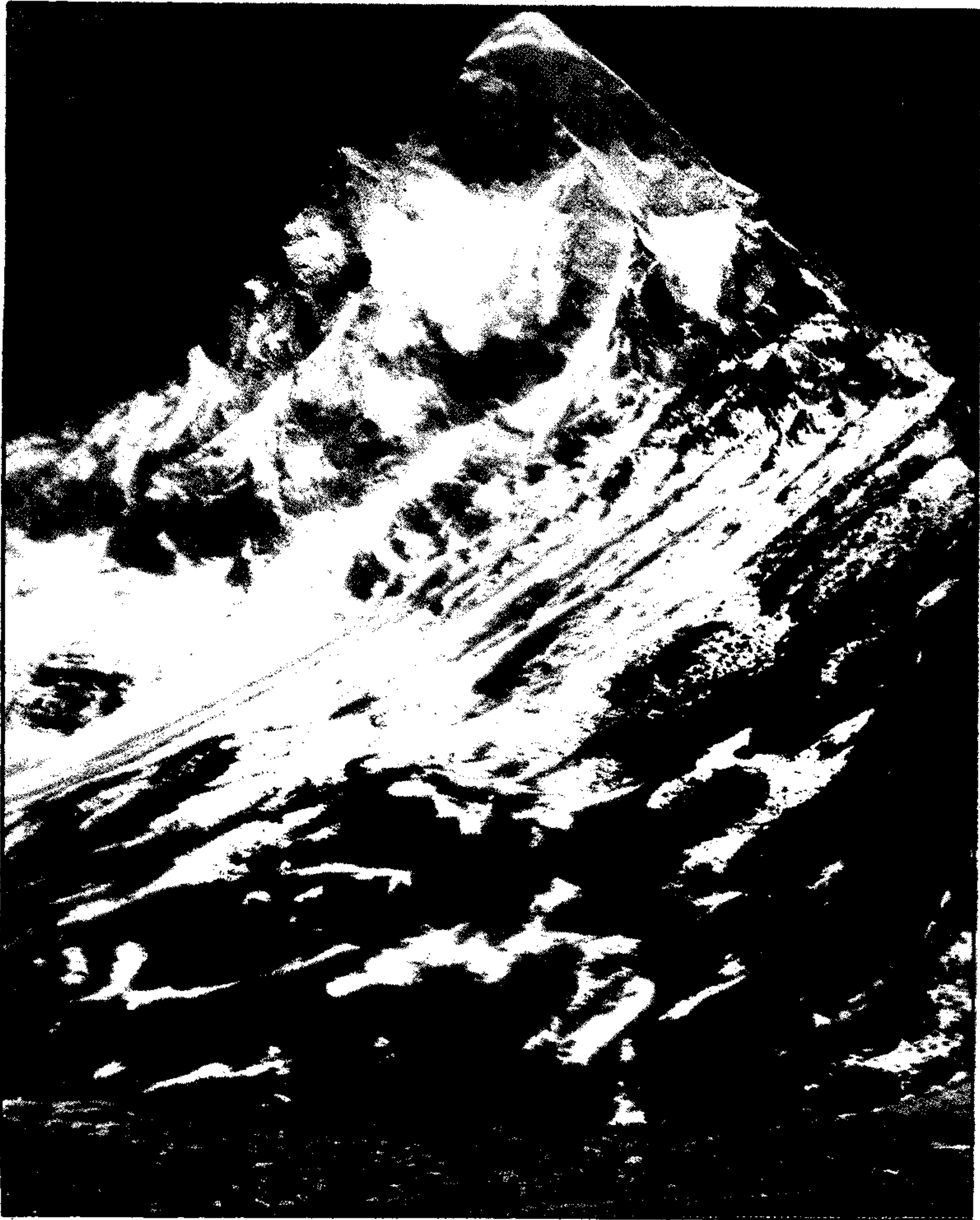


PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or Awakened India



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

Prabuddha Bharata

VOL. 96

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No. 9

The Divine Message IN PRAISE OF GENESA

अजं निर्विकल्पं निराकारमेकं निरानन्दमानन्दमद्वैतपूर्णम् ।
परं निर्गुणं निर्विशेषं निरीहं परब्रह्मरूपं गणेशं भजेम ॥

O Lord, Thou art the One unborn, absolute and formless ; Thou art beyond Bliss and again art Bliss itself—the One and the Infinite. Thou art the Supreme, without attributes, differentiation and desire. Thou art verily the Supreme Brahman. Thee, O Ganeśa, do we worship.

गुणातीतमानं चिदानन्दरूपं चिदाभासकं सर्वगं ज्ञानगम्यम् ।
मुनिध्येयमाकाशरूपं परेशं परब्रह्मरूपं गणेशं भजेम ॥

Thy nature is beyond attributes. Thou art the embodiment of Intelligence and Bliss, the Effulgent Spirit, the All-pervading, the goal of knowledge. Thou art the object of meditation to the sages, formless and omnipresent, like ether. Thou art the Supreme Lord, the Supreme Brahman. Thee, O Ganeśa, do we worship.

जगत्कारणं कारणज्ञानरूपं सुरादिं सुखादिं गुणेशं गणेशम् ।
जगद्व्यापिनं विश्ववन्द्यं सुरेशं परब्रह्मरूपं गणेशं भजेम ॥

Thou art the Cause of the world, the Primal Knowledge, the Origin of gods, the Origin of bliss, the Lord of Gunas, the Lord of heavenly hosts. Thou pervadest the universe, and art worshipped by all. Thou art the Lord of gods, Thou art verily the Supreme Brahman. Thee, O Ganeśa, do we worship.

from Ganeśa Stava

Greatness of Ganesa

Worship of the divine forms should not end in mere static piety, but must bring about tangible change in one's character and purification of heart. However amorphous may be our conceptions about God in the beginning, as we proceed to try to live the spiritual life things appear in new light. Veil after veil lifts and spiritual enquiry gathers its own momentum. There is no failure in spiritual life. Even a spark is enough to burn down the whole forest. There is an assurance in the Gītā (II.40): "*Svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt*" —"Even very little of this dharma saves one from great fear." The Divinity and divine qualities we worship and meditate upon become living and real when we see them manifested in beings like ourselves. These divinities are personifications of purity and perfection. Our prayers should be not merely for the playthings of the world, but for virtues leading to Knowledge and Devotion. It is the only priceless treasure; all else is tinsel.

Upanisadic sages, though they declared boldly: "*Nedaṁ yad idaṁ upāsate*" —"Reality is not what people worship here." —Yet they were aware of the immense value of representative forms and symbols. The evolution of spiritual consciousness begins from an objective phase and culminates in absolute subjectivity. The objective stage is the ladder to reach the summit of non-dual reality. Moreover, the two aspects, form and formlessness, are potent means to the realization of the Infinite Consciousness. Both are equally important. Sri Ramakrishna, wishing to set the endlessly reasoning mind at rest, often advised: "First realize the Divine

Mother, She Herself will tell you whether She is with form or without form." Through the divine forms one realizes that oneself and the indwelling pure consciousness, or God, are one. "Īśwara, as the indwelling spirit," writes Dr. Radhakrishnan,

And not as an object who is external to us, is what the Real is. God must cease to be a conceived and apprehended God, but become the inward power by which we live. But this inward experience of God is felt only by the advanced spirits. The simple unreflective child-mind seeks God who is above and not within.¹

Worship of whatever form one undertakes is immaterial, but what matters most is total self-yearning, earnest effort to know the Divine. The Divine knows the innermost thoughts of an aspirant and the subtlest motive behind every wish or prayer. It responds quickly to an earnest prayer. According to Sri Ramakrishna it is enough to have faith in either aspect one conceives of as God—with form or without form. He defended the worship of clay images by saying that to suit different men in different stages of knowledge, these multiplicity of forms are necessary. In his commentary on the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (I.i.2.), Śaṅkara calls this faith "*Āstikya-buddhi*"—faith in the existence of the Beyond, faith in the Supreme Power. The kindling of this *Āstikya-buddhi* is necessary. Dr. Radhakrishnan observes:

While the Upaniṣads recognise that deliverance is the supreme end of life, they are aware that many are not ready for the supreme sacrifice, the dying to their ego. They need some preparation for it. They ask for emotional satisfactions,

1. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upaniṣads* (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1989, p. 582).

and for their sake devotional and ritualistic practices are tolerated. They are not useless, for they lead us on by the upward path by directing our minds and hearts to the reality of the eternal being, and gradually take us out of ourselves into the true religion of Spirit.²

Therefore, the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* says: “*Śreyo hi dhīro’bhipreyaso vṛṇīte*”—“The wise choose the good in preference to the pleasant. (I.2.2) The simple-minded, for the sake of worldly well-being, prefers *kṣema* (well-being), and a man endowed with *buddhi* (intelligence) chooses *yoga*. The Lord also said in the *Gīta* that “*I look after both the yoga and Kṣema of my devotees.*” The later *Upaniṣads*—e.g. *Śvetāśvatara*—look upon the Reality as the Personal God, who bestows grace. The sage, Svetaśvatara declares that the ultimate truth is revealed to one who has “*Yasya deve parā bhaktir, yathā deve tathā gurau*”—“who has the highest devotion for God and Guru, alike”. (VI. 23).

The Upaniṣads do not teach narrow dogmas. All symbols of the Divine and all divinities are parts of that ineffable limitless Consciousness. What they insist upon is not limited religious formulations but spiritual experience, direct vision of truth. Choice of symbols and forms are left to an aspirant to make use of and move forward towards the goal of oneness. It is only when the spiritual pursuit becomes lukewarm and secondary that all sectarian evils raise their heads and so-called religious life turns into an arena of petty squabbles. Śiva, Śakti, Viṣṇu, Christ, or Gaṇeśa—all these personal gods are attempts by devotees to see and comprehend, through them, the non-dual reality. With their faith and strengthened by their filial love, numbers received grace and guidance from the Omniscient Divine. The direct vision of that Deity and intimate relation-

ship with that Godhead cannot be brushed aside as fantasy. To accept only as real what our limited senses convey to the mind, and reject mystical experiences outright, as hallucinations, is nothing but intellectual vanity. That there are traders who try to sell their spiritual merchandise to the gullible, is also true.

All Hindu divinities worshipped today, except some of the minor ones of mythology, can be traced to the *Vedas*—the earliest of repositories. What appeared in seed form, or as of nebulous description, in course of evolution emerged assuming distinct personality of its own with well-defined attributes. The god Gaṇeśa owes his origin to the *Vedas*. In the *R̥g Veda* (II.23.1), the name of Gaṇapati was an epithet used for Bṛhaspati, the god of wisdom and Sage of sages. He is also called the Lord of sacred speech and the Patron of speakers and inspired poets. He is also depicted as the Protector from sins and obstacles (X. 64). There is also an example of his valour, when he stormed into the impregnable mountain caves and retrieved cattle, horses and riches stolen by the demons called *Pāṇis*. But in the *Veda* there is no mention that Bṛhaspati was an elephant-headed god.

The legend how Gaṇapati came to acquire an elephant head is described in the Purāṇas—in *Brahma Vaivarta*, *Skanda*, and specially in *Śiva-rudra*. Pārvatī, Supreme Māyā, fashioned from the elements of her body a handsome strong boy and loved him as her own son. She stationed this boy, staff in hand, at her door to guard it, as the chief of her *Gaṇas* (*attendant*). Gaṇeśa stood at the door to carry out the orders of his mother that no one should come into the house without her permission. When Śiva came and wanted to enter his house, Gaṇeśa, not knowing he was Śiva, brandished his staff to stop him. Infuriated by this affront, Śankara ordered his *gaṇas* (*attendants*) to

2. Ibid. p. 132.

throw out the boy. Enraged, they approached and fought with this heroic son of Durgā. He bashed them all with his club and they fled in all directions. Then Śiva himself came to defeat this formidable foe. Viṣṇu too entered the battle to defeat the mighty hero. Finally, Śiva cut off the head of Gaṇeśa with his trident. When Durgā saw the slain body of her beautiful son, she became furious and assumed the form of Caṇḍikā. She started destroying the world. Even Brahmā and Viṣṇu could not do anything before Mahāśakti. It was only at the intervention of sage Nārada that finally the Mother became pleased and asked them to revive her child. They went to the north as directed by Śiva, to cut off the head of whomsoever they first encountered. The first thing they met was an elephant with a single tusk. Taking its head, they fastened it to Gaṇeśa, and with Śiva's blessings he regained life.

According to the *Brahma Vaivarta Purāna*, when Paraśurāma wanted to meet Śiva and Pārvatī while they were asleep, but was refused permission by Gaṇeśa, who was at the door Paraśurāma was angered and shot his deadly missile called Paraśu and it hit and broke one tusk of Gaṇapati. Therefore Gaṇeśa is called Ekadanta—the god with one tusk.

Such celestial qualities of Bṛhaspati, viz, with divine wisdom, the lord of sacred speech, the chief of gods, the patron of speakers and inspired poets, of mighty power and invincible strength—all these find their wonderful expression in the image of Gaṇeśa. The elephant, as a rule, is majestic, serene, harmless, independent, and no obstacle can stand before its formidable strength. It is also known for its astonishing memory and agility. In Indian scriptures the elephant has earned its place, awesome, auspicious and adorable. Indra's vehicle, the mighty elephant Airāvata; Gajendra, the king of elephants in the *Bhāgavata*, and the

elephant that always accompanies goddess Lakṣmi, are famous. In the *Jātaka Tales*, Buddha was once born as a gentle, wise white elephant. Because of this Gajānana has become popular with an elephant head.

Ridiculous though it may seem, that huge Gajānana rides on a tiny mouse. It is said that *muṣaka*, or mouse is speech. A mouse can go to any nook and corner to explore. Nothing can be hidden from it. In the *R̥g Veda*, speech is described as pervasive. (X. 125) Words can describe everything in the world. Nothing can escape its comprehending net.

Another plausible esoteric interpretation is that one's ego should be as small as a tiny and lowly mouse. With big bloated ego, man inevitably invites misery, enmity of his fellow beings, and unhappiness. With subdued ego, on the other hand, he can overcome obstacles and live happily and contentedly. This is connoted by the huge belly and smiling face of the tender deity. On a powerless ego one can easily ride, but in most cases people are ridden and goaded by uncontrollable ego—like "*dustāśvā iva sārathēh*"—"the wicked horses of a charioteer." It is difficult to obliterate completely the ego or 'I-sense', therefore it should be our aim to keep it in its proper place, as tiny as possible. Such harmless ego is called 'ripe ego' by Sri Ramakrishna.

