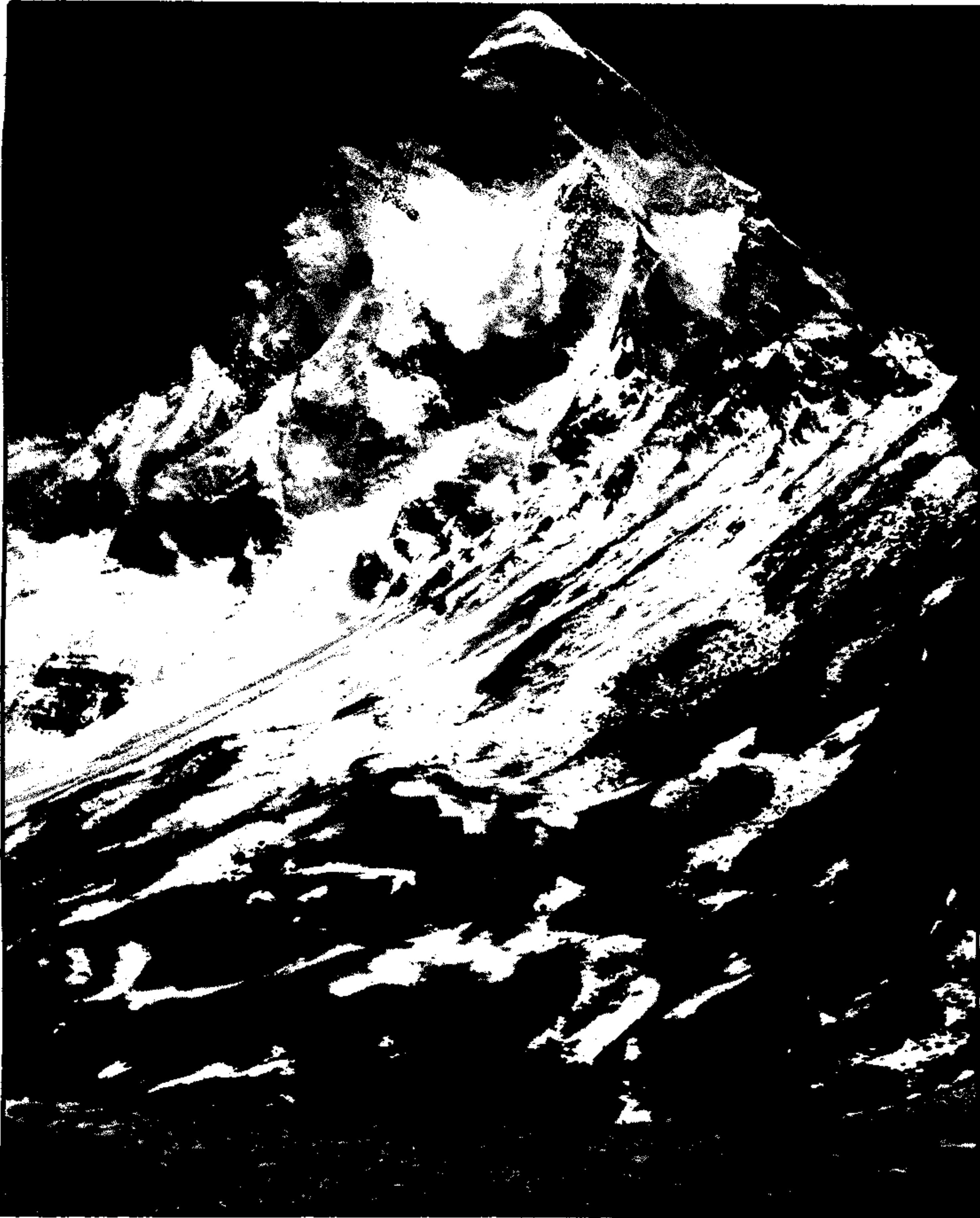


# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or Awakened India



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*Cover:* Shivalinga Peak,  
Himalayas

# Prabuddha Bharata

Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

A MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE  
RAMAKRISHNA ORDER

**JANUARY 1991**

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

# Prabuddha Bharata

Or Awakened India

VOL. 96

JANUARY 1991

No. 1

## The Divine Message

Whether you believe in spirituality or not, for the sake of the national life, you have to get a hold on spirituality and keep to it. Then stretch the other hand out and gain all you can from other races, but everything must be subordinated to that one ideal of life ; and out of that a wonderful, glorious, future India will come—I am sure it is coming—a greater India than ever was. Sages will spring up greater than all the ancient sages, and your ancestors will not only be satisfied, but I am sure, they will be proud, from their positions in other worlds, to look down upon their descendants, so glorious, and so great. Let us all work hard, my brethren, this is no time for sleep. On our work depends the coming of the India of the future. She is there ready waiting. She is only sleeping. Arise, and awake and see her seated here, on her eternal throne, rejuvenated, more glorious than she ever was—this motherland of ours.

The longest night seems to be passing away, the sorest trouble seems to be coming to an end at last, the seeming corpse appears to be awaking, and a voice is coming to us—away back where history and even tradition fails to peep into the gloom of the past, coming down from there, reflected, as it were, from peak to peak of the infinite *Himālaya* of knowledge, and of love, and of work, 'India, this motherland of ours'—a voice is coming unto us, gentle, firm, and yet unmistakable in its utterances, and is gaining volume as days pass by, and behold, the sleeper is awakening! Like a breeze from the Himalayas, it is bringing life into the almost dead bones and muscles, the lethargy is passing away, and only the blind cannot see, or the perverted will not see that she is awakening this motherland of ours, from her deep long sleep. None can resist her any more ; never is she going to sleep any more ; no outward powers can hold her back any more ; for the infinite giant is rising to her feet.

Up, up, the long night is passing, the day is approaching, the wave has risen, nothing will be able to resist its tidal fury. Believe, believe, the decree has gone forth, the fiat to the Lord has gone forth—India must rise, the masses and the poor are to be made happy. Rejoice! The flood of spirituality has risen. I see it is rolling over the land resistless, boundless, all-absorbing. Every man to the fore, every good will be added to its forces, every hand will smooth its way, and glory be unto the Lord!

## Vivekananda— The Unfathomable

It was the year 1899. Vivekananda visited the New York home of Vedanta for the second time—this time only to stay for a short period, only two weeks. During his first visit to the West, after the great success at the Parliament of Religions, he came to New York and laid the solid foundation for Vedanta. Even after the Swami's departure to Europe and India, the Work continued to grow. The Vedanta Society in New York steadily expanded and attracted the attention of earnest souls. Many of these followers who had not seen Swamiji during his earlier stay were eager to see him

and listen to him. They had heard and read about him much and with baited breath they waited for his arrival. They were not disappointed. He won their hearts with his irresistible charm. One ardent lover of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Vedanta was a young man—Cornelius J. Heijblom, who later became a monk, Swami Atulananda, lived in India for many years and died at a ripe old age. This old Swami was very popular for his large store of reminiscences of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. He recorded his first impression of Swami Vivekananda in the following terms:

Simple in dress and behaviour, he was just like any one of us. He did not put himself aside on a pedestal as is so often the case with lionized personages. He walked about the room, sat on

## To Our Readers

With the arrival of 1991 *Prabuddha Bharata*, the oldest running monthly Journal of India, is entering its 96th year.

This first issue of 1991 comes as a special number. Many eminent writers of East and West have contributed valuable articles on varied themes, enriching it. We express our gratefulness to all of them. During the last year, 1990, writers, scholars, and devotees contributed dissertations, essays, travelogues and other types of articles for the monthly issues. Some have enrolled themselves as life-subscribers of the Journal. Many others have offered donations and help of other kinds, in order to keep the prestigious religio-cultural Journal alive.

*Prabuddha Bharata* staff wishes to improve the quality, printing and paper of this Journal started under the inspiration of Swami Vivekananda in 1896. We hope the general public, especially the lovers of this great country and her precious culture, and the devotees of Swamiji, will come forward in large numbers to help us by enrolling as life, or year-to-year subscribers, by offering donations, and by contributing articles which will help to fulfil Swami Vivekananda's vision of Awakened India.

*Prabuddha Bharata* wishes all its subscribers, contributors, and admirers best wishes for a happy, peaceful, and prosperous New Year.



the floor, laughed, joked, chatted—nothing formal. Of course, I had noticed his magnificent, brilliant eyes, his beautiful features, majestic bearing, for these were parts of him that no circumstances could hide. But when I saw him for a few minutes standing on a platform surrounded by others, it flashed into my mind: "What a giant, what strength, what manliness, what a personality! Everyone near him looks so insignificant in comparison." It came to me almost as a shock and seemed to startle me. What was it that gave Swamiji this distinction? Was it his height? No, there were gentlemen there taller than he was. Was it his build? No, there were near him some very fine specimens of American manhood. It seemed to be more in the expression of the face than anything else. Was it his purity? What was it? I could not analyze it. I remembered what had been said of Lord Buddha—"a lion amongst men". I felt that Swamiji had unlimited power, that he could move heaven and earth if he willed it. This was my strongest and lasting impression of him.<sup>1</sup>

Swamiji had, it is true, unlimited power, but seldom did he use it. He behaved with others and bore the travails and sorrows of this world like any other mortal. He lived through hunger, illness, poverty and sometimes humiliation like any one of us, but of course with one great difference. His equipoise was like that of the Himalayas. Had he wished he could have employed his spiritual powers to command innumerable men and women to follow him in utter submission. But he was a free and fearless lion. As he loved his freedom, so he cared for the freedom of others. He never liked to see abject, meek acquiescence in anyone. He fought against some of the ideas of his own extraordinary teacher, Sri Ramakrishna, for six years relentlessly. Like the Master and like Buddha, again and again he cautioned his listeners not to accept anything on mere belief. He advised all to use their own brains and stand on their own feet. He used

to say, "*Test these truths and realize them, but don't swallow anything and everything because so and so said it.*" Next to morbid weakness and unmanly passivity in human-beings, he used to abhor those who would make him an idol—the personality cult. Fawning over a great person, or worshipping him, not only overshadows, but relegates to secondary importance the truths, the principles which he stands for. Vivekananda, therefore, did not like to sit on a high pedestal and receive the adoration of thousands of people. In one of his letters, written to Mrs. Ole Bull, on 18 July 1896, he made it clear: ... "I have no workers," he said. "Everyone is independent to work as one likes. I don't bother my head about these little things at all. I can give ideas that is all." He allowed everyone to grow and develop according to his own nature, in the sunshine of freedom.

The following remarkable incident, told by Miss Josephine MacLeod, reflects the greatness of Swamiji. Miss MacLeod was very much devoted to him. She passed away in October in the year 1949. During all these years she spoke only about the beloved Swami, and nothing else. Her devotion was almost unparalleled. Whenever she heard that someone or some group evinced keen interest to know more about Vivekananda, in any part of the globe, she went there, carrying in her bosom the fire lit by her great Teacher. She had met him for the first time in January 1895. When she was eighty years old she used to say, "I am only forty years old, I was born in January 1895—when I first met Swamiji." In her ringing voice she would sometimes shock her circle of admirers saying, "Swamiji cleaned my shoes!" She also related, ... "Once Swamiji was lecturing in New York. He was at his best and the audience seemed to be in a rapture. There was not a sound, they hung on his lips. Then suddenly he stopped, bowed to the audience of, perhaps, a thous-

1. Swami Atulananda, *With the Swamis in America and India* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1988) pp. 59-60

and people, and left the platform. It was so abrupt that the audience wondered what had happened to him. Later I asked him. Swamiji replied, 'I felt such an inflow of strength and power that had I continued, it would have spoiled my message. All these people would have become my disciples. I don't want disciples. I want everyone to get free by their own efforts.'"<sup>2</sup>

Ida Ansell (Ujjvala), in 1927, in a reminiscing mood, wrote a letter to Swami Atulananda, in India, about Swamiji. She recollected: "...perhaps best of all, saw him standing by the campfire (at Camp Taylor) against the dark background, and heard him say, 'You may meditate on whatever you will, but I shall meditate on the heart of a lion. That gives strength'. And never have I seen and felt anything so magnificent since that night. I marvelled and worshipped and loved him. ... And yet I was utterly incapable of understanding him."<sup>3</sup> Miss MacLeod voiced that same sense of wonder: ... "The thing that held me in Swamiji [*sic*] was his unlimitedness. I never could touch the bottom—or top—or sides. The amazing size of him!"<sup>4</sup>

Who can understand and measure the vastness of that ocean called Vivekananda? Even his brother monks were often awe-struck by the profundity of the Sage whom they thought they knew well. The impact on the world of his thought and message has yet to be evaluated. The world is awakening to recognize the priceless legacy that he left behind for the welfare of mankind. At the end of this twentieth century one can see even now the presence of his resplendent figure on the horizon of world thought. His social and spiritual ideas have captivated some of the best minds in every

culture. However dogmatic or chauvinistic or nationalistic one may be, one has to listen to the compelling, thundering universal message of Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. The key to world peace and prosperity lies in their teachings.

Only one person was able to fathom the depth and immensity of Vivekananda, and that was his own Master, Sri Ramakrishna. The Master held him in such love and reverence that he hesitated to allow Naren to render him any personal service, however small. Sri Ramakrishna, before the devotees, always praised in glowing terms the virtues of this disciple. To devotees, Naren was only a young intelligent college student, showing much promise to rise high in worldly life. They never understood the meaning of the words, "Naren was a thousand-petalled lotus, the blazing Sun of Knowledge." The prophecy of the Master that Naren would shake the world and astound the best minds with his dazzling intellect, and win innumerable hearts by his purity and compassion, bore fruit within a decade of his passing away. Professor John Henry Wright of Harvard University, completely impressed by the young monk's genius, introduced him to the organizers of the Parliament of Religions as a superbly well-qualified delegate— ... "one who is more learned than all our professors put together". And the Swami, as he said, "was like the sun, with no need of credentials in order to shine." In the history of mankind, Vivekananda is a phenomenon, no sage ever matching the majesty of him as he walked over this earth. Romain Rolland paid the fitting tribute when he wrote: ... "But his pre-eminent characteristic was Kingliness. He was a born King and nobody ever came near him either in India or America without paying homage to his majesty."<sup>5</sup>

2. *Ibid.*, p. 292.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 274.

4. *Vivekananda, A Biography in Pictures* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1977) p. 58.

5. Romain Rolland, *Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1979) p. 5.



He was made of the stuff of the thunderbolt, yet he possessed the softness of a mother's heart. In January 1901, Swamiji came to Mayavati Advaita Ashrama and spent a fortnight here. He used to sit in front of the open fireplace and spent hours in animated conversation on various topics, electrifying the whole atmosphere. Mohanlal Shahji was a young hill-boy working in the Ashrama then. Decades later he recollected vividly this memorable visit of Swamiji and told many of us that when Swamiji sat in front of the fire, he appeared to him like an embodiment of Siva. Indeed, he was Siva. Did not Bhuvaneshwari Devi's austerities, sacrifices and constant prayers bring down Siva from his deep meditation as her son? Can one expect such exceptional manifestation of purity, love, renunciation, power, and unearthly splendour in ordinary human beings? In unguarded moments Swamiji unselfconsciously manifested god-like immensity, largesse of mind and heart that struck a sense of wonder in others.

Sarat Chandra Chakravarty was a great devotee of Sri Ramakrishna's lay-disciple, Nag Mahashaya. One day he begged Nag Mahashaya for spiritual initiation, but Nag Mahashaya said: "Don't lose heart. Lord Siva himself will be your Guru." Binodini Mitra, Nag Mahashaya's cousin and his biographer, related in her book how that blessing was fulfilled. It was May 1897. Swami Vivekananda was staying at the Alambazar monastery after returning from the West. Sarat Chandra went to see Swamiji and found him resting in his room. He sat down to wait for Swamiji to get up, but all of a sudden he saw Siva was lying where Swamiji had been. He could not believe his own eyes at first, but as he stared more at the figure he could not doubt what he saw. Then he remembered the boon Nag Maha-

shaya had given him, and Swamiji later initiated him.<sup>6</sup>

Swami Shivananda had a similar startling experience. One night he had fallen asleep beside Swamiji. He suddenly woke up at the dead of night and found the room and the inside of the mosquito net flooded with light. He looked for Swamiji, but in his place found little Sivas lying asleep. They were beautiful boys with matted locks for their hair. It was the celestial light emanating from their bodies that lit up the room. Swami Shivananda could not believe his eyes and gazed for a long time at those little Sivas. He spent the whole remaining part of the night in meditation. When in the morning he related to Swamiji what he had seen, Swamiji laughed a great deal. Shivananda said he had seen the true nature of Swamiji.

Swami Shivananda had great reverence for Swamiji. Whenever he used to pass by the room used by Swamiji at Belur Math, and where Swamiji had attained Mahasamadhi, he always bowed down in deep devotion. Sometimes he would say, "I wished good morning to Swamiji. He has just come back from his morning walk." Or sometimes he would say, "I saw Swamiji sitting in his room in deep meditation." He always felt Swamiji's presence.<sup>7</sup>

Though Vivekananda had the power to shut out the world and lose himself in contemplation, he did not do so. If the world appeared to traditional sannyasi Vedantins as a dreadful dream, to Vivekananda the whole world was a great playground or moral gymnasium—"where we come to make ourselves strong", or it was a place of pilgrimage where man could work

6. Swami Chetanananda, *They Lived With God* (St. Louis: Vedanta Society of St. Louis, USA, 1988) pp. 228-29.

7. *Sivānanda Smṛti Samgraha*, Edited by Swami Apurvananda, (Bengali), (Barasat: Ramakrishna-Sivananda Ashrama, 1967) p. 300.



consciously and free himself from all limitations imposed on the Soul by nature. Sri Ramakrishna wanted him to be a huge spreading banyan tree providing shade and shelter to innumerable suffering souls. Preaching to men only the message of strength, spiritual freedom, in fact, that is what he became. The dominant note in Vivekananda's 'new philosophy' was man-making and the growth of man in his total or comprehensive aspect. He held aloft the divinity of man, yet he tirelessly strove to mitigate the physical sufferings of men. To him spirituality was not mere reclusiveness but rather a life of courage and bravery to face facts—to face the world as it comes. At the same time he stressed in unequivocal terms the importance of science and technology. In his lectures on *Jnāna Yoga*, delivered a century ago, he anticipated many of the latest discoveries which we are witness to now in the fields of quantum physics, astrophysics, and neuro and molecular-biology. He was a giant of his age, and is, undisputable, the confluence of what is best in East and West. Addressing Indians he said: "What we need...is to study, independent of foreign control, different branches of the knowledge that is our own, and with it the English language and western science; we need technical education and all else that will develop industries, so that men, instead of seeking for service, may earn enough to provide for themselves."<sup>8</sup> Though he spoke nearly a century ago, his prophetic vision foresaw the glorious future of India. He himself suggested many concrete steps to be taken to regenerate India's innate greatness. Day and night he had the glorious vision of future India before him. Sister Nivedita said, "Throughout those years in which I saw him almost daily, the thought

of India was to him like the air he breathed. ...But he was born a lover, and the queen of his adoration was his Motherland."<sup>9</sup>

Will not our politicians who have been fighting for the crumbs of power, and our citizens who demand their rights only, soon catch some of the fire of patriotism from Vivekananda and learn to use their energies to rebuild the India of his vision? Not by jingoism can we do this, but by learning what is the true spirit of patriotic and spiritual love of country. For that we shall have to sit at the feet of the patriot-saint Vivekananda, and learn. His life and inspired writings should be made part of the compulsory programme of study in our schools and colleges. To know Vivekananda is to know India. If our race is to rise up again infused with indomitable energy, the national heart shall have to be set aflame with the desire to work for the welfare of country and humanity. It has to worship Siva in His cosmic dance, the energizing and terrible sound of whose tabor sends a thrill through the spheres—That is the thundering Vivekananda.

Saints can tell us about God, describe mystic visions and inspire us to cultivate religious devotion. Vivekananda was also a saint, but with a difference. His superb genius outshone all others and considered and illumined every minute aspect of human life. It applied itself to the practical and to the sublime, addressing the problems of India's gnawing economic poverty, sought ways to uproot social evils, and ultimately showed the way to lift man from slavery to Godhood. His pervasive insight covered the wide gamut of human activities, always shedding fresh light on them. One time he declared, "This time I have left nothing unsaid." Vivekananda as a saint stands

8. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. V* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989) p. 368.

9. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita* (Calcutta: Sister Nivedita Girls' School, 1969) Vol. I. p. 45.

apart, incomparable. Who before him felt excruciating pain at the sight of human misery? Who was ever ready to forego personal salvation and everything to help even a single man as he was?

It was in 1897; Swamiji was staying at the home of Balaram Bose in Calcutta. He had been elucidating for his disciple, Sarat Chandra Chakravarty, Sayana's commentary on the *Rig-Veda*. Swamiji was explaining the theory of Creation, according to the Vedas, when the great Bengali dramatist, Girish Ghosh arrived. Swamiji greeted him with great courtesy. Turning to Girish Swamiji said, "What do you say, G.C.? Well, you do not care to study all this, you pass your days with advocacy of this god and that god, eh?" Then Girish answered: "What shall I say, brother? I have neither time nor understanding enough to pry into all that. But this time with Sri Ramakrishna's Grace I shall pass by with greetings to your Vedas and Vedanta, to take one leap to the far beyond! He gets you through all these studies, because he wants to get many a thing done by you. But we have no need of them. Saying this, Girish Babu again and again touched the big *Rig-Veda* volumes with his head, uttering, "All Victory to Ramakrishna in the form of Veda!" Then Girish said to Swamiji: "A good deal of studies of the Vedas and Vedanta you have made. Did you find anywhere in them any way for us out of all these profound miseries in the country, all these wailings of grief, all this starvation, all these crimes of adultery, and many horrible sins?"

Girish continued painting graphically the deplorable condition of Indian society while Swamiji remained speechless and silent. Swamiji's eyes welled up with tears at the thought of sorrows and miseries of his fellow men. Tears began to flow from his eyes. He rose and left the room.

Then Girish Ghosh said to the disciple: "Did you see what a great loving heart?

I respect your Swamiji, not as a great scholar well-versed in the Vedas, but for that great heart of his which made him retire weeping at the sorrows of his fellow beings."<sup>10</sup>

From history we have learned that the great Gautama Buddha had such limitless compassion for living beings. Did the same Buddha incarnate himself once again in the form of Vivekananda?

It was the middle of March 1933. Swami Shivananda was then seventy-nine years old and President of the Math and Mission, suffering from many ailments. Three young monks were attending him at his bedside. One day he slept a little in the morning. After half-an-hour's slumber, he suddenly started weeping. The attendants noticed the great Swami crying aloud. After awhile he beckoned to them to help him sit up in the bed. He appeared to be in an indrawn mood. After a bit of conversation on this and that subject, the attendant asked: "Maharaj, why were you weeping; were you in pain?" Shivananda, in a surprised tone countered, "Was I?" Pausing a few moments he said, "Swamiji came. What an effulgent celestial form! Swamiji said, 'Brother Tarak, it is I who had come as the Buddha and you as Ananda. Can you recollect all those past events? Now the play is over; get ready to quit.' Saying this Swamiji disappeared."<sup>11</sup>

This twentieth century Buddha gave a new *Mantra* to the world: "*Ātmano mokṣārtham jagaddhitāya ca*"—*One's own spiritual freedom and the welfare of the world*. These twin ideals go hand in hand. In the light of this *Mantra*, factory and temple, research laboratory and monastery, playground and prayerhall, field and hermitage, and service and meditation, all are sacred.

10. Swami Vivekananda, *Complete Works*, Vol. VI, p. 499-500.

11. *Sivānanda Smṛti samgraha*, p. 390.



Vivekananda is limitless ; none can fathom him, either at top or at bottom. Nivedita aptly remarked, ... "and some of us...believe that not even yet has it been given to us to understand the vastness and significance of the message he spoke."<sup>12</sup>

12. *Sister Nivedita, Complete Works, Vol. I.* p. 11.

Salutations to that King of renouncers, the radiant Vivekananda, who is verily Sacchidānanda, the Personification of Existence-Knowledge—Bliss Absolute, the great Teacher, and the Remover of Distress.<sup>13</sup>

13. नमः श्रीयतिराजाय विवेकानन्द सुरये ।

सच्चित्सुखस्वरूपाय स्वामिने तापहारिणे ॥

(composed by Swami Ramakrishnananda).

## Earnestness In Spiritual Pursuit

SWAMI BHUTESHANANDA\*

*Srimat Swami Bhuteshananandaji Maharaj, President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, held an informal talk with devotees on the importance of earnestness. In his inimitable way, in comely and plain language, he brushes aside unrealistic and romantic notions about religious life and offers wise counsel.*

There is generally a vague idea about what our spiritual pursuit is. We are mostly not very clear about the import of this phrase, 'Spiritual Pursuit'. Perhaps in the same way we may say that we are seeking God. Otherwise, spiritual pursuit may mean different things to different people. In fact, the word God does not mean the same thing to all people. In very simple terms, our God is our conception about the Supreme Reality which we may not clearly understand in the beginning. Our concept of God is our concept of the Divine that we create in our mind. And we give different attributes to express our concept. Moreover, these concepts are not always the same. In simplest terms, Sri Ramanuja has described God as

\* Based on a talk delivered by Revered President Maharaj on 30-1-90 at the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Bombay.

*Aśeṣa kalyāṇaguṇasampannaḥ nikhilaheya-guṇavarjitah*—"He is full of all good qualities and quite free from all evil qualities." This statement gives some meaning to our attempt to express what God is. Our conception of God means our conception of an entity to whom we swear in the name of all the good qualities that we think of in their highest proportion. Otherwise, God remains for us an attributeless all-pervading principle only.

This is a subject which we can understand in a practical way. And, as we proceed, our idea of divinity will evolve along with our evolution spiritually. One thing is certain, and that is our limitedness to a body. We generally think that we are the body or we are the mind. This limitedness is to be transcended if we are to proceed towards divinity. Now, that is the pursuit of spirituality. 'Spirit' here means everything that is not material, that does not undergo change,

that which is imperishable and that which is free from impurity of all kinds. Roughly speaking, this is our idea of divinity or Godhood. And our approach towards it is possible through various paths, according to our mental tendencies and according to the make-up of our mind—all the tendencies that are innate in us at the moment.

What is the path and what is the goal? The path is to cultivate such qualities as we imagine in our supremely divine being, the qualities that we imagine in God. Those qualities are to be pursued. That is, we shall have to gradually become worthy of those qualities and free ourselves from all evil qualities. (I do not go into very scholarly discussion about these things because what we want is not a scholarly dissertation but ideas that will be helpful in our spiritual life.) So we shall try gradually to become like the ideal that we think of as God, and each one of us is required to cultivate those qualities step by step, from whatever state of life we are placed in at the moment. We have to free ourselves from the evil qualities and attain to those qualities which we now ascribe to our God, to the furthest extent that is possible. According to some, this is not possible. We, as human beings, are not capable of raising ourselves up to the level of divinity. According to others it is possible because we are essentially made of the same quality as that of the Supreme Spirit. We are sparks of the same fire. Man is essentially divine.

Admittedly, that divinity has been covered up, as it were, by our wrong thinking and wrong living. But gradually those coverings will have to be removed so that we find manifested in us the divine essence, that is our real inmost being. The idea that we are ordinary helpless beings is a misconception which has arisen due to wrong ideas of the essential core of our life, our true Self. We have to free ourselves from all superimpositions and make ourselves pure by thinking

that we are essentially divine—God Himself. Believers in God, by and large, believe in leading a spiritual life. Some do not. But those who believe in a Higher Power slowly turn into seekers. That this does not seem to be very fruitful in our life is due to our lack of earnestness about it. We are seeking spirituality, but seeking it in a half-hearted manner. Surely, we cannot make any progress with lukewarm enthusiasm. Our great saints have shown by their exemplary lives how God is to be gradually pursued and how we are to reach Him. They have shown that complete dedication and great earnestness alone ensure progress in the spiritual path.

