeyana Yateendra Ashrama Trust of Kaiwara which is doing yeoman service to spread the message of the sage both in secular and spiritual activities should be congratulated for bringing out this fine book. Reasonably well produced and priced, it is a text of great interest to all those seeking aids for the inward odyssey.

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MAHATMA GANDHI AND ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI: A CHALLENGE TO NUCLEAR HOLOCAUST: BY ANTHONY ELENJIMITTAM. Published by Aquinas Publications, Bandra, Bombay 400 050. 1985. Pp. xxiv + 302. Price not mentioned.

The book is in the main a narration of the life story of Mahatma Gandhi from his birth at Porbandar in 1869 to his martyrdom to the cause of truth and non-violence in 1948. Of its seventeen chapters covering some three hundred pages, fifteen are devoted to the biography of the Mahatma. They tell us about his Gujarati origin, his Indo-British formation, his South African campaigns, his religious idealism, his Satyagraha movements, Civil Disobedience movement, Quit India movement and finally, about his martyrdom.

The sixteenth chapter makes the point that the applied Gandhian dynamics of truth and non-violence is the only alternative to a total nuclear annihilation.

The final chapter notes the spiritual kinship between Mahatma Gandhi and St. Francis of Assisi who lived seven centuries ahead of Gandhi. Both of them realized God in the service to humanity. To quote the author, 'The kinship between these two great ones of history should induce us to study their life and teachings closer and help us to apply the principles of Love or Non-Violence to the burning problems in the political and economic life of our human family. The spiritual kinship between St. Francis and Mahatma Gandhi may take us topographically to a twinship, for establishing a link between the towns of Assisi and Porbandar thus consolidating the spiritual links between India and Italy'. (p. 5)

The author, a trained theologian, rebel priest and monk, and now running a Welfare Society for Destitute Children in Bandra, Bombay, had the privilege of working with Gandhiji in his peace mission in Noakhali in 1946. During this association, Gandhiji is quoted as saying to him, 'I am a follower of Christ, but not of Christians... Unlike the missionaries and priests who are the champions of exclusive arc of salvation in the churches, St. Francis gave us the example of an all-inclusive love and service.... We have to go to the rock-bottom of all religions which is ethics, fellow-feeling and feeling of oneness of all in God, of God in all'. (p. 210). Asked by Gandhiji to spread the gospel of universal love and compassion, the author devoted his life wholly to the cause of inter-religious understand-

ing, believing that 'Humanity is my Family ; Truth is my light ; Love is my religion'.

—Mahatma Gandhi and St. Francis—stood and worked for.

All right-thinking people will wish him well in his crusade for One World, One Humanity and One World Citizenship—the ideals his Masters

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A CORRECTION

In the review of *A Concordance to the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, published in our February 1986 issue (p. 82), it has been stated that 'because the pagination in the standard Madras edition is totally different, the *Concordance* will not work with it'. This may be rectified, since the current Madras edition (1985) is a page-for-page reproduction of the New York edition.

NEWS AND REPORTS

REPORT OF THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION BELUR MATH, FOR 1984-85

*Issued by the General Secretary
Ramakrishna Mission, on
24 February 1986*

The 76th Annual General Meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission was held at the Belur Math premises on Sunday the 23rd of February, 1986, at 3.30 p.m. Swami Gambhirananda, President of the Ramakrishna Mission, was the chairman of the proceedings. A synopsis of the Governing Body's report for 1984-85 placed before the meeting is given below.

A significant event of the year was the declaration of the birthday of Swami Vivekananda (12th January) as the 'National Youth Day' by the Government of India. The first 'Youth Day' was observed at Belur Math and in almost all the centres in a solemn and enthusiastic manner.

In the period under report the Mission spent a sum of Rs. 31,15,537 towards relief and rehabilitation programmes spread throughout the country. Besides, relief articles worth Rs. 14,57,841 were received and distributed. Nearly four lakhs of people of about one thousand villages affected by natural calamities such as cyclone, earthquake, fire and flood, as also by riots and disturbances were provided with succour.

The Ramakrishna Math did not lag far behind. It conducted rehabilitation programmes in Gujarat incurring an expenditure of Rs. 28,35,792.

During the year Pallimangal programmes (Integrated Rural Development) such as Agro-economic service, cottage industry, pisciculture etc. were implemented by quite a few branches of both the Mission and the Math, involving substantial outlay of funds. The Headquarters alone spent more than Rs. 6,00,000 under these programmes.

Among the important developments during the year the laying of foundation stone for a new institution named 'Samaj Sevak Shikshan Mandira', for training youths in rural development work, at Saradapitha, Belur, and the inauguration of a computer section in one of the schools of the Mission Ashrama, Madras, deserve special mention. The academic results of the educational institutions were brilliant as usual with our students securing the 1st, 3rd, 4th, 6th & 8th positions in Madhyamik Examination 1984 and 2nd, 5th & 6th positions in the Higher Secondary Examination 1984, in West Bengal. The Ramakrishna Mission School at Along (Arunachal Pradesh) was honoured with the 'National award for the best institution for children's welfare 1984' by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Government of India.

Other significant developments during the same period in the Ramakrishna Math were the dedication of the temple of Sri Ramakrishna at Contai Ashrama and the affiliation of three private centres at Barasat (West Bengal), Pune (Maharashtra) and in Japan to the Ramakrishna Math, Belur.

The Mission conducted 8 hospitals, 62 dispensaries and 12 mobile medical units (including 30 dispensaries and 6 mobile units in

rural and tribal areas) which treated 41,13,293 patients.