Gaṇeśa is worshipped throughout the length and breadth of India by Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists alike. In the past ages the fame of this deity did not remain confined to India, but spread also to Tibet, Nepal, Mongolia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Afghanistan, China, Japan, Mexico and Central America. Archaeological discoveries have brought to light many temples, images, carvings and plates of an elephant-faced god which lend credence to the immense popularity of this deity. In Roman religion, Janus, the auspicious god, occupied an important

place. "Some scholars regard Janus as the god of all beginnings and believe that his association with doorways is derivative. He was invoked as the first of any gods in regular liturgies. The beginning of the day, month and year were sacred to him."³ Entrance to all principal gods must be made through him. The month January is named for him. Sir William Jones, the celebrated British orientalist, compared the striking similarities between Janus and Gaṇeśa in one of his essays, "On the Gods of Italy and Greece".

In Ellora caves, a series of magnificent Gupta-period (sixth to eighth century A.D.) rock-cut temples, the images of Gaṇeśa can be seen. Many famous temples and places in South India and Maharashtra, and some famous *Svayambhumurties*—images that sprang into existence spontaneously—of Gaṇapati are found in Kashmir and are popular places of pilgrimage. There has been an exclusive sect called *Gāṇapatyās*, though no longer prominent, which worshipped the deity as the supreme reality or Brahman. This sect must have come into existence in the fifth century A.D. and was at its height in about the tenth century. Later, under the influence of *Śāktism* (the worship of Śakti) six separate cults sprang up that venerated different forms of the god, Mahāgaṇapati, Haridrāgaṇapati, Swarna-gaṇapati, and Santānagaṇapati.

The *Gaṇapati Upaniṣad*, a minor Upaniṣad, must have been written during the heyday of the *Gāṇapatyās*. It extols Gaṇeśa as the substratum of the manifest universe. It says: "*Tvam ānandamayah, tvam brahmayah, tvam saccidānanda advityo'si, tvam pratyakṣam brahma'si*"—"Thou art full of bliss, and pure consciousness; Thou art Saccidānanda; Thou art verily Brahman."

Yogis and Tantrics believe that Gaṇeśa is

established in *Mūlādhāra cakra*—the psychic centre where potential energy is sleeping. When he becomes active and bestows his grace, the Kundalinī Śakti is roused. That is, spiritual awakening occurs. The *Gaṇapati Upaniṣad* states: "*Tvam mulādhārasthito nityam*"—"Thou art eternally established in the Mulādhāra." Śankara in his commentary quotes yajñavalkya's advice, "O Gārgi, before meditation, worship Gaṇapati with fruits and sweetmeats."⁴ In *Śāradātilak Tantra*, fifty different forms and equal powers of Gaṇeśa are described. Some of his forms are Vighnarāja, Vighneśa, Vināyaka, Trilocana, Ekadanta, Surpakarṇa, Lambodara, Sumukha, Varada, and so on. Some of his powers are: Śanti, Svasti, Saraswatī, Swāhā, Śubhadā, Medhā, Kānti, Suyaśā, and the like. There is a separate Gāyatrī mantra of Gaṇeśa which devotees of the Deity use for meditation.

*Ekdamṣṭrāya vidmahe vakratundāya
dhīmahi,
Tanno vighna pracodayāt.*

*We contemplate on the One-tusked God;
we meditate upon the Elephant-faced One.
May He remove all the obstacles in our
spiritual path and illumine our consciousness.*

Āstikās, those who have firm faith, believe that the adorable son of Gaurī destroys the ills that flesh is heir to. He destroys likewise the ills of this *samsāric* existence, the cycle of births and deaths.

Śankara, therefore, sings in ecstasy the glory of Gaṇeśa: "Immutable, destroyer of perils, indweller in the hearts of yogis, the elephant-faced Lord with a single tusk, I worship Thee in adoration!"

Gajānana with serene and happy countenance sits like an immovable rock. His firm posture reminds us of one of the Psalms—"Be still, and know that I am God."

3. *The new Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1974, vol. V, p. 517.

4. *The complete works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama Calcutta, 1989, vol. I, p. 307.

The Indian Vision Of God as Mother

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

If, in the character of an individual, the 'mother-heart' stands for love, purity, and fearlessness, it is also a truth within the cosmos—explains convincingly the internationally known speaker and author.

The Devī Māhātmyam is the most authoritative book on the subject of God as Mother ; it is known also as *Durgā Saptaśatī* and *Chandī*. Beginning with the *Vāg-Ambhṛṇī Sūkta* of the *Ṛg Veda* (10.125), the oldest book of humanity which according to many scholars, has directly influenced the *Devī Māhātmyam*, the vision of God as Mother became the focus of devotion and philosophical and mystical exposition in India down the ages. Thus sing *Sūktas* 3, 4, and 5 (as rendered by Thomas Coburn in his book referred to above, page. 256):

I am the queen who brings treasures together
wise, foremost of those worthy of worship,
The gods have put me in many places,
variously abiding, of manifold presence.
Through me a man eats food ; he who sees,
who breathes, who hears what is spoken
(does so through me).
Unknowing, they depend upon me : Hear,
O famous one—I am telling you
(something worthy of faith).
I myself proclaim this (state of affairs) which
is approved by gods and men,
Whomsoever I wish, I make mighty—a
Brāhmaṇa, a seer, a sage.

What is the *māhātmyam*, or glory, of the *Devī*, or the Divine Mother ? She is conceived as the universal *Śakti* or energy and the whole universe is the expression of that *Śakti* ; She brings forth this world from within Herself, protects it, and finally reabsorbs it into Herself at the time of final dissolution. That is how the *Devī Māhātmyam* deals with the concept of God

as Mother. This spiritual truth is inculcated through many a myth and legend. The philosophy behind all this myth and legend is the truth that *Cit Śakti*, the energy of Consciousness, is the ultimate reality behind the universe and that it is Masculine-Feminine, as *Brahman-Māyā*, as *Śiva-Śakti*, as Impersonal-Personal. Its quiescent state is the masculine aspect and Its active state is the feminine aspect. It is the integral unity of *Nityā* and *Līlā*, Eternity and Time.

The Devī Māhātmyam presents the nature of this Divine *Śakti* through the invocation of *Brahmā*, the Firstborn Cosmic masculine Person from whom the universe evolves (1.75, 77-79 ; and 81-82):

*Tvayaitat dhāryate viśvam
tvayaitat sṛjyate jagat ;
Tvayaitat pālyate devī
tvamatsyante ca sarvadā...*

“By You is supported this whole universe, by You is projected this whole universe ; by You is this whole universe protected, O *Devī*, and You also always re-absorb all this into Yourself.”

*Mahāvidyā mahāmāyā
mahāmedhā mahāsmṛtiḥ ;
Mahāmohā ca bhavati
mahādevī mahāsurī...*

“You alone are the great knowledge, the great *Māyā* or illusion ; the great insight, the great memory ; You also are the great

delusion, the great Goddess, the great demoness.”

*Tvam śrī tvam īśvarī tvam hṛīḥ
tvam buddhiḥ bodha lakṣaṇā ;
Lajjā puṣṭiḥ tathā tuṣṭiḥ
tvam kṣāntiḥ śāntireva ca...*

“You are prosperity and welfare, You are the Supreme, You are modesty, You are the intelligence of the nature of illumination; You are bashfulness, well-being, also satisfaction; You are also forbearance and tranquillity.”

*Prakṛtistvam ca sarvasya
guṇatraya vibhāvinī ;
Kālarātriḥ mahārātriḥ
moharātriṣca dāruṇā...*

“You are Nature (behind) all (the manifested universe), Manifester of the three *guṇās* (of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*); You are the dark night (of the periodic cosmic dissolution), the great night (of final dissolution), and the terrible night of delusion.”

*Soumyā soumyātarāśeṣa
soumyebhyastvatisundarī ;
Parāparāṇām paramā
tvameva parameśvarī...*

“You are pleasing, more pleasing than all the pleasing things; You are the Supreme beyond the high and the ordinary; You alone are the Supreme Queen.”

*Yacca kiñcit kvacit vastu
sadasad vākhilātmike ;
Tasya sarvasya yā śaktiḥ
sā tvam kim stūyase mayā...*

“Whatever or wherever a thing exists, effect or cause, O Self of the entire cosmos, and whatever power they all possess, You are all that; how can You be extolled by me (in words)?”

The Sanskrit word for nature is the feminine word *Prakṛti*; and *Prakṛti* includes,

unlike the word nature, not only the whole range of the objective world, but also the world of subject, the world of consciousness, that observes it and handles it. This *Prakṛti* of a two-fold totality, *aparā-prakṛti*, or ordinary nature subject to change, and *parā-prakṛti* or higher nature, which is *jīvabhūtām mahābaho*, *yayedam dhāryate jagat*—“consists of intelligence, O Mighty-armed, by which this universe is sustained” (*Gītā*, 7.5). And the Divine Mother is the totality of that two-fold *Prakṛti*; She is also called *Cit Śakti*, consciousness-energy; *Parā Śakti*, Supreme energy; *Ādyā Śakti*, Primordial energy. And this world is the *Līlā* or play of that Divine energy. If modern astrophysics conceives of the ultimate reality, out of which the cosmos has come through a big bang, as an inert background material, the cosmology of Indian philosophy of Vedānta, conceives of that ultimate reality, out of which the universe has evolved as infinite Pure Consciousness. And if consciousness is the essential stuff of the ultimate reality, its description in terms of personality becomes perfectly valid. And so ancient Vedānta, and Sri Ramakrishna today, speak of the ultimate reality in its two-fold aspect of *Nirguṇa-saguṇa*, the Impersonal-personal, *Nirākāra-sākāra*, the Formless-Formful, as Brahman and *Śakti*, *Śiva* and *Kālī*. Sri Ramakrishna expounds this truth in these luminous words (*Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 271):

Govinda: “Revered Sir, why does the Divine Mother have a black complexion?”

Master: “You see Her as black because you are far away from Her. Go near and you will find Her devoid of all colour. The water of a lake appears black from a distance. Go near and take the water in your hand and you will see that it has no colour at all. Similarly, the sky looks blue from a distance. But look at the atmosphere near you; it has no colour. The nearer you come to God, the more you will realize that He has neither name nor form. If you move away

from the Divine Mother, you will find Her blue, like the grass-flower. Is *Śyāmā* (Kālī) male or female?...That which is *Śyāmā* is also Brahman. That which has form, again, is without form. That which has attributes, again, has no attributes, Brahman is *Śakti*; *Śakti* is Brahman. They are not two. These are only two aspects, male and female, of the same Reality, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute."

Sri Ramakrishna loved to sing the following song about Kālī, the Divine Mother (*Ibid.*, p. 386):

Is Kālī, My Mother, really black?
The Naked One, of blackest hue,
Lights the lotus of the Heart. ...

He compares the immobile Brahman to a snake coiled up, and *Śakti* to the same snake in motion. That motion constitutes the evolution of the universe from within Itself, which is entirely within the jurisdiction of that *Śakti* aspect of the Divine Reality, the Divine Mother, which also is the inseparable power of Brahman. Here Sri Ramakrishna introduces the concept and term *Māyā* as an alternative to *Śakti*; both mean the one Divine power which has manifested this universe from within Herself. Brahman is the One; the world is the many; and that One is hidden in the many, It is hidden by the many. This is called the *Līlā* or play of *Māyā*. Śaṅkarācārya describes *Māyā* as (*Vivekacūdāmaṇi*, verse 109): *mahādbhutā anirvacanīya-rūpā*—"a great mystery, of the nature of the indeterminate or the undefinable." Expounding the immense comprehensiveness of this concept of *Māyā* in his lecture on "*Maya and the Evolution of the Conception of God*" in London in 1896, Swami Vivekananda says (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, p. 112):

What you call matter, or spirit, or mind, or anything else you may like to call them, the fact remains the same: we cannot say that they are, we cannot say that they are not. We cannot say they are one, we cannot say they are many. This

eternal play of light and darkness—indiscriminate, indistinguishable, inseparable—is always there. A fact, yet at the same time not a fact; awake and at the same time asleep. This is a statement of facts, and this is what is called Maya. We are born in this Maya, we live in it, we think in it, we dream in it. We are philosophers in it, we are spiritual men in it, nay, we are devils in this Maya, and we are gods in this Maya. Stretch your ideas as far as you can make them higher and higher, call them infinite or by any other name you please, even these ideas are within this Maya. It cannot be otherwise, and the whole of human knowledge is a generalisation of this Maya trying to know it as it appears to be. This is the work of Nama-Rupa—name and form. Everything that has form, everything that calls up an idea in your mind, is within Maya; for everything that is bound by the laws of time, space, and causation is within Maya.

This *Māyā*, says Sri Ramakrishna, has two aspects, namely, *avidyā-māyā*, *Māyā* of ignorance, and *Vidyā-māyā*, *Māyā* of knowledge. And every human being is free to choose to be under the one or the other. What is called evil comes out of men and women when they allow themselves to be under the control of *avidyā-māyā*, and they consequently become stagnant at the sensate level, become a problem to themselves and to society, and miss their evolutionary march to spiritual freedom and fulfilment. *Vidyā-māyā*, on the other hand, helps them to understand and manifest ethical and humanistic values, to become a friend and helper of society, and advances them on that human evolutionary road to spiritual freedom.

It is the privilege of every human being to convert his or her heart into a play-ground of the forces of *Vidyā-māyā*. If the world has come from the Divine *Śakti*, evil in the world is as much the Divine Mother's play as the good also is. The dirt on the earth, as much as its clean and beautiful things, are all only condensations of solar radiation. Mother loves all her children, but specially loves those who struggle against the evil forces in her universe, as also those who

courageously face even death in that struggle; that is what is hailed as the hero of all tragic dramas.

Accordingly, the religion centred in the Divine Mother has been the nursery of several heroic souls in the Indian tradition, like Shivaji and Guru Govind Singh. That religion does not say to humanity the soothing idea that all good comes from God and all evil comes from an entity called the devil. No, the Ultimate Reality is both life and death, not life only. "Whose shadow is both immortality and mortality," sang the *Rg-Veda* several thousand years ago (10.121.2):

*Ya ātmadā baladā yasya viśva
upāsate praśiṣam yasya devāḥ;
Yasyachāyā amṛtam yasya mṛtyuḥ
kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema...*

"Unto Him who gives us our individuality, who gives us strength, whose commands all beings, together with the gods, obey, whose shadow is immortality as well as mortality, we offer our oblation!"