Sri Ramakrishna one day said, "People talk of God-realization, but mere talk is of little value. If they are really earnest for God-realization then they will have to pray with all sincerity." Saying this, he started rolling on the ground, crying for the Divine Mother in such a way that people were wonder-struck. What was the reason for this transformation? Just a moment ago he was speaking like a different person, and suddenly he became a child who was seeking its Mother with all earnestness, and visibly showing signs of the misery he was feeling at separation from his beloved Divine Mother. That is the example by which he wanted to teach us, showing what is meant by earnest seeking of God. We are not earnest and sincere. In our very idea of approach to God, there is insincerity. We know how to reach Him more or less, but we are not prepared to dedicate ourselves and to forsake all the things which are against that idea. That is the fate of almost all the seekers of God. Very few like to seek that divine Essence, and even among those who seek, very few are in right earnest about it. Only those who are in right earnest are blessed with the divine vision of God. This is the fate of the majority, who seek



God without total dedication. We find this echoed in the scriptures:

*Śravaṇāyāpi bahubhir yo na labhyaḥ  
śṛṅvanto'pi bahavo yam na vidyaḥ ...  
Kaṭha Upaniṣad, 1.2.7.*

*"Many people do not have the opportunity to hear about Him. And even most of those who hear do not understand the meaning."*

Only a very few can understand the real meaning and then have the earnest hankering for God-realization. These fortunate few will be blessed ultimately with the vision of God. God-realization is not such a simple thing that it can be attained without much sacrifice. That is why Sri Ramakrishna said in Bengali: *"Tyāg chhādā kichhu habe nā, bāpu!"* *"Without renunciation, nothing can be attained, my child!"*

This remark sounds like a bombshell for people who are following the life of householders. They think that renunciation is meant for monks only. No, Sri Ramakrishna does not make an exception like that. He says nothing can be attained, no true spiritual progress can be made without utmost renunciation. How can a householder do that? Sri Ramakrishna has told us how it can be done. One day, when he was addressing a group of mostly householders, he said that "for householders it is enough if they renounce mentally. They need not renounce externally, formally. Only mental renunciation will do for them."

What is mental renunciation? Giving up the attachment towards the sense pleasures. If you can get rid of them, then you are free to progress towards the ultimate God-head who is free from all impurities, who is the embodiment of all that is good. That is the path of spirituality and the simplest path to God-realization. Simple path, no doubt, but how many are there who are prepared to follow that path? We are sannyāsins. We know what people want of us, what people seek from us.

In a certain place I was a guest of a gentleman in his home and one of the relations came and asked me, "Sir, can you read palms?" I said, "No." "Can you read horoscopes?" Again I said, "No." "Do you know medicines?" I said, "No." Then he asked me point blank, "What do you know then? If you do not know these things what are we going to get from you?" That is what many people think of spiritual life. Most of us want to know how we can be freed from all miseries—physical, mental and so forth. We expect our life here to be sweet and long; this is all that is sought from a monk or a person following the path of God-realization. Most of us don't want anything else. This is the usual way of spiritual practice of common people. They practise certain things with the idea that those will make their life happy and there will be fulfilment, in the material sense. That is the sole aim and goal of their pursuit.

Can such practices lead to true spirituality? No, they cannot. Again, in a sense they may do so, because they will gradually lead to purification of the mind. God's name does not go in vain. Even when we are taking God's name with some ulterior motive, the very content of that holy Name will gradually free us from the impurities and will show us ultimately the clear path to God realization, will lead to a spirit of complete renunciation in life. But this renunciation does not come all on a sudden. It has to be practised.

The most important idea behind spiritual practices is that God is invaluable. We put value on different things. All of these fade in comparison to God-realization. When God is attained all the joys of life are fully realized. Is it really so? The idea is that man who is looking for pleasures has gradually to be led to the highest goal. So the scriptures speak of the *yajnas*, sacrifices, which when properly performed yield fulfil-

ment of desires. It is believed that if one wants a long life, plenty of things, and worldly enjoyments, he can get them through these sacrifices. The boy Nachiketa was enticed by Yama, the King of Death, to enjoy all the possessions of this world and the world beyond, enjoyments which no man had ever had before. Yama even promised to give him an almost interminable long life to enjoy all those sense pleasures. But Nachiketa, sincere and earnest, replied to Yama that any amount of joy of the senses ultimately leads only to feelings of weariness and at last boredom. And when all the pleasures are enjoyed, life too is very short. When Yama reminded Nachiketa that he had granted him an extremely long life, Nachiketa answered that however long it might be, it is nothing when compared to eternity. What Nachiketa sought was eternal joy and eternal existence.

In our ignorance we have forgotten about that eternal life. That is why we express cravings for only temporary joys and fleeting pleasures of the senses, pleasures that will not last long. We know life is short; we also know that joys are still shorter. Even then we are seeking them. That is the tragedy we are in. That is the basic insincerity that is deep rooted in us. We are in reality seeking infinite joy, eternal existence and unlimited knowledge. But we persistently move in a wrong way with a distorted perception of the final Truth. As a result our sincerity runs into trouble and gets exposed. We are not sincere, and we are not in earnest. We are seeking God, but along with God we want these pleasures also to remain in the fullest measure.

Sri Ramakrishna says, "If you walk towards the east, to that extent you will be far from the west." These two cannot go together. You cannot walk towards the east and west at the same time. If you want spiritual joy you will have to sacrifice your material pleasures. If you cannot

do that, that only means you are not sincere. Sincerity is that which must prepare us gradually to sacrifice our pleasures to the maximum extent, not partly, but fully. If we want God, we should seek God alone and nothing else. There is a saying in Jewish scriptures, "I am a jealous God". God cannot bear a rival in our hearts. If there is a rival, God will not accept that place. If we give our heart to Him, we shall have to give it wholly; otherwise, we shall not have the blessing of God being installed there in our hearts. We have to give our whole heart to God. That is the condition for spiritual life. Are we prepared for that? Really it should make us search our hearts and find out. How many of us are prepared for this utmost sacrifice for the sake of God? We seek God as a means and not as an end. We actually do not want God, but we want only an instrument for fulfilling our desires. We want just the things of the world and we want God to just help us attain them. That is what our idea of spiritual practice is. Such an idea does not work.

For the beginners the scriptures advise prayer to God. "Ask and it shall be given unto you; seek and you shall find." But does it really hold good in all respects? It does seem so. Though in the beginning this is a great attraction for us to hear that pursuit of God will give us all the joys that we are seeking; that is a sort of hoax. Such enticement only acts as a sort of allurements, so that we may be drawn to that path. But then gradually, as we proceed step by step, we realize that this is not true. For instance, in the Bible it is said that the Jews followed Christ so that they could be freed from the domination of the Romans. So they accepted Christ as a saviour of the Jews, not of mankind. But what happened? Jesus proclaimed that what he offered them was not the kingdom on earth, but the kingdom in heaven. Then that did not seem satisfactory to them. So many turned away from



it. Only a few, perhaps, a very few, followed him and accepted the great suffering that was in store for them because of this following of the path of true spirituality, the path of Jesus. Now, the same thing is true for all religions, all seekers of God. If you want to pursue that path, you must be prepared to accept all the sufferings. Without that you can never reach there. *Kṣurasya dhārā niṣitā duratyayā durgam pathas tat kavayo vadanti*—“Sages say that the path is sharp as a razor and it is difficult to go along the way.” (*Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 1.3.14).

One's feet will be lacerated, one will have to accept enough sufferings for that. There is no example of a person who had God realization without shedding copious tears, copious tears through miseries all along. The path is strewn with thorns only, not with rose petals. That path has to be followed only by a heroic heart, not by a coward. A coward cannot proceed much along such a path. It requires a heroic heart. In this context is how earnestness and sincerity in spiritual life have to be understood. And the criterion of one's progress along that path is that he will accept all these miseries with a smiling face and never care even if he is doomed to suffer from those miseries. That is the price that he has to pay for his progress in spiritual life. Are we prepared for that? Let us do a little heart-searching for ourselves. We need not go and look for others. We just see what is our reaction to it. We just look at ourselves and see whether we are prepared to follow God and accept all those sufferings as gifts from God. They are to be not only tolerated, but they must be welcomed. They are to be accepted with a smiling face as gifts from God. That is what is necessary. That is what is required.

Do not be frightened by this kind of utterance that there will be no joy in spiritual life in the beginning, and that it will be a very long way. It is worth taking all the

troubles because the pleasures of this earth will pale into insignificance when compared to the supreme joy that we have on reaching the goal. That is the end of the journey. It holds a great offering and a supreme reward which will solve all our problems. Only we have to be earnest seekers. That is the idea that has to be stressed, and very clearly it should be understood. Are we prepared to follow that path? If we are prepared, let us not look back. Let us not calculate that if we think of God, how much joys He will give us. This is like the mind of a child thinking how many sweets he will get if he does this or that thing. Parents sometimes say to their children, “Go and do such-and-such thing, I shall give you some sweets.” They can value the sweets only. Are we then children? In fact, we are children—because we are not prepared to sacrifice everything that we hold dear, that we consider pleasant, for the sake of God-realization. That is the most important question that we have to ask ourselves.

Life without that earnestness is nothing, so far as spirituality is concerned. Spirituality can be understood, can be judged, only by the amount of sacrifice that you have to offer for the sake of this God-realization. God is everything for us and everything else is only a misnomer, only a sort of illusion. That is why it is said that the world is an illusion. Illusion means that it has no value. The value that we put over it, is only a false conception of the true worth of things. God alone is worthy of pursuit and all else are only temptations. That is why great souls say the world is full of temptation.

Temptation means that it takes us away from the real path. Earnestness means that we shall have to concentrate on that one goal, viz God-realization. As Sri Rama-krishna said, “I know only one thing, I know God alone and nothing else.” The mind should never stray from that one idea. This one idea must be the source of all our acti-

vities, source of all our inspirations. When we have done that, when we have become integrated in that, then only we are prepared for the path of spirituality.

I pray to Sri Ramakrishna that through His blessings we may have that preparation of mind in us so that step by step we may proceed towards the ultimate Goal.

## Sri Ramakrishna's Conception Of Religion

SWAMI TAPASYANANDA

*Revered Swami Tapasyanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Order, delivered this brief speech over the air waves. This almost verbatim report of the Swami's speech reveals to us how Sri Ramakrishna's alternative to competitive religion and politicized religion is greatly needed in our modern times. It brings home to us that to the Master, real religion is realization—being and becoming closer to our divine ideal.*

In his Foreword to *The Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, Mahatma Gandhi remarked: "The story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa's life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face. No one can read the story of his life without being convinced that God alone is real and that all else is an illusion. Ramakrishna was a living embodiment of Godliness. His sayings are not those of a mere learned man, but they are pages from the book of life.... They are revelations of his own experience."

These words pointedly indicate the nature of Sri Ramakrishna's conception of religion. The priests of most of the religions of the world have preached to their followers that the acceptance of the particular dogma they advocate, the prophet whose claim they uphold, and the rituals they prescribe, are sufficient to assure their followers' salvation. Those who do not do so are heathens, mlecchas, or kaffirs, who will meet their doom.

Sri Ramakrishna stood against such a

conception of religion. For him dogmas and creeds are only like the bottles used to contain the wine of spiritual values. If there is no wine, the bottle has no relevance. But the bottle has a limited value so long as it holds the liquid in it and makes it available for consumption.

Faith is the source of power supply that makes religious doctrines live-wires of spirituality. But faith as understood by the dogmatic religionists is exclusive. They prefer to imprison what they admit to be the Infinite and Absolute in the narrow confines of their limited understanding, and contend that this is the whole truth and nothing else can be the Truth. This confinement of the Absolute and denial of its all-inclusiveness is the greatest blasphemy, if there is a blasphemy, and the greatest idolatry, if there is an idolatry.

Sri Ramakrishna's is, therefore, a universal religion that accepts all religions as valid, not by a syncretism or parts of them stitched into a whole, like a patch-work quilt of



many-coloured cloth, but by an acceptance of each having its distinct identity through having a common end, like the radii of a circle which start as different lines from different points on the circumference but converge to a common centre.

How does Sri Ramakrishna prove this conception of religion? Not by arguments but by experience, which is the most convincing of all forms of proof. He actually practised the spiritual disciplines of all the great world religions, besides those of the different Hindu sects. Intense yearning for God, the abiding Truth behind this changing phenomena, even to the extent of overcoming the organic cravings of the body, was the common means he used in his pursuit of Truth through these different religious faiths. Thus, being a Hindu by birth, he first practised the adoration of the Divine *as Mother*, which is the way of the Śakti cult. He then practised under different gurus the various modes of Vaiṣṇava devotionism, according to which God can be worshipped through different aspects of human love. He can be loved as father, as friend, as master, as child, and as sweetheart. Rama and Krishna are the two important incarnations of the Deity who form the objects of loving adoration in these cults. After completing the Vaiṣṇava disciplines, he devoted himself of the practice of pure Advaita or non-dualistic consciousness, in which, in place of adoration and prayer for Divine Grace, the disciplines of discrimination and renunciation form the important means.

He also took the opportunity that offered itself to him for following Islam, when a very holy Muslim Sufi Fakir graced the premises of the temple of Dakshineswar where Sri Ramakrishna was staying. Possessed of an insatiable appetite for spiritual experience as he was, the contact with this Fakir filled him with a strong urge to practise the presence of the Divine in the Muslim way. On being initiated by this Fakir into

the Muslim way of prayer and contemplation, the orthodox Hindu devotee Sri Ramakrishna was able to transform himself into an orthodox Muslim in his ways of thought and life. The very idea of going to worship the Divine Mother in the Temple became abhorrent to him. He changed his residence to a Muslim *Dargah* nearby, dressed himself like a Muslim, took food cooked only in the Muslim way, and spent all his time in repeating the name of Allah and in contemplating on His supreme Majesty, as instructed by his Muslim Guru. Three days of practice was sufficient for him to attain to the spiritual realization that Sufi Islam offered to aspirants. He, however, found from actual experience that, though the disciplines he had to practise as a Muslim were quite different from—nay, even contradictory to the various ways of Hindu sects that he had practised earlier, the end that it led him to was the same universal and Absolute Being. That is, as said earlier, he found that Supreme Being was like the common centre of a circle to which all the divergent radii converge.

Just as he had done with Islam, he began to practise Christian devotionism when he came into contact with it through readings from the Bible and seeing the Christian way of worship in a Church. His highly creative and receptive mind recapitulated, as it were, the centuries through which the Christian saints have developed their thought-pattern, and a few days of such intensive practice led to the dawn of a spiritual consciousness which he found was identical with the end to which his pursuit of the Hindu and Muslim disciplines had brought him.

Thus from actual experience he demonstrated to their utmost, the validity of all religions and was able to declare the great truth, "As many faiths, so many paths". It means that all the great religions are different paths leading to the same Supreme Being and none of them is to be despised

and branded as the way of 'heathens', 'mlecchas' or 'kaffirs' going towards their doom.

It is worthwhile considering what the implication of such a non-sectarian view is in regard to religions which have as one of their principal aims the proselytization and herding of all the people of the world into the net of their dogma. It is such an attitude of some religions that has led to persecution and bloody wars in the name of God, Who is at the same time preached as All-love.

The acceptance of Sri Ramakrishna's doctrine, "As many faiths, so many paths", is the antidote to this poison of exclusiveness in religion and removal of the ill-fame that it has attained in the eyes of many as

a consequence. Religions of Semitic origin having plenty of funds and organizational experience look upon the Indians with a liberal outlook—as a field for harvesting a bumper crop of converts. Conversion due to sincere conviction should always be welcomed, but if it is attempted to be achieved through monetary power or high-pressure advertisement and salesmanship tactics, it will become a social menace. It will lead to politicization of religion, which means, in frank terms, the destruction of religion. The acceptance by all of Sri Ramakrishna's doctrine of, "As many faiths, so many paths", can alone save religion from this catastrophe.

## With No Regrets

SWAMI NITYABODHANANDA

*How does God show compassion to beings? Does the Divine Lord after all comprehend the difficulties of living in this world and try to help man find a way? Swami Nityabodhananda in his very perceptive article shows us that God is indeed the Saviour. The author's sympathetic outlook and striking originality are very appealing. Swami Nityabodhananda has been for many years the spiritual leader of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre in Geneva, Switzerland, now semi-retired living in Kalady.*

Can Brahman, the Absolute, have any regrets?

Definitely none on the absolute plane. But on the relative plane Brahman has a supreme regret. But it is not of the same order as those of the human individual. The individual's regrets emerge from ill-prepared or reprehensible acts and thoughts. Also from promising in haste and repenting at leisure. The regret of the Absolute, on the contrary, issues from over-generosity.

*Māyā is the generosity of Brahman.*

Māyādhīśa, the Lord of Māyā, is over-abundant and lavish in bestowing to mankind the gifts of enjoyment, Bhukti. As if in regret and also to counterbalance, the Lord juxtaposes Bhukti with Mukti, Deliverance. Innumerable texts repeat the theme of this co-existence of and collaboration between Bhukti and Mukti—Bhoga and Mokṣa, as the 'fruit' of God-realization



(*Bhukti-mukti-pradāyakam*—the Divine posing for humankind the attractive summit of Bhukti-Mukti). This is the divine 'programme'. The presence of the one without the other would have made the programme incomplete. If Bhukti were the only 'dish' in the plate of life, life would be without much taste, and monotonous. The mixing of Bhukti and Mukti elements breaks up the monotony. The Mukti element puts always the question: 'Why?—Why enjoyment?' It brings in doubt—the great Doubt. In a text of the *Bhāgavata*, (11.16.24) the Lord says that among cogitations *He is* the doubt. Monotony is disturbed. The door is opened for creative acts and repetition disappears.

Regret digs a deep pit in 'the regretter'. God, the Divine, pours out His Grace with extreme generosity.

"O Regret! where else have the regretters and sinners to seek for the charms which Your Face can offer them!"

Insisting on the intimate relationship between individual regret and cosmic regret is like placing the child in the Mother's lap. The Mother-regret compares well with mother-suffering—*duhkha*, the cosmic phenomenal *duhkha*.

The genius of the Lord Buddha gave special emphasis to suffering. The four Noble Truths: the existence of suffering, the cause of suffering, the ways of curing suffering and the fourth, the co-existence of *duhkha* and Nirvāṇa—the *Duḥkha-nivṛtti*. *Duḥkha* brings in voidness. Nature abhors a vacuum. If vacuum alone reigns, our world will be a chaos. In fact, it is a cosmos. In a cosmos the negative and the positive, the void and plenitude reign. The Archetype of regret, along with the Archetype of non-regret make up the whole picture.

The doctrine of the Archetypes, primordial uncreated energy forms celebrated in Indian thought and western psychology,

comes in handy to substantiate the same link.

"O Lord of all forms, You are indestructible." (*Paraśa prabho sarvarūpavināśin...*) Regret is a form, *rūpam*, of the Lord. It is an archetype. Man's unconscious is the home of the archetypes. Regret is a cosmic archetype and individual regret is an inevitable participation of the individual in the cosmic regret.

How to take the edge off the individual regret?

By living the archetypal cosmic form. Individual suffering has the edge and cuts deep into our flesh. But the moment we switch on to the archetypal idea that suffering is cosmic, the sharp edge is blunted. When we live an experience in its cosmic dimension the ego disappears. The edge—"I suffer" disappears. In cosmic suffering who suffers? Who can say? When all are dead, who weeps and for whom?

*With no regrets—Gītā fashion.*

Says Sri Krishna to Arjuna, "You may kill the whole world of people and incur no sin. Fight for yoga. In the fight you will have to kill your Gurus, Droṇa, Bhiṣma and others. Do fight and kill without regret; I have already killed them, you are only an instrument."

The Gītācārya does not stop here at the no-regret line. He goes further. He delineates the scope and grandeur of the *complete act* which the humankind is competent to do. The complete (*pūrṇa*) act is to be an act as God the divine is and acts. For fear of lengthening this paper we only suggest the framework of the 'complete' act.

The complete act presses into service the richness of the three summit—Karma, Jñāna and Bhakti. The Karma Summit is traced in the *Gītā*: IV. 18—"He who sees action in inaction...He is the doer of all actions."

The Jñāna in the *Jñāna-yajña* verses as

also in the Lord's declaration: "Jñāna is Myself" (*Gītā*: IX. 15 ; XVIII. 70).

The Bhakti Summit appears in: "I am in them and they are in Me" (*Gītā*: IX. 29).

The complete Act is the one of the *Sthitaprajña*, of the *Guṇātīta*, and the *Bhāgavatottama*—the act of one established in Knowledge, beyond the qualities of Nature, and who is at one with God.

*Nature's gift to blunt the edge of regret: Perfection-Imperfection.*

Life is a journey from unconscious perfection, through conscious imperfection, to conscious perfection. When the light of this knowledge is turned on the human condition and the Gordian knots of Life, the knots of anguish of perfection, are cut asunder. Imperfection and perfection are two strands that make up the rope. When these two are wrongly warped, knots are formed. The phrase 'anguish of perfection' is itself a contradiction. Imperfection is the raw material necessary for the purification of perfection. The edge that cuts into our flesh—"Oh, how imperfect I am" is either off, or at least, made blunt!

*Punya and Pāpa, Virtue and Sin.*

The difference between sin and virtue is a question of degree and not of nature or kind. The regret "I am a sinner" comes from the idea that the gulf between the two is unbridgable. The opposites of sin and virtue mix and mingle to constitute the psychical energy of man, which is a neutral energy. The person who declares, "I am a sinner" is oblivious of the fact of the union of opposites in him. May be the sin at that moment was in excess. But the feeling of sinfulness is not a fixed quantity. It changes, acted upon by the law of flux and mutation functioning in man. *Prakṛti* (nature) is subject to *vikṛti* (change). The superconscious presides over this mutation.

To know the presence of this law is to blunt the edge of the sentiment of sinfulness that cuts into our flesh.

*With no regrets or anguish.*

The scene is laid in the Guruvayur Temple. A very old Nambūdri Brahmin comes on the *mandapa* (platform) facing the Lord in the sanctum, recites a verse and prostrates and does not get up. He expired. The person was Chelaparambu Nambudri, probably a contemporary of Meppathur Narayana Bhatta, author of *Nārāyaṇēyam*. Chelaparamban in his late eighties, though a great devotee, was very much a slave of the flesh. This thought was uppermost in his mind. The day of his passing away he had gone as usual to the temple tank where a sympathetic friend had a soft discussion with him. The subject being Chelaparamban's actual life away from holiness. The verse he recited runs thus:

Within six months Dhruva, Uttānapāda's  
son propitiated Thee,

O Lord Hari!

Within seven days, King Parīkṣit.

In half a *yāme* (moment), Piṅgalā ;

In two seconds, King Khatvāṅga.

Though I am in my late eighties I am not  
anguished at what remains of my life.

I propitiate Thee, O Thou Ocean of  
*kāruṇya* (compassion)!<sup>1</sup>

Chelaparamban had neither regret nor anguish. The above śloka says: "Na-vyathe" (with no anguish) the topmost assuring thought was that the Lord, being the ocean of love, Chelaparamban would be accepted

1. अब्दार्धेन हरिं प्रसन्नम् करोत् औत्तानपाद शिशुः ;  
सप्ताहेन नृपः परीक्षिदबलायामा दधतः पिंगला ।  
खट्वांगो घटिकन्तयेन नवनि प्रायोयितन्नव्यये  
तं कारुण्यनिधिं प्रपद्य शरणं शेषयुषा तोषये ॥



by the Lord. Hence his release was immediate. The river emptied itself in the ocean.

... When you were born, my child!  
You were crying ; all around you, laughing.

Live in such a way  
That when you pass away  
You laugh and others weep—  
And you—on your lips the words,  
WITH NO REGRETS.

## Vedanta In Poland And Sweden

SWAMI BHAVYANANDA

*Here is an interesting description of recent visits to Poland and Sweden by Swami Bhavyananda, a senior monk and Leader of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre in the United Kingdom.*

### *Discovering Poland ...*

In September, 1989, the political picture completely changed in Poland. With Gorbachev declaring *perestroika*, the iron grip on Eastern Europe was loosened. The first State that was the victim of the second world war—Poland, was first again to change her political scene. This change was gracefully accepted by the Kremlin. *Solidarity*, which was a movement of the people, swept into power and democratically elected a new Prime Minister. They also re-elected the President from old regime.

The socio-political scene is gradually improving, and capitalist economy is creeping in. The country is suffering great inflation. The purchasing power is going down. There is shortage of commodities, but the people are optimistic and full of hope. Small shops crop up at all street corners to compete with the co-operative government stores. Vegetables and meat are sold on the open pavement and housewives queue up to buy. Plenty of salads and local fruits are available. The people are very pollution-

conscious and clean their food thoroughly before consuming.

In spite of shortages, the picture did not look gloomy. Though there is lack of prosperity, no beggars could be seen anywhere. Though the vehicles on the roads do not cause traffic jams, motor cars are in abundance. The small Fiat is most popular, next, the Soviet-made car. An occasional Mercedes, BMW and Volvo can be seen on the road. The taxi system is quite effective and readily available. I understand that for a middle-class family a taxi is too expensive.

My first visit to Poland last September, was to attend Inter-religious prayer meetings organized by the Vatican in conjunction with the Church of Poland. The Government also helped and co-operated to make it a success. The President and the Prime Minister were present at various meetings. More than a hundred thousand people attended the open air prayer meetings. The participants had not much chance to come into contact with the common people. I happened to meet a couple who were interested in Oriental thought and religion. One of them came to see me off at the airport and left her

name and address. Correspondence during the months deepened into friendship, which resulted in my second visit to Poland, in June this year.

In the past, we had a friend in Poland, Antonina Cieszyńska, who had met some of our Swamis briefly. She also visited India and some of the Swamis of the Ramakrishna Mission. When I came to this country (England) twenty years back, she got into correspondence with me. Till the end of her life our contact was through letters. She had translated some parts of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and xeroxed copies were circulated among friends. One of her friends, Kazimierz Tokarski, came to our London Centre and established contact. Later on, he wrote an article on Madame Cieszyńska, which was published in our magazine (Vedanta for East & West) in November-December, 1987. Another dedicated lady who lived in India for forty years, Wanda Dynowska (Uma Devi), had come into contact with the Ramakrishna movement. She had translated the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and also written a small book on Swami Vivekananda and translated his *Karma Yoga*. From all this, it is evident that Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda were not strangers in Poland. I understand books on the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna are available there.

When I agreed to spend two weeks in Poland, I was not sure of my movements, or how my time would be used. At the airport, Urszula and her friend, Janush, met me and took me to the apartment where I was to spend my days. Urszula had vacated her own apartment for my use. The first two days were spent in making contacts. Every evening, about ten people came and spent hours in discussion. The meetings ended in meditation and prayer.

A public meeting had been organized on 1st June, in the University Students' Hall. The subject was Yoga and Spiritual Develop-

ment. About sixty to eighty people attended. Interesting questions were asked at the end of the meeting. The next evening, again, a group of visitors spent three or four hours trying to understand the Vedantic approach to life. We concluded our meeting always with meditation and the singing of hymns. On Sunday, 3rd June, I was taken to a garden house outside the city. Other guests had been invited. One of them was a popular contemporary painter. The whole day was spent in useful discussion. By the end of the day we had become great friends. This movement outside the city gave me a picture of fairly well-organized farming and country life. By seeing the traffic flowing into Warsaw on Sunday evening, I got the impression many people go out of the city for the weekend.