The Math served 7,32,727 patients through its 5 hospitals, 19 dispensaries and 3 mobile medical units (including 3 hospitals and 9 dispensaries in rural and tribal areas).

The educational institutions of the Ramakrishna Mission numbering 1074 had on their rolls 1,19,484 students while the Ramakrishna Math had a students strength of 9,724 in its 94 educational institutions. Out of these, 974 institutions including 633 non-formal education centres were conducted in rural and tribal areas.

Under the auspices of the 'Ramakrishna Vivekananda Bhāva Prachār Committee' a number of Youth Conventions were conducted by our centres. In the regional seminars organized by our branches under the guidance of the 'Committee for Comprehensive Study of the Ramakrishna Vivekananda Movement', eminent scholars and educationists participated.

The Math and Mission foreign centres were engaged in educational, medical, cultural and spiritual activities of various types.

Excluding the Headquarters at Belur, at the end of the year the Mission and Math had 74 and 70 branches, respectively, spread throughout the globe.

RAMAKRISHNA MISSION, BELUR MATH RELIEF WORK DURING FEBRUARY '86

Primary Relief: Sri Lanka Refugee Relief: Besides distribution of milk and *Sundal* to 37,586 & 24,000 persons respectively, 695 books, 7 blankets, 52 kgs. puffed rice etc. were further distributed through our Madras Mission Ashrama, among Sri Lanka refugees sheltered at Mandapam and Tiruchi camps. The usual monthly medical check-up and treatment of students have been conducted.

Rehabilitation: West Bengal Tornado Rehabilitation: The newly constructed Saradmani Block of Thakurnagar Balika Vidyalaya at Gaighata, 24-Parganas, is now ready for inauguration.

RAMAKRISHNA MISSION, ALONG (ARUNACHAL PRADESH)

REPORT FOR THE YEAR 1985-86

The School: This school was started on the

27th July, 1966 in a thatched building in the present football ground with only 35 students in classes Preparatory, One and Two. Our late Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi laid the foundation stone of the present school building on 25 December 1967.

During the period under review the school had classes from the Preparatory to XI, affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education, New Delhi. The present school strength is 977 including the 200 Tribal boys in the hostel. The school has been upgraded to the plus two stage, in both science and humanities, from July 85.

Being affiliated to the CBSE, New Delhi, the school has been sending candidates for the All India Secondary School Examination since 1978. From 1978 to 1985, there have been cent-per-cent pass results.

Besides general education, socially useful work like typewriting, tailoring, poultry-keeping, dairy-maintenance, kitchen-gardening, printing, carpentry, bee-keeping, drawing and painting, Indian music, dance, embroidery and knitting, automobile repair and maintenance were taught. Shorthand has also been recently introduced in class-XI.

All the students were provided with free lunch.

The school received the National Award for outstanding Child-welfare work in 1984-85 from the President of India. The school has been accorded 'Permanent Affiliation' (model school) status by the CBSE, New Delhi.

Hostel: provides free board and lodging to 200 tribal boys.

Library and Reading room: had 8,291 books and 55 journals.

Mobile dispensary: with an attached audio-visual unit attended to the medical needs of the local people.

Cultural activities: Birthdays of great spiritual and national leaders and national days were celebrated as usual.

An appeal: The Institution needs donations in cash and kind for further developments, and requests the general public to institute endowments of Rs. 1,000/- or more for the same.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Employment and the Quality of Life

The right to work is a fundamental right in Communist countries like Russia and China. The constitutions of these countries guarantee employment to every citizen. A few years ago an unsuccessful attempt was made to move a bill in the Rajya Sabha for such a provision in the Indian constitution. The minister concerned stated that it would not be possible to implement the right to work unless all the property was owned by the State. His assertion went unchallenged because none, either in the ruling party or in the opposition parties, had the faintest hope of all the millions of people in this country getting jobs.

The problem of unemployment has been growing over the last thirty years. The Planning Commission has laid down laudable goals and targets in various fields, but at no stage has it thought of full employment for all the people. A study of the growth of unemployment (1951-1969) made by the Reserve Bank of India says, 'In none of the Plan periods employment opportunities could be created on a scale to absorb even the new entrants to the labour force, leading to progressively rising backlog of the unemployed'.

Most people think of employment only in terms of providing more jobs in government departments and public sector undertakings or starting new factories. The scope for expansion in these fields is limited, but that is not the main problem. The main problem is the low standard of living of the people. Poverty produces only more poverty; wealth produces more wealth. Raising the standard of living does not only mean increasing the production of food, cloth or steel. It includes improvement of services in public health, communication, transport, even the supply of luxury goods like automobiles, TV sets, fashion fabrics etc. Any improvement of the quality of life automatically increases the opportunities for employment. Now there is a construction boom all over India; as a result, carpenters and masons even in the remotest villages are fully employed and earning high wages. This is true of plumbers and electricians in cities. Simply laying roads in inaccessible places tremendously improves the job opportunities for the people of those parts in various ways.

The paradoxes that bedevil this country such as bumper stocks and starvation, recession in cloth industry and half-naked people, recession in the industry of heavy transport vehicles and overcrowded buses, the failure of soft loans, subsidies and other concessions to generate self-employment, the failure of the consumer product industry to bring down the prices because of limited internal market—all these and more are the direct result of one single factor, lack of purchasing power. And purchasing power can be generated only through increased employment.

It is now being widely recognized that self-employment is the only solution to the problem of unemployment in India. The government has already launched several laudable schemes like the TRYSEM (Training of Rural Youth in Self-Employment). But these have not produced the expected results mainly because the overall quality of life of the population remains low.