The philosophy, spirituality, and ritual centred in the religion of the Divine Mother is based on this philosophy of Advaita, non-dualism. *Devī* literally means the luminous female, the goddess; but, as used in the *Devī Māhātmya*, it means The Goddess, the one Divine Mother of all, the *Parā Śakti* which is the dynamic feminine counterpart of the immobile masculine *Parama Śiva*. They are inseparable from each other, like word and its meaning, as expressed by ancient India's greatest poet and dramatist, Kālidāsa, in the opening verse of his *Kumāra-sambhavam*:

*Vāgarthāviva samprktau vāgartha
pratipattaye;
Jagataḥ pitarau vande Pārvatī
Parameśvarau ...*

"In order to achieve the comprehension of word and meaning, I salute the parents of the universe, Pārvatī and Parameśwara, who are inseparable like word and its meaning."

In Vedānta and the Tantra system, Brahman and *Śakti*, or *Śiva* and *Sakti*, are used alternatively. Śiva or Brahman is immobile, the energy of movement is in the *Śakti* or the immanent aspect. This world of multiplicity, this world of manifestation, is thus in the realm of *Śakti*. When one transcends this world of duality in the deepest *nirvikalpa* state of *Samādhi*, one realizes Brahman, the impersonal aspect of the Ultimate Reality. But very few can reach that dimension. All else come under the jurisdiction of *Śakti*, the personal aspect of the Ultimate Reality. This is what is conveyed in the passage from Vivekananda about *Māyā* quoted earlier, that we are all under the jurisdiction of *Māyā* which, as the *Cinmayī Śakti*, the energy of infinite Consciousness, is viewed as a person, as the Divine Mother. We are all under the jurisdiction of *Śakti* from that point of view, whether we know it or not. The Divine Mother is, and remains, the supreme reality for you and for me, and for all, except when you or I merge in that deep *nirvikalpa* state beyond the jurisdiction of the Divine Mother and become one with the transcendental Impersonal Brahman. Therefore, in all aspects of life and work and inter human relations, we all live and move and have our being in the Divine Mother, like fish in water.

5. Śaṅkarācārya on the Divine Mother

This glory of the Divine Mother is expressed by India's greatest philosopher of the eighth century A.D., Śaṅkarācārya, in some of his hymns. He was a great teacher of Advaita, non-duality. He built up the unified structure of Indian philosophy, and intellectually and spiritually influenced the

whole of India during his brief life of thirty-two years. About his greatness, the late internationally known Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, President of India, writes (*Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II. p. 446):

It is impossible to read Śankara's writings, packed as they are with serious and subtle thinking, without being conscious that one is in contact with a mind of a very fine penetration and profound spirituality. With his acute feeling of the immeasurable world, his stirring gaze into the abysmal mysteries of spirit, his unswerving resolve to say neither more nor less than what could be proved, Śankara stands out as a heroic figure of the first rank in the somewhat motley crowd of religious thinkers of the medieval India. His philosophy stands forth complete, needing neither a before nor an after.

The comprehensiveness and breadth of Śankara's religious outlook and sympathies made the people of India to confer on him a unique title, namely, *Ṣaṅmata-sthāpanā-cārya*, 'one who established six religions'! And this great philosopher was also a passionate devotee of the Divine Mother whose glory he has sung in several soul-stirring hymns. He has sung in praise of the Impersonal Ātman and Brahman, as also of many other divinities of the Hindu pantheon, knowing all of them to be manifestations of the one and non-dual Ultimate Reality. One of his many famous hymns is *Śivānanda Lahari*, 'Waves of the Bliss of Śiva'. In its very opening verse, he sings the glory of *Śakti*, the Divine Mother, more than that of Śiva, which he reserves to the rest of the hymn:

*Śivaḥ śaktyā yukto yadi bhavati kiñcit
prabhavitum ;
Na cedevam devo nakhalu kuśalaḥ
spanditumapi...*

"If Śiva is united with *Śakti*, He becomes capable to project this universe ; if not, He is not capable of even moving His limbs!"

In the Indian presentation of Śiva as *Naṭarāja*, 'the Great Dancer', dancing the world of manifestation into existence, we have the integration of Śiva and *Śakti* into a unity. There is another wonderful hymn of Śaṅkarācāryā where he even goes into a humorous eulogy of the feminine at the cost of the masculine, as it were. That is the *Devyāparādha Kṣamāpaṇa-stotram*, 'Hymn asking for forgiveness from the *Devī* for mistakes and sins'. There one finds that the last line sung in refrain in most of the verses is: *Kuputro jāyeta, kvacidapi kumātā na bhavati...* "There may be a *kuputra*, or bad son, but never a *kumātā*, bad mother". A son or daughter may reject a mother, but a mother will never reject her son or daughter. That is the mother-heart ; that, raised to the infinite dimension, is the heart of the *Devī*. Addressing Her by one of Her many sweet and dear names as *Bhavānī*, wife of *Bhava* (i.e. Śiva), Śaṅkarācārya sings (verse 7):

*Citā-bhasmā lepo garalamaśanam
dik-paṭa-dharo
jaṭadhārī kaṅṭhe bhujagapati-hārī-
paśupatiḥ ;
Kapālī bhūteśo bhajati jagadīśaika-padaṅvīm
Bhavānī tvat pāṇigrahaṇa-paripāṭī
phalamidam...*

"One who was smearing his body with ashes taken from the cremation ground, whose food was poison, whose clothes were the four quarters of space, whose hair was matted, who wore a snake as a garland on his neck and was the Lord of animals, who uses a skull as an eating bowl, and was the Lord of Bhūtas or ghouls—that Śiva now holds the undisputed status of the Lord of the whole universe ; O *Bhavānī*, this is only because of His being married to you!"

The human heart seeks and responds to the love of the mother-heart ; in verses 10 and 11 of the hymn, Śaṅkara sings:

*Āpatsu magnaḥ smaraṇam tvadīyam
karomi durge karuṇārṇaveśi ;
Naitat śaṭhatvam mama bhāvayethāḥ
kṣudhātrṣārtā janānīm smaranti ...*

“Immersed in dangers, O Durgā, I turn my mind to you, O Ocean of Mercy and spouse of Śiva ; please don't consider this as my deceitfulness, since children remember their mother when they suffer from hunger and thirst.”

*Jagadamba vicitramatra kim
paripūrṇā karuṇā'sti cenmayi ;
Aparādhaparamparāvṛtam
nahi mātā samupekṣate sutam ...*

“O Mother of the Universe, what wonder is there if You have full compassion on me who am enveloped in a succession of sins! For a mother never forsakes her son.”

When I recite some of these verses during my lectures in America or Europe, listeners are very much impressed with the absence of fear and trembling, and with the sense of love and fearlessness, the sense of intimacy that is present in the approach to God as Mother. This is the expression of the *bhakti* in the heart of a *jñāni* that Śaṅkara was, one who had realized the inseparable unity of the Impersonal-personal God.

In fact, one of the songs composed in Sanskrit on Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, by Swami Abhedananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, who helped Swami Vivekananda's Vedanta work in the U.S.A., which we often sing during the evening service in the centres of the Ramakrishna Order in India and abroad, also expresses a similar sentiment of mother-child love relation :

*Sneḥena badhnāsi manosmadīyam
doṣān aśeṣān saguṇīkarosi ;
Ahetunā no dayase sadoṣān
svāṅke gr̥hītvā yadidam vicitram...*

“With love You bind our hearts to You, and all our evils You convert into good ; spontaneous is Your compassion on us who are with evils, what a wonder is this that You take us on Your lap even with all our evils!”

That explains the great hold of the Mother Goddess concept on the Indian mind. We understood that here is a person who embodies a unique value, namely, love. If God is love, as many scriptures say, here is a unique expression of that love. This value is found in the female of all species—the urge to care for and protect the offspring, even at the cost of one's life. Some years ago, I read in one of the newspapers a report of a very touching incident that took place somewhere in Georgia in the U.S.S.R. One out of a pack of wolves chased a flock of deer in a forest ; the flock ran for safety. A fawn entered into the hollow of a tree for safety and its mother covered the hollow with her belly to protect her offspring. Soon a bear appeared and killed that chasing wolf, and the fawn and its mother were saved.

In his book *Bhakti Yoga*, Swami Vivekananda expounds the truth that love knows no fear (*Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. III, pp. 88-89):

Love conquers naturally all fear. Think of a young mother in the street, and a dog barking at her ; she is frightened, and flies into the nearest house. But suppose, the next day, she is in the street with her child and a lion springs upon the child. Where will be her position now ? Of course, in the very mouth of the lion protecting the child. Love conquers all fear. Fear comes from the selfish idea of cutting one's self off from the universe. The smaller and the more selfish I make myself, the more is my fear.

If the mother-heart is a truth of life within an individual, and if its expression in life makes for fearlessness, Vedānta says, it is

(Continued on page 378)

Sri Ramakrishna Touched Them— Nafar Bandyopadhyay

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

Drawing from various sources, the scholar-monk who is Assistant Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, reconstructs the little known life of a devotee, showing how the grace of the Master touched and purified the lives of many earnest souls.

AFTER his spiritual striving and divine madness, Sri Ramakrishna came back to Kamarpukur where he was married to Sarada Devi in May 1859. Following the marriage he stayed on at Kamarpukur for about one year and seven months. Again, to honour family custom he visited his father-in-law's house at Jayrambati in 1860, when Sarada was about to complete her seventh year.¹ Sri Ramakrishna stayed in Jayrambati a few days, and during this period the Mukherjee family, knowing of the Master's love for devotional singing, arranged a *Saṅkīrtana* (an emotional and unritualistic mode of musical worship).² Nafar Bandyopadhyay led in the singing. Hriday, the Master's nephew, was present there too, probably having come to return with his uncle back to Dakshineswar. As Nafar hailed from the same village as Hriday and was everywhere known in the locality as a good singer, it is likely that he was brought by Hriday for the kīrtan. Thus it was for the first time that Nafar saw Sri Ramakrishna and felt drawn to him.

Due to Sri Ramakrishna's reminiscing many years later in the presence of Mahendranath Gupta, or 'M', we have an account in the Master's own words recorded

in the *Gospel*.³ Sitting one day in his room at Dakshineswar, the Master was speaking to the devotees about his God-intoxication. He was saying: "Oh, what a state of mind I passed through! When I first had that experience, I could not perceive the coming and going of day and night. People said I was insane. What else could they say? They made me marry. I was then in a state of God-intoxication...I visited my father-in-law's house. They arranged a kīrtan, and there was much singing of God's holy name. The kīrtan was led by Nafar, Digamber Bandyopadhyay's father...*Khub saṅkīrttan!* What a kirtan it was!"^{3a}

Nafar experienced in his heart a great inflow of devotion, faith, and power. It seemed to him solely due to the presence of Sri Ramakrishna and seeing his overwhelming religious ecstasy and divine intoxication with the thought of God. It appeared to Nafar that Sri Ramakrishna was a perennial fountain of love and divine power encased in a human body. Also, Sri Ramakrishna was evidently pleased with Nafar and his singing. Sri Ramakrishna's yardstick to measure a man was the latter's devotior to God. Once he said, "The fact is, all men

1. Swami Gambhirananda, *Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1955) p. 28.

2. A. K. Mazumdar, *Chaitanya, His Life and Doctrine*, 1969. P. 143 footnote.

3. 'M', *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Tr. by Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1985) p. 231, in conjunction with—3a. *Srī Srī Ramakṛṣṇa Kathāmṛta*, Vol. II, p. 49.

may look alike from the outside, but some of them have fillings of 'condensed milk'. Cakes may have fillings of milk or powdered black gram (pulses), but they all look alike from the outside. The desire to know God, ecstatic love of Him, and such other spiritual qualities are the 'condensed milk'.⁴ Nafar had some such stuff in him, therefore it was natural that they were attracted to each other.

When the famous preacher Keshab Chandra Sen discovered Sri Ramakrishna and wrote about him in the newspapers, Sri Ramakrishna became well known to the general public almost overnight. Keshab and many others rejoiced in his exuberant genius and love of God. Whoever visited Dakshineswar felt a strange and compelling love and attraction for the divine personality that Sri Ramakrishna never tried to suppress or hide from others. Not only was there his natural childlike spontaneity and the religious power conveyed in his natural actions, but his words were so direct and clear that no one could remain untouched and unmoved by them. All felt in his presence a renewed strength and capacity to strive hard to attain life's goal. In short, the charisma of Sri Ramakrishna, his rationality, and the appeal of his words threw light which made the darkness in others recede. This happened in the case of Nafar too, changing his life in subtle and profound ways.

As already mentioned, both Hridayram and Nafar belonged to the same village of Sihar, being northwest of Jayrambati about one and a quarter miles, and northwest also of Kamarpukur by about four and a half miles. Hriday was the son of the Master's elder sister, so he used to visit Sihar now and then. Hriday was four years younger than his maternal uncle, but very intimate with him. Later on he became the Master's

personal attendant and served him with affection and loyalty.

A few things we know of Sri Ramakrishna's visits to Sihar. He used to be fond of standing alone in front of the vast meadow covering seven or eight square miles of land on the western side of the village. It was often the earnest wish of Hriday that brought him there. During those visits he had many spiritual visions; of which the following, occurring sometime in 1853, are specially remembered.

Once Sri Ramakrishna was travelling in a palanquin to Sihar, when in a divine vision he saw two boys of tender age and beautiful appearance emerge from his own body and start to run and jump in the fields. After such sportings they once again entered his body. Hearing this, Yogeshwari Brahmani, one of Sri Ramakrishna's gurus, later remarked, "Chaitanya is manifesting this time in the body of Nityananda."⁵ Another vision, recorded in the Gospel, the Master recounted: "In Sihar, I fed the cowherd boys. I put sweetmeats into their hands. I saw that those boys were actually the cowherd boys of Vrindavan, and I partook of the sweetmeats from their hands."⁶ Strangely enough the flashes of such visions in Sri Ramakrishna's pure mind proved to be intimations of things to follow. Also it may be supposed that on these visits Nafar could see Sri Ramakrishna to his heart's content.

About one hundred kilometres away from the metropolis of Calcutta, the then capital of British India, Sihar was an old village which had witnessed the rise and fall of several religious upsurges. With the revival of Brahminic cult in the fourth and fifth

4. *The Gospel*, p. 232.

5. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master*, Tr. Swami Jagadananda (Madras, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1978.) p. 189.