On Monday morning I did a bit of sight-seeing, travelling by public transport, which seemed quite frequent and comfortable. A couple of gardens I visited were well-kept and beautiful. On Tuesday, I was to visit the Polish Asia Society. The present Director was in the Foreign Service of Poland, and is building up a small museum, and organizing a library and public lectures. The Government, I understand, is supporting this venture. In the evening, we had a public meeting in a club. The subject was Meditation and Yoga. About sixty to seventy people attended. The small hall was crowded and people were standing. The questions raised indicated great interest on their part. These two public meetings and daily evening gatherings have created a small circle of good friends in Warsaw. Early on Wednesday, at 6.40 am. we travelled to Cracow by train, where our friend Tokarski lives. They offered me a choice of accommodation, either to stay in a hotel or at the Korean Meditation Centre. I preferred to stay at the Meditation Centre, but the accommodation was far from satisfactory. However, the human contact there, and the routine of



the house compensated adequately. There was a public meeting in the Centre at 5 pm. Their small prayer-room was very crowded. There must have been about fifty people. As a religious group, the response to my talk on meditation was very positive. Their questions revealed their faith and earnestness. We had been invited to a Tibetan meditation group for supper. After supper, we assembled in the prayer-room, where we had fruitful discussions. Half the audience had come from the Korean Centre. It was a pleasure to see such enthusiasm and response. I should mention here that the whole audience was Polish only.

On Thursday morning, I went out sight-seeing and saw an ancient palace-cathedral, which is a very important church in Cracow. At 5 pm. we had another meeting at the Korean centre, which drew similar enthusiastic crowds. After the lecture we had dinner in the house of an art teacher, who is also a good musician and a member of the Cracow Orchestra. She is widely travelled and deeply committed to spiritual life. She had invited a few friends. Some of the members of the Korean Meditation Centre also appeared there, and we had more long and interesting discussions before we returned at 10 pm. Friday was a busy day for me. In the morning, a local newspaper reporter interviewed me. At noon, I had been invited to the University to address the Religious Studies Department. The next public meeting was at 6 pm. in the City Centre, organized by the Polish-Indian Friendship Society. The hall was full and quite a few familiar faces were there. A lot of useful discussion also took place. From there I was whisked away to a doctor's house for supper. Some friends seemed to have followed me to this house for dinner. Everyone was welcomed. After spending a couple of hours in the house, I returned to the Korean centre for rest.

We caught the early morning train at 7.10. The residents of the centre gave us a friendly

send-off. At the station there were about half-a-dozen friends to bid goodbye. They heartily wished that I come back again, if possible, in the autumn. By 10 am we were in Warsaw. The trains are clean and fast. The platforms were spotless. We had a quiet lunch and rest. By 5 pm. again about a dozen people appeared. My hostess was very generous, she kept on bringing coffee and snacks. This gathering lasted nearly four hours and was very friendly, too. There was a lot of frank discussion about the religious atmosphere in the country, and various new oriental movements appearing on the scene, both authentic and otherwise. Often people are confused. However, they deeply appreciated my presentation of spirituality in general. I have just introduced them to the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. I have also left behind a few books. I am sure this will stimulate their search for truth. After finishing our final meditation session, with one voice they requested me to come back as soon as possible. They are willing to organize a week-end or week-long retreat, which will enable them to adopt various disciplines for their life.

I came back with a feeling that seeds have been sown on fertile ground. The future is in God's hands.

#### *... and Sweden*

I spent the first two weeks in July visiting friends interested in Vedanta philosophy. This is my fourth visit to Sweden. During the last fifteen years, interest has increased and friendships have deepened to commitment. In the four cities I visited, group meetings were held, and in the houses where I stayed I found small altars had been set up around which their personal spiritual lives centred. In one house they have monthly meetings for study and meditation. Books on Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda are well known, widely studied

and are available both in English and Swedish. Sweden is the only country where an interpreter was not necessary. The people were so enthusiastic they have requested me to come back again next year to conduct a spiritual retreat. They have also ordered books and magazines. On the whole, the trip was fruitful.

## Sri Ramakrishna's Interaction With Sikhism

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

*Swami Prabhananda carefully explores a new horizon for most readers as he brings into full focus Sri Ramakrishna's special relationship with Sikh devotees who came to Dakshineswar during his time. In this absorbing account the Swami brings little remembered facts to the surface. It is sure to strike the hearts of devotees. Writer of many scholarly articles and books in English and Bengali, the author is an Assistant Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.*

When our country's linguistic, religious and ethnic unity-in-diversity is under unprecedented stress and strain, and the Punjab, the cradle of Sikhism, is bleeding for similar reasons, it may be worth while to study the prophet of harmony Sri Ramakrishna's interaction with Sikhism.

The execution of Guru Arjan (1563-1606), the fifth Guru of the Sikhs by the Moghul Emperor Jehangir made the Sikhs gradually change from a pacifist to a militant sect. The process of change culminated with the creation of *Khalsa* (pure) community by the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Raj (1666-1708). On the day of *Baisakhi* (mid-April) 1699, he got his followers assembled at Anandapura. Before the thousands gathered from far and near, the Guru, with a naked sword in hand, appeared and asked for the head of a Sikh for the cause of Dharma. This caused a flutter in the assembly. But soon, one by one, five of them, belonging to different castes came forward. They were initiated by the Guru. They drank *amrit* (nectar) from the same bowl, received new names with the

suffix Singh, and swore to keep the five K's: to wear long hair (*kesh*), a comb (*kanga*) in the hair, soldier's shorts (*kachha*), a steel bangle (*kara*) on the right wrist, and a sabre (*kripan*). Next, the Guru in his turn was initiated by them and renamed Govind Singh. The ceremony ended with the clarion call given by the Guru Govind Singh '*Wah Guru ji Ka Khalsa, Wah Guru ji Ki Fateh* (the Khalsa are the chosen of God; Victory to God!).

The word Sikh more often than not is interpreted to mean a disciple (from the Sanskrit *Śiṣya*), but according to Dr. Gopal Singh, it derives its origin from Pali and means the elect or in Sikh parlance, chosen by God, God's own.<sup>1</sup> From a pragmatic standpoint Khuswant Singh has defined a Sikh as 'one who believes in the ten gurus and the Granth Sahib'.

The Sikh power rose to its height when Ranjit Singh (1780-1839) of the Sukarchakria

1. Dr. Gopal Singh, *Sri Guru-Granth Sahib*, Vol. I, 1962, *Introduction*, p. xxxv, and also *The Religion of the Sikhs*, 1987, p. 1.



*misal* took up the leadership and created a unified Sikh state. His kingdom included a greater portion of the present Indian and Pakistani Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir and the erstwhile North-West Frontier Province. After his death it rapidly disintegrated, however. The two Sikh wars of 1845-46 and 1848-49 brought the Sikh power to collapse and the Punjab was annexed to the British India thereafter. As regards the Sikhs' role during the British regime, it suffices to quote the British General, Sir John J. H. Gordon, who wrote, "None have fought more stoutly and stubbornly against us, none more loyally and gallantly for us, than the Sikhs."<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, violence *per se* did not have any important role in the religious ethos of Sikhs. Were it so, argued Dr. Gopal Singh, "Guru Govind Singh would have annointed his own *Dasam Granth* (containing mostly heroic and chivalrous poetry) as the '*Guru*', after himself, [instead of] the *Adi-Granth*, every word of which inculcates peace, self-surrender, sacrifice, compassion and forgiveness in the name of the One-and-Only-God and the meditation on the utterance of His Name."<sup>3</sup> Its founder, Guru Nanak (1469-1539) was one of the great Messengers of love and light witnessed by humanity. At the age of twenty-nine Nanak had a vision of God. He was charged with his mission in the following words, "Nanak, I am with thee. Through thee will My Name be magnified. ...Go in the world to pray and to teach mankind how to pray. Be not sullied by the ways of the world. Let your life be one of praise of the Word (*Nām*), charity (*dhān*), ablution (*iṣṇān*), service (*sevā*) and prayer (*simran*)."<sup>4</sup> He arduously

tried to free the peoples' mind from bigotry and superstition, dogma and ritual, on the basic truths of religion.

Founded by Guru Nanak, Sikhism was nourished by his successors from Guru Angad (1504-1552) to Guru Govind Singh. To the Sikhs the Guru is one, inspite of changes in succession, 'as one lamp is lighted from another'. Guru Govind Singh in his autobiography, *Vacittar Natak*, said: "The generality of men take them as different from one another; very few recognize them as one in spirit. But only those realize perfection who recognize them as one." As Teja Singh has pointed out, the Guru in person taught, directed and trained the young church for two hundred thirty-nine years after its founding in 1469, and continued to control and guide it after 1708 through the *Granth Sahib*. The institution of 'guruship' is the pivot of Sikhism. The *Granth Sahib* called the *Gyan Guru* provides the truth and philosophy while the *Khalsa Panth* decides all issues in the form of resolution called *Gurmatta*, or decision of the Guru.<sup>5</sup>

Journalist and academic Khuswant Singh opined that Sikhism was a later offshoot of the *bhakti* (devotional) cult of Vaiṣṇava Hinduism. Viewing from another angle, historian Arnold Toynbee remarked that Sikhism was itself a monument of creative spiritual intercourse between two traditional religions, Hinduism and Islam.<sup>6</sup> Sikhism, however, is not simply a hybrid of Hinduism and Islam, made into one; nor is it syncretic with the implication that there is little original in its system of belief. A dispassionate overview suggests on the contrary that Sikhism, as it has developed, is distinct and complete in itself. A new scripture, a new

2. Quoted by Duncan Greenless: *The Gospel of the Guru-Granth Sahib*, 1960, p. xiv.

3. Dr. Gopal Singh: *The Religion of the Sikhs*, p. 192.

4. Khuswant Singh's paper on "Sikhism", *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Editor-in-Chief, Mircea Eliade, New York: 1987, pp. 315-16,

5. Teja Singh, *Sikhism*, 1938, pp. 19-33.

6. Foreword by Arnold Toynbee in the *Selections from the Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*, by Dr. Trilochan Singh and others, 1960.

script, new centres of worship called *Gurudwaras*,<sup>7</sup> new symbols and ceremonies have given Sikhism the status of a new religion.

Sri Ramakrishna's exposure to Sikhism was primarily through his contact with the Sikh soldiers, or *sepoys* as they were called, and some *Nanak-panthi* monks. Here, we intend to study Sri Ramakrishna's response to the interaction, touching upon parallels and influences.

Established in the fourth decade of the nineteenth century, the gun-powder magazine lying on the northern boundary of the Dakshineswar Kali temple was placed in the custody of a contingent of Sikh soldiers. Being so near by, the religious minded Sikh soldiers occasionally visited the Dakshineswar temple. This provided Sri Ramakrishna an opportunity to meet with some of them and to come in touch with the popular religion they professed.

Sri Ramakrishna's first encounter with them was during the latter part of the twelve years of his intense spiritual practices. Sri Ramakrishna, now a household name in India and perhaps the best known Indian saint abroad, was then almost unknown to the public. He was absorbed in the pursuit of different spiritual disciplines and stoically enduring the exacting demands of fire of austerities. To have a glimpse of the Saint's life we may reproduce a narration of his which describes just one of his religious experiences of the period. Sri Ramakrishna said, "Mahābhāva is a divine ecstasy; it shakes the body and mind to their very foundation. It is like a huge elephant entering a small hut. The house shakes to its foundation. Perhaps it falls to pieces. The burning pain that one feels when one is separated from God is not an ordinary feel-

ing. ...I was unconscious three days in that state. I could not move. I lay in one place. When I regained consciousness, the Brahmani took me out for a bath. But my skin could not bear the touch of her hand; so my body had to be covered with a heavy sheet. Only then could she hold me with her hand and lead me to the bathing ghat. The earth that had stuck to my body while I was lying on the ground had become baked."

None of his predecessors, Buddha, Christ or Chaitanya did as much to verify God in his own religion, much less in other religions. As he unlocked the secrets of different religions he uncovered the surprising truth that there was no essential difference between any of them. However, many people took him to be crazy. Admirers like Mathuramohan Biswas suggested some medical intervention. Devendranath Tagore once expressed diffidence over his not wearing a garment over the upper part of his body. Gentlemen of Calcutta were sometimes critical of his unpolished rustic language. In fact, very few could understand the import of his spiritual search for God; fewer still could judge his spiritual status. Nevertheless, everybody who knew Sri Ramakrishna felt an unusual attraction towards him, like iron filings instantly drawn to a magnet. Someone said that he effused all around him a luminous atmosphere; another said that he was full of fun; still another felt that he used "to handle human minds like impressionable lumps of clay, breaking, moulding and remoulding them at ease and filling them with new ideas by a mere touch". For these and many such other reasons, people used to flock to Dakshineswar, eager to have a glimpse of him.

Exactly when Sri Ramakrishna met the Sikh devotees for the first time is not known. But it must have happened around 1865, when Sri Ramakrishna was living in the *Kuthibari* (proprietor's mansion) at Dakshin-

7. *Harimandira*, or the Golden Temple of Amritsar, is the chief Gurudwara founded by Guru Arjan, several times destroyed and finally rebuilt by Ranjit Singh.



eswar. In those days he used to meet devotees mostly under the roof of the large open portico (*natmandir*) adjacent to the Kali temple, or on the small porch of the Viṣṇu temple, or in the *Pancavati*. The first recorded encounter we have was when Sri Ramakrishna met with the Sikh devotees in front of the Kali temple, very probably in the *natmandir* itself. In the course of their conversation one Sikh devotee remarked, "God is full of compassion."

"Indeed!" Sri Ramakrishna said, "Is that true? But how do you know?"

The devotee replied, "Because, Sir, He has begotten us; He has created so many things for us; He has brought us up to be men; and He protects us from danger at every step."

Sri Ramakrishna retorted, "Why should that surprise you? After begetting us, God looks after us and feeds us. Is there any credit in that? Who will look after the children if the father does not? Do you mean to say that the people of the neighbouring village should look after them?" It was the turn of the devotees to be surprised. Never before had they heard anyone talk about God like that. It appealed to them tremendously. Instantly it touched their hearts.

Sri Ramakrishna used to impress upon his listeners that God was our very own. We must have an unwavering conviction that we are God's children and not someone else's. He would further say, "We should force our demands on Him. He is our Father and Mother, isn't He? If the son demands his patrimony and gives up food and drink in order to enforce his demand, then the parents hand his share over to him three years before the legal time. Or when the child demands some *pies* (pennies) from his mother, and says over and over again, "Mother, give me a couple of *pies*. I beg you on my knees!—then the mother, seeing

his earnestness, and unable to bear it any more, tosses the money to him."<sup>8</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna further clarified his stand saying, "Should we not call God kind then? Yes, in the preliminary stage a devotee says all such things. But when he realizes God he feels in his heart of hearts that God is but his own father and mother."<sup>9</sup>

As a living evidence of the sweetness of God-realization, Sri Ramakrishna was always a main draw. The Sikh devotees' intimacy with him grew apace. The more they came to know of Sri Ramakrishna the more they found in him a holy man, but a holy man with a difference. Guileless like a child he wore "an unspeakable sweetness of expression and smile". His words were an unbroken flow of spiritual wisdom. His conversation, interspersed with similes and metaphor, illustrations and witty remarks, would bring home to them the subject matter he desired. He had the unique ability to come down to the level of his listeners and communicate with them. More than his words, his friendliness and deep concern for the welfare of others impressed the Sikh devotees.

Some of them had already read from *Astapadi-5, Pauri-7* of the *Sukhmani* of Guru Arjan:

*He who preacheth to others what he doth not  
practise  
Shall be born and die again in unending lives.  
But in whose heart the Formless One indwelleth  
Shall save the world by his teaching.  
Only those, Lord, who have won Thy Love  
Have grasped Thee truly.  
Nanak is prostrate at the feet of such seers!<sup>10</sup>*

Guru Arjan said, "He who dwells through out the eight watches of the day in the Lord's

8. See *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1985) pp. 96, 470, 605, 629, 791 and 843. (or the New York edition, 1942)

9. Sashi Bhusan Ghosh, *Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Deva* (Bengali) p. 167.

10. *The Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*, p. 160.

presence, that man, says Nanak, is perfect." Kabir too said, "Perfect in the world is he in whose heart there is no one else." Moreover, Guru Nanak hinted, "Signs appear on the faces of those in whose hearts is the true Name."<sup>11</sup> The Sikh devotees were delighted to recognize in Sri Ramakrishna's person similar signs of holiness. They felt awed to discover that the Saint was one of those few who have won the Lord's love.

Word spread among the Sikh soldiers at Barrackpore, a few miles north of Dakshineswar. They came in groups to meet the Saint. Their rank and file apart, there came Havildar Koar Singh, a soldier of higher rank, Kumar Singh, and others. Every one of them got enchanted as it were. All of them held Sri Ramakrishna in high regard. So deep was their regard that something very unusual happened one day.

A 900-strong army of Sikh soldiers was marching along the Barrackpore Trunk Road. The leader of the troop, an English Captain, was riding a horse. Leaving the cantonment at Barrackpore, the battalion was on move towards the Fort William, Calcutta. All on a sudden the soldiers raised a slogan and prostrated themselves on the ground, leaving their guns aside, in honour of the man coming from the opposite direction. The man was no other than the Saint of Dakshineswar. He was travelling in a phaeton in the company of Mathurmohan Biswas. In return, the Saint raised his hand in benediction. The Sikh soldiers's gesture was a token of their high esteem in which they held the Saint. Angry at such unseemly conduct of the troop in open defiance of the rules, the Captain shouted at them. Sergeant Koar Singh explained that they revered the Saint verily as their Guru and what they had done was in keeping with their holy tradition. Also he hinted to the English Captain fuming with rage that they

11. *The Gospel of Guru-Granth Sahib*, pp. 92-93.

were prepared to face the consequences. The British Government, as a matter of policy, scrupulously avoided confrontation which might hurt the religious sentiment of the Indian soldiers. The intelligent Captain quietly swallowed his words.<sup>12</sup>

This episode indicates the reverence and awe in which the Sikh soldiers held the Saint of Dakshineswar. The toiling people had accepted him as their trusted mentor long before the elite of Calcutta found him out; before Keshabchandra Sen discovered in him 'the true Brahmo'; before Ramchandra Dutta recognized in him a semblance of Sri Chaitanya, or even before Williams and Prabhudayal Mishra perceived Jesus Christ in his person. Deeply impressed, the Sikh soldiers began telling others about him. According to Swami Akhandananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, these Sikh devotees of Sri Ramakrishna first helped spread the glory of the Saint.<sup>13</sup> They talked with their acquaintances about the extraordinary holy man. Hearing from them, a group of Marwaris of Burrabazar called on the Saint. They were followed by other groups just as bees rush towards a honeycomb.

During his wide travels Guru Nanak (records the *Janamsakhis*)<sup>14</sup> preached the following triple precept which beautifully sums up the Sikh tenets: *Kirat Karo, Wand Chhako, Nam Japo* (earn thy livelihood by honest labour, share the fruit of thy labour with fellow beings and practise the repetition of the holy Name).<sup>15</sup> This guides the

12. Akshay Kumar Sen, *Śrī Śrī Rāmākṛṣṇa Punthi* (Bengali) 10th edition, p. 208. According to 'M's diary the battalion's destination was Bhutan. The sepoy took the dust of Sri Ramakrishna's feet.

13. Swami Akhandananda, "Bhagawan Śrī Rāmākṛṣṇa", *Udbodhan* (Bengali), *Phalgun* 1342 p. 124-A.

14. The earliest life stories of the Guru.

15. *Sri Guru-Granth Sahib*, Vol. II, *Introduction*, p. xiv.



common run of the Sikh community. The Sikhs believe that man's 'coming and going' is due to *Karma*, or deeds wrought in a previous birth, but the writ of *karma* can be erased in this very life by the grace of One Personal-Absolute God, Who is to be invoked by dwelling upon and following the *Nām-mārg*, as enshrined in the Guru's words.

The news of the Saint of Dakshineswar reached the ears of the Sikh soldiers at Dumdum too, a few kilometres east of Calcutta. There a cantonment had been established since 1783. During the short recess of few hours the Sikh soldiers used to hurry in the hot sun to Dakshineswar to meet the Saint. Some of them would bring him presents of flour and sugar drops. They would pay obeisance by touching his feet.<sup>16</sup> After hearing him for sometime they would return.

Sri Ramakrishna had, not without reason, a soft corner in his heart for these toiling people. Not only did he treat them as his near and dear ones but would offer special prayer to the Divine Mother for them. 'M', the chronicler of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, reminisced, "Ah, the Master would shed tears noticing the devotion of these toiling people. During the break of about three hours the *sepoys* from Dumdum took the trouble of walking the distance to call on Sri Ramakrishna. The latter used to pray to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, you have to look after their well-being. They undergo so much strain just to visit you.'<sup>17</sup> The Saint's loving concern for this group of devotees was palpable in all he said and did.

Naturally, Sri Ramakrishna talked with them in Hindi as he did with Sri Totapuri. Language was not a barrier with him. But never did he lose himself in idle talk; he

communicated always in the language of the heart. Sometimes the Sikh devotees visited him at the temple; at times he would return their visits to the Magazine, or the cantonment at Barrackpore. To show him due honour they would spread a clean sheet on one of their cots and request him to sit there, while they would sit on the floor. They would offer him tobacco in hubblebubble.<sup>18</sup> Sri Ramakrishna would entertain them with rapturous devotional songs. At times singing became impossible for him, because of excess of feeling and he would plunge into *samādhi* with a beatific smile dancing on his lips. Returning to normal consciousness he would pour out his heart. The Sikh devotees, as others, would listen to his words and watch him, enthralled.

As mentioned earlier, Sri Ramakrishna was undergoing rigorous spiritual disciplines about that time. Most of the time he was in a God-intoxicated state. One day the Sikh official, Kumar Singh, arranged for a *bhandārā* (feast) for holy men. It must have been at the powder-magazine in Dakshineswar itself. At Kumar Singh's entreaty Sri Ramakrishna participated. Recalling his experience there, Sri Ramakrishna later narrated, "Once Kumar Singh gave a feast to the *sadhus* and invited me too. I found a great many holy men assembled there. When I sat down for the meal, several *sadhus* asked me about myself. At once I felt like leaving them and sitting alone. I wondered why they should bother about all that. The *sadhus* took their seats. I began to eat before they had started. I heard several of them remark, 'Oh, what sort of man is this?'" The monks misunderstood him, but Kumar Singh and other Sikh devotees did not.

In Sikhism, asceticism and maceration have always been discouraged. The Gurus disapproved of asceticism, of penance, and

16. 'M's unpublished diary, p. 153.

17. Swami Nityatmananda, *Sri Ma Darsan* (Bengali), Vol. III, 2nd edition, p. 195.

18. *Sri Rāmakṛṣṇa Deva*, p. 167.

of celibacy as a step towards self-enlightenment. Indeed, Guru Nanak enjoined upon himself and his disciples strict and faithful carrying out of the duties and obligations of a householder. Sang Guru Nanak in *Var Sarang*:

*That man who calls himself a teacher of truth,*

*But lives by begging, does not pay his homage ;*

*That man who earns his bread by the sweat of his brow,*

*And gives some of his gains in charity*

*Knoweth, Nanak, the true way of life.<sup>19</sup>*

One day Sri Ramakrishna had gone to Barrackpore cantonment when one Sikh devotee asked him, "How should a man live in the world so that he may realize God?" No sooner had the Master heard the question than there flashed before his mind the image of a carpenter's hut at Kamarpukur. There a woman was pushing paddy into the heavy mortar and pestle. Thus taking his cue from the Divine Mother, Sri Ramakrishna struck on a brilliant idea. (In fact he used to admit ... "such pictures come before me when I talk to people.")<sup>20</sup> With picturesque similes then he used to hold people in rapt attention while he talked. Sri Ramakrishna said, "I had been to Chanak<sup>21</sup>

and said to the *sepoys* of the barracks: 'Do your duty in the world, but remember that the pestle of death will sometime smash your hand. Be alert about it. In Kamarpukur I have seen the women of carpenter families making flattened rice with a husking machine. One woman kicks the end of the wooden beam, and another woman, while nursing her baby, burns the paddy in the mortar dug in the earth. The second woman is always alert lest the pestle of the machine should fall on her hand. With the other hand she fries the soaked paddy in a pan. Besides, she is talking with customers. She says, "You owe so much money. Please pay it before you go." Likewise, do your different duties in the world, fixing your mind on God. But practice is necessary, and one should also be alert. Only in this way can one safeguard both—God and the world.'" Thus the Saint drove the point home to the Sikh devotees. They were convinced of the way of life a householder should follow if he desired to proceed Godward.

On one such occasion Sri Ramakrishna was having a chat with the *sepoys* in the barrack when an English officer happened to arrive there. All the *sepoys* stood up in attention and saluted him. Sri Ramakrishna was amazed. To satisfy his childlike curiosity Koar Singh explained, "India is now under the rule of the English. Therefore one should salute an Englishman." Once Sri Ramakrishna came across there some monks, belonging to Nanak Panth, who rather disappointed him. Several of them were chatting and sewing clothes. Sri Ramakrishna later said, "At the sight of us they threw aside their sewing. They sat straight crossing their legs, and conversed with us."<sup>22</sup>

Besides attending the dedication ceremony of the Annapurna Temple at Barrackpore on 12 April 1875, Sri Ramakrishna once

19. *The Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*, p. 116.

20. Based on his own experience Sri Ramakrishna said, "Mother sits in the heart of him who depends entirely on Her and makes him say whatever he has to say by showing it to him through unmistakable signs. Mother always keeps his mind filled with a mass of knowledge which She continues supplying from Her never-failing store of wisdom, whenever it appears to run short." *Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master*, Trans. by Swami Jagadananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1978, p. 702).

21. Author's own translation, See *Śrī Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Kathāmṛta* (Bengali) (Calcutta: Udbodhan) p. 515. The town called Chanak came to be known as Barrackpore from 1770's. (P. Thankappan Nair, *A History of Calcutta's Streets* 1987 p. 184).

22. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 476.



paid a return visit to his chum of youth, Sriram Mallick who was running a grocery store at Barrackpore.<sup>23</sup> It seems from there he made a surprise visit to the cantonment. As usual Hriday was his companion. Extremely happy to find the holy man in their midst, the Sikh soldiers sat around him. As usual with him, Sri Ramakrishna poured out his soul in conversation and enthralled everyone. It was already time for his bath. He decided to go. The sepoy took the Master to the nearest bathing ghat on the Ganga. They brought a few softened twigs for him to use as a toothbrush. One sepoy took care of his cloth, another his umbrella, and still another his slippers. His nephew Hriday rubbed his body with oil. Aware that *jilabi*, a kind of fried sweet, was a favourite dish of the Saint they purchased a packet of *jilabi* at rupee one and one anna, and offered it to him after his bath. Sri Ramakrishna partook a little of it and distributed the rest among the devotees. Thus sharing a feast of joy with the Sikh sepoy, the Saint left for Dakshineswar.<sup>24</sup>

Eulogized by Guru Nanak and other Gurus, the company of a holy man (*sādh sangat*) is an essential requisite of righteous living by the Sikhs. Sri Ramakrishna, too, shared their view. Moreover, he was always eager to meet noble souls and sincere spiritual aspirants. During his travel to Varanasi he once visited a young sannyāsi of about twenty-eight years of age, belonging to a sect of Nanak.<sup>25</sup> He was the abbot of a monastery and made a good impression on Sri Ramakrishna. He used to refer to Sri

Ramakrishna as 'the loving monk'. Sri Ramakrishna found that he was like a housewife, concerned day and night with meeting the needs of the monastery. He was reading a book. Reading over, he recited "Viṣṇu is in water, Viṣṇu is on land, Viṣṇu is on the mountain top; the whole world is pervaded by Viṣṇu." At the end he said, "Peace! Peace! Abiding Peace."<sup>26</sup> Sri Ramakrishna asked the holy man, "What is the way?" The Sannyāsi replied, "For the Kaliyuga, the path of devotion as enjoined by Narada." Sri Ramakrishna appreciated it much. He too taught that Narada's path of devotion was the most suitable for the people of the modern age. One day Sri Ramakrishna was invited there. He did not fail to notice that the young monk began reading the *Gītā*, turning his face toward him and his back on Mathurmohan who was but a worldly man.