6. *The Gospel*, p. 232.

centuries, the traditional Hindus had begun the worship of Śiva, the Mother Goddess, and Vāsudeva. Thereafter, Tantricism spread imperceptibly and began to influence different sections of society. Following the advent of Sri Chaitanya, however, Neo-Vaiṣṇavism spread under the active patronage of Bir Hambir of Viṣṇupur, about twenty-two miles northwest of Sihar. Afterwards, the deity Vasudev (Viṣṇu) took the forms and names of Kālosonā, Nani-chorā, Shyamchānd, and others—different forms of Krishna holding the flute to his lips, Sri Radha always at his side. Nevertheless, orthodox and conservative Brāhmin Vaiṣṇavas of Sihar had their reservations about the Chaitanya-cult, although seventeen of the thirty-four holy places of the Vaiṣṇavas (called *Patbāris*) are located in the district of Hooghly. Side by side, the religious undercurrent of esoteric yogic practices interacted with Vaiṣṇavism to give birth to the Vaiṣṇava *Sahajiya* movement.⁷ Sihar had some of their adherents too, and Sri Ramakrishna was acquainted with some people belonging to this group. He once commented about them: "They do not like the worship of a deity or of an image. They want a living man. That is why one of their sections is called *Kartābhajā*. They worship the *Kartā*, that is to say, the guru as God."

Also he said, "Many of them follow the *Rādhātantra* and take the five elements as aids to their spiritual practice. Employing these, their methods of spiritual discipline are very dirty. It is like entering a house through the back door by which the scavengers come."

A good many of the followers of this and other similarly oriented tantric groups indulged in forbidden practices and immoral activities. One such person came to meet

Sri Ramakrishna. The latter, who could see the soul of the man, turned his back to him. But he came across good people in these sects too. There was one Saday Bābāji, a good singer of *saṅkīrtana*, and a lady devotee by the name of Saraswati Pathar. But the Master noticed in general that superstitious beliefs were again raising their ugly head through these popular cults spread mainly among the lower uneducated sections of society.

However, the orthodox of the upper caste Vaiṣṇavas, zealously guarding their own beliefs, even feared and abhorred the pure Bhakti cult propagated by Sri Chaitanya. Wrote Akshay Kumar Sen:

They jeered at the Sri Chaitanya followers,
At times chased them with bamboos and
sticks.

Whenever they sang kirtan glorifying
Gour and Nitai
The villagers used to snatch away their
drums.

Nafar Bandopadhyay's house was in the southern part of Sihar known as Koarpur mouza. His grandfather, Ramgovinda Bandyopadhyay, had left his ancestral village of Lakhurdi in Burdwan district, and migrated to this part of the country. He had two wives—with one of them he started a household at Jayrambati, and with the other another household at Sihar. The former wife had borne him a male child named Natabar and the latter a male child named Nafar. The family deity 'Damodar', was placed in his household at Jayrambati.

Nafar had five sons, Ramhriday, Ram-saday, Digambar, Sashibhusan, and Atal. Although Brahmin by caste, taking on priestly duties was not acceptable to the family. The small cultivable land possessed by Nafar was their only source of income. Undoubtedly the family suffered from many

7. Sashibhusan Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cult*, 1969, Introduction, pp. 33-34.

wants till Nafar's third son, Digambar, met with some good luck, and the dismal situation took a happy turn. There is a story behind this.

Once the grown-up Ramhriday, Ramsaday and Digambar were occupied constructing the mud-clay walls of a new house for the family. Their father was watching as they worked. Somehow Digambar's part was slipshod and not coming up to the mark. Besides this, his father was annoyed with him for being lazy. After a time Digambar's attitude so much annoyed the father that he scolded him severely and struck him with the hubble-bubble he was smoking. While it all was extremely unfortunate, it turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Humiliated, Digambar walked out, left Sihar, and walked to Indesh, en route to the district town of Burdwan where his sister lived. The sister gave him shelter and affection and informed her father. One day Digambar was idling away his time by the side of a road, when an European trader attached to the Mackenzie firm, came riding by on a horse. He was blind drunk, lost his balance, and fell into the roadside ditch. Seeing the whole thing, Digambar hurried to rescue him and helped him get to his bungalow not far off. The man was much pleased with Digambar's assistance and asked him to see him next morning. The good-looking youth, broad-shouldered and of fair complexion, impressed the Sahib, who immediately offered him a small contractor's job. At this Digambar proved a good workman. His willingness to try new things, dexterity and ambition led him up the ladder of self-improvement. He worked for the industry giant and made a fortune for himself. Finally he purchased fourteen *mohallas* of land in Bankura, Midnapore and Hooghly and constructed a fairly large building of brick and mortar, the first such building in Sihar. This he gave to his father, and to fulfil his father's

desire he constructed a beautiful small shrine wherein Nafar installed the stone emblem of the Deity, 'Śrīdhar', actually another of the forms of Viṣṇu.⁸ A salaried Brahmin priest offers daily worship even now. Thereafter, a happy Nafar devoted his time to taking care of 'Śrīdhar' and to singing devotional songs of *Saṅkīrtan*, which it may be supposed, many people in the surrounding area benefitted.

Long before the fabulous rise of Digambar's fortunes, Nafar had surrendered himself at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna. It dawned upon him that the beloved family deity, Śrīdhar-Viṣṇu, was all the time appearing before him in the form of Sri Ramakrishna. About this time Nafar divided the landed property he owned among his five sons. On one portion of the land (said at the time to be haunted or otherwise consecrated) shared with Digambar, a *chandīmandap* and *natmandir* (open-air, but roofed-over structures usually near a temple) were put up. The *chandīmandap*, of clay walls and thatched roof, was finally razed to the ground by the great cyclone of 1978. In front of the *chandīmandap* stood the *natmandira*, also with a roof of thatch. Here

8. The family legend was obtained from Debipada Bandyopadhyay and Bhavani Bandyopadhyay, the two great grandsons of Digambar. Ramlal Chattopadhyay, the nephew of Sri Ramakrishna, gave another story. Once Digambar brought a rosary of one hundred and eight beads and after sprinkling holy Ganga water on it and applying sandal paste, offered it to Sri Ramakrishna for his blessings. The latter returned the rosary, instructing Digambar, "Chant the holy name on this rosary, and sing God's name and glory with drum and cymbal accompaniment. This will do you good. In this Kali-yuga chanting of God's name is essential. This will bring you the fruits of meditation, sacrifices, etc." He sincerely followed the instructions and subsequently became a rich man. (Kamal Krishna Mitra: *Sri Ramakṛṣṇa O Antaranga Prasanga* (Bengali) second edition, pp. 40-41).

Nafar brought together over the years many a religious festival of *Saṅkīrtan*, and Sri Ramakrishna joined the large gatherings on several occasions, singing and dancing in the ecstasy of love of God. Encircling him others would also participate in the enthusiastic worship, completely forgetting the world around them. Sri Ramakrishna would enter into *Samādhi*, standing transfixed, a bewitching smile lighting his countenance. Those present used to be overwhelmed by a current of divine bliss. Sri Ramakrishna seemed to them like a dynamo of radiant spiritual energy. Nafar and others were astounded by those never to be forgotten scenes of *Saṅkīrtana*, and they cherished the memory of them forever. Nafar felt his life was blessed.

As noted earlier, some of the orthodox sections of people of Bankura and Hoogly districts, including Sihar, resisted for a long time the coming of the Bhakti cult of Chaitanya. It is interesting to note how that resistance was gradually worn down.

Village life of Sihar was dominated by the families of proud Brahmins. Though Sri Ramakrishna's being practically illiterate was known, still he was held by them in high respect. Some of those men, however, were conceited scholars and used to slight him. An interesting episode changed their view and behaviour towards him forever.

A team of Brahmin scholars from Khanakul once visited Sihar, having heard of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual ecstasies and his attraction for people. Those scholars, who possessed a wider culture than most, knew also that the Master was highly regarded by, and the guru of Keshab Chandra Sen, of Calcutta, so they came to Hriday's house to meet him. Naturally they greeted the Master cordially in their accustomed way and began to converse with him on religious topics, according to their own

manner of dialectics, reasoning and argumentation. It was natural for them to have thus challenged Sri Ramakrishna on some points of Scriptural controversy and started a debate on some subtle question. Though it was possibly not their original intention, in the end, those visitors became highly pleased with the Master and conceded their inferior position before him.

At this time Sri Ramakrishna was the centre of attraction for a large number of people who came to join the *Saṅkīrtan* gatherings held so frequently in and around Sihar. All this was due to Hriday's and Nafar's enthusiasm for organizing and bringing people together for those festivals. The Master too was happy to find so many taking delight in the loud chanting of God's names and glories. These many open-air gatherings were held in a number of places, including the *natmandira* and *chandi-mandapa*. After the Brahmins of Khanakul, more people were attracted. Even Sri Ramakrishna used to be the centre of *Nagara-saṅkīrtanas* when large gatherings used to proceed along the roads and lanes of the villages, as they had once done when Sri Chaitanya preached and chanted throughout Bengal singing "*Harāya namah, Krishna-Yādavāya namah, Gopāla-Govinda, Rāma Sri Madhusūdana.*" They used to sing and dance to the melodies of the *Krishna-līlā* (story) and *Sangīt* (songs), and induce others to join them. In all these ventures, Nafar Bandyopadhyay was one of the self-appointed leaders, and in this way people of Sihar came to respect Sri Chaitanya. Opposition to the cult of Chaitanya gradually disappeared.

The most important place in the village of Sihar was the temple of Shāntināth, constructed in the seventeenth century.⁹ On one

9. Shāntināth is still standing in good repair, though the *natmandira* in front was severely

blessed. All but Nafar Bandyopadhyay left for home. The devoted Nafar could perceive the reflection of Lord Śrīdhara, the Deity of his worship, in the person of Sri Ramakrishna. He therefore approached the Master saying, "You are my Śrīdhara, and taking a garland of those *Tulsi* beads, put it round the feet of Sri Ramakrishna. A charming smile broke across the Master's face and the touch of *Tulsi* sent him into deep ecstasy. This convinced Nafar of the genuineness of his vision and deepened his faith. A happy Nafar then took the beads and placed them round his own neck.¹¹ Thus Nafar not only acclaimed Sri Ramakrishna as the living incarnation of the Lord, but in his own heart he became thoroughly convinced and blessed. For the rest of his life he never wavered from this faith and it sustained him through many vicissitudes of his long life.

From a letter of Hriday Mukherjee addressed to the inmates of the Alambazar Math, it was learnt that Nafar looked upon

11. Akshay Kumar Sen, *Śrī Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Punthi* (Bengali) 10th edition, pp. 218-19.

Sri Ramakrishna as his Child Krishna (Gopāla), and would serve the Lord with that attitude. He would occasionally invite the Master to his house and feed him. Quietly Nafar would sit in the presence of Sri Ramakrishna watching his every movement. This would fill his heart with joy.

While his eldest son, Digambar¹² was making his large fortune, Nafar became more and more disinterested and detached from the thought of worldly prosperity. He devoted his time and energy to the ripening of his devotion to God till he breathed his last. Simple villager that Nafar was, by dint of devotion and spiritual fervour actively took part in the divine sport of the modern incarnation of God. He carved a memorable niche for himself in the wonderful life-history of Sri Ramakrishna, hailed by many the world over as the Beacon in the sea of darkness in the bleak world of strife and bloodshed today.

12. Digambar kept contact with Sri Ramakrishna. From M's diary it is learnt that he called on Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar on 7th July, 1877 and gave him Re 1/- as *Pranami*.

THE INDIAN VISION OF GOD AS MOTHER

(Continued from page 371)

also a truth within the cosmos as a whole. That is the vision of God as Mother, and Vedānta therefore calls Her *Jagadambā*—*Ambā*, i.e., mother of the *Jagat*, world. Not only in a mother, but also in other areas of human experience, in all parts of the world, you can see verification of the truth of the above statement that love knows no fear. Our country now has soldiers in the snowy Himalayas, living a hard life, guarding the frontiers of India. What makes them face

these challenges? Love for the freedom of the nation. Anyone who loves one's nation, or an ideology, or a worthy cause, experiences less fear compared to one without that love and has contracted oneself to become a mere bundle of complaints and grievances. Love strengthens one to bear stresses and strains with less and less complaint and inner tension.

(to be continued)

Royal Knowledge and Royal Secret

SWAMI AMRITANANDA

The ninth chapter of the Gita contains a great and sacred secret. The learned writer casts illumination on the seeming enigmatic sayings of the Lord and discusses their hidden meaning. The author is Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Madras.

The *Bhagavad Gita* is a popular scripture and has widely been commented upon, alike by scholars, saints and even by statesmen and political thinkers of various hues. It is universal in its appeal and application, and its universality itself puzzles many a scholar. The key to understand the *Gita* is its spirit of discovering the unity behind a world of bewildering diversity. The *Gita* synthesizes the four yogas by removing the notion of conflict between *jñāna* and *karma*, and harmonizing *bhakti* and *jñāna*.

It was Madhusudana Saraswati who for purposes of study and understanding of the *Gita* grouped its eighteen chapters into three divisions of six chapters each. The first six chapters speak mainly of *Karma* or action, the next six chapter, of *Bhakti* or devotion and the last six of *Jñāna* or knowledge. The passing from *karma yoga* to *jñāna yoga* is not smooth as the two paths are somewhat different in nature, and some intervening medium is necessary to make the passage smooth. The middle six chapters, known as *bhakti śaṭaka*, or *upāsanā śaṭaka*, perform this function of smoothening. So we see a beautiful edifice raised tier upon tier, and based on the sure foundation of the *Śruti* itself. The ingenuity of the author of the *Gita* is thus remarkable and unique.

The main objective of all the scriptures is to preach *mukti* or freedom as the goal of life. There are various paths prescribed for attaining *mukti*. Scriptures emphasize

in different places the efficacy of one or more of these paths. The *Gita* leaves the choosing of a path to the spiritual aspirant by its recognition of the natural diverse nature of human beings and of the paths, but lays stress on the unity of the goal.

If duty is performed without attachment it leads to purification of the mind. A pure mind can easily grasp the subtle meaning of spiritual truths. Meditation on these truths with purity of mind reveals the true knowledge of *Ātman*. This knowledge confers *mukti*. It is the path of disinterested action with its emphasis on work and is known as *Niṣkāma karma*.

Similarly one can practise love of God and attain a one-pointed mind devoted to God. The liberating knowledge that comes to the mind possessed with love ultimately paves the way to *mukti*. This is the path of devotion or *bhakti mārga*.

Again if one approaches the ideal, constantly meditating on it to the exclusion of everything else, as a result, the knowledge of the ideal becomes well-established in the mind and one is led to *Vijñāna*, or realization of the ideal. This is called the *sāṅkhya mārga*, or the *jñāna mārga*, the path of inquiry.

In all these cases the mind becomes ripe and refined with practice and the mind itself gradually leads an aspirant to the final goal of freedom. In traditional interpretation of Vedānta we do not come across

the method of synthesis. For instance the dualists do not ever compromise with the non-dualists; devotees do not think very highly of knowledge, and work is always disparaged by them as having nothing to do with devotion or knowledge. But the *Gita* uses the language of synthesis and wonderfully bridges the gaps between all the four approaches, and the secular and the spiritual. Even though this attempt at bridging has been made in almost every chapter of the *Gita*, the ninth chapter appears to be the most illustrative, in the sense that here there is discussion of many ideas such as: the idea of creation, the idea of the all-pervasiveness of God, the nature of God, the necessary qualifications for attaining liberation, sin and virtue, incarnation, the glory of devotion, and other important points. All are taken up and answered with amazing clarity.

The ninth chapter occupies the middle stage of the *Gita*. From this position it takes up the threads of previous discussions in earlier chapters and begins fresh ones to be concluded in the later chapters, until there comes the grand finale of harmony in the eighteenth chapter. Many of the famous quotations taken from the *Gita* are from this chapter. It is said in the traditional circles that Śankarā finished all that he had to say in his commentary on the *Gita* in the second chapter. But still he refers to the last śloka in the eleventh chapter as being the essence of the *Gita*. We find that the last śloka in the ninth chapter also coming very near this description.

It is in the ninth chapter that we get the unqualified declaration by the Lord spelt in unmistakable terms that everyone, irrespective of birth, attainments, caste, creed or sex is entitled to the Highest, viz. *mukti*. All one has to do is to develop one-pointed devotion to God and He takes entire care

of the welfare of such devotee. In the language of Sri Ramakrishna, what is needed is *vyākulatā*, or intense yearning.

Sri Krishna calls for a bold faith and loud assertion by Arjuna that a devotee of the Lord will never perish. Even though such assurances and proclamations given by Sri Krishna elsewhere have drawn the attention of teachers of *bhakti* more pointedly, Sridhara Swami, whose gloss on the *Gita* is famed for its lucidity, is particularly attracted to *this* assurance given by the Lord in chapter nine. Our mind is delighted at Sri Krishna's broadcasting an idea called 'the royal secret' in the second śloka. Such is the glory of devotion! Many such gems of ideas are scattered all over the ninth chapter, making its name, 'The Path of the Royal Knowledge and Royal Secret' the most meaningful. We presently take up some of these ideas for a short discussion.

The chapter opens with the promise that the Lord is going to say something secret. It becomes secret because it is sacred. This secret when unravelled will confer liberation. It is not a mere theoretical knowledge, but something to be practically realized. It is directly experienced and easy to practise and yields imperishable results. According to Śankara, this chapter deals with knowledge which is superior to meditation mentioned in the previous chapter. According to Sridhara Swami, it is the glory of God and devotion to him that is sung here. Madhusudana Saraswati feels that knowledge is given in the language of devotion. This shows that the secret given out here is interpreted as knowledge by some, and as devotion by others. It makes no difference so far as the practice is concerned.

Fundamental to all the paths is *śraddhā*, or faith. People fail or do not get full results because they lack faith. The idea of *māyā*, an understanding of which helps us

develop discrimination, is introduced here in the form of a puzzle. There are two ślokas which speak in apparently contradictory terms. In one of the ślokas the Lord says that all beings are in Him, but He is not in them. (IX.4) In the next He says that beings are not in Him. (IX.5) This is the mystery. The mystery is explained as follows : an embodied being is attached to his body by reason of his ego-consciousness, whereas the Lord is free from it. That is, the Lord is in all beings because He is all-pervading, but not in them because He is not attached to them-unlike a *jīva*, or bound soul.

The creation emanates from the Lord and in the end again merges into Him. He is not the agent of creation. His presence is sufficient for *Prakṛti* to bring out creation. His transcendental nature is the object of meditation for *jñānis*, whereas His immanent aspect is for the *bhaktas*. These acts of creation and dissolution of the universe do not bind the Lord. Beings are helpless and are bound by their nature, and therefore are born again and again. It is an indication of the merciful nature of the Lord that He creates this universe, thereby providing us with an environment to work out our inherent tendencies. Swami Vivekananda says that this world is like a gymnasium and we come to the world to work, gain experience, educate ourselves and attain knowledge. God is not involved in the creation, whereas the *jīvas* are. *Bhakti* makes the *jīvas* seek the Lord in creation, whereas *jñāna* makes them seek Him outside of it. Either way we cannot be attached to His creation.

The Lord fully knows about His creation. To teach us we require some one who knows. The Lord himself comes down in the form of a human being, but endowed with all super-human excellences. He inspires and

liberates the virtuous. It is only the foolish who mistake His divine incarnation as an ordinary human birth, not recognizing His transcendental nature. Recognizing the Supreme Being in His human form is the hallmark of spiritual wisdom. It is difficult to recognize and understand fully the life and work of an incarnation of God. One who recognizes it becomes liberated. People endowed with divine nature alone can do that. Others belittle the significance of the life of an incarnation.

One must learn to see and recognize the Lord who is one without a second in all His manifestations. He is the Goal and fruit of all actions, the Master, the eternal witness, the ultimate Abode of all created beings, the sole Refuge, and the unfailing friend. He is both the manifested and unmanifested. One should always think of Him with a devoted resolute mind, sing His glories, and surrender oneself to Him. The ślokas which deal with the above aspects are in mellifluous language which captures the mind of a devotee.

People are generally interested in quick results. They therefore worship His manifestations and get the desired results. There are a few who worship the Lord Himself and are liberated. People who follow the Vedic (ritualistic) injunctions worship the limited manifestations and go to higher worlds. But they are subjected to birth and death. To know, while worshipping the manifestations, that they are only the manifestations of the one Supreme Being is knowledge ; not to know this is ignorance.

Now a strange economic proposition is given by Sri Krishna. Rituals prescribed in the Vedas are elaborate and require a great deal of materials and money for their performance. The fruit is commensurate with the size of the sacrifice. Any sacrifice yields

limited results, and no sacrifice can confer immortality. Worshiping the Lord with devotion alone confers immortality. The Lord gives the devotees the right knowledge. To please Him it is not necessary to perform costly rituals. He is pleased with whatever a sincere devotee offers and He confers on His devotee the Highest. Love alone attracts Him and not wealth, pomp or show. We are advised to practise this loving devotion in everything we do, offering all the fruits of action to Him. This is the spirit of *karma yoga*. Traditionally *karma* means ritualistic work or duty prescribed by the scriptures. In this chapter the scope of *karma* covers everything that we do. We should think of Him even while doing our worldly actions. He should be made to participate in everything we do and as a logical consequence accept the fruits thereof. Love binds the Lord to the devotee, and the difference between the secular and the spiritual vanishes. After all, it is His creation. Where is the World? It is He who appears as the world!

We may get into doubt if the Lord is partial to His devotees. Sridhara Swami explains such is not the case. Whoever seeks Him gets His grace, just as whoever seeks fire gets the heat.

Now comes a very important declaration of the Lord which is not so forcefully spoken anywhere else. We always hear about the virtuous men of right conduct. What about men of wrong conduct? Can they become devotees? Is right conduct a *sine qua non* or *desideratum* for being a devotee? Does devotion depend only on birth or conduct? The question has not been dealt with satisfactorily by the commentators and it is difficult to harmonize the idea of wrong conduct with devotion, in the traditional interpretation of scriptures. Among the devotees we do come across some who did

not bother about the prohibitions and injunctions of the *śāstras*. In the language of Sri Ramakrishna, their devotion takes them by a storm as it were. They do not know anything other than the Lord. The Lord assures them too that they may attain to the Highest. Examples of those who might not be fit for the study of the scriptures, or those of sinful birth, or those whose professions distract their minds, can get inspiration from the lives of such devotees described in mythology or recorded history. Sri Krishna casts His net very wide! He does not want to leave out anyone who is sincerely devoted to Him. He makes Arjuna proclaim to the world with a loud beat of drums that the devotees of God never perish. This is the special Gospel of Sri Krishna to the world at large, particularly to the modern world of sceptics and cynics. The modern world seems to be more in need of the message of the chapter on the 'Royal Secret'. The message is so relevant to intellectuals who are feverishly engaged in acrimonious, never-ending debates about God and pious life.

Examples of devotees who were born in lower castes and whose conduct was not thought highly of by society are many: Guha and Sabari in the *Rāmāyana*, Vilva-mangal and Kannappa Nayanar in recorded history, Samadhi mentioned in the *Chandi*, the Gopis of the *Bhāgavata*, and so on. If these humble devotees could attain *mukti*, where is the doubt about pious devotees of noble birth? Chapter nine of the *Gita* concludes by exhorting the devotee to fix his mind on the Lord, be devoted to Him alone, worship Him, and surrender everything to Him. What is there to expect in this world? It is not permanent and cannot give eternal happiness. Take refuge in the Lord. That is the only way. This is the real synthesis of the Yogas.

Tyagaraja—The Saint-Musician

KAMALA S. JAYA RAO

For the saint who realized the immanence and transcendence of the Divine Lord through Nāḍopāsanā, (music) occupied a very exalted place. Dr. Kamala S. Jaya Rao, M.D., of Hyderabad, writes a warm appreciation of the divinely Inspired poet and musician.

Sri Ramakrishna describes three types of joy: the joy of worldly pleasures (*viṣaya-ānanda*), the joy of worship (*bhajan-ānanda*) and the joy of God-realization (*Brahmā-nanda*). The Indian poetical genius used music, which belongs to the second type, as a potent means to attain to the third and the highest type of bliss. The spiritual map of India is thickly dotted with musicians and music composers, who used their art and talent not only for individual personal salvation, but broadcast it to help the less fortunate move Godward.

Classical music is today broadly classified into the Hindustani school developed mainly in the northern part of India, and Carnatic music, developed in the South. Three great composers, known as the Vaggeyakāra-s, contributed immensely to the development of the latter school. The three—Muthuswami Dikshitar, Shyama Sastri, and Tyagaraja, are reverentially referred to as the musical trinity. The last named, Tyagaraja, was a great devotee honoured as a saint.

Tyagaraja's *Iṣṭa* (Chosen Deity) was Sri Rama, and the majority of his compositions (called *kīrtana-s*) are addressed to the Supreme as Rama. The Saint also sang in praise of Siva, the Divine Mother and other deities as well. Tyagaraja wrote his wonderfully melodious songs in the Telugu language, but richly embellished them with Sanskrit. Then his use of alliteration, rhetoric and similes are such that the *kīrtana-s* beggar translation. The epithets he used to describe

Sri Rama form a choice treasury for etymologists. To quote from *The Cultural Heritage of India*,¹ "His songs...gave an added prestige to Telugu as a mellifluous speech and sweet language for music." He expressed in his compositions the truths of the Gītā and Upaniṣads in simple and appealing language.

Tyagaraja composed his songs extempore during periods of ecstasy and inspiration and did not write them down. It is due to the immense credit of his devoted disciples that the large number of *kīrtanas*—nearly eight hundred—are available to us today. Scholarly treatises and books have been written on Tyagaraja and his musical compositions. The present essay is a humble effort to introduce this great saint-musician to a wider readership.

In Tiruvarur, on the bank of the Kaveri river near Tanjavur (Tamil Nadu), Tyagaraja was born in 1759. Tiruvarur was renowned for its spirituality, its saints and its musicians. Not far away, Tiruvaiyyaru, where he spent much of his life, was also a sacred place known for its spiritual atmosphere and for its being a centre of culture. Realizing the great spiritual potency in this region, Tyagaraja in many of his songs praises its glory and the glory of the river Kaveri. Tyagaraja was married but belonged to that

1. *The Cultural Heritage of India* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, 1970).

galaxy of luminaries who are a standing testimony to Sri Ramakrishna's assurance that householders too can realize God. Sri Ramakrishna stressed the importance of holy company, and Tyagaraja too sang in like vein—

*What if you are householders (Samsārins) ?
If you believe in the Lord, the enemy of
Kamsa (Kāmsārī), refrain from harming
others and delight in the company of the
holy ;*

*If you drive away all evil thoughts and
convert your spouse and children into
servants of God ;*

*If you join the holy company of devotees,
surrender all pleasures unto Sri Hari and
sing His praises—*

What if you are householders ?

Being a householder himself, Tyagaraja had his share of worldly trials and tribulations. He referred in many of his *kīrtanas* to the troubles and derision he was subjected to by his brother and other kith and kin. He also reminded the Lord of how He had protected Sugrīva and Vibhīṣana from their cruel brothers. His true longing, however, was for deliverance from the ocean of worldliness, and prayed for divine beatitude. In a song addressed to the Divine Mother, he prays—

*O Dharmambika, Do not treat me as a
stranger! I have now become your own.
Do not entangle me in the meshes of your
Māyā.*

*Dharmambika, Come to my rescue as a
mother rushes to succour her crying infant.
O Mother! Do not treat my wail as mere
din and noise.*

To devotees of Sri Ramakrishna this may bring before their eyes the picture of the Divine Mother putting down the rice-pot from the hearth and rushing to lift up her beloved child.

Tyagaraja was not wealthy, he voluntarily embraced poverty and he was the embodiment of his own name, Tyagaraja—the prince of renouncers. It is said that the local ruler, Raja Sharabhoji of Tanjavur, desired that Tyagaraja should dedicate his poetical works to himself, and sing his praise, in return for which he promised immense riches. Outraged, Tyagaraja sang:

*O my mind! Tell me truly, is wealth
(nidhī) superior or Rama's proximity
(sannidhī) superior ?*

*Are curds, butter and milk delicious, or
is the nectar of meditation and worship
(dhyāna bhajana sudhā rasa) of Dāsarathi
delicious ?*

*Is flattery of men in pursuance of self-
interest (mamatā bandhana yuta narastuti)
better or is the kīrtana of the Lord, adored
by Tyagaraja better ?*

The saint's elder brother, Japyesa, an ordinary householder, was extremely annoyed at what he considered Tyagaraja's foolish refusal to go to the royal court, sing the praise of mortal man, and accept the royal gift. It is said that in a fit of anger he stole the image of Rama which Tyagaraja worshipped and adored, and threw it into the river Kaveri. One can imagine the anguish the Saint experienced at this loss and his sorrow poured forth in song—

*I wonder where he has hid himself, O
Mind ; when will He (Rama) have the
compassion to reveal Himself ?*

*Unable to tolerate the ill-treatment suffe-
red by Prahlada at the hands of his father,
Kanaka Kasyapa, did he not hide Himself
in a pillar ?*

*Unable to bear seeing Sugriva being
pummeled by his brother, Vali, did He
not hide Himself behind a palm-tree ?*

*To forgive the evil deeds of the past lives,
to crush the six enemies within, and to
protect those who have steady devotion*

to Him, and to protect Tyagaraja, I wonder where He has hid Himself this time!