At Dakshineswar itself Sri Ramakrishna met monks of various sects, including those of the *Nanak Sahis*. The *Nanak Sahis* are divided into seven groups, all recognizing Nanak as their sole Guru and all professing to follow his doctrines, but separated from one another due either to variations of practice or by loyalties to particular teachers after the Guru.<sup>27</sup> The *Gospel* mentions

Although the original Sikhism was opposed to asceticism, several sects of ascetics sprang up in course of time. Most of them are close adherents to the doctrine of Guru Nanak. Sri Chand, one of the sons of Guru Nanak, who could not succeed to the preceptorial seat of his father, is said to be the founder of the *Udasi* sect. In support of their claim that Nanak himself was their founder, the *Nirmalas* adduce proof that the word *Nirmala* occurs here and there in Nanak's sayings and writings. Another view traces the spiritual ancestry of the *Nirmalas* to the first five whom Guru Govind had sent to Varanasi. The *Namdhari* movement started by Baba Ram Singh put a check to the drift of Sikhism towards *Vedānta*.

<sup>26.</sup> *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 297.

<sup>27.</sup> H. H. Wilson, "Hindu Religions" (reprint), p. 164.

<sup>23.</sup> Sri Ramakrishna said, "Ram Mallick and I were great friends during our boyhood. We were together day and night; we slept together." (*The Gospel*, p. 787.)

<sup>24.</sup> Based on the unpublished diary of 'M', p. 152.

<sup>25.</sup> Very probably he belonged to *Nirmalakhara*, with its motto: "Ride gian, mukh bhagati, vartan vairāg." (Wisdom in the heart, devotional love in the mouth, unattached behaviour.)



several such monks. On 16 October 1882 a group of monks belonging to the sect of Nanak entered Sri Ramakrishna's room and greeted him, uttering "Namo Narayana, Salutations to God!". Sri Ramakrishna received them cordially. In keeping with the spirit of their faith Sri Ramakrishna emphatically said, "Nothing is impossible for God. Nobody can describe His nature in words. Everything is possible for Him", and to illustrate this idea he narrated the story of Narada, who saw God making camels and elephants pass and repass through the eye of a needle.<sup>28</sup> *The Gospel* also mentions the visit of a *Nanak Sahi* monk on 21 December 1883. He was a worshipper of the formless God. An expert in the minutest subtleties of spiritual life, Sri Ramakrishna could fathom the inner nature of the monk. He advised the monk to meditate on God with form as well. He said, "Dive deep; one does not get the precious gems by merely floating on the surface. God is without form, no doubt; but He has form also. By meditating on God with form one speedily acquires devotion; then one can meditate on the formless God. It is like throwing a letter away, after learning its contents, and then setting out to follow its instructions." The Master instructed him to dwell on God with form as a means to attaining the summit of realization, where God is beyond all human conceptions.

His interactions with the people professing the faith of Sikhism helped Sri Ramakrishna, a life long learner, to get acquainted with the basic tenets of the faith. According to Hridayram, who attended on Sri Ramakrishna for twenty-six years, some Sikh devotees regularly read out for some days together the teachings of Guru Nanak. On different occasions Sri Ramakrishna echoed some of these teachings. We may mention a few instances. On 24 February 1883 he

28. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 124.

said, "The Sikhs teach: '*Thou art Satchidananda!*' In their language the Sikhs say God is forever *Sacchidanand* (Truth, Consciousness and Bliss). He is both Absolute (*Nirankar*) and Personal (*Puruṣa*), transcendental (*Parbrahma*) as well as immanent (*Bharpur*). As a Person, God is, according to Nanak, 'of beautiful eyes and white sparkling teeth, of sharp nose and luxurious hair, of golden body, with a alluring gait like a peacock's and sweet of speech like a koel, and of flowing youthfulness like an ever-fresh morning!'"<sup>29</sup>

On at least two occasions he mentioned, "Once some Sikhs came to the Kali temple at Dakshineswar. They said: 'You see, the leaves of the Aswattha tree are moving. This too is due to the will of God. Without His will not even a leaf can move.'<sup>30</sup> God is the Supreme Lord. We must try to realize that everything happens by the will of God. Man can realize Him only "when he abandons his formative will and the discursive clamour of reason, and surrenders himself to Him." Another idea of the Sikhs pleased Sri Ramakrishna. Once he said, "The Sikhs said to me, 'The cause of all worry and confusion is these three: land, woman and money.'"

Sri Ramakrishna heard from the Sikh devotees anecdotes from the life of Guru Nanak. One such anecdote Sri Ramakrishna retold to a group of Marwari devotees. Nanak once said, "I was about to eat the food of unholy people, when I found it stained with blood." A man should offer only pure things to holy men. He should not

29. *The Religion of the Sikhs*, pp. 30-33.

30. Guru Nanak sang, "At His will all come into being, at His will they carry out their work, at His will men come into the power of death, at His will He is merged in the Real. Nanak, what pleases Him takes place; there is nothing at all in the power of creatures." (*Sri Astapadi*, 4:8, quoted by Duncan Greenless in his *The Gospel of the Guru-Granth Sahib*, p. 49.)



give them food earned by dishonest means. After the narration, Sri Ramakrishna commented, "God is realized by following the path of truth."

Interesting it is to note that Sri Ramakrishna enjoyed the song, the last stanza of which read:

*My mind craves nectar day and night  
at Hari's Lotus Feet.  
Oh, shower the waters of Thy Grace  
on thirsty Nanak, blessed Lord!  
And may Thy hallowed Name  
become his everlasting home!*

Narendra, in his rich deep voice sang this song before Sri Ramakrishna at least on two occasions.

On the other hand, Sri Ramakrishna, too, had formed his distinct opinion about Sikhism and its ten Gurus. According to Swami Saradananda, Sri Ramakrishna learned in the later part of his life about the ten Gurus of the Sikhs and he cherished deep love and respect for them. He used to say, "They are all incarnations of the *R̥ṣi* Janaka.<sup>31</sup> The royal *R̥ṣi* Janaka, I have been told by the Sikhs, had a desire in his mind on the eve of his liberation to do good to the people. He, therefore, was born ten times as a Guru, from Nanak to Govind, and having established religion among the Sikhs, became eternally united with the

31. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master*, p. 297.

Guru Nanak was against the idea of human incarnation of God. Said Nanak, "Burnt be the tongue that sayeth 'God falleth into the womb.'" Guru Govind said, "Those who call me supreme Lord will go to hell!" But the followers gradually deified Nanak and other Gurus. Finally they came to believe that "the Gurus present resemblance with the Avatars, or the prophets of God, or even God Himself." Also Bhai Gurdas quite frequently posed an equation between the Guru and God. For Bhai Gurdas Nanak, the Guru was beyond time (*Akal-rūp*); he was like God. (J. S. Grewal, *Guru Nanak in History*, 1969) pp. 194-98.

Supreme Brahman. There is no reason why this saying of the Sikhs should not be true."

Sri Ramakrishna's burning curiosity to get to the truth of everything could not be satisfied with mere intellectual comprehension of Sikhism. Himself a daring explorer in the world of ideas, he plunged headlong to put into practice the religious ideal of Sikhism and verified its truths. Published in 1297 B.S., practically the first biography of the Saint of Dakshineswar, written by one of his direct disciples, Ramchandra Dutt, it mentions that Sri Ramakrishna being very eager, got himself initiated into this faith.<sup>32</sup> This he did before he practised Islam. Unfortunately the author has provided no details. Curiously enough, Prof. Kapur Singh in his introduction to Vol. II of Dr. Gopal Singh's translation of *Sri Guru-Granth Sahib* has claimed that a Sikh ascetic, Udasi Totapuri, imparted to Sri Ramakrishna "the Sikh esoteric instruction efficacious for removing impediments on the spiritual path." For want of supportive evidence however this claim cannot be much entertained. The philosophy of the Udasi ascetics being the same monistic Vedanta as that of the *Daśnamis* might have given rise to this confusion. Nevertheless, it can be safely presumed that Sri Ramakrishna succeeded in his endeavour as he did in every such other attempt and succeeded in all probability in three days as in the case of other religious disciplines. Also this confirmed his hypothesis that the religions of the world are not contradictory or antagonistic. Sincerely followed every faith can lead its practitioner to the same goal.

As regards the query if Sri Ramakrishna ever visited a Gurdwara, circumstantial evidence suggests that he probably did. The oldest Gurdwara of Calcutta, called Bara

32. Ramchandra Dutt, *Śrī Śrī Rāmākṛṣṇa Paramahamsadever Jīvanvṛttānta* (Bengali), B. S. 1357, p. 50.

Sikh Sangat, was in those days on the ground floor of a two-storied building on a plot of land presently designated 172, Mahatma Gandhi Road.<sup>33</sup> Guru Nanak is said to have visited the house on that plot of land during his halt at Calcutta *en route* for Puri. A few minutes' walk away stands Chotta Sikh Sangat at 112 Cotton Street. The Bara Sangat is close by the house of Mani Mallik and also the houses of Marwari devotees who were visited by Sri Ramakrishna several times. As was his wont it is quite probable that Sri Ramakrishna dropped into Bara Sangat, particularly because the Hindus in common used to believe that Sikhism was but an off-shoot of Hinduism.

Sri Ramakrishna's encounters with the Sikh *sepoys* were not without fun. It is recorded that once Sri Ramakrishna went to the quarters of the *sepoys* at the powder-magazine when Narayan Shastri of Jaipur, an erudite Sanskrit scholar, accompanied him. The Sikh *sepoys* got Sri Ramakrishna seated and they took their seats in front of him. Sri Ramakrishna began to talk to them in his usual familiar tone. At some stage, Narayan Shastri intervened and began elucidating the scriptural import of some teachings of the Saint. This offended the Sikh devotees. Immediately, they drew their swords from scabbards and sharply told, "You rascal, worldly man! How you dare instruct others!" Sri Ramakrishna raised his hands and pacified the *sepoys* saying, "Yes, Shastri has done a very wrong thing. Pardon him for my sake." The *sepoys* cooled down, put their swords back into scabbards. Then only the panicky Narayan Shastri got his breath back. They told Shastri, "Such conduct of a householder like you is unpardonable. Make sure that you do not repeat

it." Shastri, humbled, said, "Yes, I shall obey."

Among the Sikh devotees Koar Singh was the most perceptive. He had a philosophical bent of mind. He would often lay the doubts of his mind before Sri Ramakrishna and get them resolved. One day Koar Singh asked him, "Sir, can a man return from the plane of *samādhi* to the plane of the ordinary world?" We do not know what exactly Sri Ramakrishna said in reply. But in reply to the same question put by Mahimacharan Chakraborty, Sri Ramakrishna said,

"Koar Singh also asked me that question. You see, there is a vast difference between the *jīva* and *Iswara*. Through worship and austerity a *jīva* can at the utmost attain *samādhi*; but he cannot come down from that state. On the other hand, an incarnation of God can come down from *samādhi*. A *jīva* is like an officer of the King; he can go as far as the outer court of the seven-storey palace. But the King's son has access to all the seven floors; he can also go outside. Everybody says that no one can return from the plane of *samādhi*. In that case, how do you account for the sages like Śankara and Ramanuja? They retained the 'ego of knowledge'. ...Again, there are instances of sages like Prahlāda, Narada and Hanuman."

Such a simple explanation of a tough philosophical question would have impressed anyone deeply. And such intellectual clarification apart, Koar Singh witnessed repeated demonstrations of Sri Ramakrishna's travel between the different planes of consciousness. One day he admitted to Sri Ramakrishna, "I have never before seen a person who has returned from the plane of *samādhi*. You are none other than Nanak." Not only to Koar Singh, but also to a few thoughtful others, the Saint appeared as a veritable incarnation of Guru Nanak.

Some other time Koar Singh raised another subtle question. He asked the Saint, "You still worry about your body?" Referring later to this question of his, Sri Ramakrishna said, "But it is my nature to believe that my

33. On this plot of land there now stands a six-storied building, the second and third floors of which are used for Bara Sikh Sangat.



Mother knows everything. It was She who would speak at Rajendra Mitra's house. Hers are the only effective words. One ray of light from the Goddess of Wisdom stuns a thousand scholars. The Mother has kept me in the state of a *bhakta*, a *vijñāni*," It may be presumed that Sri Ramakrishna's reply to Koar Singh was of a similar nature. The latter understood that entirely dependent on the Divine Mother as he was, Sri Ramakrishna did not bother his head about himself.

Sri Ramakrishna's comprehension of Sikhism had touches of originality too. By way of example we may point out that contrary to the popular view, Sri Ramakrishna held that Sikh monasticism accepted both the path of Knowledge and the path of Devotion.<sup>34</sup>

In the last phase of Sri Ramakrishna's life, when educated Calcuttans began visiting him, none could see among them either a Sikh civilian or soldier, possibly because there were very few in Calcutta at that time. The link with the Sikh *sepoys* of the Magazine at Dakshineswar and at Barrackpore and Dum Dum cantonments was broken due to their transfer to some other far off places. Nonetheless, Sri Ramakrishna's divine

influence on them must have remained throughout their lives. His touch transformed innumerable hearts and lives. We may mention the renowned journalist Sant Nihal Singh's many papers on the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement. His parents had seen Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. His father often used to reminisce about Sri Ramakrishna and say, "I have never met anyone so God-intoxicated as he was."<sup>35</sup> Also we may mention Principal Niranjani Singh's articles in Punjabi on Sri Ramakrishna which appeared in *Panch Beti Sandesh* and Jasbir Kaur Ahuja's translation into Punjabi of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

Religious pluralism has indelibly imprinted its unique message of unity in diversity on the fabric of Indian society. It has provided as many paths as necessary for people of various temperaments, abilities and tastes. In the last phase of the nineteenth century Sri Ramakrishna, himself an embodied 'Parliament of Religions', played the conductor of an orchestra presented by the religious genius of India. As the grandmaster of the orchestral concert, Sri Ramakrishna included all the musical scores and instruments of the different faiths, including Sikhism. The grand symphony played on the theme 'Harmony and Peace and not Dissension'. It will echo down the halls of time until the man-made differences between religion and religion, and religion and life in the world vanish; until the entire human society already weary of hate, strife and violence, seriously take to the ideal of Unity in Diversity.

<sup>34</sup>. See *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 297.

G. S. Ghurye writes that the *Udasi* ascetics follow the monistic Vedānta of the *Dasnamis*. The *Nirmalas*, who claim Nanak himself as their founder, follow Sankara's monistic Vedānta through the *Granth Sahib*, which they worship as their tutelary deity. (*Indian Sadhus*, 1964, pp. 143-48) Over and above his, the over-riding influence of *Bhakti* on these sects cannot be denied.

<sup>35</sup>. *Prabuddha Bharata*, March 1954, p. 109.

## Unpublished Letters

*The following letters of the disciples and admirers of Swami Vivekananda are coming to the light of the printed page for the first time. During the Swami's lifetime and for long afterward, the devotees retained a wonderful reverence and loyalty for the great Swami. Going through the letters readers are moved to sense the profound spiritual relationship they had with the beloved Guru.*

*For long years these unpublished letters have lain in the archives of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, U.S.A. We are grateful to the authorities for making them available to us for publication in this Journal.*

*From Mr. J. J. Goodwin to Miss Josephine MacLeod*

Almora, N. W. P.  
May 18, 1897

Dear Miss MacLeod,

The Swami is back again with us, and is better, altho' still very far from well. India, even in the Himalayas, is too hot for him. He reached Kathgodam last Sunday and Almora on Tuesday, receiving an enthusiastic welcome from between 4000 and 5000 people out of a population of 8000. A pandal (lecture hall) was arranged in the Bazar Street, and three addresses presented in a handsome case. He made a short speech in reply. He finds Almora too hot, & indeed it seems to have got hot since he came up here. So this afternoon we leave for Devathar, 20 miles from here further into the Hills, & after two or three days there go on to Pindari Glacier, & shall probably live for some time just at its foot. That is seven days journey from Almora. The Swami says you and Mrs. Bull are thinking of coming out here. I hope it is true. If so you should try to be here by the end of September which would enable you to take part in his autumn campaign, which will probably be far more interesting & important than that of the spring.

On his journey here the Swami, who brought with him three other Swamis, stayed one day at Lucknow, on account of the poor health of one of them, & altho' unofficial & unprepared—received a genuine welcome. He has this week received requests from three Rajas to visit their territories & themselves.

The work in London is not doing well, & Mr. Sturdy is in low spirits about it. That is a pity, because it will not encourage Abhedananda to do better.

The Swami asked me yesterday why you & Mr. Leggett never wrote to him.

Please give my kind regards to him & Mrs. Leggett, and accept also yourself.

Very truly yours,  
J. J. Goodwin

\* \* \*

*From Mr. J. J. Goodwin to Mrs. Sara Bull*

Dewaldhar Baghesha, N. W. P.  
May 23, 1897

Dear Mrs. Bull—

I wish I could paint in words the beauties of this place in which we are now living for a time, but I am quite sure I could not. It is 21 miles further into the heart of the Himalayas than Almora, and a really seclud-



ed place. Chiringilal, the proprietor, is a relative of the Almora people, and five years ago bought the whole of a hillside, 500 acres, covered with thick jungles. In this time he has not only cleared about 300 acres of it, but has laid it out with really marvellous art, planted it with fruit trees, built bungalows and other buildings, not one of which (even outhouses) is inartistic, tanks, etc. The situation itself helps him, for, wherever you look it is roll on roll of jungle covered hills, and at night, when clearing fires are burning in all directions it is as beautiful as it is in daylight. It is distinctly cooler than at Almora and about 86° in the shade at the hottest part of the day—and the air is fresh and healthy to a degree. The Swami benefited in one day, and is maintaining the improvement, but the short journey of 21 miles here showed how far he is yet from well, the few hours riding sending him back to his old condition again almost. He must *not* spend another summer in India, there is too much for him to do yet to run any risk with his health, altho' I know that everything is in the hands of the Divine Mother. I heard two very pretty stories about him the other day. Once Ramakrishna Paramahansa asked for some water and Swamiji brought it for him. Ramakrishna Paramahansa took it and threw it away. Swamiji got angry and so did the Paramahansa. "What, shall I take water from you and you a God?" And he never would let the Swami get anything for him again. Another story was this. When the Paramahansa was passing away he called in all his disciples but Swamiji and gave them an express command that they were always to pay every attention to Swamiji, and never to leave anything undone that could add to his health or comfort. Then sending them out and calling in Swamiji he committed all his other disciples into his charge. There is yet another, and most significant. The

Paramahansa once called Swamiji to him and said, "Come here, I'll give you some siddhis (powers). What power do you want?" "None," said the Swami. "You fool you must have them, they will be useful to you." But the Swami was obdurate, and altho' the Paramahansa got almost furious with him all the answer Swamiji would give was, "If you can show me God, and make me to want nothing, either food or anything, that will stand in the way of my seeing God always, then I'll have it. If not I don't want any other siddhi." Since then of course he has got all the powers in attaining to the highest realization. One day the Paramahansa went into Calcutta and for fun, Swamiji concentrated on him and saw and heard everything he did and said. When the Paramahansa got back Swamiji laughed and said, "I know what you have been doing; and forthwith told him everywhere he had been, what he said to this man and that man, and so on. The Paramahansa was angry and told him not to meddle with such nonsense, but to think always of God. This is a rambling letter, but perhaps these little things will interest you, so I write them. I hope everyone is well, and it is nearly time to wish Godspeed to Greenacre again. With kind regards.

Very truly yours,  
J. J. Goodwin

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*From Mr. J. J. Goodwin to Mrs. Sara Bull*

Almora, N. W. P.  
June 28th, 1897

Dear Mrs. Bull—

We have just seen reports from Chicago & Detroit papers which give a lecture by Dr. Barrows, & contributions from our old friends the Revs. Mr. Thoburn & Mr. Clark. In these it is stated that Swamiji has lost no opportunity since he returned to India

of abusing & belittling American women. Now, we do not wish to reply to these papers, but you have so many opportunities of meeting representative American women that I can do no harm in acquainting you with the absolute facts, and leaving them in your hands. I have been present at every single lecture given by Swamiji in India & Ceylon. I have also been present at every single interview granted to a newspaper man. Further I have not missed one single report of any utterance of his in any paper. With this opportunity of knowing the actual facts I can assure you that any statement of a single word from Swamiji derogatory to American women is a malicious fabrication. On the contrary I am becoming almost weary, if that be possible, of hearing him speak in the most glowing terms of the American women, and only a week or two ago he said, "If I have to come back again as woman I must & will come as an American woman." It is further charged against Swamiji that he ran away from Madras in order to avoid Dr. Barrows, thus showing gross ingratitude. Dr. Barrows has yet, apparently, to learn that but for an open letter which Swamiji wrote to India before his own and the doctor's arrival there, not a single Hindu would have moved a step to see, let alone to welcome Dr. Barrows, barring of course native Xns. Moreover the Madras Missionaries, through the Rev. Mr. Kellett, invited Swamiji to sign an address of welcome to the Doctor, & on the strength of the Swami's signature obtained a number of other Hindu signatories. Swamiji's plans for Madras were settled, even to the date of leaving, before he reached Madras, & before he had the least idea that the Doctor was expected there. The Doctor arrived on a Saturday evening, while *Swamiji was delivering a lecture*, & the Swami gave a further lecture the following afternoon, in addition to

receiving several hundred, almost amounting to a thousand, visitors in the morning & evening, and we had to leave for the steamer at 5 on the Monday morning. The Swami moreover made not a single remark prejudicial to Dr. Barrows—(which is another Chicago statement)—& only once referred to him in a lecture, & then to criticize in a spirit, which anyone who cares or cared to read the report of his speech will admit to be thoroughly fair & temperate, an extravagant claim of Dr. Barrows on behalf of Xnity as the only universal religion. If Dr. Barrows is unable to accept criticism in a proper spirit he has no right to pose as a preacher or teacher. Beyond this not a single word was said prejudicial to the Doctor, & certainly nothing prejudicial to him personally & any reception he might secure.

Surely Christianity must have fallen to a very low ebb if its self constituted leader in America, Dr. Barrows, descends to deliberate lies in order to bolster his cause. Apart from which, is it quite honest on the part of Dr. Barrows, a Unitarian, to come to India as a pillar of Christianity? This seems to me somewhat paradoxical. Here he told another deliberate lie (in Madras) stating at a meeting of the Triplicane Literary Society that he invited Swamiji to lunch with him in Chicago & when asked what he would have Swami replied that he would prefer beef, & would always choose beef where a number of meats were to be had.

In your last letter you referred to the book of his journey from Colombo. The book is in hand, if not already published. His remarks about "Religion in the Kitchen" are not only perfectly true, but absolutely necessary. No other way of speaking will reach the people here, & as this book will be largely for India it is difficult to avoid incorporating such remarks. For the sake



of the Indian work I am afraid you must try to put up with it.

Swamiji is quite well & is going to Nainital in a few days, where he will lecture, coming back after a few days & lecturing here.

It seems probable that I shall not return to the West at all, after all. One of Swamiji's ideas is to have a newspaper of his own in Calcutta (in Bengalee) & another in Madras (in English). He has told Alasinga Perumal to establish this latter, & insists upon my being appointed Editor, because, & you will pardon my feeling pleasure in telling you this, he relies implicitly on me as a disciple, & knows that I shall not attempt to strike out & live independent from him. Swamiji also told us of this plan himself the other day.

Very truly yours,  
J. J. Goodwin

\* \* \*

*From Josephine MacLeod to Sister Nivedita*

Los Angeles  
Fri., Dec. 15, 1899

Dearest Child—

Your heavenly gossiping letter came last evening and I'll read parts of it to Swamiji after lunch (which he is now cooking) while he lies in the hammock—Oh! The peace and blessings of this life and with each day comes the feeling that the reestablishment of Swami's health is more and more permanent.

Tomorrow if it be fine, Mr. and Mrs. Baumgardt, Swami and I go to Mount Lowe—where there is a fine observatory and we shall have a rare night looking through the telescope—and do some fine excursions in the neighborhood—returning home here about 5 on Sunday afternoon—a Mr. Fritz—a fine young man, the head of the "Forward Movement", a splendid broad thinker

and worker, is to announce for Swami three lectures next Tues., Thurs. and Fri. evenings at 7:30 in the Blanshard Hall Building—Swami said to him that he wanted to make a little money, and do the rest of his work in writing, and wanted enough money to keep him in the Himalayas—Swami is talking and lecturing so quietly that it does not seem to fatigue him in the least—and he says he just as leave lecture every day and have classes. On December 13th Swami wrote a long beautiful letter in Bengali to Saradananda telling him of his recovery and [ being ] full of courage—and the same day sent a cablegram to Brahmananda : "Perfectly cured—bless all"—Vive. And he really seems to feel and act as if a new era were open to Him! Swami says that financially your work may not prove a great success in Chicago, but that it is necessary to strike that as a center—"Chicago is the center of this country—New York is the center between two continents—All the idea the Californians have of me, emanated from Chicago"—So you see, child, that there is no doubt in his mind that you started in the right place. I can see that he loves the intimacy and confidence that exists between you and me. He said the other day—the difference between Mrs. Bull and me was that she loved his disciples and friends *through* him—whereas I loved them *directly*—as apart from him—and this is true, tho' it took *him* to see it, and that is the reason I am bound to hold Mr. Sturdy—for I bear a personal relation to him that no one can alter—see? On Sat. a week from tomorrow we are going to see "My Friend from India", the farce on Swami! It will be screaming fun! and good relaxation after all his lectures. Mr. Fritz wants Swami to influence the public school teachers here—a big public you see—The lecture on "Cosmos", under the auspices of the Academy of Sciences last Tues. eve., called out over a thousand, and it was much apprecia-

ted. A Mr. Lloyd, a lawyer and graduate of Harvard, and two degrees in Germany, came upon the platform (being a member of the A. of S.) and said he wished to pay his tribute to the valuable contribution to psychology and modern thought that the Swami V. had given and then asked him a question as to the Indian idea of the creation. That gave Swami a chance to be not only clear but very brilliant, causing much applause—so you see, child, *my* way of being an impresario, is to like personally the two men, Mr. Baumgardt and Mr. Fritz, and they to take the initiative and responsibility. You might send this letter to Mrs. Bull—bless her sweet heart—I'm not doing any writing these days beyond a daily letter home—but I want S. S. to know all there is to know. I am rejoiced you are getting hold of Mrs. Adams in your own way—one cannot

give one's own love and appreciation of another as a gift—but it must grow up as a new bond between you two. You must both get acquainted with each other's methods and nature. I love you both deeply and only hope you may form a new combination apart from me. Mrs. Adams has more my method of doing things (lack of friction—diplomacy) while you have Swamiji's method—no yielding—no diplomacy—no “line of least resistance” and perhaps it is because your method is so foreign to mine that it seems so strong—so much greater than I could ever hope to be—Swami sends love as does your loving

J. Jo—

P. S. Swami loved your letter !  
I read it all to him !

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## Mud-Brick Housing—A Fresh Look

PROF. P. K. MEHTA

*The author, Prof. P. K. Mehta, has done extensive and valuable research with new materials for housing construction. His carefully planned experiments offer an indubitable validation that mud dwellings can be a considerable help in solving India's housing construction problem. The time is ripe for the Government of India to take a serious look to new innovations in mud-brick fabrication which will mitigate the pressing need for adequate housing for our citizens. Prof. Mehta has been on the teaching faculty in Civil Engineering at the University of California, Berkeley for many years and received the 1987 Wason Medal for Materials Research from the American Concrete Institute, one of the prestigious awards for civil engineers in the U.S.*

Mud-brick houses with eroded foundations, crumbling walls, and leaking roofs present a common sight in most rural areas and urban slums of the developing countries. The people inhabiting these houses dream

that some day they will be able to live in more durable and comfortable dwelling made of modern building materials, such as burnt brick and concrete. It is widely believed that unbaked earth, which has been



the principal material of construction for human shelters throughout the world for thousands of years, does not have any future in housing.

Since the advent of the industrial revolution town planners and materials researchers have consistently ignored unbaked earth for housing purposes and have focused their attention on alternate building materials, in spite of the fact that almost half of the world population cannot afford homes built with modern materials. In the developing countries where most of the world's poor live, governments often assume that somehow the number of poor will be drastically reduced within a short period, and with this will disappear the need of mud-brick houses.