Needless to say, Rama revealed to His devotee where He was hidden, and Tyagaraja recovered the Idol, his sole wealth in this world.

Impermanence of the World

Living in the world, Tyagaraja was acutely aware of the follies of ordinary people, their obsession with 'woman and gold', their blissful ignorance of the certainty of death and their foolish attempts to seek permanence in this earthly existence. He cautioned the mind to beware of the female body—

O Mind! Do not be deceived by the body. It is but a repository of filth, excreta, and blood.

Sing paeons to the Lord, and do not be deceived by the female body.

Tyagaraja's caution fell on deaf ears and he lamented—

O beautiful Sri Rama! Why is it that men in this Kaliyuga do not realize that this body is impermanent?

They build stone houses, have attendants, overfeed themselves and hoard money; They earn wealth through cheating and run after women like dogs, thus ensuring repeated births for themselves in the world. Why do not they realize their afflictions are the result of their own actions? Why don't they worship the Lord of the Universe, Whom Tyagaraja adores, and realize that material wealth will vanish like the morning dew?

Referring to Sri Rama in pure idiomatic Telugu as 'the Beautiful', Tyagaraja indicates that, that is the only beauty to be adored. The truth appears otherwise to the worldly-minded, to whom this world itself is a paradise—

Without any fear of the other world (paraloka bhayam), people get bound by worldliness (bhava paśa baddhulu). They think they alone possess pretty women, children, find raiment and dwelling places, and consider this world to be a paradise.

A time comes in the life of everyone when he awakens to his sorrow, the impermanence of everything he considered everlasting. Tyagaraja could not repose a silent spectator. He advised a way to put an end to *bhava baddhulu*, worldly entanglement, which was a treatment as well as preventative for this disease of spiritual ignorance—

Even the best of men cannot obtain Knowledge without the help of a guru.

To remove this dense and hard malady of the heart, a sadguru—true teacher is needed.

When the body, children, spouse, wealth and relatives appear, only to be lost, that distress can be removed by a kind guru alone; he frees the mind from attachments by the medicine of spiritual instruction. That Guru is the One who cares for Tyagaraja.

A potent way of using the 'medicine of spiritual instruction' is to pray incessantly. "Let me assure you that man can realize the Inner Self through sincere prayer," said Sri Ramakrishna, "but to the extent that he has the desire to enjoy worldly objects his vision becomes obstructed" Tyagaraja fervently prayed for the removal of obstructions—

O Tirupati Venkata Ramana, O Supreme Being, will you not remove the curtain of envy (matsara) which is within me, and which keeps me out of reach of the four puruṣārthās!

I am like a hungry fish lured by the bait of worldliness. The curtain of enticements covers the light of Knowledge. Like a fly it troubles one taking his food.

It is the snare trapping the deer unawares. I have been following You faithfully; kindly hasten to remove this curtain of arrogance (mada) and envy from within me.

An interesting anecdote is related in connection with the above *kīrtana*. It is said that when Tyagaraja arrived at the famous temple of Venkateśwara at Tirupati, it was time for food-offering to the Deity and the curtain was drawn across. Pained and disappointed at not being able to see the Deity, Tyagaraja burst forth in allegorical song, depicting how it is not any physical barrier, but the six enemies within that obstruct man's vision of Truth.

God does not appear easily even before a devotee of Tyagaraja's eminence. The Saint prays plaintively for the removal of this grief of his—

Lord, reposing on the milk-ocean (Kṣīra-sagara-śayana), should you subject me to such worry?...Chanting of 'Your holy name brings redemption; do have mercy on me!

By referring to Rama as the Lord reposing on the milk-ocean, Tyagaraja avers that Rama is Viṣṇu Himself, the Supreme Godhead. In many *kīrtanas* he refers to Puraṇic *itihāsaḥ* (history) when the Lord came to the rescue of Prahlada, Draupadi and the elephant-king Gajendra, and who is ever-ready and alert to save the devotee. And, here is a gentle rebuke. Now the Lord reposes quietly on the milk-ocean, oblivious of this devotee on the earth, and subjects him to the pain of not granting His vision. The bitter reprimand is found in many of the *kīrtanas*, and who but a true devotee can criticize the Lord?

Of what avail is it to be called the Servant of Your servants? O Lord, You have no love for the poor and the lowly; With no compassion whatever You declare that my

troubles are the result of my own karma. You lack self-indignation. Your sweet words are false And yet, they say You protected your devotees!

Rama, the virtuous, whose arrows and words, according to Tyagaraja are never taken back, now the same Lord resorts to lies!

What pleasure do you derive by telling lies?

Time passes on Kalyana Rama, but a man's words remain.

Many a time You assured me You were my mother and my father, and said there was no cause for fear (yet You do not protect me).

What pleasure do you derive, O Lord, by telling lies?

The Lover's quarrel with the Lord was not unique with Tyagaraja, nor is it shocking. It forms a charming chapter in the life of almost every true devotee of God and reveals the passionately intimate relationship the devotee establishes with his Chosen Deity. In such intimacy, even the devotee's chiding the Lord is a form of praise, for it brings out the true qualities of the Supreme. In Ramprasad, Mira, Purandar Das, and Tulasi one finds same loving, gentle criticism of the Lord. With the same deep intensity of feeling Tyagaraja questioned Siva—

Who on earth has called You 'the Destroyer of Distress' (Pranartihara) and named You Śaṅkara, 'the One Who Brings Peace'? I have meditated on You, Lord, and bowed down to You.

The admission that he meditated on Śaṅkara reveals that Tyagaraja was not a bigoted follower of one Deity only of the Hindu trinity. He made no distinction between Viṣṇu and Siva. Siva, renowned for His being easily pleased, however, seems

not to have been satisfied by the Devotee's prostrations. There was despondency. Did the Lord consider Tyagaraja an unnecessary burden?—

Raghurama, You who are the Universe Itself, is it a burden for You to protect me, a single soul?

Sri Vāsudeva! You revealed that you carry all the worlds in Your stomach...Is it a burden to protect me?

In this *kirtana*, Tyagaraja recalls the beautiful episode wherein the Baby Krishna graciously bestowed the vision of His Universal Form on Mother Yaśoda. He revealed to her that indeed the entire universe exists within Himself; He has become all that exists. In a mood of pique and pathos, therefore, Tyagaraja asks the Lord how then could a single soul like himself prove a burden? He indicates that Rama and Krishna are not really different. He could not really bring himself to blame the Lord for negligence. The poet in him concluded that it must be the Lord's attendants who were non-cooperative—

Sri Raghuvāra! Do you not understand my distress at not seeing Your ever-blissful smiling face?

Does Khagaraja (the king of birds) not obey Your command to come quickly, or is it that he thinks earth is too far from heaven (and does not wish to travel so far)?

O Paramatma, Ruler of the Universe, to whom else can I appeal? I cannot tolerate it any more, please do come and bless me!

The devotee is, however, not totally disheartened. He is fully aware that the Lord has His own plans. While Sri Ramakrishna considered himself a chariot driven by the Divine Mother according to Her wish, Tyagaraja likened himself to a puppet in Rama's hands and surrendered himself wholly to Him—

Why should I worry, O Sri Ramachandra, Prince of Saketa, Protector of devotees (sadbhakta mandāra)?

You hold the puppet strings in Your hands and conduct the show with unerring rhythm, and the whole world showers encomiums on you!

Humour

Not all the *kirtanas* of Tyagaraja are plaintive appeals. There is a thin vein of humour running through some of them, revealing his intimate relationship with the Lord. That intimacy entitled him to some freedom and friendly witticisms. Here is an admonition and a friendly tip too, to Sri Rama—

O Rama, this is not proper on Your part. I am much upset. I worship You with devotion, but Your conduct is otherwise. You are Wonderful Bliss-Condensed (Adbhutananda-ghana) and immanent in the Creation. Am I not Yours, Sita-Rama? If you bless me, will you not earn immense merit (punya)?

Tyagaraja knew well that he was not the only one thus deceived by the Lord; he knew that no seeker ever had his prayers fully granted—

Whoever enjoyed pleasures by simply asking for them, O Primordial Being (Adi-mūlam)?

When Sita desired to roam in sylvan surroundings, You banished her to the forest. When Śurpanakha desired You, You lopped off her nose!

When sage Narada wanted to know Your Maya, You turned him into a woman.

O Rama! O Resider of Saketa! I know Your tricks; Your mystery stands revealed. You may protect us, out of compassion, or then again, You may not!

(Continued on page 392)

Leaky Boats and Lordly Liner

N. HARIHARAN

Giving up all his pretensions of knowledge and wealth, a man may become a seeker of God and enter the realm of Supreme Truth—writes forcefully Sri Hariharan of Madurai, Tamil Nadu.

KNOWLEDGE and Wealth are titanic twin powers, mighty in their workings and unfailing in their conquests. While Knowledge dazzles and overawes by its iridescent majesty, subdues all dissent and establishes its undisputed sway, Wealth lures, corrupts and enslaves the world. In the face of vast sweep and concentration of knowledge, thick encrustations of ignorance have to melt away. Knowledge, thus, is ever victorious in its onward march—albeit, for its every new advance, new areas of darkness also loom on the unknown horizon. By contrast, Wealth is an insidious force of hypnotic allurements that saps the grimmest resolve and crumbles the most adamant resistance. Wealth is so imperious in its subtle claim on the mind that it simply buys off the entire world with the least ado. Like twin colossuses, Knowledge and Wealth rove invincible over the world and exercise their powerful dominion.

And yet, there is one realm which is entirely immune from either the pompous pretensions of Knowledge or the subtle blandishments of Wealth. The mystic secrecy of Brahman, the Absolute, defies all rational thought and intellectual comprehension. The Transcendental Truth is forever—immobile, austere, and silent, and would not yield its esoteric import to the subtlest enticements of wealth.

This spiritual rule—of Brahman's stern inaccessibility to the demands of Knowledge and Wealth—is embedded in the corpus of Upaniṣadic lore. According to the *Chāndogya*

Upaniṣad, Narada once approached the sage Sanatkumara and requested him to show the path to spiritual knowledge. Sanatkumara said, "Let me first know what you have already learnt. I shall tell you of things that are beyond them"—"*Yad vettha tena mopasīda, tatasta ūrdhvam vakṣyāmi.*" (VII 1. 2.) Narada then said, "Sir, I have learnt the *R̥g-Veda*, *Yajur-Veda*, *Sāma-Veda* and *Atharva-Veda*, the fourth. History and mythology which are the fifth *Veda*; grammar, the rites for the manes, mathematics, astronomy, astrology, the science of augury, jugglery, logic, ethics, the lore of the gods, science of animals, science of war, and the subjects of fine arts—I know all these. But, Sir, I feel I merely know the mantras or potent words, but I do not know the *Ātman* or the soul, or spirit of things. I have heard from men like you that he who knows the *Ātman* goes beyond all sorrow (*tarati śokam ātma-vid iti*) (VII. 1.3.) Sir, I am full of sorrow and grief and remorse. I hope and believe that you will be able to lead me to the other shore of the sea of sorrow with the help of the raft of knowledge of the Self." The sage replied, "Dear Narada, all that you have known is but mere name and verbiage, mere words. (*Yad vai kincaitad adhyagiṣṭāḥ nāma eva tat*) (VII. 1.3.) You can, by your present knowledge, achieve only what words can achieve and nothing more." Narada's knowledge here represents the entire body of possible empirical knowledge and his confession of spiritual nescience shows that discursive knowledge, even in its encyclopaedic sweep, is powerless to comprehend the Absolute.

Taittiriya Upaniṣad echoes the same view in the succinct and memorable phrase "...that Brahman from which all speech, with the mind, turns away unable to reach..."—"*Yataḥ vacaḥ nivartante aprāpya manasā saha.*" Thus, according to scriptural testimony, the entire gamut of mundane lore is classified as *aparā-vidyā*, inferior knowledge, and is to be distinguished from *parā-vidyā*—Transcendental Wisdom—which is intuitive, supra-sensuous and supra-rational. In fact, the massive collection of empirical knowledge is a load and liability on the mind of a seeker of Absolute Truth, as it accentuates the mind's natural proclivity to fancy, distortion, and false projections. Self-experience sternly demands surcease of all mentations. The richer our empirical knowledge, the more violent our mentations and the poorer are we in spirit. This is what the *Śruti* means when it pithily says, "He who does not conceive it—to him it is known. He who conceives it—he does not really know. It is not really understood by those who understand it; it is really understood by those who do not understand it. (*Yasyāmatam tasya matam matam yasya na veda saḥ—avijñātām vijñātām vijñātām avijñātām*) *Kenopaniṣad*, II. 3.

As if he were paraphrasing the *Śruti*, Sri Ramakrishna tersely avers: "*Grantha-s* are *granthi-s*"—"Books are so many knots." Again, illustrating the barrenness of book-learning, the Master says, "The kite and the vulture soar high up in the air, but all the time their eyes remain fixed on charnel-houses in search of putrid carcasses; similarly the minds of the so-called learned men are attached to the things of the world, to lust and wealth, in spite of their erudition in sacred lore, and hence they cannot attain true knowledge."¹

1. *Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore,) p. 54.

With the highest order of ability, intellect and empirical knowledge, Swami Vivekananda probed the mystery of Brahman, and said in his inimitable incisive way:

This is the whole history of man. Finer and finer becomes the veil, more and more of the light behind shines forth, for it is its nature to shine. It cannot be known; in vain we try to know it. Were it knowable, it would not be what it is, for it is the eternal subject. Knowledge is a limitation, knowledge is objectifying. He is the eternal subject of everything, the eternal witness in this universe, your own Self. Knowledge is, as it were, a lower step, a degeneration. We are the eternal subject already; how can we know it?²

Brahman is undifferentiated Pure Consciousness, the Supreme Light which illumines everything, including the act and fact of knowing. It is Pure Being wherein the triad of Knower, Knowledge and Known is immolated in the blaze of Unitary Consciousness. The act of knowing, in which subject-object relationship inheres, founders on the inexorable logic of Brahman being the Eternal Subject, and hence being ever unknowable. Intellection and ratiocination fail to lift the veil of the mystery of Brahman, the Pure Awareness.