However, a deeper analysis of the issue will expose the unsoundness of this assumption. Suppose that by a miracle every poor family in India acquires enough money to build a home of their choice. Since all the modern building materials, viz cement, burnt-brick, glass, plastics, and steel are energy-intensive, from where shall we get the energy sources to make large quantities of these materials for fulfilling the housing needs of the entire Indian population? Somehow, even if the country is able to acquire enough cement, burnt-bricks, and steel to build homes for the entire population, from where shall we get enough energy on a continuing basis to cool the concrete or burnt-brick buildings during hot summers and warm them up during winters? Evidently, a dependence on the modern building materials to meet the housing needs of all or even a majority of the people in India cannot be a sound national policy.

Unbaked earth is a no-cost, labour-intensive building material which requires no expenditure of energy either for making structural elements or for maintenance of a comfortable temperature inside the house during extreme weather conditions. Therefore, from considerations of energy and

affordability, unbaked earth continues to provide the only sensible answer to the human housing problems for a majority of the people living in the third world countries.

Now the next questions: Is there anything inherently wrong with the unbaked earth masonry, which makes it inferior to other materials for the construction of an aesthetically pleasing, comfortable, and durable human dwelling? Why there is little or no construction activity with this material in industrialized countries? Why people in developing countries shun unbaked earth as soon as they are able to afford modern materials of construction? In search for the answers to these puzzling questions, the author availed himself of an opportunity to participate in a recently completed research investigation at the Catholic University of Peru in Lima. This paper contains a summary of the research findings and some personal observations.

#### LESSONS FROM THE ANCIENT BUILDINGS IN PERU

Unbaked earth was a common building material in ancient Peru. The Spanish word adobe, derived originally from the Arabic, is the term used to designate unbaked bricks of earth shaped in wooden molds and dried in the sun. Another Spanish term, tapia, indicates a thin masonry wall made by ramming unbaked soil between two parallel frames which are subsequently moved. Adobe and tapia were the primary building materials for most monuments, pyramids, walls, and houses in Peru.

In Chan Chan, about 15 km away from Trujillo in northern Peru, are located the ruins of one of the largest imperial cities, 18 to 20 sq. km area with 2,00,000 to 2,50,000 inhabitants, built with adobe during the Chimu Empire (12th to 15th century A. D.). There were nine walled compounds, each enclosed with a 9 meters high adobe-

brick wall. In spite of floods, earthquakes, and wars several of the 800-years old walls are still in good condition (Photo 1). Many walls are covered with impermeable clay stucco containing well-preserved carvings of fish, sea otters, birds, and other anthropomorphic and geometrical figures (Photo 2).

Near Chan Chan there are the ruins of a restored temple, Huaca El Dragon (the pyramid of the dragon), which dated back to the Mochica Empire (200 to 800 A.D.). It is a religious pyramid built of adobe walls, the exterior surface of which is decorated with an extraordinarily elegant carving of serpents in high relief (Photo 3).

Among the other conspicuous example of durable unbaked earth structures in Peru are the 600-years old walls (Photo 4), 14 m high, 80 m long, and 1.5 m thick at the base, which rests on stone foundations, of the Wirakocha Temple in Racchi built during the Inca Empire. Presently, the typical annual rainfall in Racchi is about 60 cm, and the buildings have survived at least two earthquakes of major intensity. These beautiful Peruvian structures, as well as numerous similar structures of unbaked earth in many parts of the world, as documented for instance by Jean Dethier, are a *living proof that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with unbaked earth as a primary material for the construction of beautiful and durable buildings.*<sup>1</sup>

### WHAT WENT WRONG ?

In contrast to some of the old buildings of unbaked earth, recently constructed dwellings—some hardly more than a few years old—are easily destroyed by heavy rain or earthquakes. For example, during the last 30 to 40 years huge losses of both adobe

dwellings and human lives by floods and earthquakes have been reported from countries, such as China, Columbia, India, Iran, Mexico, Peru, and Turkey. Let us try to understand what went wrong in the age of technological revolution.

The three common enemies of adobe buildings are:

(1) Flood water which can erode the foundation of the structure.

(2) Rain water, especially heavy showers on adobe walls when they are not adequately protected by an overhanging roof and an impermeable wall plaster. This can cause excessive erosion on the walls, reducing their thickness and strength.

(3) Earthquakes, when the structural components are not properly joined together (this is discussed later).

A survey of under-construction or recently constructed structures in most parts of the world will show that the current building practice with adobe seldom pays any attention to address the above mentioned problems. Inadequate foundation and improper drainage (not enough overhang of the roof) are the frequent causes of foundation erosion (Photo 5). It seems that the following expression in old English has been forgotten: "Give a gude hat an' a gude pair o' butes an' ev'l last forever"<sup>2</sup>, which means simply that an earth house needs an overhanging roof to protect the walls from rain and a stone foundation to protect the base of the wall from running water. We do not know about the original roofing which protected the adobe walls at Racchi, but there is little doubt about the adequacy of the stone foundation (Photo 4).

The wall of a recently constructed adobe house in Lima, Peru, is shown in Photo 6. Apparently the mud-mortar for joining the bricks, besides being too thick or too wet, was of a composition that showed severe

1. *Down to Earth—Adobe Architecture: an Old Idea, New Future*, by Jean Dethier (translated from French by Ruth Eaton), published by Facts on File, Inc., New York, USA (1982).

2. *Ibid*, p. 8.



microcracking after the drying shrinkage. This type of wall will have only a little or no shear strength, and will easily collapse during an earthquake. In contrast, the mortar joining the adobe masonry at Racchi was found to be free from such microcracking. Examination of a sample of this mortar showed that it contained large amounts of straw and sand, which is a very effective method of controlling the microcracking but was not used in preparing the mud mortar for the construction of the wall shown in Photo 6. Evidently, *with the development and increased use of modern building materials, the art and science of building with unbaked earth was neglected, and gradually lost.* No wonder that adobe houses look run down, ugly, and structurally unsafe. With ever growing emphasis on labour-saving technologies and industrialized housing, building with adobe has become unfashionable now in most countries of the world.

### REDISCOVERING THE LOST TECHNOLOGY

If there is nothing inherently wrong with unbaked earth as a construction material to provide affordable, durable, comfortable, and beautiful self-made homes for almost half of the human population in the world, then something must be done soon to rediscover the old construction and design practices with adobe, which have been lost since the advent of the industrial revolution. A worldwide review of the published literature shows that compared to the research and developmental efforts on other building materials, very insignificant amount of resources are committed to this purpose. In addition, the reported work usually lacks the scientific rigour and, even more importantly, a recognition of the fact that for the results to be usable in practice, the construction and materials costs must be kept at a bare minimum. For example, many recent

studies have shown that the strength and moisture resistance of mud bricks can be increased by the addition of 5 to 10 percent cement, lime, or asphalt by weight of the dry soil. The total increase in the building cost when such expensive additives are incorporated with soil, will make the modified material outside the reach of most low-income families.

A brief review of materials and practices that should be considered for the construction of important components of a mud-brick house, is given below.

#### *Hats and Boots for Mud-Brick Houses*

The most important and expensive structural components for a mud-brick house are the proverbial hats and boots (the roof and the foundation, respectively). Stones cut to precise dimensions and fitted snugly, provided excellent foundations for old Inca buildings in Peru. Many Spanish churches built in America during the 17th to 19th century period which are still standing, have foundations made of large pieces of stone cemented together with lime mortar. Wooden posts and rammed earth provide inexpensive but less durable foundations. Foundations made of reinforced cement concrete or of burnt-brick masonry cemented together with portland cement mortar are of relatively recent origin, and are very durable but expensive.

The purposes of a foundation are to carry the weight of the walls and the roof, and to save the wall bases from erosion by flowing waters. Thus if a foundation is not constructed with proper materials, or if the engineering design and workmanship are inadequate, the entire structure may suffer irreparable damage in a relatively short period when exposed to a rainstorm, hurricane, or an earthquake.

The size of a foundation depends on the wall thickness, the weight of the roof, the quality of soil at the building site, and the

climatic conditions. Since cut-stone is not readily available in most parts of the world, lime-pozzolan concrete or portland cement concrete foundations are recommended for use with mud-brick structures. Where portland cement is available, a typical recipe for making 1 m<sup>3</sup> concrete, suitable for most foundations, is as follows: 250 kg cement (5 bags), 125 kg total water (or just enough water to yield the most stiff concrete that can be consolidated satisfactorily by tamping or vibrating after placement), 900 kg of clean sand (from which clay and silt have been washed away), and 1200 kg of clean gravel or crushed rock (with a random distribution of particles in the 5-50 mm size range). After the concrete mixture has set (solidified), it should be moist-cured for at least 7 days. The cost of concrete can be reduced by substituting one bag of portland cement by a pozzolan, or by using a portland-pozzolan or portland-slag cement in place of pure portland cement.

Where portland cement is not readily available or is too expensive, a lime-pozzolan mixture can be satisfactorily substituted in place of portland cement, provided the quality of lime as well as pozzolan is suitable. Pozzolans are natural (viz volcanic ash) or industrial materials (viz pulverized coal ash, or surkhi made by grinding burnt bricks), which consist essentially of noncrystalline or very poorly crystalline forms of silica (or silica, alumina, and iron-oxide), and which, in the presence of lime (calcium hydroxide) and moisture, are capable of forming cementitious products at ordinary temperature. Only freshly calcined and hydrated lime should be used. Not all pulverized coal ash (popularly called, fly ash), surkhi, and natural pozzolans are suitable for making lime-pozzolan cements. For a crude test for the control of quality of lime and pozzolan, 1 part by weight of hydrated lime may be mixed with 3 parts of the pozzolan and just enough water to make a

workable paste, which is shaped into a ball or pat and cured under moist conditions for about a week and then the strength is tested by simply crushing it. The author has made an excellent cement from a pozzolan produced by incineration of rice husks under controlled conditions.

Like foundations, roofing represents 20 to 40% of the cost of a low-cost house, and is equally important for the durability of the entire structure. Among the traditional roofing materials for mud-brick houses, burnt-clay tiles, bamboo, thatch, and slate are the most commonly used. More durable and also more expensive are the corrugated roofs made of galvanized iron, asbestos cement, and glass or steel fibre-reinforced concrete. To shed water away from the wall base, a roof should have an overhang of at least 1/2 m. It should be resistant to wind, water, fire, earthquakes, and insects. For earthquake resistance purpose the roofing material should be securely fastened to roof rafters. Lightweight roofs are usually more economical because they require less thick walls and foundations.

A thatch may consist of reeds, palm fronds, grass, or straw left over after harvesting wheat, rice, oats, and barley. Thatching should begin at the eaves and proceed upwards in rows; the progressively higher rows of thatch overlapping the lower rows in such a way that water is always channeled to the outer surface of the roof. A thatch roof must have a pitch of at least 50° in order to shed rain water efficiently. The roofs provide good insulation from the heat of the sun or cold winds, are lightweight, and aesthetically pleasing. However, they are susceptible to attack by fungus, insects, and rodents, and are highly inflammable. The published literature contains a method of fire-proofing thatch by impregnation with a solution of ammonium phosphate, which is a fertilizer usually available in agricultural communities.



In tropical or semitropical areas where bamboos are abundant, waterproof roofs can be built by splitting lengths of bamboos into two semi-circular sections and then overlapping these sections like tongue and groove joints. Bamboos are susceptible to decay by insects. A simple and environmentally sound technique to reduce insect attack is by leaching out the sugars by soaking the bamboo in water for about a week prior to use.

Fired-clay tiles make an excellent roofing material, but are heavy, expansive, and dangerous during earthquakes. In arid climates unfired-clay is sometimes used as a topping on reed roof to prevent leakage of rain water. This purpose may not be achieved if drying shrinkage cracks appear in the topping. The problem may be solved by using the tiles instead of the topping of unfired clay (Photo 7). An even better idea to make a thatch, bamboo, or tile roof leakage-proof is to cover it with plastic sheet made from latex. A team of scientists at the Shri Ram Institute for Industrial Research in New Delhi have found that certain cactus species (*Euphorbia Nivulia* and *Euphorbia Nerifolia*) secrete a milky fluid, which can serve as a primary raw material for making water-proof plastic films.

Mud-brick vaulted roofs dating back to at least 2000 B.C. were used in Egypt, and this art is still being practised there. Although aesthetically attractive, they are difficult to construct and the span size is generally limited to about 1-1/2 m.

In tropical and subtropical areas with heavy rainfall, corrugated sheets of galvanized iron (GI), asbestos cement, or plastics are more popular on account of their durability. The excellent runoff characteristic of the corrugated sheets means roof pitches as low as 20°, and an ability to catch clean water for storage purposes, where piped water is not available. Besides being awfully

expensive, the available products suffer from various shortcomings. The GI roofs become uncomfortably hot during the summer, and cold during the winter. Also, they look ugly when rusted, and can be hazardous during a hurricane. Plastic sheets made of thermoplastic resins (such as polyethylene, polypropylene, polyvinyl chloride, and polystyrene) are somewhat less expensive than thermosetting resins (phenol-formaldehyde, urea-formaldehyde, and polyesters), but both types possess poor fire resistance. Asbestos products are now believed to be a source of lung cancer, therefore glass-fibre and steel-fibre cement composites have been developed as a substitute but are much more expensive.

Cement composites reinforced with natural fibres, such as sisal, jute, coir, are also being developed, but the durability of natural fibres is uncertain in the alkaline environment of hydrated portland cement. Since blended cements composed of rice husk ash and lime (or rice husk ash and portland cement) possess a little or no alkalinity after hydration, future research should be aimed at the development of low-cost and durable roofing panels or tiles made of rice husk ash cement and natural fibres.

#### *How to Make Strong Mud-brick Walls and Durable Wall-plasters*

African, Asian, and Native American building traditions frequently contain references to the use of natural additives, such as animal dung and extract from banana stalk, cactus pulp, or locus bean pods which, when added to mud, are claimed to be beneficial in improving the moisture resistance of the mortar used for joining the adobe bricks, or the stucco (plaster) used for protection and beautification of wall surfaces. From preliminary investigations of mud stuccos in a simulated rain test at the Catho-

lic University of Peru<sup>3</sup> it was concluded that locally available banana stalk and locus bean pods were not effective in improving the impermeability and erosion resistance. However, a viscous solution obtained by soaking equal proportions by weight of chopped stalks from a local cactus (*Opuntia Ficus Indica*) was found to be highly effective, provided it was aged properly. The published literature does not contain any information of the influence of the aging process on the moisture resistance of stuccos. The author believes that development of scientific data, is very essential to advance the state-of-the-art of building durable adobe structures.

Like adobe bricks, the mud mortar for joining the bricks is made by thoroughly mixing a local soil with water. Soils are mixtures of gravel (small pieces of rock), sand, silt, and clay minerals. It is the clay minerals which impart strength to an unbaked mud-brick when the brick is dried after molding. Unfortunately, the presence of excessive clay in a soil becomes the source of high drying shrinkage, which causes cracking. To achieve a better mortar-brick integration, cracking in the mortar should be reduced as much as possible.

Due to the excessive clay content of the local soil in Lima, Peru, the shear strength of adobe masonry was low due to excessive microcracks in the mortar composed of this soil. Therefore a study was undertaken to determine the effect of sand or straw addition on the degree of microcracking in mud mortars used for the construction of adobe-brick walls.<sup>4</sup> It was found that by adding

coarse sand or chopped straw the number and width of the cracks in the mortar were substantially reduced, and 100% or more increase in shear strength was obtained with the adobe brick walls thus made. When an animal waste such as cow-dung is added to a soil-water mixture, it is suspected that the presence of fibres in the animal waste plays a similar role in restraining the drying shrinkage cracking.

The research at the Catholic University of Lima also confirmed some of the construction practices, which are helpful in prolonging the durability of adobe masonry. For instance, the use of a relatively stiff consistency, with just enough mixing water to obtain adequate workability, was found to be advantageous for reducing the number and width of cracks due to the drying shrinkage. Wetting the brick surface a few minutes before the application of mortar was similarly beneficial, because by decreasing the moisture differences between the mortar and the brick one is able to reduce the rate of drying shrinkage. Cracking becomes more severe when the rate at which the drying shrinkage occurs, is high.

Moreover, it was found that with the help of simple techniques, highly durable wall plasters can be made which are very effective in prolonging the service life of adobe masonry. For instance, a mixture of soil, chopped straw, and cactus solution produced a dense, strong, and crack resistant stucco on drying. A 15-mm thick coating of this stucco on an adobe wall, when dried and subsequently polished with a hard stone or a metal trowel—a technique still used by some tribes in Africa—produced a skin which was virtually impermeable to water. Painting the polished surface with the cactus solution enhanced the impermeability further. It is possible, although one can never be sure, that the decorative motifs in unbaked earth on the walls of Chan Chan and the El Dragon temple (Photos 2 and 3), which have

3. "Improving the Moisture Resistance of Adobe Structures", by E. A. Heredia, J. J. Bariola, J. Vargas, and P. K. Mehta, *Journal of Materials and Structures*, RILEM, Paris, France, Jan. 1989.

4. "Seismic Resistance of Adobe Masonry", by J. Vargas, J. Bariola, M. Blondet, and P. K. Mehta, *Journal of Materials and Structures*, Vol. 19, No. 112, 1986.



withstood the ravages of time for 600 to 800 years, were constructed with such techniques.

### *Are Mud-Brick Structures a Hazard in the Earthquake Regions?*

From an extensive review of recent earthquake losses in Skopje (1963), Managua (1972), Mexico City (1985), and San Salvador (1986), Langenbach<sup>5</sup> has concluded that in terms of human survival in earthquakes there seems to be no sharp distinction between traditional constructions and modern constructions in reinforced concrete and steel. Even with the application of sophisticated technology and expensive materials, modern buildings have been subject to failures that have caused thousands of deaths by earthquakes. The often sweeping condemnation of traditional masonry buildings in seismic areas, "as dangerous", is unjustified and, therefore, we must develop a more informed approach towards understanding the fundamentals of earthquake safety for various types of structures.

Throughout the world, masonry made of stone or brick (both unbaked and baked earth) has since long been in use for the construction of human dwellings. Unreinforced masonry, although strong and durable under most conditions, is weak in both shear and tension and, therefore the components of an unreinforced structure are unable to act together in resisting seismic forces. On the other hand, reinforced masonry contains an embedded material of high tensile strength which helps the entire structure to sway together during an earthquake. Concrete reinforced with steel, and brick masonry reinforced with bamboo represent examples of

structures that are better equipped to withstand earthquake motion. However, experience shows that the ability of a particular structure to resist a strong earthquake without catastrophic failure depends less on the type of construction materials, and more on the quality of construction work and engineering design.

One of the fundamental principles of earthquake engineering is that the structural frame must be rigid and well tied together with major components of the structure (i.e. all the walls, the roof, and the foundation) such that the whole house sways together during the ground motion.

A construction method illustrating how mud brick walls can be tied to a concrete foundation, is shown in Photograph 8. A reinforced concrete structure when properly designed and built, is a monolith of great coherence and high elasticity, which are the important properties needed to resist earthquake motion. In addition to high elasticity or stiffness, which is helpful in resisting minor earthquakes it is desirable to design for high ductility (energy absorption through material yielding) for earthquakes of a major intensity. Seismic forces tend to concentrate on the stiffest elements of a structure; thus with reinforced concrete, this type of stress concentration lead to building collapses that have cost thousands of lives in major earthquakes during this century.

With unreinforced brick masonry, reviewing the damage caused by the 1963 earthquake in Skopje (where modern housing had been built with unreinforced burnt-brick walls and precast reinforced concrete floors), Langenbach observed that most of the 3 to 6 storeys buildings with timber bracing behaved far better. *How did these adobe buildings resist the severe damage whereas those built with much stronger materials failed?* In an answer to this question Langenbach says that normally timber joints

5. "The Uses of Masonry in Earthquake Zones", by Randol Langenbach, paper presented at the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, 1986 Technology Conference, Washington, D.C.

are not of sufficient strength to resist seismic forces in a rigid (elastic) manner. Therefore, it is more likely that the combination of timber frame and low-strength masonry allowed the absorption of the energy of the ground motion in a ductile manner by cracking the masonry beyond its elastic range.

In conclusion, modern materials may be stronger but modern masonry may not necessarily be stronger as a system. An unreinforced burnt-brick wall joined with a portland cement mortar represents a system where the bricks are often weaker than the mortar. According to Langenbach, "While stronger mortar can help provide for a wall with greater strength within its elastic range, the problem in earthquakes is that if failure occurs in the masonry units themselves, it can lead to the collapse of the wall. If on the other hand, the mortar is weaker than the rocks, the shifting and cracking in the bed joints can allow the wall to move in a nondestructive manner. In addition, the internal friction of the sliding of the masonry along its bedding planes provides an important energy absorption and dampening effect. As long as the masonry stays in place, it can help prevent the overall structure from collapsing."

Therefore, in comparing the various types of construction in earthquake-prone areas, it may be more important to consider the failure mechanisms of different systems than

to compare the relative strength of the materials or of the system. Strength can be important in preventing the damage in mild earthquakes, but in the event of severe earthquakes even high strengths can be overcome. From a standpoint of saving human lives, a failure mechanism which allows horizontal cracking of the mortar and sliding movement of the bricks while leaving the walls in place, is of ultimate importance.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Hundreds of years old mud-brick structures are still standing in many parts of the world. This proves that there is nothing inherently wrong with mud-brick as a primary material of construction for low-cost housing. After the advent of the industrial revolution, the technology of building earthquake- and moisture-resisting homes with unbaked earth was gradually lost. With the awareness that mud-brick housing provides the only affordable and energy-efficient solution to the housing problem for millions of people in the developing countries, the lost technology is now being rediscovered. It is shown in this paper that with the help of simple construction practices and almost no-cost locally available materials, it should be possible to build beautiful, durable, and comfortable human dwellings.

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Even those engaged in worldly activities, such as office work or business, should hold to truth. Truthfulness alone is the spiritual discipline in the Kaliyuga.

—Sri Ramakrishna



# Sri Ramakrishna And The Vedanta Movement In Argentina

SWAMI PARESHANANDA

*Swami Pareshananda, the Swami in charge of the Buenos Aires Centre, portrays vividly the founding of the Ashrama in Argentina. The Ashrama is doing wonderful work in several Latin American countries. The Lord's message has lept over oceans and mountains.*

Early, the country known to us as Argentina was called El Plata, and included Paraguay, Uruguay, southern Bolivia and modern Argentina. Spain created the new viceroyalty to strengthen its territories facing the Portuguese colonial power in Brazil. With Napoleon's rise in Europe, in 1810, the Spanish colony became autonomous with its government located at Buenos Aires. Soon afterward, in 1816, under a new name, Rio de la Plata, it declared its independence from royalist Spain and with Simón Bolívar's liberation of Peru in 1824, independence became a reality.

When Spain, the great European power of the early sixteenth century, arrived to colonize the southernmost region of South America, the country was inhabited by only about three hundred thousand nomadic Indian tribal people. By the late 1800's, when large scale immigration took place from Italy, Germany and Spain, most of these indigenous people had died under the rigours of serfdom (not slavery), or were racially absorbed by the incoming races.

Argentina quickly became prosperous, educated and modernized, in fact more advanced than any other South American country. But due to heady success, many social inequities developed just before and after the turn of the century and there followed widespread social disorder, military

coups and economic disasters. Argentina gradually slipped into economic chaos, which is a great problem even now. Democratic government returned to the country after the Falkland War in 1983.

Argentina is the second largest country in South America and is about the same size in land area as India. Bounding the country on the North and East are Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil and Uruguay, and on the West, the great Andes Mountains and Chile. The highest peak in the western hemisphere, 22,834 foot Aconcagua is here. Argentina is blessed with fertile land and thick forests in the mountain region. Her people are mostly of European descent, but include also Indians, Mestizos (mixed Indian and European), and Arabs. Spanish is the official language, but other widely spoken languages are English, Italian and French. About thirty-three million people live in Argentina. Most are Roman Catholics.

The Lord indeed gets his work done in wonderful and mysterious ways. Swami Vivekananda remarked in his public address to the people of Calcutta in 1897 on the great wonder that was the power of Sri Ramakrishna, how "...that son of a poor priest, born in an out-of-the-way village, unknown and unthought of, today is worshipped ...by thousands in Europe and America, and tomorrow will be worshipped

by thousands more.”<sup>1</sup> “Here has been the manifestation of an immense power,” he said, “just the very beginning of whose workings we are seeing...and before you is the fact that within ten years of his passing away, this power has encircled the globe!”<sup>2</sup>

Who can trace the hand and thoughts behind the well-known publishing house of Buenos Aires, Editorial Kier’s publishing of *El Evangelio de Ramakrishna*, the first Spanish translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* in the year 1909? It was a translation of the English version of Swami Abhedananda. About this time too, the growing interest in the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Vedanta led to the formation of a Vedanta Society (*Sociedad Vedānta*) in Buenos Aires City by some admirers. By 1922, this Society had published *Karma-Yoga*, *Rāja-Yoga* and *Jñāna-Yoga* of Swami Vivekananda in Spanish (translated by Mr. M. Lopez Villamil and Mr. Ricardo Vivie). The pioneering contributions of this society towards spreading the message of Sri Ramakrishna and Vedanta in Argentina were really outstanding. As a result, many distinguished thinkers of this and other Spanish-speaking countries became deeply interested in Ramakrishna-Vivekananda-Vedanta literature.

Amado Nervo (1870-1919), the great Mexican poet and writer, and one of the noblest and most famous writers of all times in Spanish literature, wrote the following touching letter to the Vedanta Society, Buenos Aires, after reading *El Evangelio de Ramakrishna* :

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989) Vol III, p. 268.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 314-15.

Madrid, 30th July 1916

Mr. Ricardo Vivie  
Vedanta Society  
Buenos Aires

My Esteemed Sir,

You have made me a very valuable present by sending seven books. All of them are really nice; but I must say the admirable *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*—which has been a real revelation for me—excels them all. What a profundity under its crystalline innocence! How beautiful are the parables! (for example, of the wall behind which there is the Absolute!) I had read long ago with deep emotional interest the *Gospel of Buddha*, classified and arranged methodically by Paul Carus. It impressed me much, but less than this delightful *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, so profoundly familiar, so familiarly profound. From today it will be one of the books at my bedside. One of those which I carry with me everywhere. It is a small mystic lamp for searching God, outside this spider-net of philosophies, of rituals and of metaphysical disputes. It is impregnated with very pure love and no threat casts its shadow over those pages of mysterious whiteness.

Those short, compendious treatises are very well written, above all: THE IDEAL OF A UNIVERSAL RELIGION. About the other volumes, I will tell you after I read them repeatedly.

Such a Centre as the Vedanta Society, glorifies the Republic of Argentina, which could neither continue nor be understood in many other countries.

Now I am reading attentively the *Curso Adelantado de Filosofia Yoga* (The Advanced Course of Studies in Yoga Philosophy).

Many thanks for this spiritual gift. Please send such gifts always. Your most affectionate friend,

AMADO NERVO

Ricardo Güiraldes (1886-1927), the author of the Spanish masterpiece (novel) *Don Segundo Sombra*, was one of the leading and most famous writers of Argentina. In the preface to his famous *El Sendero*, his wife Adelina Del Carril wrote :

Güiraldes longed for the real sources of oriental spiritual wisdom. *The Aphorisms of Patañjali*,



commented on by Swami Vivekananda made a well-aimed impact on his feelings and understanding, and he was fascinated by them. The same deep impression was created by the abridged *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. The unity of God and His Creation is the great message for this age.<sup>3</sup>

### *First Ramakrishna Ashrama*

Before 1930 there was another Society named *El Hogar de Amigos de Buenos Aires*, in the city which undertook in-depth studies of Indian philosophical thought. Mr. Joseph Schmidt, Dr. Bartoleme Allodio, Dr. Miguel Catalano and many other members of this Society felt keenly the wish to have a Hindu Vedantist come to Argentina to guide them. Mr. Schmidt, expressing this desire, wrote in a letter on May 4th, 1931 to the English monthly of the Ramakrishna Order, *Prabuddha Bharata*, at Mayavati :

...At the same time, I shall be greatly obliged if you would be so kind as to tell me if there could be any possibility of a Hindu Vedantist coming to this country, as there is a great field for this doctrine in this country. There is a great deal of interest, as I said for this study, and many of my friends have told me that if any Hindu philosopher would like to come to this country, his passage would be paid and he would be taken care of during his stay here.

The Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata* forwarded the letter to the authorities of the Ramakrishna Math at Belur Math. There was then some more exchanges of letters between Belur Math and the group in Argentina. In one, Mr. Schmidt wrote : "I beg to say that there are some members who would like to have some real pictures [photographs] of Sri Ramakrishna and also of Vivekananda." At last, moved by the earnest entreaties of the group, Belur Math deputed one of their able monks. Swami Vijayananda reached Buenos Aires

by steamship on 10th December 1932, most probably the first Hindu sannyasin ever to go to Argentina. Soon after, he gave his first public address on December 18th. Thereafter, a course of classes on Religion and Philosophy were started and the Swami established personal rapport with the followers. In 1933, the first birthday anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna in Argentina was celebrated.

One Mr. Chiodi, an ardent follower of Buenos Aires, arranged for an apartment for the Swami. On March 18th, 1933 the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Argentina was founded in the Buenos Aires City by Swami Vijayananda. The following report, published in *Prabuddha Bharata's* January 1937 issue, gives some idea of the Swami's many activities in the early years :

Swami Vijayananda, Head of the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Buenos Aires, South America, reached Belur Math on the 19th December after five years of strenuous work in the cause of Vedānta. The Swami was deputed in 1932 for the first time to expound in that distant land the catholic and universal Gospel of Hindu philosophy at the earnest request of Academia Internacional "Schmidt" of Buenos Aires, of the Argentine Republic. We are glad to announce that the Swami has been able to capture the imagination of the enlightened people of the land by his masterly presentation of the essentials of Vedānta, by his profound scholarship, saintly life and his magnetic personality. He has held systematic religio-philosophical classes and discourses and delivered a series of thoughtful lectures on a variety of subjects. The Swami has succeeded in arousing in the public mind a lively enthusiasm and an abiding love for Vedāntic ideals and Indian culture. To facilitate his preaching work the Swami learned Spanish. Indeed the publication of numerous works on Vedānta in Spanish under the auspices of the Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama which he founded there, the growing demand for his lectures, and the phenomenal expansion of his field of work bear an eloquent testimony to the splendid success which has attended his activities on alien soil in the midst of manifold difficulties and handicaps. We extend our heartiest welcome to the Swami.

3. Ricardo Güiraldes, *El Sendero* (Buenos Aires; Editorial Losada, 1967) p. 10.



On 3rd July 1941 the Ramakrishna Ashrama shifted to Bella Vista, a beautiful suburb thirty kilometres to the west of the main part of the city. The property for the Ashrama was donated by a devoted lady, Mrs. Ninon Wolf de Kahn. The activities of the Centre increased and attracted many spiritual souls. Swami Vijayananda did commendable work spreading the Master's ideas and Vedānta in Latin America. He had a masterful knowledge of spiritual subjects. His exemplary life and cheerful personality captivated the hearts of people. The April 1948 issue of *Prabuddha Bharata* appreciated the yeoman service of the Swami :

...The Swami has established a permanent Vedanta Centre in the beautiful locality of Bella Vista, just a few miles away from the centre of the town. Formerly he used to hold ten classes in a week (five in the mornings and five in the afternoons), and give two public lectures and two radio talks in a month. The most original work of the Swami, which one very much appreciates, are his morning classes where he has an average attendance of about sixty people—doctors, lawyers, university students, wage-earners, ladies, persons belonging to all sections of life, who come at the early hour of seven-thirty to meditate with the Swami and have lessons of meditation along with the scriptural classes.

The Swami has published in Spanish four *Yoga* books and the *Inspired Talks of Swami Vivekananda*. He has also written six original books in Spanish. In the course of the current year he hopes to publish [a new translation] of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and *The Pañcadasi*, a standard book on Vedānta. At present he holds three classes—one on Vedānta and two on comparative philosophy.

Even today, many people cherish the fond memory of Swami Vijayananda for his gifted personality and compassionate heart. *Prabuddha Bharata* continued :

In the short period of these few years he has succeeded in making many people interested in the message of the Vedānta and Indian culture. Some of his students are trying to put into prac-

tice the teachings of Vedānta in their daily lives. They are deeply interested in the message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, whose keynote is that all religions are true. As such, many students belonging to Catholic families feel quite at home in his classes. His book on Christ, written in Spanish, is so much appreciated that it has passed into the third edition. The same is true with the French translation of this book. The Argentine Republic is the stronghold of the Roman Catholics, who hold very dearly to their own interpretation of Christ. Even amongst them, the broad and liberal views of the Vedanta are spreading steadily.

Swami Vijayananda is the first Indian in the whole of South America who has learned the language of the people (Spanish), and is bringing India and Latin America in close touch. His radio talks are much in demand, and through them he reaches a vast multitude of people from Buenos Aires to Mexico. We hope he will be able to continue this work of love, understanding and spiritual culture and make those distant brethren of ours realize that, given opportunity, any man can wake up the dormant spirit of Universal Consciousness in him.

Thus the Swami continued his life of total dedication for the cause of Truth till the end. He passed away in Bella Vista on 1st September 1973, radiating peace, serenity and joy.

The Swami used to visit regularly for lecturing several places in Argentina and Brazil. He also lectured in Chile, Colombia, Guatemala and Peru. In Brazil, even now, there are more than one hundred devotees who received spiritual initiation from him.

There is now a Ramakrishna Vedanta Ashrama in Sao Paulo City in Brazil managed by Professor D. A. Gomes, Mr. Ernani Buffalo, Mr. Tanetaka and other devotees. This Ashrama also has a retreat in Embu, a place about fifty kilometres away from the main city. There are also Ramakrishna Vedānta Study Groups in Belo Horizonte, Curitiba and Rio de Janeiro, three prominent cities of Brazil. A magazine in the Portuguese language named *Vedānta* is being published regularly by David Kohen,



Maximo Rafael Pieroni and other admirers there.

There are two small groups of ardent admirers of Sri Ramakrishna and Vedanta in Montevideo and La Paloma of Uruguay. These groups were started by Mr. P. B. Humberto, the first resident Secretary of the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Argentina. A magazine in Spanish, called *Urukrama* is now being published by Tamar Hesse and others.

### *Some Notable Events*

Miss Josephine McLeod had regular correspondence with Swami Vijayananda. She was a great admirer and friend of Swami Vivekananda. In 1935 she came all the way from North America to meet the Swami in Buenos Aires and encourage him.

The Centenary celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary was held in 1936 with jubilation. There were religious and cultural programmes. The opening address was delivered by Dr. Eduardo A. Garcia. In the public meeting Swami Vijayananda spoke on *Ramakrishna, Harmony and Realization of the Religious Ideals*, and Professor Kalidas Nag, a well-known scholar of Calcutta University, on *The India of Yesterday and Today*. Mrs. Sophia Wadia spoke on *The Spiritual India of Today* and Mrs. Adelina del Carril spoke on *The Message of Sri Ramakrishna*. All of them echoed the spirit of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings.

"The abolition of distance is but a sign of union amongst people, so that they know themselves better and learn to love and understand one another more...

"Our free and hospitable America could not remain indifferent to this message whose aim is the union of all men in the pure Spirit which neither admits limits or frontiers or permanent divisions. This eternal message never condemns any religion, and

only asks every individual to practise his own religion and respect and revere others. It tells us to be truthful and sincere."

### *The Ashrama*

This Ashrama became a registered society in 1957. Mrs. Adelina del Carril Güiraldes became the first president. The following letter of blessings was received from the Revered Swami Sankarananda, the then President of the Ramakrishna Organization :

Ramakrishna Math  
November 29, 1957

Twenty-five years ago, in response to the request of a few friends in Argentina, the Ramakrishna Math Headquarters sent one of its accredited members, Swami Vijayananda, to Buenos Aires to deliver the universal spiritual message of Sri Ramakrishna in that far off country. The bulk of humanity is composed of the followers of the great, ancient religions, and human welfare depends on the sincerity with which men and women everywhere strive to appreciate religious harmony and understand on another's point of view. In the world of today, which is more or less preoccupied with material pursuits, this mutual understanding amongst the followers of different religions is essential to array the forces of religion against irreligion. It is therefore very encouraging that the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Buenos Aires has on the eve of its silver jubilee, been given a legal status as a religious Association by the Government of Argentina. May the Ashrama ably spread the life-giving message of Sri Ramakrishna all over Argentina as also in the neighbouring states of South America, is my earnest prayer to the Lord.

With blessings to all the devotees,

Swami Sankarananda  
President

In the year 1969, the Government of India sent Swami Ranganathananda as its cultural ambassador to many countries. He visited six countries of South America, viz. Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Panama, Peru and Venezuela. The Swami stayed in the Ashrama

for two weeks. On 25th August, afternoon, he gave a press interview at the Indian Embassy Chancery to four television channels, four leading newspapers and to a journal. He delivered a series of lectures in the Salvador University and at other places of Buenos Aires. The following report from a local newspaper gives an idea of the impact of the Swami's visit. *La Prensa*, the local Daily newspaper reported :

Arrived in this city, under the auspices of the Indian Government and the Escuela de Estudios Oriental de la Universidad del Salvador, Professor Swami Ranganathananda, an outstanding scholar of the Hindu philosophy, member of the cultural and spiritual movement started by Sri Ramakrishna in 1886 and organized by Swami Vivekananda, its first President. He is a member of the Council of the Ramakrishna Mission in Belur Math, India, and one of its Directors.

**FROM FATHER BERCENA:** In the meeting held yesterday in the local Indian Embassy, Swami Ranganathananda was introduced to the press by Father Bercena, Head of the Oriental Study School of the Universidad del Salvador, who, in his introduction, said, that "It is necessary to understand the depth and breadth of oriental thought, and also to remove some misunderstandings that so often are attached in the West to the oriental customs and thoughts." He also said that, "Whatever happens in the next ten years in the Asiatic South-East will have a decisive influence on the whole world in the next century."

In the course of his lecture the Swami said: "Hindu philosophy seeks to untie the oriental tradition with modern science—the theme that fascinates all the intellectuals of this part of the world, and it is trying to do so without creeds or dogmas." He hinted that Vedānta philosophy was scientific, rational and humanistic, and that it did have a great influence over the minds of men in many parts of the world.

In this context, it may be worth while to quote here the significant observations of Swami Ranganathananda about the influence of Vedānta in the Latin American countries:

Once a measure of social justice is achieved in these countries, by peaceful democratic, or violent revolutionary methods, they are likely to end their

long history of political turbulence and enter on a peaceful and cooperative social evolution, for which they possess two priceless assets, namely, the complete absence of racial attitudes and tensions, unlike in the neighbouring United States, and a fund of emotional richness in their human populations which incline them to be informal, hospitable, and friendly. And with the discarding of bigotry and intolerance by Catholicism, which forms the main Christian denomination in these Latin American countries, and with the deeply ingrained religious attitudes of their peoples, we can predict a steady evolution of a rational and progressive Christian religion of the *Bhakti* type among them. This development will be aided powerfully by the Vedānta influences flowing from India since half a century, in a trickle, and since the post-war and post-Indian-Independence years, in a flood. And the most striking aspect of this Indian impact is that it is keenly welcomed and sought-after by these peoples. Spanish-American and Portuguese-American books on Indian Culture, Hindu religion, Vedānta, and Ramakrishna-Vivekananda thought, are coming out of the presses in increasing numbers year after year. Anti-Indian attitudes and forces, which sometimes surface in these countries are nurtured more by powerful outside influences than by indigenous national ones which, on their part, find themselves also thwarted by those very outside influences.<sup>4</sup>

Over the years many distinguished persons and earnest seekers of God have been visiting the Bella Vista Ashrama. They come from interior places of Argentina and from other countries. But because of the vast geographical distances it is difficult for Swamis of the Ramakrishna Order to come often. The distance of the nearest Vedanta Centre to Buenos Aires is more than 9000 kilometres. Even so, during the last decade, the Ashrama and its admirers have had the privilege of meeting Swamis Ritajananda, of France, Bhavyananda, of London, and Swahananda, of the U.S. Their visits have always created a festive atmosphere here. Devotees and admirers enjoy the opportuni-

4. Swami Ranganathananda, *A Pilgrim Looks at the World* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1975) p. 424.



ties of coming into close contact with them, and the Swamis gladly grant personal interviews, hold group-meetings, and also accept invitations to lecture outside the Ashrama.

It is a matter of joy and great satisfaction to write that during the last eighty years many have contributed generously and worked untiringly to help in spreading Vedanta and Sri Ramakrishna's teachings far and wide. Special mention may be made of Humberto P. Barrea, Enrique C. Linton, Jorge Despres, Antonio Morgado, Alberto Terracina, and Otto Schneider whose help was considerable in publications and other activities of the Centre. Doña Olga, Carlota E. Elsbach and Emma Martierena are also to be remembered for their support and sacrifice for this noble cause.

Swami Paratparananda succeeded Swami Vijayananda in 1973 and conducted the affairs of the Centre ably till his return to India in 1988. He translated *Vedāntasāra* into Spanish and completed the translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Professor Otto Schneider helped much in our literary work. He was the President of this Centre for a long time.

Monica Von Kleist, at the age of twenty, came all the way from Letonia. She stayed as a dedicated resident member till she passed away in 1974 at the age of forty-eight. Maria Elena, now eighty-one, has been serving the Ashrama for the last forty six years. Her loving and dedicated presence has always been an inspiration.

It is gratifying that the ennobling and enriching teachings of Vedānta and Sri Ramakrishna are spreading quietly here in Argentina and also in so many other parts of the world, helping to bind humanity together spiritually into one great human family. The life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna in Argentina and in a few other Latin American countries are drawing many spiritually hungry souls. It was very aptly remarked by Mahatma Gandhi and is still true today, "In this age of skepticism, Ramakrishna presents an example of a bright and living faith which gives solace to thousands of men and women who would otherwise have remained without spiritual light."<sup>5</sup>

5. *The Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (Mayavati Advaita Ashrama, 1977) Foreword.

## History Of Sri Ramakrishna's Photograph

PIJUSH KANTI ROY\*

*Sri P. K. Roy has painstakingly coalesced chronicles and scattered information to present this interesting account. Along with the photographs of the Master, and other historical pictures, he gives relevant background material and dates. The author is a devotee, now residing in New Delhi.*

The nineteenth century saw wonderful advances in science and applications of

science making life richer. A whole vista of progress and opportunity seemed to be dawning. For one, in 1826, with the invention of the camera, the first ever photograph was printed. Immediately following came many

\* Translated by Sri N. Sarkar, Puri, Orissa from the original Bengali,

new ideas for improving the camera and the chemical sensitization of negatives. Louis Daguerre, the famous French scientist, achieved fame with his photography, using silver-nitrate bath and silver-iodide sensitized copper plate negatives, and from his improvements on Niépce's prototype camera, posterity was bequeathed the first ever photographs of natural scenes and noted personalities. Among those, we owe much for the three eternally famous photos of Sri Ramakrishna. As, for the first time in history as Aldous Huxley said,<sup>1</sup> we have a record of the details of the life and conversations of a God-man; so for the first time in history we know how an incarnation of God looked. Indeed, it was a God-sent blessing to humanity.

As we know, Sri Ramakrishna lived near, and at times within, the great metropolis of Calcutta for thirty-four years—from 1852 to 1886. Three photographs which have now become world famous were made of him. One, taken in 1879 at the Lily Cottage of the great Brahmo leader, Keshab Chandra Sen, at a festival; a second taken in a metropolitan photographers' studio in Bowbazar, Calcutta in 1881; and a third one taken of Sri Ramakrishna while he was in Dakshineswar, five miles north of Calcutta in 1883, as he was seated on the western terrace of the Radhakanta temple next to the famous temple of the Divine Mother, Bhavatāriṇī. The first two photographs show the Master standing in deep ecstasy. The fourth and fifth photos were made of the Master as he lay on his bed, covered with flowers, a couple of hours after his passing away. It is recorded in the memoirs of one of Sri Ramakrishna's sannyāsi disciples, Swami Akhandanandaji, that there was an uncounted sixth picture of the Master

taken during his lifetime, but which was destroyed. We shall try to bring together some of the details and circumstances surrounding all these five great events in the religious history of the world.

One hundred and twelve years ago neither cameras with sophisticated lenses and flashes, or even with shutters, were widely available. Celluloid film also had yet to be invented. Therefore, amateur and professional photographers were still using only improved prototype field cameras with heavy glass-plate negatives sensitized with silver halides to give black and white pictures. Fortunately, by this time, only a couple of seconds of exposure time was sufficient to make a portrait.

Swami Abhedananda, an apostle of Sri Ramakrishna, said that the Master would always be in an ecstatic mood the moment he faced a camera. This is why he is found in deep samādhi in all his three photographs. In the opinion of Sashi Bhusan Ghosh, a contemporary of the Master, Sri Ramakrishna did not like his photographs being taken, but this was not always true. It is known that the Master readily agreed to visit the studio for that purpose at least one time, and went with the intention of seeing how a camera (he used to call it a machine) functioned. Afterward, it is recorded, he commented, "Ah, today I have enjoyed seeing how photographs are made."<sup>2</sup>

#### *First Photograph:*

About the circumstances of Sri Ramakrishna's first photograph, it may be remembered that Keshab Chandra Sen met him for the first time on 15th March 1875, in the garden house of Jaygopal Sen of Belgharia, near Calcutta. Thereafter he became very close to Sri Ramakrishna and made frequent

1. Sri M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1985) 'Foreword' by Aldous Huxley.

2. Sri M., *Srī Srī Rāmakṛṣṇa Kathāmṛta* Udbodhan, 1986, (Bengali original) p. 1206.



visits to Dakshineswar accompanied by his followers and sometimes by members of his family. He invited Sri Ramakrishna many times to his house on the occasion of Brahma festivals. References are there in Akshay Kumar Sen's book, *Śrī Śrī Rāmakrishna Punthi*, as well as among some notes in the original Bengali *Gospel*. Sri Ramakrishna visited Keshab's house on 21st September 1879 on the occasion of one such festival. The Master's photo was taken on that day, arranged by Keshab. This was the first photograph of him. The Master is seen standing in an ecstatic mood or in samādhi in the midst of a group of Keshab's followers engaged in devotional singing, both right and left arms upraised with hands expressive of inner joy. His nephew Hridayram Mukherjee is supporting him lest he become unsteady. His face seems to glow from an inner bliss. At least ten, and probably many more Brahma devotees sit around. The flower-designed carpet is covered with a white sheet and behind is a venetian blind and at least one opened window. The *Gospel* reads: "Keshab took Sri Ramakrishna to the Lily Cottage on 21st September 1879 to attend the Brahma festival. Sri Ramakrishna went into ecstasy and his photograph was taken along with some of the Brahma devotees. The Master was standing in ecstasy and Hriday was holding him."<sup>3</sup> According to some devotees the festival was being held in the spacious hall encircled by Deodar trees on the eastern side of the building. According to others, it was in the parlour of the first floor; still others say the large garden room of the house. In support of the second opinion it may be said that as the Brahma festivals attracted many devotees, especially when the Master was present, it is most probable that the influential and foresighted Keshab selected the spacious garden room on the ground floor.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

An additional reason for thinking so is that this large garden room was some distance away from the family's living quarters in the house, and completely detached, so it would have been the most fitting place for the frequent Brahma festivals with their group singings, often with dance, drums and cymbals. Further, Keshab made arrangements for taking the Master's photograph. Since the old cameras were not fitted with flash lights the photographers had to depend on sunlight. This room had quite a few doors and windows which must have been a help to them. Swami Nirvananandaji, late Vice President of the Ramakrishna Math, who was very knowledgeable of the history, and Surendra Nath Chakravorty, a well-informed devotee, have thought that the festival and photographing both took place in the spacious garden room. Until 1962, nobody was certain which photographer or studio could have been engaged by Keshab to take the photo. But it is now come to light by the discovery of Swami Vidyatmanandaji, formerly of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, that a print from the original negative in the Vedanta Society bears on its reverse side "The Bengal Photographers, Estd. 1862, 19/8 Bowbazar Street, Calcutta". Of how many prints of the photo were made there is no way to know; nor if, or to whom Keshab supplied copies. Of four copies which could be traced, one at sometime was taken to Southern California, perhaps by one of the early monks who took charge of the foreign centres. Swami Prabhavananda was the Minister-in-charge of the Vedanta Society of Southern California for about fifty years, so that print might have been taken to America by him. The second copy was hung on one of the walls of Lily Cottage. Sri M. has recorded once while Sri Ramakrishna was at Keshab's place: "...The Master was speaking to Keshab, Rajendra and other devotees. His photograph in ecstasy hung on the wall in the room.



RAJENDRA (to Keshab): "Many say that Paramahansa Deva is an incarnation of Sri Chaitanya Deva. Such an ecstatic mood is rarely seen. Jesus Christ, Mohammed and Sri Chaitanya used to plunge into similar ecstasy." *Śrī Śrī Rāmakrishna Kathāmrita* thus confirms that one photo was with Keshab. A third copy was perhaps kept in the ashrama of Pavhari Baba of Gazipore. Pavhari Baba was a contemporary of Sri Ramakrishna, and it is written in the *Gospel* that he kept a photo of the Master.<sup>4</sup> A fourth print of the original is with the Advaita Ashrama.

#### *Second photograph:*

On 10th December 1881 when the second photograph of Sri Ramakrishna was taken, Surendra Nath Mitra took the Master to the studio of the same Bengal Photographers in Bowbazar, to show him how a photograph was taken by camera, and also with the intention of taking his photograph. About this visit Swami Abhedananda has written: "...The second photograph of Sri Ramakrishna was taken in a studio in Bowbazar, Calcutta. Latu and myself accompanied him. ...He entered into ecstasy as soon as he stood placing his hand on the pillar." In 1980, when the writer was searching for the 19/8 address he found that the building did not exist anymore. The businessmen and shop owners around could not furnish much information. Many people had not even heard of the Bengal Photographers. Some of the older businessmen said that the building was probably pulled down when the Calcutta Corporation developed and widened the road at different times. Such being the case, there is no way to investigate how many impressions and prints were made. Since the various centres of the Math have used the block of this photograph for

reproducing in books, it may safely be assumed that at least one original must be in their possession. This photo shows the Master standing with one arm resting on a pillar, a studio prop. He is wearing a loose shirt and a close collar black coat.

#### *Third photograph:*

The famous third photograph of Sri Ramakrishna, best known to most people, and most often published, shows the Master sitting, the upper part of his body almost bare, deeply absorbed in samādhi. This photo is found today in innumerable homes in Bengal and other states of India, and in many parts of the world. It is adored by all classes of people and kept in family shrines, bedrooms and parlours. This photo is worshipped every day on the altars of the one hundred and twenty-eight centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission in India and abroad.

This third photograph of Sri Ramakrishna was taken in October 1883, in the courtyard compound of the Dakshineswar Kali temple and has gained unique popularity over the years. The coloured painting of this pose of the Master is also found widely in towns, villages and cities, and in commercial establishments. Perhaps because of its great popularity, many business concerns bring out calendars printed with it to advertise and to promote public awareness of their enterprise and business activities. It serves as a good advertising medium. One frequently finds it also in buses and taxis plying about the Calcutta and Howrah area, displayed in front of drivers' seats often decorated with fresh flowers and burning incense sticks. It is recorded that when the Master was ill at Cossipore, he prophesied about this photograph that it would become very popular. Nistarini Ghosh, wife of Sri Ramakrishna's great devotee Navagopal, said that the Master once told her "...that it would

4. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 133.



travel in railway carriages and on ocean steamers, and [be carried] by bearers, and that people would carry it in their pockets and even on their watch chains.”<sup>5</sup>

In Sri Ramakrishna's room at Dakshineswar a small wooden couch and a bed which he used are placed side by side. One can see them there just as he used to keep them, even today, and this photo of himself in samādhi hangs on the wall nearby.

Sri Ramakrishna first visited the Star Theatre in Calcutta on 21st September 1884 to see the performance of “Chaitanya Leela” by Girish Chandra Ghosh. The Star Theatre was then situated at 68 Beadon Street, later the name of the Theatre was changed, and still later the Company disbanded. That original Star Theatre building, blessed with so many memories, was demolished in 1931 by the Calcutta Improvement Trust to build the present Chittaranjan Avenue.

After the performance, Sri Ramakrishna was invited backstage by Girish to visit the greenroom and his private office. All the actors and actresses tendered the Master their affectionate greetings. The Master too was much pleased with them. After this, Girish Ghosh introduced the custom among his performers (he himself was one of them) of saluting Sri Ramakrishna before curtain time. Just before going on stage each bows to the photo of Sri Ramakrishna. The practice, it is said, is followed even today in nearly all the theatres of Calcutta, where the Master's photo can be found hanging backstage.

In another famous picture at the Asutosh Building Library at Calcutta University, Sri Ramakrishna is seen at the right in an assembly of famous nineteenth century intellectuals depicted in a large mural painting. Then there is the wonderful oil pain-

ting of Sri Ramakrishna in the sanctum of the Vivekananda Rock Temple at Kanyakumari. All of these show the Master as he was photographed seated in samādhi, and were modelled after the original photo.

This famous photograph came into existence mainly due to the indomitable zeal of Bhavanath Chattopadhyaya, a close friend of Swami Vivekananda and disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. Bhavanath lived in Kalupara in Baranagore (now called Atul Krishna Banerjee Lane). In later years all the marble statues of Sri Ramakrishna were sculpted using it as a model.

One Sunday morning around nine-thirty, sometime in October 1883 (the exact date cannot be ascertained), the photograph under discussion was taken of Sri Ramakrishna as he sat on the verandah of the Radhakanta (*Viṣṇu*) temple. He sat facing the west, in front of him across the paved courtyard were the twelve temples of Lord Śiva built by Rani Rasmani on the eastern bank of the Ganga. The upper part of the Master's body was bare except for one end of his wearing cloth (dhoti) being thrown across the left shoulder. He sat relaxed with his hands loosely joined on his lap, fingers interlacing. Sitting with left foot and leg tucked under the right, his right foot was not visible. He was absorbed in samādhi. Bhavanath had come this day to Dakshineswar with the express intention of photographing the Master, bringing with him Avinash Chandra Dan of Baranagore, a photographer of the Bourne and Shepherd Company of Chowringhee, Calcutta. That the picture was taken at all was only due to the arduous preparations of Bhavanath and Narendra Nath together. Besides them, Mahendra Pal (known as Mahendra Kaviraj of Sinthi), a close lay devotee of Sri Ramakrishna who was a resident of Banerjeepara, Baranagore, and a few other devotees were also present at the request of Narendra Nath. Sri Ramakrishna sat on a small carpet and

5. Sister Devamata, *Sri Ramakrishna and His Disciples* (La Crescenta, Calif: Ananda Ashrama, 1928) p. 154.

entered into samādhi almost immediately. Swami Abhedananda, an apostle of Sri Ramakrishna, said that he entered into samādhi as soon as he faced the camera and the photo was taken during his trance. Bhavanath gave the signal to Avinash Babu to take the photo as soon as the camera was ready. As Sri Ramakrishna was in samādhi, his body slightly leaned to one side, so when Avinash Babu, with his normal professional expertise tried to make Sri Ramakrishna's body straight, he felt that the Master's whole body moved like a thin paper. He was embarrassed and stopped his endeavour. Then as he was urged by Narendra to hurry up, he almost immediately took the impression of this best known likeness of the Master.