The *Kāthopaniṣad* crisply puts it: "This Self cannot be gained by the *Veda*, nor by intellectual power, nor by much learning. He is to be gained only by the one whom He chooses. To such a one the Self reveals His own nature"—"*Nāyam ātmā pravacanena labhyo na medhayā, na bahunā śrutena: Yamevaiṣa vṛṇute, tena labhyas tasyaiṣa ātmā vivṛṇute tanūṃ svām,*" (I.2.23.) And the choice of the Self will not fall on

2. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Caltutta: Advaita Ashram, 1989) Vol. II, p. 82.

any except that wise one, whose sole wealth consists in his possession of the supreme virtues, the four-fold norms (*Sādhana-catuṣṭaya*), viz. Discrimination (*Viveka*), Dispassion (*Vairāgya*), the Treasure of six virtues (*Saṭ-sampatti*)—like mind-control (*Śama*), sense-control (*Dama*), self-withdrawal (*Uparati*), forbearance (*Titikṣā*), faith (*Śraddhā*), and tranquillity (*Samādhāna*)—and intense Yearning for Liberation (*Mumukṣutvam*).

Self-knowledge is equally beyond the vast ambit of Wealth. If it were not so, it would be nothing better than an article of commercial transaction. Self-knowledge is as far removed from opulence and its vulgar flaunts as it is from ostentatious learning. This spiritual dictum is graphically illustrated in the dialogue between Yājñavalkya and his wife Maitreyī that occurs in the *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*. Maitreyī pointedly asks her husband, “Sir, if indeed this whole earth full of wealth be mine, shall I be immortal through that?” “No,” replies Yājñavalkya, “your life will be just like that of people who have plenty of things, but there is no hope of immortality through wealth.”—“*Amṛtatvasya tu nāśāsti vittenati.*” Material wealth cannot procure *Amṛtatvam*, which is only another name for Self-realization. The Nachiketa episode in *Kāṭhōpaniṣad* dramatically exposes the utter impotency of splendid wealth over the mind of Nachiketa who is established in longing to know the Truth (*Mumukṣutvam*). Far from being an aid to Self-realization, love of lucre and avaricious acquisition of it hamper spiritual growth by engendering such unspiritual qualities as greed, envy, covetousness, arrogance, fear and vulgar ostentation.

Mythology relates how, when Śiva (symbolising Brahman) stood as a blazing pillar of fire, Viṣṇu took the form of a boar and burrowed into the earth to find out the foot, while Brahmā assumed the form of a swan

and soared into the dizzy heights to discover the summit of the effulgent column. Both returned crestfallen, unable to measure the Blazing Mystery. Viṣṇu, the consort of Lakṣmi, the Goddess of Wealth, symbolises fabulous opulence. Brahmā, the consort of Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning, represents deep scholarship. Their failure to gauge the immensity of Śiva means, in effect, the utter incapacity of Wealth and Knowledge to probe the deep mystery of Brahman.

If we would cross the mighty ocean of *samsāra* and attain the spiritual Goal of human life, we would do well not to trust the “leaky boats” of Knowledge and Wealth.

How, then, are we to cross the ocean of transmigratory travails and reach the yonder shore of Self-experience? Is there any “liner”, safe and secure, which can take us across to the *Summum Bonum*? Yes, there is a ship, and the *Gītā* indicates that reliable ship saying:

Tad viddhi pranipātena paripraśnena sevayā/ upadekṣyanti te jñānam jñāninas tattvadarśinaḥ (IV. 34).

“Learn That by humble reverence, by inquiry and by service. The men of wisdom who have seen the Truth will instruct thee in knowledge.”

The triple factors—deep veneration, reverent inquiry and self-abnegating service, aid us in the envisioning of Truth. The Lord has placed the word *Paripraśna* (Spirit of inquiry) between the two words *Pranipātena* (Humble prostration) and *Sevayā* (Service). The true seeker is not a mere intellectual acrobat, proud of his flair for reeling off strings of knotty questions to nonplus his Teacher. In place of pride, his heart should be filled with longing and earnest supplication to know the means to shake off spiritual bondage and gain saving wisdom. His questions should be marked

by utter humility, and as evidence of it he should prostrate himself before his Guru. After eliciting answers to his queries, the seeker should again engage himself in the service of the Guru lest he should fall a victim to the demon of spiritual arrogance—the arrogance born of consciousness of one's being an ardent spiritual seeker. Prostration, intelligent queries, and loving service, blend together to form an integral spiritual approach to gain spiritual vision. Humility, indeed, is the key to unlock the treasures of spiritual wisdom, and self-conceit is the deadly foe of Self-knowledge. To quote Dr. S. Radhakrishnan:

...But mere intellectual apprehension will not do. Intellect can only give fragmentary views, glimpses of the Beyond, but it does not give us the consciousness of the Beyond. We must open the whole of our inner being to establish personal contact. The disciple has to tread the interior path. The ultimate authority is the inner light which is not to be confused with the promptings of desire. By the quality of service and self-effacement, we knock down the obstructing prejudices and let the wisdom in us shine. Truth achieved is different from truth imparted. Ultimately, what is revealed in the scriptures (*Pratipata-śravaṇa*), what is thought out by the mind (*Paripraśna-manasa*) and what is realised by the spirit through service and meditation (*Sevā-nididhyā-sana*), must agree. We must consort with the great minds of the past, reason about them and intuitively apprehend what is of enduring value in them.³

Upakosala and Satyakāma are two Upaniṣadic seers whose lives are a veritable

commentary on the *Gītā* text: “Only he who is full of faith will attain Knowledge”—“*Sraddhāvān labhate jñānam.*” Upakosala, the ardent disciple did not lose his faith in his guru Satyakāma, in spite of the fact that the latter completely neglected him for twelve years, and taught his other disciples. Upakosala was instead entrusted with the task of tending the fires and he discharged his duties faithfully, quite unmindful of his preceptor's studied indifference to him. Even the intercession of the guru's wife on his behalf failed to make the guru relent. He continued to ignore Upakosala. Once when Satyakāma was away, the triple fires tended by Upakosala so conscientiously became pleased with him and they imparted to him the theoretical knowledge of *Brahmavidyā*. They, however, instructed Upokosala that the practical techniques of transmuting the philosophy of *Brahmavidyā* into living experience would be taught by his guru. When Satyakāma came back he observed the brahmic effulgence on the disciple's face and was only pleased to know that the fires had imparted spiritual knowledge to him. The guru then completed the instruction. Later Upakosala himself became a great Seer. Upakosala's spiritual awakening came about neither by scholarship nor by affluence, for he had none of these. His vision of Truth was solely due to his faith in his guru and to his own spiritual integrity, his infinite patience, his sincerity in discharging his duties, his self-effacement and spirit of service.

Similar was the story of Satyakāma. The great seer, Haridrumata Gautama had been much impressed by the adherence to truth displayed by Satyakāma. So much so, that he promptly agreed to be Satyakāma's guru. But the preceptor, instead of imparting spiritual instruction to his disciple, entrusted four hundred head of weak and thin cattle to his care and asked him to tend them. The disciple willingly took the emaciated cattle

3. *The Bhagavad Gita*, Trans. by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan (Madras: Blackie & Son, Ltd.) Chapter IV, pp. 169-70.

and vowed to himself that he would not return again to the guru until the cattle multiplied to a thousand. After a long time they attained a thousand and Satyakāma returned. As he was driving the great herd home, he was instructed by a bull, a fire, a swan and a diver-bird. Reaching the hermitage of the guru, he shone with such spiritual radiance that the guru could not help exclaiming, "O good-looking one! You shine verily like a knower of Brahman. Who may it be that instructed you?" Satyakāma confirmed saying, "Someones other than human beings. But it is you, Revered Sir, who should instruct me for fulfilling my wish. For it has been certainly heard by me from venerable ones like you that knowledge acquired from the teachers alone surely becomes the best."

Satyakāma's spiritual illumination was due

to his unswerving devotion to truth, his deep veneration for and unshakable faith in his guru, his sincerity in the discharge of his duties, his infinite love and compassion for the dumb cattle—which love and compassion ripened into an all-embracing love and unitive vision—, his keen spiritual sensitivity, capable of picking up and assimilating spiritual truths, even from flora and fauna, and his rock-like firm faith in the excellence of instruction given by his guru. He was utterly simple and innocent, and had the strength neither of pelf nor of pedantry.

Verily, wealth and knowledge are "leaky boats", unsafe, unprofitable and untrustworthy. The sublime spiritual virtues which Satyakāma and Upakosala exemplified constitute the "lordly liner" that takes us safely to the port of Plenary Wisdom and Experience.

TYAGARAJA—THE SAINT-MUSICIAN

(Continued from page 387)

Even if the Lord does not come to protect His devotee, the latter has a potent weapon to ward off all fear, including the fear of death—

Seeing all good men (sujana) sing bhajans unceasingly, Yama (the King of Death) is worried.

Seeing his emissaries, equipped with

tridents and ropes, he is worried that their enthusiasm has been curbed!

(Yama thought)—Those who roam about without the knowledge of the true path would at least come to him, but they too have resorted to the singing of Tyagaraja's kirtanas!

(to be concluded)

Dance of Siva

JAYPAL JEE

Śiva-Tāṇḍava Stotra, or the Dance of Śiva, by Rāvaṇa, is rendered into English verse by Sri Jaypal Jee of Bhuvaneswar, Orissa.

WHOSE neck is shrouded by the forest of matted hair,
Floweth through which the holy water of the Ganga,
The chiefs of serpents whereupon bloom like flowers
And dangle from the matted crown like so many wreaths ;

The terrible sound of whose tabor sends a thrill through the spheres,
That smouldering in the ocean bed with fire flung from craters,
The earth trembles and lightnings flash with rhythmic roars,
May Siva's cosmic dance spread auspiciousness all over! 1

In the cauldron of whose matted hair in swirls
The Ganga gusheth forth unconcerned in torrents,
And dangling like a thousand-and-one charming rivulets
On the forehead of whom glittereth a fire with glow
That burnt to ashes the lord of passion (Cupid) like straw,
Whose eyes are lotus-like, brow long-arched and wide
And on forehead the crescent Moon ; with reverence to Him I bow! 2

Being charmed beholding the brilliance of Siva's crown
Shining on the crest of the daughter of mountains
Brightening all the spheres with flashes all 'round',
Whose mind in the bliss of ecstasy remained ;

The dart of the glance of whose eyes could destroy
The insurmountable dangers in a fraction of a moment,
May my mind be absorbed in the contemplation of
That Lord, who hath His Being, without length or breadth. 3

The shining pearls on the hoods of serpents
From within matted hair shed a reddish-brown light
On the charming countenance of the beauties of the quarters
And invest all around with a saffron colour bright ;

Wearing skin of elephant, stained reddish brown
From ichor of its body, my heart who beguiles,
May I find bliss in that wonderful form of the Lord,
Of prime five elements in His dance so wild! 4

Whose lotus feet bear the dust of pollen
 Of the flowers from heads of Indra and gods of heaven ;
 The king of serpents glides wreath-like on Siva's crest
 And coileth round His matted hair, in its quest for rest ;
 The crescent Moon shineth on the forehead of whom,
 May He bestow on me that wealth of wisdom eternal!

5

From the altar of whose forehead fire blazed forth,
 Sparks of which like a beam burnt to ashes
 Kandarpa, who aimed five shafts in his wrath
 At Him who beareth the Ganga on His crest ;

And the crest shone with nectar-like lustre
 May that Lord, on whose chest a wreath
 Of skulls lies, tufts of matted locks adorning,
 With growing wealth and prosperity bless us all!

6

In the terrible fire on the expanse of whose forehead
 That hissed out incessant fiery flames in succession
 And in that conflagration with fury who obliterated
 The wielder of five shafts, the lord of passion ;

He who while flying on the wings of imagination
 Drew artful designs, for delighting Himself,
 On the crest of the breast of the daughter of mountains ,
 At the feet of that Triple-eyed One may my mind take rest!

7

Like a new cloud mass which halts in its flight
 Fuming in vain, striving for a door of escape,
 Like the dense deep dark of a new Moon night
 Who beareth mark of a blue-black hue upon the neck ;

On the crest of whom descends the Ganga from heaven,
 Wearing reddish skin of the elephant who sustains
 The crescent Moon upon His tangled hair open.
 May He bless me with new prosperity and gain!

8

Bearing the hue of blossomed blue lotuses
 And the glow of azure firmament of heaven,
 Like the stem of the mushroom along whose neck
 Containing a line of stain of charming dark brown ;

To that slayer of Kama, the slayer of Tripura,
 The Remover of rebirth, Destroyer of Daksha's ill-omened sacrifice,
 Destroyer of the elephant, Andhaka, and nescience,
 In reverence, His holy Lotus Feet I adore!

9

From the ineffable beauty in the face of Parvati,
Mingled the artful spikes of Kadamba, flowed a stream
Of nectar, the sweetness of which Siva sipped
Like a bee and remained in a state of bliss sublime ;

To that Slayer of Kama, the Slayer of Tripura,
The Remover of rebirth, ill-intended sacrifice Destroyer,
Of elephant, Andhaka and nescience,
In reverence, His holy Lotus Feet I adore! 10

Victory unto Him in whose tufts the serpent
Whiffs the flickering embers, causing his head to sway
While in rhythm sounds the Mridanga reaching its climax ;
Lord Siva dancing terribly, but spreading Auspiciousness. 11

Who is alike to rocky bed or soft down of cotton,
To serpent or necklace, charming diamond or stone,
To friend or foe, a spade of grass or dame,
And on pauper or monarch looks with equal eye.
Who taketh pairs of opposites as of one value,
To that great Sada-Siva I adore and salute! 12

Sitting calm inside an unfrequented resort
On the bank of the Ganga I shall cogitate
The Moon-crested Lord, leaving all wicked thoughts
Joining my hands in prayer to my head,
The sacred name of Siva, with eyes full of tears,
When shall I cogitate and be happy forever! 13

This hymn of Shankara as sung herein above
Is famed as the Ace of all the best prayers,
The man who shall cogitate, recite or describe it
Shall attain purity of body and mind then and there.
He shall achieve devotion to Hara, the Guru Eternal,
To no evil path shall then his mind wander,
When cogitating the auspicious virtues of Shankara
Who destroys the delusions of all living beings! 14

At the end of worship in the evening—who recites
This prayer of Ravana, extolling the virtues of the Lord,
His wealth, including chariots, elephants and steeds,
By the grace of Shambhu shall be stable forever! 15

REVIEWS & NOTICES

THE ESSENTIAL TEACHINGS OF BUDDHISM edited by Kerry Brown and Joanne O'Brien ; published by Rider ; 1989 ; pp. 302 ; price: £ 8.95.

“Third in a series of readers which is intended to offer an introductory exploration of the great religious texts of the world,” this is just not a compilation of Buddhist thought. Such impersonal, amorphous anthologies abound. What is significant about the present volume is that it is meant to be of practical help in its overall orientations. As such it is designed to appeal both to those who seek a practical manual for quiet contemplation and those who “wish to open themselves to the insights which” Buddhist teachings offer.