There is positive proof that this photo could be taken only due to the unflagging efforts of Bhavanath. In February, 1968 when Satish Chandra Nath met Pratibha Devi (then aged about eighty years), daughter of Bhavanath and widow of Sarat Chandra Mukhopadhyaya, a resident of Bihari Doctor Road in Bhawanipur, Calcutta, she remarked, "Bhavanath, my father, had the wonderful image of Sri Ramakrishna imprinted in his heart. The Master's photo, seated absorbed in God-intoxication, which is now everywhere adored, was taken by the endeavour of Bhavanath."

We have already stated that up till now there is no consensus on the day, month or even the year when this photo was taken. The date was not recorded anywhere at the time. But on the evidence of Surendra Nath Chakravarty, an educationist from North Calcutta, we have come to the conclusion that the photo was made on a Sunday in October, 1883. This has been accepted on the basis of information gathered by Suren Babu from the widow of Manmatha Dan, son of the photographer, Avinash Chandra Dan. It is known from him that Mrs. Dan heard from her father-in-law, Avinash Babu,

that her husband did not have any horoscope [sic]...and that the well known photograph of Sri Ramakrishna was taken by her father-in-law on the terrace of the Viṣṇu temple on a Sunday—which was two days before the birth of her husband, Manmatha, who was born on a Tuesday in October, 1883. It goes without saying that Mrs. Dan gave the information to Suren Babu from her memory. She also informed that she could remember the episode so well, as it was connected with another interesting fact: Avinash Chandra told her that he was given ten rupees towards the expenses incurred in taking the photo, which money, however, he spent to meet the expenses for the birth of his son and as a result he failed to print any copies of the photograph, and avoided Bhavanath for quite sometime as he was feeling embarrassed and ashamed. However, ultimately Bhavanath paid Avinash Chandra a second time and collected the photo prints.

Some senior monks of the Ramakrishna Order expressed their doubts regarding the above date. According to them the photo was likely taken on a day after 2nd February 1884, not in 1883. In support of their contention they said that from the photograph it appeared that Sri Ramakrishna's left elbow was not as natural as the right one since the left appeared to be slightly swollen. It is mentioned by Sri M. in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, in the description of events of 2nd February 1884, that the Master had broken his left arm: "...One day while going toward the pine grove, Sri Ramakrishna had fallen near the railing and dislocated a bone in his left arm. He had been in an ecstatic mood at the time and none had been with him."<sup>6</sup> In either case, of course, the exact date of the photo-taking cannot be determined.

Avinash Chandra used the early type camera. The pre-prepared glass plates were

6. *The Gospel of Ramakrishna*, p. 383.



kept in a wooden case and after taking each photo a new negative would have to be fitted in the camera. Somehow, after taking the Master's photo, while being transferred, the plate dropped and the top portion of the glass was broken. At the time of printing, as there was no alternative, Avinash cleverly cut the glass plate symmetrically so that it would give a good print. For this reason the shaded semi-circular background is noticed above Sri Ramakrishna's head in many photographs. A few days after the prints were made Bhavanath brought them to show to Sri Ramakrishna, who remarked in an ecstatic mood to the devotees that in days to come this photo would be worshipped in many homes. Indeed, from that very day those six prints became treasures of the Master's disciples and copies made of those came to be worshipped in all the Centres of the Ramakrishna Mission.

Normally two negatives are exposed by amateur and professional photographers to insure that in case one is damaged the other will be available. Though it cannot be ascertained for sure, it is not likely that more than one negative could be prepared by Avinash Babu in taking this photograph of Sri Ramakrishna at the behest of Bhavanath some hundred years ago.

Though nothing is recorded about the number of copies Bhavanath secured, on circumstantial evidence we assume that at least two sets, i.e. six copies were printed. Swami Madhavanandaji, the ninth President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, also expressed his belief that there were six original copies. One original print is kept in the main shrine of Belur Math. Along with paintings of other deities, this one was at first hung on the wall in Sri Ramakrishna's room at Dakshineswar. We learn from the *Gospel* that on Dolayatra, 1st March 1885: "...Sri Ramakrishna returned to his room accompanied by M. and another devotee carrying the tray of red

powder. He offered a little of it to all the pictures of gods and goddesses in his room, but not to those of Jesus Christ and himself."<sup>7</sup>

One day Devendra Majumdar, a devotee, came to Dakshineswar and noticed the picture of Sri Ramakrishna hanging on the wall in his room. He had never seen it before. The Master was not there then, and Devendra was looking at it intently. Meanwhile Sri Ramakrishna entered the room and asked, "What are you looking at?" Devendra saluted the Master and said: "I was looking at your picture. It is beautiful." Devendra wanted the picture but was hesitant to ask the Master for it. At last he expressed his desire to Sri Ramakrishna. The Master replied: "Oh no, you can't have that picture. The boys (young disciples) hung it there with great care. You had better ask Avinash, who took the picture. He will make a print for you, but he will charge you for it." The Master also told Devendra to ask Bhavanath, Avinash's neighbour, to remind him to make the print.<sup>8</sup>

With the intention of making it easier to treat Sri Ramakrishna's throat cancer the devotees wanted to bring him to Calcutta. There he could receive constant medical attention. After a short stay in the house of Balaram Bose (now Balaram Mandir at 7, Girish Avenue in Baghbazar), on 2nd October 1885 he was transferred to the small two-storied rented house of Gokul Chandra Bhattacharjee at 55 Shyampukur Street. At the time of his leaving the Master's young disciples brought his photograph from Dakshineswar with the Master's other belongings. The photograph was kept at the Shyampukur house for about two and a half months until Sri Ramakrishna was brought

7. *Ibid.*, p. 712.

8. Swami Chetanananda, *They Lived With God* (St. Louis: Vedanta Society of St. Louis, 1989) p. 313.



to the spacious Cossipore Garden House at 90, Cossipore Road, a northern suburb of Calcutta (now a centre of the Ramakrishna Math). The change was recommended by the Master's physicians for fear that the city's polluted atmosphere would worsen his sufferings. The Master's photograph was kept here for eight months until his passing away on 16th August 1886.

In a few days the lease arrangement for the Cossipore house came to an end. Besides, as there were other obstacles and financial problems, the young disciples moved soon to a less expensive but dilapidated house, that of Kalinath Munsī (of Taki), situated near the Paramanik Ghat Road of Baranagore near the Ganges. (Bhuvan Dutta, a businessman of Baranagore, was the owner of the house at that time.) Thus, on 19th October 1886 the Baranagore Math was started. Though the sannyāsi disciples had already assembled together and the foundation of the Math was laid in Cossipore itself, yet the Ramakrishna Order took its real form in this deserted house of the Munsis' in Baranagore. It was Swami Vivekananda's responsibility to look after the Math. As he instructed, the personal articles used by Sri Ramakrishna, together with the original photograph, were transferred to Baranagore Math. From then the photo was placed on a simple throne and was worshipped ritually with great devotion by Swami Ramakrishnananda. A reference is found in Akshay Kumar Sen's writings that this very photograph was installed from the beginning of the Baranagore period: "...Sashi arranges with great care all the articles—beds, the shoes, and even the hubble-bubble used by the Master, and worships him daily with great devotion." Swami Vivekananda and some of the brother disciples renounced worldly life and accepted the monastic life according to the Vedic tradition, performing the *Virajāhoma*, the worship at the time of taking the vows of the monk (*sannyāsa*).

They assumed new sannyāsi names, leaving their previous family names, in the third week of January, 1887 in this Baranagore Math.

Due to insufficient space, and for other reasons, the Math was shifted to the rented house of Navin Chandra De at Alambazar (opposite the Alambazar Post Office, 95 Deshabandhu Road) in November 1891, the photograph of Sri Ramakrishna, having been now in the Baranagore Math for about five years. The Alambazar Math building was badly damaged by the severe earthquake of 12th June 1897 and was considered unsafe for habitation afterward. The Swami in charge of the Sacramento Vedanta Society in the U.S.A. has described how the photograph was protected by Swami Nirmalanandaji: "...The upper portions of the big pillars of the building started falling down. When all others were out, ...only one, Tulsi Maharaj, covered the Master's photograph and the box containing his relics, placed them on his chest and started going round the inside courtyard chanting all the time, 'Glory to Sri Ramakrishna'." Thus, after being with the Alambazar Math for more than six years—from November, 1891 to January, 1898, the photograph, with the Math, was temporarily shifted from Alambazar to the garden house of Nilambar Mukherjee at Belur across the Ganges on the western bank (48, Lalababu Sayar Road) on 13th February, 1898. Thakur's (the Lord's) photo was thus for the first time brought to the other side of the Ganges, i.e. from Calcutta to Belur in Howrah district. Seven acres of land were meanwhile purchased for the Math at Belur on 3rd March 1898 with the munificent donation of Swamiji's English admirer, Miss Henrietta Muller. Rupees thirty-nine thousand was paid.

In the history of this famous photo, another most important event took place on 12th November, 1898 when the Holy Mother,



divinity. "Swami lectured a great number of times at the Home of Truth and in various halls," Miss MacLeod wrote in her memoirs, "but perhaps the most outstanding lecture I ever heard was his talk on 'Jesus of Nazareth,' when he seemed to radiate a white light from head to foot, so lost was he in the wonder and the power of Christ."<sup>46</sup>

Swamiji's last words to the people of southern California was a familiar theme. In his lecture "The Great Teachers of the World," Swamiji stirred his audience:

46. His Eastern and Western Admirers, *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1964), p. 246.

Each one of these Teachers has been great ; each one has left something for us ; they have been our Gods. We salute them, we are their servants ; and, all the same, we salute ourselves ; for if they have been Prophets and children of God, we also are the same. They reached their perfection, and we are going to attain ours now. Remember the words of Jesus: 'The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!' This very moment let every one of us make a staunch resolution: 'I will become a Prophet, I will become a messenger of Light. I will become a child of God, nay, I will become a God!'<sup>47</sup>

47. *The Complete Works*, Vol. IV, 134.

## IMAGE AS DISCOURSE IN RAMAKRISHNA

(Continued from page 140)

tions, inherent risks and the modes of activating energies both physical and psychic.

But, then, Ramakrishna's is not just a clever creative sensibility, because such cleverness usually does not transcend the level of effective surprise stemming from the blending of discordant objects and emotions. For Ramakrishna, however, an image, even the one rooted in the physicality of clay, is charged with the primal energy of undifferentiated consciousness, its physicality potential with the revelatory sweep of transcendence. (Hence his admonition to M who was sceptical about 'meditating on clay images': "Why clay? These images are the embodiments of consciousness". P. 127). In effect, perceived carefully, Ramakrishna's extraordinary ordering of images offers

correctives to purely literalist, aesthetic approaches to Reality. In this sense, almost all the images in Ramakrishna are physiological precursors and symbolic correlatives for the eventual emergence of that psychological focussing which in its full sophisticated interiorization is *dhyana*, meditation.

For the *sādhaka*, in these terms, the effort at integrating the apparently disconnected contexts is wresting order out of chaos. This process is in itself emblematic of, though not fully identical with, the meditative, contemplative modes. To launch on such an integrated study is, as it were, to define for oneself an important component of all *sādhanā*, *swādhyāya*: the *discovery* of the truth of study based not so much on sight as interior, 'imagistic' *in-sight*.

of the Mother's House (No. 1, Udbodhan Lane, Baghbazar, Calcutta) and Holy Mother regarded it as the Master himself. When the silver throne became discoloured in recent years, it has been replaced by a wooden one designed by the artist Ramananda Banerjee. It is still being worshipped with all care.

Aghormani Devi of Kamarhati (popularly known as Gopal's mother), blessed by Sri Ramakrishna, obtained the third print of the original photograph from Bhavanath. Swami Vireswaranandaji confirmed this. Gopaler Ma used to worship Sri Ramakrishna in the photo at her house. After she passed away on 8th July 1908, the photo was kept for a time by Sister Nivedita and later was retained by Holy Mother in Baghbazar. Holy Mother passed away on 21st July 1920 and when the temple dedicated to her memory was erected on the bank of the Ganga inside Belur Math, this photo of Sri Ramakrishna worshipped by Gopaler Ma was installed beside Holy Mother's own photo. It may be seen there today, but it also has become somewhat faded over the years.

Possibly in 1890, sometime before he left for the second visit to the U.S.A., Swami Vivekananda gave the fourth copy of the original to his friend Pramadadas Mitra of Varanasi. Pramada Babu kept the print carefully inside a volume of Encyclopedia Britannica where it lay undisturbed for about four decades. Swami Sankarananda, who became the seventh President of the Ramakrishna Math in 1951, recovered this print from Mr. Mitra's house in Varanasi, probably in 1929. Whereas the other three prints already mentioned got discoloured due to constant exposure to light, this one being well protected remained in good condition. It was recovered with a distinct and bright image. Swami Sankaranandaji gave it to the Advaita Ashrama to be photographed so that new negatives and new prints could be prepared. It is learnt from

the Advaita Ashrama that the original print is still with them.

The fifth copy of the original negative was with Swami Abhedanandaji for many years. Regarding it, Swami Prajnanananda, the present President of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Math (Raja Rajkrishna Street, Calcutta) remarked, "We have seen the original photo of Sri Ramakrishna with Swami Abhedanandaji. The photograph was rather faded as it was very old." We thus feel certain that this fifth copy was one of the originals. It was further learned from the authorities of the Vedanta Math that this photo was preserved inside Swami Abhedanandaji's notebook for many years, but was spoiled in course of time due to paper insects. Thus the fifth copy does not exist anymore.

Depending on circumstantial evidence, a conclusion may be drawn that the sixth copy of the original print was with Swami Akhandanandaji, another apostle of Sri Ramakrishna who became the third President of the Math and the Mission in 1934. Wherever he travelled he used to carry the photograph. He was in Tibet, possibly in the year 1888, as an itinerant monk. It is known from the reminiscences of Swami Akhandananda that ... "in a place called Chekra, near Kailash, a rich Lhasa Khamba (gypsy) became totally oblivious of the outer world for sometime while holding the Master's photograph in his hands. On regaining his normal awareness he asked, 'Where did you get this photograph? Kindly leave it with me; I shall worship it daily. This must be a photograph of God Himself. Otherwise why should I have such realization by mere touch of it? No ordinary human being could have such face and eyes.'

Then he placed the photo on an altar where there were images of Buddha and other gods, and worshipped it with lamps and incense. The Master's photo was with him as long as I lived in that place. I used



to carry always with me the Master's photo during my travels, so I could not give him the picture. I also used to worship it whenever I got an opportunity." From this, as well as from the remarks of Swami Niramayanandaji, who was graced with close association with Swami Akhandanandaji, we can be fairly certain that the photograph with Akhandanandaji was one of the original prints. Regarding it Niramayanandaji once mused, "Where could you get that photo now? At first the life of a wandering monk and then the relief work swept over him like a storm. I do not know where that photo could be, ...but a similar one worshipped by Holy Mother is here in the Udbodhan." Nor further information about the photo could be gathered from the Sargachi Ashrama (Murshidabad District, W. B.) which Swami Akhandanandaji founded and where he stayed for many years.

In addition to the six prints from the original negative, whether others were produced by contact print method could not be ascertained even after thorough research. Now there is hardly any doubt that Bhavanath got printed more than one hundred years ago only six copies of this well known photograph, the Master in the seated posture, the third and last photograph taken while he was living.

#### *Fourth and fifth photographs:*

When Sri Ramakrishna gave up the mortal coil in the early hours of 16th August 1886 at Cossipore many of the disciples found it

hard to accept that he had entered Mahasamadhi never to return. When in the morning they carried his body on the cot to the ground floor, even then some were under the impression that the Master was not expired, but was in samādhi. Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar dispelled that impression and asked them to have a photograph made, himself giving Rs. 10/- toward the expense. A photographer was called, and it is said that Ramchandra Babu asked Narendra to stand beside the Master's bed with all the other young disciples. This he did and the photo was taken. Evidently another one (fifth) was also taken since some of the devotees in the back are seen to have changed their positions in the fifth, and Narendra, the upper part of his body bare in the fifth, is seen to have covered his shoulders with a wearing cloth in the fourth. These photos are seldom published and are kept with the Advaita Ashrama.

Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, and other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna used to see the living presence of the Master in his photographs, and not merely the picture of him. Swami Vijnananandaji used to say to his monastic disciples: "Do not consider it as merely a photograph. He is living in it; he is watching and hearing everything." An old monk in the Udbodhan once asked the Holy Mother, "Is the Master alive in his photograph?" Holy Mother replied, "Of course he is living there. He and his image are one and the same. The photograph is his image." And she added further: "Look on at his picture; you will have everything!"

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You will gain everything if you but take refuge in the Master. Renunciation alone was his splendour.

*Holy Mother*

# Sri Ramakrishna's Relevance For An Emerging World-View

S. SRINIVASACHAR

*This in-depth essay, takes a wide look at the world and shows that humanity has always been beset with crises, especially the spiritual malady that is even today a great sorrow to mankind. The down-to-earth practical spirituality of Sri Ramakrishna and his universality offers a new way. Sri S. Srinivasachar, a scholar, was formerly Chief Editor of Govt. of India Publications. He is currently on the teaching staff of The Ramakrishna Institute of Moral and Spiritual Education in Mysore.*

*"The religion of love is apart from all religions. The lovers of God have no religion but God alone."*

*Jalal al-Din Rumi (13th century)*

*"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you?"*

*St. Paul, 1 Corinthians 3:16*

It is over a hundred years since Sri Ramakrishna passed away. During this interval many things have happened in the field of science which could not have been foreseen in the nineteenth century. The premises of Descartes and Newton, which started the modern scientific era, have been found inadequate to explain many a phenomenon. In a reversal of the time process, as it were, the future is impinging on the present compelling us to re-discover the spiritual dimensions of life and to re-orient our thinking accordingly. This is evidenced in a small but significant measure by a growing interest in the mystic experiences and philosophy of old Seers, and the newly admitted relevance of religion for a more balanced perception of man and his place in this fast shrinking world. Some, at least, are able to discern the faint outlines of a new world outlook in which dogmatic theologies and externals

of religion are often incongruous and even harmful. The rich and varied heritage of man in religious experience and philosophic thought has had to co-exist uneasily at times in the modern company of the more glamorous scientific heritage. The quest for truth which is the goal of all higher human endeavour cannot continue on two mutually divergent roads—Oriental and Occidental, or of faith and reason. Our ideal of a happy union of religion and science may yet remain a distant possibility, but such an alliance seems more predictable now than a hundred years ago because of its inevitable critical importance to us for global survival. Sri Ramakrishna's mystic insight is of the same substance as that of other mystics down the ages who shed light on the reality of the Spirit in all religions and climes. The quintessence of Sri Ramakrishna's strenuous exertions, which transformed his life into a sublime poem, has a message for this tormented world. It is a message that cuts across the multiplicity of faiths and the hostilities they have generated. That message is: Beneath all the plurality of faiths lives one basic truth, one essential taste, and one flavour—that of LOVE which, besides binding man to God, also binds man to man.

We can perhaps start by making a small but overdue concession to reason by attempt-



ting a re-evaluation of Ramakrishna's life in the light of the experiences of other mystics, together with some of the latest trends in scientific thinking which are somewhat startling because of their closeness to mystic revelations. It is this closeness that cradles the seen of a more meaningful World View in which man's future destiny acquires an enduring spiritual dimension.

Someday our concept of man and his place in the universe will have to change and yield to more convincing and more acceptable perceptions. So far, with all the breathtaking advances that science has made, these perceptions have moved only from one set of inherent limitations to another. At all times and in all countries, however, there have been seers who pondered deeply on the dimensions of experience in its totality, and who could discern the basic harmony that lies at the root of all. In often assertive and pithy language they proclaimed the validity of a *Universal Principle* governing everything. Such questions as "Does God exist?" and "What is the purpose of human life in the universe?", which bother the ordinary votaries of science, did not trouble the seers because they got their answers direct from contemplative experience. (The Sanskrit word for philosophy is *darśana*—that which is *seen* or experienced.) They also recognized the infinite variety that we see—differences in names, forms and colours—not as a part of *being*, but of *becoming*. We recognize their experiences as spiritual insight, very different from observance of religious externals which emphasize mostly the spirit of conformity and tradition.

The mystics who made discovery of truth the pivotal point of their earthly existence have belonged to all nationalities and to all ages. Whether history has designated them as pagans, heretics or heathens does not make a difference in the validity of their experience. If we were to dismiss their experiences as subjective, hallucinatory or

psychic we would be doing violence to the credibility of many men of eminence who swear by the pursuit of truth in science or religion. Even an atheist of the eminence of Bertrand Russell conceded: 'It is important not to caricature the doctrine of mysticism, in which there is, I think, a core of wisdom.'<sup>1</sup> These seers were men and women of high moral integrity whose religious genius was to develop in themselves (to borrow Einstein's picturesque phrase) "a cosmic religious feeling". Needless to say, any discussion on these people would be futile or counterproductive unless at the outset we concede the validity of their experience. Accepting them, we can see a whole galaxy of mystic philosophers, from Plotinus to Hegel in Europe; from the Upaniṣadic seers to Sri Aurobindo in India; from the Sufi Abu Yazid al-Bistami (9th century) in the Islamic world, and a host of others from among the Hebrews, the Chinese, the Japanese and the Tibetans, to Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.

In this galaxy of countless stars, the one nearest to us in point of time and influence is Sri Ramakrishna. A product of the Hindu religion, he demonstrated in his life that far from being only 'personal' or 'Hindu', the experience of God can be pagan, Buddhist, Christian, or Islamic; that in this experience, no frontiers exist and no demands are made on sensory knowledge. He laid bare the profile of the moral and spiritual crisis which has been dogging man since his stepping into the modern era. Today no sensible person questions the reality of this crisis. No one can afford to. But we are all bewildered at the growing magnitude of this moral and spiritual crisis and what its predictable effects will be on the future of man and civilization. With the aggressive march of

1. "Religion and Science", *Home University Library of Modern Knowledge* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1956).



materialism, co-terminus with the achievements of modern science, there has been a compelling need to re-examine the validity of older perceptions for an emerging world which for its sheer physical survival will require enormous spiritual strength. Today, it is not the men of religion alone who speak of this crisis, but scientists too have been joining the chorus, for they are not, by themselves, able to reconcile the two polarized forces—the material and the spiritual. The most spectacular thing happening today is the gradual disappearance of the long familiar chasm that once divided science from religion and religion from spiritual insight. And the ecological problems peculiar to our age that occupy so much of our mind have to be traced mainly to the erosion of our spiritual strength (self-control) on the one hand, and to our relentless quest for power over nature, on the other.

In olden times, only men endowed with deep insight could appreciate the inter-relatedness of matter, mind, environment and spirit. They could see the organic unity between life in all its manifestations and the world of matter and motion. They were persons who, in Einstein's words, felt "*the futility of human desires and aims, and the sublimity and marvellous order which reveal themselves both in nature and in the world of thought. Individual existence impresses [them] as a sort of prison and [they] want to experience the universe as a single, significant whole.*"<sup>2</sup> This experience was, no doubt, intuitive and personal but it was also universal in its sweep and significance. In this context, we are forced to examine and re-evaluate the amazing life and contributions of the nineteenth century saint of Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna, who was a stranger to scholarship, semantics and pedantry.

2. *Ideas and Opinions* by Albert Einstein (Calcutta: Rupa & Co., 1984) p. 38.

Sri Ramakrishna was a simple man of religion whose profound accomplishments lay wrapped in the glow of a child's innocence. He went through the externals of several religions with a single overpowering desire to get at their inner truth. The sum-total of his life not only confirmed but enriched what many seers and prophets of yore had previously said about the unity of the Godhead and the governing principle of love, and the harmony which bind man to God and man to man in fraternity. After experiencing different states of mystic rapture, he unravelled a world of Supreme Consciousness which he found to be more real and more universal than our immediate world of plurality. Even though his frame was frail and subject to all the natural ailments, he demonstrated that spiritual exertions of unbelievable results were possible for anyone who could dare to pursue truth relentlessly. His life demonstrated to all that it is possible to experience truths beyond our sense perceptions.

Sri Ramakrishna was indeed a mystic; but his personality and wisdom were not confined to mystic experiences alone. He never lost his foothold in ordinary life and the real world. He did not retire like a hermit from society for a life of seclusion and *nirvāna*. Nor did he ridicule the externals of religion as unimportant or meaningless. He was too humble to claim for himself the status of a saint or prophet, which world was ready to accord him. His personal "encounters with God" and the wisdom that emanated from this experience are of interest to us now, than ever, as we search for the essentials of a universal religion which can possibly help to shape the UNIVERSAL MAN of the future. In this one may run the risk of being dismissed as a visionary or a dreamer of things that can never come to be; but it is also true that great achievements have often been born of dreams. In any case, Sri Ramakrishna's life and message



merits closer study. His life was one of universalism in practice. On the need for this message of universalism to spread across the world, Vivekananda said:

All narrow, limited, fighting ideas of religion have to go. All sect ideas or tribal or national ideas of religion must be given up...

As the human mind broadens, its spiritual steps broaden too. The time has already come when a man cannot record a thought without its reaching to all corners of the earth; by merely physical means, we have come into touch with the whole world; so the future religions of the world have to become as universal, as wide.<sup>3</sup>

The need to understand Sri Ramakrishna and through him the religious ethos of India cannot be better expressed than through the following words of Albert Schweitzer:

I found Romain Rolland's penetrating studies on Ramakrishna and Vivekananda very inspiring...

Indian thought has greatly attracted me since in my youth I first became acquainted with it through reading the works of Arthur Schopenhauer. From the very beginning I was convinced that *all thought is really concerned with the great problem of how man can attain to spiritual union with infinite Being*. My attention was drawn to Indian thought because it is busied with this problem and because by its nature it is mysticism. What I liked about it also was that Indian ethics are concerned with the behaviour of man to all living beings and not merely with his attitude to his fellow-man and to human society.

But...I was assailed by doubts as to whether the view made familiar to us Europeans...—the view namely that Indian thought is completely governed by the idea of world and life negation—is right. ...There are two great fundamental problems to all thought (European and Indian): (1) the problem of world and life affirmation and world and life negation, and (2) the problems of ethics and the relations between ethics and these two forms of man's spiritual attitude to Being.<sup>4</sup>

What assailed this scholar of great

3. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989) p. 67.

4. Albert Schweitzer. *Indian Thought and Its Development*, Trans. Mrs. Charles E. B. Russell (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957) pp. VI, VII.

eminence, and continues to assail many others, is whether Indian thought has (in its pursuit of spiritual Knowledge) emphasized the world-negating attitude *to the detriment* of the life-affirmation attitude. Doubtless, India's philosophic thought which greatly influenced Sri Ramakrishna, contains both the strands, namely, the so-called doctrine of 'world-negation' (which is really a misnomer for the spiritual practice of giving more importance to God than to the world—*Māyā-vada*), and so-called 'life affirmation', which emphasizes the world more. Yet it should be emphasized that both of these are given important recognition in Indian thought—each in its sphere, and have given rise to the familiar and important concepts of *Nivṛtti* (detachment and renunciation), and *Pravṛtti* (attachment and duty). These will be treated at some length in reference to Ramakrishna's life and sayings.

#### *A Born Mystic*

*Those who are eternally free do not have to enter worldly life. Their desire for enjoyment has been satisfied with their very birth.*<sup>5</sup>

*Sri Ramakrishna*

We owe it to the famous Bengali diarist and disciple of Sri Ramakrishna—Mahendranath Gupta, also called Master Mahashay (meaning school master)—that we have authentic records of the Seer's activities and sayings right from his first day of acquaintance with Sri Ramakrishna in February 1882. This record, spanning a period of only the last four and a half years of Sri Ramakrishna's fifty-year journey as a mortal (he passed away on August 16, 1886) provides picturesque glimpses into his personality as a man, a mystic, a philosopher and a spiritual guide. In Mahatma Gandhi's

5. Sri M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1985) p. 386.



words: "He was a living embodiment of godliness. In this age of scepticism, Ramakrishna presents an example of a bright and living faith which gives solace to thousands who would otherwise have remained without spiritual light."<sup>6</sup>

This spiritual insight of Sri Ramakrishna is doubtless a culmination in modern times of the religious and philosophical heritage of India. India's Vedantic thought has had to contend all along with problems related to (1) *the nature of the Absolute or Brahman*, (2) *the nature of the individual soul or Atman*, and (3) *the relation between the two—that is, the Knower and the Known, the Creator and the Creation, and the individual soul and the Infinite Being*. Though he was not a scholar in the multitude of scholastic commentaries on the Vedic lore, Ramakrishna spoke from the depths of his spiritual insight and was a Seer, as much as any of the *Rṣis*. On many an occasion he discounted scholastic disputations as fruitless exercises which would not carry the disputants any nearer to knowledge of God. The quest of his life was for genuine God-experience, and in the fruition of this quest, on however personal a level, we see him discover for himself a deep-seated harmony in all the great religions of the world. He emphatically taught his disciples that such an experience was accessible to anyone who had the courage, conviction and discipline to seek it.