What is offered is comprehensive and represents all the extant Buddhist traditions: Theravada (Thailand and Sri Lanka) and Mahayana with its vast range from India, Tibet, China, Korea, Japan to the various modes of Zen. Thus it is a rich harvest of the basic traditions of Buddhism embodied in “the word of the Buddha Himself and the word of saints, sages, and scholars.”

In spite of the rich material offered, with all “its richness and variety” and its “varying forms”, the reader, as the editors rightly say, is saved any possible bewilderment thereof because what is presented here is the core, “the continuing transmission of Buddha dharma”. Presented by practising members of these “living traditions” this book of daily readings from the sacred texts of Buddhism is thus a practical manual.

Appearing, as it does, under the Rider Imprint which is a guarantee, as it were, of both meticulous editing and pragmatic orientations,—specially in religious/spiritual areas—*The Essential Teachings of Buddhism* is highly recommended to all those given to the diligent cultivation of the seed of quiet, contemplative awareness.

Dr. M. Sivaramkrishna,

ASTROLOGY AND THE HOAX OF SCIENTIFIC TEMPER, EDITOR: GAYATHRI

DEVY VASUDEV. Published by DR. RAMAN Foundation ‘SRI RAJESWARI’ 115/1 Sheshadripuram, Bangalore 560 020. pp. 348, Rs. 54.

The book edited by Smt. Gayathri Devi Vasudev is a fitting and spirited defence of the Divining Science—‘Pratyaksha Phala Darpana’, ‘Vedanga’, ‘Vedaschakshu’—Astrology against the attacks and criticisms of the prejudiced and pseudo-rationalists. These people mainly play to the galleries, awfully ignorant of the depths of this great, useful and lofty shastra.

The book exposes the hoax of the so-called ‘Scientific Temper’ coloured by sophistry and hypocrisy. Neither a degree in science nor earning a little fame automatically endows one with true scientific temper which is characterized by openness and receptiveness to Truth. Orthodox Science is as harmful as orthodox religion.

This book is unique in trying to establish authentically that Vedanga Jyotisha, which deals with correlation between celestial phenomena and terrestrial events, is at least six thousand years old, and existed much before the origin of the Greek and Chaldean Systems. The book exposes the unreliability of computer forecasts and much commercialized sun-sign astrology and marriage matching. It also points out that a huge amount of money is spent on space, medicine, and meteorology despite their frequent failures. A nation can also benefit from the predictions made by Astrology. “Why single out Astrology,” very pertinently asks Gayathri Devi Vasudev, from receiving some financial help and also getting research facilities ?

The article of Shri K. N. Rao, “The Proof of the Pudding”, a well-documented and rational paper, is an excellent objective assessment of success and failure of predictions by a well-known, honest researcher in Mundane Astrology.

The book contains some interesting self-explanatory anecdotes by Dr. Bhise, Paramahansa Yogananda, Paul Brunton,

Sri Aurobindo, and others. Bhrigu Nadi Reading of Ramana Maharshi's horoscope reveals the amazing predictive power of Astrology.

'Consult in private and condemn in public' has become the fashion of the day to preserve the modernity image of the higher-ups.

Carl Jung, the great psychiatrist, who studied horoscopes to understand the personality structures of patients, wisely remarked: "Western civilization, by ignoring astrology, gains little and may be losing much."

In itself, quantification is no magic key. But still, a lot of research with documentation and statistics is necessary to increase the validity, credibility and utility of this great science.

Prof. H. S. Venkata Rao

THE WANDERING MONK, Published by Vivekananda Kendra Prakashan, Kanya Kumari, 1989.

Vivekananda Kendra Prakashan has brought out a separate volume on the theme of 'the wandering monk'. Its articles have been contributed by monks of the Ramakrishna Order and by other persons well-versed in the life and message of Swami Vivekananda. The volume describes in thorough detail the itinerant life of the great Swami from the time he came out of the Baranagore Math in 1880 up to 1893.

This volume on Swamiji's wanderings is a significant contribution because it gives the reader graphic idea of the experiences which led Swami Vivekananda to conceive the way to carry out the world mission entrusted to him by Sri Ramakrishna. Reading through the book one gets a clear perception of Swamiji's dynamic personality, prophetic visions, and above all, his compassion for suffering humanity.

The volume utilizes attractive pictures and photographs to illustrate this rich and colourful period of Swami Vivekananda's life, weaving in details of Swamiji's visits to

different states, his meetings with contemporaries, and the development of his grasp over prevalent social, economic and political problems of the era. The printing and get-up are very good. Educational institutions should possess such volumes.

Dr. Chetana Mandavia

ASPECTS OF INDIAN PSYCHOLOGY, by DINESH CHANDRA BHATTACHARYA SHASTRI. Published by Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur, 24 Parganas (S), West Bengal. 222 pages, Rs. 50/-.

There is a general misconception that Psychology in the sense of 'Science of the Mind' has not received systematic treatment in Indian Philosophy. That this is only a superficial reading, and that the truth of the matter is otherwise, is amply proved by the author in this able treatise on the subject. Maybe psychology as an independent science has not been so regarded in Indian thought, but as a significant part of Yoga, Meditative techniques, Ayurveda, the science of life, and Philosophy of Knowledge and Emotions, the subject has received ample attention. The author cites passages from the Vedic texts and the Upanishads, testifying to the importance the ancient seers give to an understanding of the mind and its functions. Is the mind a separate entity or part of the *antahkarana*? The *Brihadāranyaka Upaniṣad* is clear: "There is a factor or entity whose connection and non-connection with the sense organs accounts for the origination and non-origination of cognition, in spite of the soul, sense organs, and objects being present there." (page 110).

Raising the question whether the mind is only a subtle sense organ or a formation of the consciousness, the writer cites the view of the Advaita-Tantra that "...Manas is not material but is active consciousness itself." (page 16) Discussion on the different functions of the mind, the extent to which the 'Unconscious' is part of the activity of the mind, the psychology of education in the Indian tradition, and above all, the ramifications of the Yoga Psychology of Patañjali is learned and thorough. Fully documented and authentic in exposition, the book serves

both the needs of scholars in the universities and the general reader interested in the subject.

Sri M. P. Pandit

THE BHAGAVAD GITA, by O.P. Ghai. Published by Institute of Personal Development, 1-10, New Park Extension, New Delhi, 110-016, 1990. 116 pages, Rs. 75/-.

The subject matter of the book is not the whole of the *Gītā*, but its summary and essence in simple English, chapter by chapter. The author, O.P. Ghai, admits in the preface that he attempted a summarised rendering in simple English for ...'laymen, young people and foreigners' who are not conversant with the cultural heritage of India. The author has been successful in presenting the story of the *Mahabharata* at the background of the philosophical and spiritual discussions between Sri Krishna and Arjuna.

In describing the story the chapters of the *Gītā* are presented with their special bearings, with only those ślokas which convey the content of the whole. Each chapter is given a caption and the selected ślokas are carefully arranged according to the standard English translations, of the *Gītā* by at least thirty four different authors mentioned in the Bibliography. The book, though abridged, is infused with the spirit of the entire *Gītā*. Paper, printing, binding—the overall get-up of the book is excellent, but the price seems a bit high for the personal library of a middle class reader who is likely to be tempted to possess a copy.

Dr. Satchidananda Dhar

SPIRITUAL PERFECTION by Anthony Elenjmittam, Aquinas Publications, Bombay, 1989. 216 pages.

Rev. Anthony, the author, has attempted to establish the fundamental unity in the conception of spiritual perfection in all major religions of the world. A widely read scholar and active preacher of spiritual values, the author has liberally highlighted the wisdom of the Vedas, the Upaniṣads, Buddhist texts, the Bible and other classics of antiquity.

The views expressed in the book, in most cases are founded on the Vedāntic ideas of 'unity in diversity' and these the author supports with passages from other scriptures and sayings of the enlightened ones. Views of the author are catholic and universal in nature. That 'Man is divinity' and that 'man is God' and his perfection is to be one with God, are assertions of the Vedānta and are the keynote of the book. There are thirteen chapters explaining the nature of human perfection and the ways and means leading to perfection—without which, according to the author, "...our social, economic and political problems will never be solved".

The author deserves credit and praise for asserting the need for spiritual values and the realization of one's innate divinity in this modern age of mere sensory existence.

Dr. Satchidananda Dhar

KANAKADHARA STOTRA of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, by S. Kameswaran (Author-Publisher) 7 Vivek, Sector 4, Chheda Nagar, Chembur, Bombay 400-089. Rs. 9.00.

There is always an undercurrent of *Jñāna* in the devotional outpourings of Acharya Shankara. And the present Hymn of seventeen verses lauding the Divine Mother as *Lakṣmi*, the bountiful Goddess of Wealth, is no exception. In this translation Sri Kameswaran has spared no pains in bringing out the subtle nuances of each word in his elaborate notes following fluent renderings in English. He draws upon the lore of other scriptures, the *Puranas* and modern classics (in English) to explain in detail the purport of the verses which are framed in a number of rich metres. The meaning of *katākṣa* (side-glance) the role of *Śhākambhari*, the presiding deity of the plant-world, the apposite reference to *Gajalakṣmi* (verse 16) for meditational purposes—these and other relevant topics are dwelt upon with precision. The author rightly states that the occasion for the prayer is found in a legend about the needs of an indigent family, but the overtones extend to the perennial human situation and the human need of the gifts of divine Grace in spiritual life.

In a note on *AparOkṣānubhūti*, Sri Kameswaran writes: "As there is a sub-conscious state, so there is a superconscious state. When the mind bounces beyond the confines of the conscious plane, it reaches a state where there is no perceiver, no perception and nothing to be perceived; where it comes face to face with the Supreme Spirit; nay it merges itself totally in It." (page 19).

The text in Nagari script with transliteration, word-for-word meaning and translation into English verse with copious notes make this Edition both educative and elevating.

Sri M. P. Pandit

PRINCIPAL SYMBOLS OF WORLD RELIGIONS, by Swami Harshananda. Published by The Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras 600 004, 1989. 47 pages, Rs. 4.00.

In our daily experience and especially when visiting places of worship, we come across varieties of symbols representing different concepts and deities. These symbols often stand for profound and meaningful concepts of philosophy and religion, but may not be clear to us on first sight. The present book under review fulfils a great need by giving some explanations.

Various symbols in the world religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Shintoism, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism and Taoism are illustrated with fine drawings in this booklet. For each symbol the author has given a description and interpretation of its different parts, discussed its origin, historical significance and meaning. Apart from these, Swami Harshanandaji has not missed giving in brief the essentials of each religion and the basic truths taught by them. Thus the reader gets

a clear insight into the ideas suggested by each symbol.

On the whole, this small book is charming and enlightening. Its printing and get-up are very good.

Dr. Chetana Mandavia

SOME SELECTIONS FROM THE SCRIPTURES OF WORLD RELIGIONS, by SWAMI HARSHANANDA. Published by The Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras, 1989. 60 pages, Rs. 6.00.

The frequent occurrence of communal clashes, displays of religious fanaticism, and sectarianism have their origin in lack of understanding of the teachings of religion. So a right knowledge of fundamentals of religion is necessary to ward off narrowness, bigotry and fanaticism. The present scholarly book by Swami Harshanandaji brings out the basic ideas of world religions. Original verses from the scriptures of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Islam are translated into lucid English. The passages are selected to give the quintessential ideas of each religion. Preceding each discussion, the author presents an introductory note and the dominant theme. His approach is useful, especially to one who is reading the scriptures for the first time. The key to transliteration and pronunciation given at the beginning will also be very helpful to many.

It strikes the reader that the ethical, moral and spiritual principles taught by each religion are the same; following which humanity should be able to live in peace and harmony. This collection will be a most useful publication. Its study generates in the mind respect for the great religions and kindles a spark of interest to know more about them.

Dr. Chetana Mandavia

PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY

In this ever-changing evanescent world, union coexists with separation, prosperity with adversity, happiness with misery, fortune with misfortune, enjoyment with disease, property with strife. Each follows the other like a shadow that passes. Knowing this and experiencing this, why do men still get entangled in such a world through the lure of phantom happiness? The immediacy of the pleasure derived from the enjoyment of sense-objects is the undoing of man. Even a grain of nominal pleasure makes one forget the pains of miseries suffered a million times!

One can escape from the clutches of misery only if one always thinks over the ultimate result that his acts may bring. Who can remove the misery of one who fails to learn even by repeated experience? Who can awaken one who is feigning sleep? The true fruition of human life is reached by taking the steps necessary to avoid coming back to this world and undergoing endless sufferings, by being born again and again.

No work can ever be done and nothing can ever be successfully accomplished, if one sits idle and waits for what fate or luck may bring. Moreover, such an attitude makes a man unmanly and *Tāmasic* (inert) and debases him altogether. Men commit mistakes or fail because of their own faults, and they put the whole blame on evil fate or luck or stars! A person trips or slips through his own carelessness, but blames the ground! All achievement usually depends upon one's own effort. If there be anything called fate which is felt to be an obstacle to the realisation of the aim of life, it has to be overcome by rousing with self-effort the innate strength that lies dormant within everyone. Only then are you a Man. If you do that, you will find that fate also will be favourable

to you. If fate alone were all-powerful, there could be no such things as talking of right or wrong, virtue or vice, or the power of the Spirit. Men are not stocks and stones. "Fate alone is causing me to do everything, I am not responsible for my acts; I am being helplessly driven along by it."—If this be the mental attitude, no man can ever rise, or hope to reach *Mukti*, or salvation. Remember, it is nothing but degrading for a man to think himself weak and at the mercy of unseen Powers; it pushes him down more and more into the mire. When some work has to be done, you should be full of activity, setting yourself to it with all your heart and soul. Do not pay the slightest heed to obstacles and hindrances, if they turn up, however insuperable they may seem to be. You will then find that those very obstacles and hindrances will actually help you in some way or other. Is it always possible to have a favourable atmosphere after one's own heart? The person who thinks that he will devote himself to the worship of God with a carefree mind, after having completed all his duties and settled all his family affairs satisfactorily, fares like the fool who goes to bathe in the sea, but frightened by its dreadful waves, thinks he will go into the water only after the waves have subsided a little and the sea becomes calm. That never comes about, even if he sits on the beach till the last day of his life. There will always be waves in the sea. One should boldly jump into the sea, bathe fighting with the waves, and get through with it. In the same way, in this sea of the world, one must call on God, do spiritual practices and worship Him, fighting all along with the waves.

Swami Virajananda
from *Paramartha Prasanga*