Sri Ramakrishna cannot be easily judged or categorized. His was a transcendental personality. He often appeared eccentric to those who had yet to understand him. Childlike in disposition, with hardly any formal education, he knew only how to read and write in Bengali. Though born in a pious Brahmin family, he neither studied

Sanskrit like a pundit, nor took up responsibilities as head of a family or household. However, he was precocious! By six he was familiar with all the stories of the Indian epics and *Purānas*. From his childhood he was prone to experiences of trance and ecstasy, and these became more and more frequent with him as he grew older. Whenever within his sight or hearing he saw something beautiful or heard the melody of God's name being sung, he tended to lose himself in deep emotion, sometimes becoming completely oblivious of his surroundings. His experience was basically aesthetic—an experience in which he did not comprehend reality in parts, but as an organic whole, of which he was himself an indistinguishable part. By divine providence rather than by choice he started as an ordinary temple-priest, but soon engaged in a mystic quest which in moments of fruition wiped out both the image and the worshipper in ineffable ecstasy. When he spoke, the content of his language was that of the *Upaniṣads*. Humble to the point of self-effacement,<sup>7</sup> he also spoke with supreme self-assurance and authority on matters of philosophy, ethics, religion and realization.<sup>8</sup>

7. "I am the most insignificant of the insignificant, the lowest of the lowly. I am the servant of the servants of God. Krishna alone is great."

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*,

8. If an occasion arose, he spoke with an astonishing accuracy on the nuances of meaning of abstruse words or points of philosophy. Once, when a disciple of his, Hazra, with scholarly pretensions explained *Tattvajñāna* as the knowledge of twenty-four tattvas, or cosmic principles, in which he included the six passions, Sri Ramakrishna smilingly corrected him thus: "Listen to him! Notice how he explains *tattvajñāna*! The word really means 'knowledge of the Self'. The word 'tat' means the 'Supreme Self' and 'tvam' means the embodied soul. One attains Supreme Knowledge or *Tattvajñāna* by realizing the identity of the embodied soul with the Supreme Self. ...Hazra only argues. This moment perhaps he

6. Swami Nikhilananda, *Vivekananda, A Biography* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1953) p. xvi.



During the time of his religious austerities, his one consuming desire was to have the continual vision of God whom he worshipped as the Divine Mother Kali. As a child, separated from its mother longs for her presence, so he prayed, beseeched, and wept for Kali like a forlorn child when she did not materialize. Sometimes in great longing of soul he would retire into the jungle not far from the temple and meditate under an amalaki tree, *sans* clothes, *sans* his sacred thread, *sans* food and water. When Kali did not show Herself, his intense longing would become unbearable. He would cry out, "Oh, Mother, another day is spent in vain; could it be that Thou dost not exist? Art Thou merely a dream of diseased minds?" When his elders proposed matrimony as a possible cure for his eccentric behaviour, he suggested himself, a child bride from a different village, and went through the ritual of marriage. When the bride did come to join him twelve years later in the full bloom of youth, he welcomed her not as a wife but as the Divine Mother incarnate, and throughout his life both of them were committed to an unusual partnership in celibacy. Explaining his attitude to women, he once observed to Master Mahashay, "I am very much afraid of women...I wouldn't allow one to come near me. Now I persuade my mind in various ways to look upon women as forms of the Blissful Mother. ...Woman monopolizes three quarters of the mind, which should be given to God. And then, after the birth of a child, almost the whole mind is frittered away on the family. Then what is it that is left to give to God?"<sup>9</sup> Yet it was not hatred of women that Sri Ramakrishna taught, but

understands, but the next moment he is his old self again!" Again, he corrected Hazra's belief that only those who are born-Brahmins attain liberation. Everyone, even those of low birth can attain liberation through *Bhakti*, or love of God devoid of selfish motive.

<sup>9</sup>. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 593-94,

that the impure or sexually oriented attitude towards her must be eschewed by spiritual aspirants. He used to say that to regard all women as one's own mother is a very good attitude.

Once Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar, a householder, objected to Sri Ramakrishna that "both woman and money are useful in life." Sri Ramakrishna replied, "Yes, for those who think that way...but a man forgets God if he is entangled in the world of maya through a woman. ...But he who truly realizes that all women are manifestations of the Divine Mother may lead a spiritual life..."<sup>10</sup> Sri Ramakrishna's attitude towards *Kāmini* (lust) and *Kāñchana* (lucre) was one of uncompromising revulsion, and he taught that one who wants to attain God must renounce them. Lust and money symbolized for him desire in its grossest form, which binds man to the world, making God-experience impossible. But on this account he did not decry the value of a householder's life. His plea was that even as one carried on his worldly duties according to dharma, he should not lose sight of the higher goal which was both moral and spiritual. He said: "Yes, you can perform them too (referring to a householder's worldly duties to earn to maintain his family) but only as much as you need for your livelihood. At the same time you must pray to God, 'O God, make my worldly duties fewer and fewer. I find that I forget Thee when I am involved in too many activities.'"<sup>11</sup> On another occasion he observed: "There is nothing wrong in your being in the world (of activity). Do your duty with your one hand and hold on to God with the other. After the duty is over you will hold on to God with both hands!"<sup>12</sup>

Though Sri Ramakrishna was a God-

<sup>10</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 965.

<sup>11</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>12</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

intoxicated *sannyāsi* who could experience God-consciousness whenever he liked, he did not advocate the life of a monk for everybody. He reminded his disciples of the eight fetters that bound a man to worldly life, namely, shame, hatred, fear, caste, lineage, pride of good conduct (meaning social approbation) grief, and secretiveness". He maintained that unless a person had all the basic disciplines which helped renunciation, he should not think of *sannyāsa*. "The rules for the life of a *sannyāsi*," he said, "are very strict indeed. If a man takes the garb of a *sannyāsi*, he must act exactly like one. ...He should renounce 'woman' and 'gold' for his own welfare. Even if he is unattached, and consequently not in danger, still, in order to set an example to others, he must not keep 'woman' and 'gold' near him. The *sannyāsi*, the man of renunciation, is a world teacher. It is his example that awakens the spiritual consciousness of men."<sup>13</sup>

Ramakrishna's admonitions regarding the respective duties of a monk and a householder were not those of 'a man of the world', trying to be pragmatic because of an inability to reconcile the earthly and spiritual cravings. He did not see in a householder's life, or the performance of one's duties in the world, any deterrance to spiritual quest so long as his mind was rivetted on God. In another context while discussing with Bankim Chandra the relevance of scholarship for knowing God, Ramakrishna said: "Why do you bother so much about the world, creation, science and all that? Your business is to *eat mangoes*. What need have you to know how many hundreds of trees there are in the orchard, how many thousands of branches, and how many millions of leaves? You have come to the garden to eat mangoes. Go ahead and eat them. Man is born in this world to realize God; it is not good

to forget that and divert the mind to other things."<sup>14</sup>

#### *A Message For Every Age*

Sri Ramakrishna's consuming passion was to enjoy constant communion with God in the company of devotees. He urged one and all to do likewise—a proposition which could be daunting, if not laughable, to many. He did not believe in miracle-mongering. On the other hand he condemned miracles and miracle-men as "wanderers from the path of truth, with their minds entangled in the meshes of psychic powers." In a beautiful parable in which a man claimed to have learnt, after long penance and practice, the art of walking on water, Sri Ramakrishna observed that what he achieved after a lifetime of exertion could have been accomplished by paying a few annas to a boatman who would have ferried him across the river. He always spoke in the simple language of common men. But he had a wonderful ability to use appropriate parables and stories to illustrate his every point. Those stories and parables often had a touch of humour and ridicule. He loved to sing, for he had a good voice, and as lofty ideas melted in the melody of a song, he experienced divine joy. To him music was the language of God, a reminder that we live in a world which is a compound of harmony, melody and rhythm. (Wasn't it Robert Browning who said, "There is no truer truth obtainable by man than comes of music."?)

Sri Ramakrishna's dialogues were always interspersed with devotional songs, sung by his talented disciples. He often participated, singing in chorus or solo, and would very often fall into a state of divine intoxication. We, even as commoners lost in the grime and noise of life, experience music in the crimson glory of a beautiful sunrise or sunset,

13. *Ibid.*, p. 442-43.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 672.



the steady gurgle of a mountain stream, the haunting sound of a cataract or beholding distant peaks robed in the pure serenity of snow. Doesn't the sweet voice of a child yet untouched by the wiles of the world, fall on everyone's ears like divine music? Or the timely shedding of a tear or kind word? Perhaps at such times the gods look down on the world of man approvingly. "It was this artistic emotion of Ramakrishna," said Romain Rolland, "a passionate instinct for the beautiful that was the first channel bringing him into contact with God." Dearer far than all to Ramakrishna was the music begotten of the soft stillness of silence when he turned inward on a journey into the labyrinths of his own mind to discover truths invisible to the naked eye—as Wordsworth put it, to behold "...truths that wake, to perish never". In joy or in pain, music came to him as a natural language of prayer, to lead him along on a paved path to ecstatic communion. He could experience music in the noiseless burst of yonder flowers at the soft caress of the rising sun. He discerned beauty in clean and simple living, with no undue attachment to women or money, in generous giving, in stainless love and the pursuit of the noble and sublime ideal. Once Sri Ramakrishna remarked, "There is a special manifestation of God's power in a man who has an outstanding gift for music."<sup>15</sup> The way of music is to *suggest*, and of its literature to *affirm* and to guide. To Ramakrishna music and sensory knowledge came as aids to God experience. Unless one's mind was bent on God, he considered the pleasures derived from learning or aesthetics to be transitory.

As said before, Sri Ramakrishna was neither a scholar nor did he possess oratorical skills. He never quoted long passages from the scriptures to befuddle the mind of people. There were times when he said that

scholarship by itself could be a hindrance rather than a help to God-realization, because to an honest seeker, every accretion of knowledge only reveals new areas of ignorance. But on this account he did not decry learning or learned people. He observed, "As long as I live, so long do I learn."

It was this unusual man who after death 'lived' to inspire a movement of great significance for millions of people, not only Indians, but people of the world. His message of universality and the harmony of all religious experience crossed oceans and continents, appealing to many men and women. He also had an uncanny ability to spot talent and sincerity of faith in others. His choice fell on Narendranath to carry the torch he had lighted. When he fell seriously ill and the end was not too far away, we learn that he one day called this favourite disciple of his to his side and communicated the most fateful decision of his life. Narendra could not believe his ears at first when the Master touched him and said: "Today I have given you my all and am no better than a fakir, possessing nothing. With the powers I have transmitted to you, you will accomplish great things in the world. Not until this is accomplished will you return [to your source]"<sup>16</sup> What we see today in the light of this torch is not a new religion or a new dogma, but the implant of a new seed and new hope into this critical age. In Swami Vivekananda's words: "His message was to proclaim and make clear the fundamental unity of all religions. ...This great teacher of the nineteenth century made no claim for himself...because he had realized that in reality they are all part and parcel of the ONE ETERNAL RELIGION."

If Sri Ramakrishna was a product of the Hindu religious ethos, he was equally a product of the nineteenth century India, assailed with the pangs of rebirth into

15. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

16. *Vivekananda: A Biography*, p. 66.

modernity. "As a lamp does not burn without oil, so a man cannot live without God. ...God is in all men, but all men are not in God; that is the reason for [man's] suffering."<sup>17</sup> This was his deep conviction. After his many years of religious austerities, when his young disciples began to come to him, Sri Ramakrishna came face to face with the conditions of despair, ugliness, hypocrisy, ignorance and the intellectual and spiritual turmoil that raged in contemporary India. The Brahma Samaj, the Arya Samaj, the work of Christian missions engaged in proselytization, the Islamic legacy, the Theosophical Movement, the traditionalism of Brahmanical orthodoxy, the aggressive march of materialism, the mesmeric hold of Europe's science and technology, the oppressive attitudes of a caste-ridden society, and above all, the pervasiveness of poverty of an enslaved people, constituted the Indian scene. It was a situation which for most people seemed confusing, challenging and unnerving.

The educated few were under the spell of Europe's industrial culture. Sri Ramakrishna's coming into contact with men of great learning like Keshab Chandra Sen, Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Bankim Chandra and others only strengthened his conviction that ... "books [and] scriptures...only point out the way to reach God. After finding the way, what more need is there of books and scriptures? Then comes the time for action."<sup>18</sup> Sri Ramakrishna's life and energy was exhausted by his incurable illness before his message could reach the wider audience of the world. 'The time for action' that he spoke of began only when his favourite disciple, Narendra, took over his Master's unfinished task. What this young man was

able to achieve in a brief span of ten years after the Master's demise has become the well known saga of resurgent India. Today, however, more than a century later, amidst many changes wrought by time, we have once again the need to re-evaluate the lives and sayings of these two men for an emerging world-view, brought about not by religion, but by science.

Two basic questions, as old as philosophy and religion, still seem to demand convincing answers:

(a) *Can mystic experience be credited with scientific validity?* and

(b) *Can religion, purified of the accretions of history and mythology supply a new and acceptable world-view?*

Perhaps the quest for answers to these questions will continue as long as man is assailed by doubts, and mistakes the constructs of religion for pristine religious experience itself. If the gods we worship are only wish-beings, products of our conception of religious phenomena, then Sri Ramakrishna has an answer to this doubt. The dialogue in the *Gospel* between him and a Brahma devotee who did not believe in image worship is interesting:

BRAHMO: "Sir, is it good to worship God with form—an image of the deity made of clay?"

SRI RAMAKRISHNA: "You do not accept God with form. That is all right. The image is not meant for you. For you it is good to deepen your feeling towards your own ideal. ...When the believers in the Personal God worship the images of Kali and Durga, with what feeling do they love their Deity! You should accept that feeling. You don't have to accept the image." Again,

SRI RAMAKRISHNA (to the Brahma): "Well, it seems to me that both the formless Deity and God with form are real. What do you say?"

BRAHMO: "Sir, I compare the formless God to the electric current, which is not seen with the eyes but can be felt."

SRI RAMAKRISHNA: "Yes, both are true. God with form is as real as God without form. Do you know what it is like to describe God only as formless? It is like a man's playing only a

17. Max Mueller, *The Life and Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna* (Calcutta: S. Gupta & Brothers, 1978) pp. 76, 106.

18. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 729.



monotone on his flute, though it has seven holes. But on the same ways the believers in a personal God enjoy Him! They enjoy Him through many different attitudes: the serene attitude, the attitude of a servant, a friend, a mother, a husband or a lover.

"You see, the thing is somehow or other to get into the Lake of the Nectar of Immortality. Suppose one person gets into It by propitiating the Deity with hymns and worship, and you are pushed into it. The result will be the same....On attaining the Knowledge of Brahman, the Infinite, without form or shape and beyond mind and words ...man is overpowered with bliss. He becomes silent. Who will speak? Who will explain?"<sup>19</sup>

To a mystic and seer like Sri Ramakrishna, the journey through this world of plurality to the worship of a *Saguna* Deity, and from the worship of a God with form and attributes to the realization of the formless Brahman (*Nirguna Brahman*), is a pilgrimage of the human spirit. The goal is, as all the great mystics have said, to seek and find bliss in the union or identity of the self with the transcendent Self. This state of Bliss is explained in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (Ch. III. 6.1) thus:

"He knows Bliss as Brahman; for from Bliss, indeed all these things originate; having been born, they are sustained by Bliss."<sup>20</sup>

The *Kena Upaniṣad* elaborates this point thus:

"That which man does not comprehend with the mind, That by which they say, the mind is encompassed, know That to be Brahman and not what people worship as an object."<sup>21</sup>

How then is this experience comprehen-

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 216-17.

20. *Anando brahmetivyaajānāt, ānandādd hy eva khalvimāni bhūtāni jāyante, Anandena jātāni jīvanti, ānandam prayantyaabhisamvisanti Taittirīya Upaniṣad III, 6.1.*

21. *Yan manasā na manute yeñāhur mano matam tad eva brahma tvam viddhi nedam yad idam upāsate. (Kena Upaniṣad I. 6.)*

ded? Is it related to or similar to sense experience? Is this experience describable? Are we aware of the process by which it is brought about? To these questions the *Kena Upaniṣad* gives an unequivocal answer:

"The eye does not go there, nor speech, nor mind. We do not know [Brahman to be such and such]; hence we are not aware of any process of instructing about It."<sup>22</sup>

The 'ineffable' bliss that mystics speak of, on the cognition of Truth in its fullness, is basically aesthetic—a state in which truth and beauty do not appear as distinct—that is, where the one can appear as the other. This experience of oneness is spontaneous, and most recorded instances of it are of persons bestowed with an 'inner vision'. They comprehend and experience the Transcendent. An instance is there in the childhood of Sri Ramakrishna. When he was barely six years old—a happy and healthy boy of village India ('a darling of a pygmy size', to Wordsworth), one day he was sauntering along across the balks in the paddy fields carrying a snack of parched rice in a fold of his garment. We have his own words: "I was following a narrow path between the rice fields. I raised my eyes to the sky as I munched my rice. I saw a great black cloud spreading rapidly until it covered the heavens. Suddenly at the edge of the cloud a flight of snow-white cranes passed over my head. The contrast was so beautiful that my spirit wandered far away. I lost consciousness and fell to the ground. The puffed rice was scattered in all directions. Somebody picked me up and carried me home in his arms. An excess of joy and emotion overcame me. ...This was the first time that I was seized with ecstasy."<sup>23</sup> In

22. *Na tatra cakṣur gacchati na vāg gacchati no manah na vidmo na vijānīmo yathaitad anusīṣyāt. (Kena, 1.3.)*

23. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Ramakrishna* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1970) pp. 22-23.

this strange and unearthly experience of joy, Sri Ramakrishna seems to have discovered in himself an innate capacity for spontaneous cognition of beauty in which colour, form and movement combined to provide a circumstance for aesthetic bliss. We are reminded of William Wordsworth's famous lines—"The flash upon that inward eye, which is the bliss of solitude"—in his poem, "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud".

In Indian tradition the philosopher endowed with religious experience (*dārśanik*) is a seer as well as a poet. The Upaniṣadic seers did not speak like logicians, but sang like poets. Can we deny the empirical value of aesthetic or religious experience of great minds whose words still inspire us to get into—

"...the blessed mood  
In which the burthen of the mystery,  
In which the heavy and weary weight  
Of all this unintelligible world,  
Is lightened—that serene and blessed  
mood..

(Lines from Wordsworth's  
"Tintern Abbey Revisited")

Ramakrishna's earliest mystic experience made familiar to us nearly a hundred and fifty years later echoed also in the English poet's famous lines:

"...From God, who is our home  
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!  
Shades of the prison-house begin to close  
Upon the growing boy.

(Wordsworth's *Intimations of  
Immortality*)

That he grew up to be a great mystic and Seer was only due to Sri Ramakrishna's retaining throughout his life this innocence and purity of childhood. He himself once said, "after realizing God a man becomes

like a five-year old child. The ego of such a man may be called the ego of a child, *the ripe ego*. The child is not under the control of any of the three *guṇas*; he is beyond them."<sup>24</sup> As he grew up, his mind yearned only for repeated experiences of this transcendental bliss. This was possible for him because he always wanted to get to the truth behind religion, and never allowed paralysing formalism of religion to interfere with his spiritual quest. It was due to this characteristic desire of his to pursue everything to basic truth that he owed his discovery and conviction that beneath the plurality of religions and religious practices lies the Inviolable Truth—eternal and pervasive in essence, and manifold in manifestation. This is the strain that runs through all of the Vedic lore, particularly in the *Upaniṣads*, which urge upon one the realization of Truth. Thus *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* says:

"That which is known as the Self-Creator is verily the source of joy; for one becomes happy by coming in contact with this source of joy. Who indeed will inhale and who will exhale, if this Bliss be not there in the Supreme space? For, whenever an aspirant gets fearlessly established in this unperceivable, bodiless, inexpressible and unsupported Brahman, he reaches the state of fearlessness. For, whenever the aspirant creates the slightest difference in it, he is smitten with fear. Nevertheless, that very Brahman is a terror to the (so-called) learned man who lacks the unitive outlook."<sup>25</sup>

The fountain-source of India's philosophical systems in the Vedas—the *Upaniṣads*, is itself a free-wheeling enquiry into the nature of every component of experience.

24. "After realizing God, a man becomes like a child five years old. The ego of such a man may be called the 'ego of a child', the 'ripe ego'. The child is not under the control of any of the *gunas*. He is beyond them." *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 860.

25. *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, II. 7.1.



namely, the objective world, the self, body, mind, knowledge, soul and the relation between them together with the destiny of the individual soul. By its very definition, 'experience' presupposes duality between the 'Knower' and the 'Known'—a point which is apparently not arguable. What might be arguable is to say that this experience in its ultimate state transcends all known limitations, including those of space and time. The Knower and the Known would then become one without distinction—which amounts to saying that the ego loses its identity in a state of Supreme, ineffable bliss. In a beautiful parable Sri Ramakrishna says, "He who has seen God retains his 'I' only in name. No evil can be done by that 'I'. It is a mere appearance, like the mark left on a coconut tree by its branch. The branch has fallen off. Only the mark remains."

When our problem is one of enquiry into the validity of mystic experience in all religions, religious formalisms—theologies, scholasticism, become irrelevant and even meaningless. A remarkable fact about all mystics, whether ancient and pre-Christian, Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, Taoist, or other, is a certain unanimity of experience,

though they may have their differences in language. They all agree that the universe is a single organic unity and all plurality or separateness is only apparent, and not the ultimate truth. Secondly, they consider time as a dimension of sensory experience and the eternal truth is beyond or outside time. Albert Einstein conceded, in his letter of condolence to a friend's sister: "Michele has left this strange world just before me. This is of no importance. For us, convinced physicists, the distinction between the past, the present and the future is an illusion, although a persistent one." Besides, in Bertrand Russell's analysis of mysticism, he suggests there is a third common factor in the experience of all mystics, "that evil is illusory, and that the illusion arises through falsely regarding a part as self-subsistent".<sup>26</sup> In other words, what we see here in life as good and evil are only parts of a process, but we mistakenly treat them as self-subsistent. Is this position tenable? We shall examine the ethical implications of mysticism separately.

(to be concluded)

26. "Religion and Science", p. 179.

## Vivekananda Among The Saints

DOROTHY MADISON

*It is a brilliant paper from Ms. Dorothy Madison. Her deep insight produces a resplendent portrait of Vivekananda. The author has been a close follower of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement in the U.S.A. for more than five decades. Many of her thoughtful essays have appeared in Prabuddha Bharata and Vedanta Kesari over the years. She lives in Alameda, California.*

Swami Vivekananda was no more concerned about being a saint than a lion about being a cat. So why, ask the righteous, would anybody at this late date want to discuss the question of whether he was a saint? If he was, well and good—he was a

lot of unusual things. And if he was not, what difference does it make? He is still what he always was, with nothing subtracted. Discussion does not change facts; at best it discomposes the mind, at worst it makes for dissension; in any case, it is unnecessary. Vivekananda can do without a halo—for good reason.

During the century since his brief ministry, the growing consensus of scholarly and religious opinion has been that Vivekananda was both the living commentary of his Master Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings, and his natural interpreter. He was also his Master's apostle to the West, and the self-dedicated prophet of women and the common man. Further, he was the leader of Sri Ramakrishna's monastic Order, and with Sri Ramakrishna, one of the spiritually powerful, intensely creative personalities of India's renascent Hinduism and national awakening. In the face of these credits, naysayers avow, to introduce into Vivekananda's work history the issue of saintliness is uncalled for and greatly to be deplored.

Equally to be deplored is naysaying righteousness. To forbid discussion about Swamiji's saintliness may suit the ascetic who sits facing the wall of his cave. It may even be all right for the pragmatist who gags at abstractions or the pauper too hungry to think. But it is truly unseemly in persons who have at heart the welfare of the human race. Surely, these good people must know that love for others, the gut-reflex of all saints, is the "glue" which holds society together. They know very well that without goodwill and selfless behaviour—curbing one's own desires out of regard for the rights and feelings of others—a society falls into chronic suffering and disorder. Furthermore, they know that in the global market-place saintly example attracts few buyers. The refusal, therefore, to consider the ways in which saintliness was revealed in the person

of Swami Vivekananda seems not merely foolish but derelict.

To be sure, Vivekananda does not need to be proven a saint, but the fact that he is a saint needs to be stressed, if only because he is so many other things in addition. In his own time, he was, after all, a phenomenon—and like it or not—often as mysterious as God, and beyond the grasp of ordinary understanding. The fact is, that within his unbelievably complex being, many human types, states, and conditions can be identified.

With respect to saintliness the prime fact about Vivekananda is that he was a new type of a man altogether, made from a brand-new mould and, as such, serves as the prototypic model of the men and women of the future. This being so, the saint's greatness of heart must stand first among the traits of this new human type, because greatness of heart alone guarantees the observance of all human rights, duties, and decencies, and keeps fresh the spiritual integrity upon which these rights, duties, and decencies depend. Clearly, in Vivekananda's own case it was specifically his great-hearted love which, like a river, watered and brought to fruition the multiple richnesses of his own nature.

Swamiji was, in short, the new man whose energies naturally locked on to the human condition out of a love and compassion as ultimate as Buddha's own. But the chances that this saintly aspect of Vivekananda might be lost sight of are real indeed. For one thing, a loving heart seems such a modest part of Swamiji's many-sided genius that it could easily go unnoticed. Yet it was the white heat of this love which gave force to every word he uttered. Who is the man who can show that Vivekananda lived for himself or unto himself or put himself first? The notion is madness. In self-abnegation Swamiji stands with the saints, and in sheer impassioned love for the human race he stands at their head. To repeat, this love is



the particular quality of Swamiji's which is so important for humanity to ingest.

Doubtless, one of the factors which stand in the way of perceiving Vivekananda as a saint is the vigour and bite of his language. Who could guess, for instance, that a saint was speaking?

Our first duty is not to hate ourselves; because to advance, we must have faith in ourselves first; then, in God. He who has no faith in himself, can never have faith in God.<sup>1</sup>

Or again, when he was asked what one should do if one happened to see the strong oppressing the weak, said, "Why, thrash the strong, of course!"<sup>2</sup>

Certainly such words do not bring to mind the popular image of saint in which virtue speaks in the passive voice, and the saint himself acts more or less as an anvil for God's hammer. This particular saintly mode Vivekananda left behind in the village smithy. He belonged to another order of saint altogether, combining in himself both immovable passivity and irresistible activity, in rich, contrapuntal patterns. The result was that he was the freest and easiest of holy persons—in no way bound down, boxed in, backward-looking, or guarded; yet he could be absolutely immobile when the fit was upon him.

Natural and unconstrained himself, Vivekananda believed in the innate goodness of men and women whom he actually loved and worshipped as "the other God." His spontaneity, warmth, and genius for plain fun endeared him to young and old. In the cool of the evening, for instance, he loved to go "kneipping,"—walking barefoot—on the dewy lawns of Ridgely Manor with

Ridgely's band of kneippers.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, because he stood powerfully—never diffidently—for freedom, reason, self-knowledge, self-direction, and self-effort, and was himself so unimaginably generous and compassionate, all kinds of people trusted and followed him without having to think twice. To crown all, he believed in man's future, and kept himself going by his faith in men's and women's ability to achieve greatly, and find their way out of the spiritual darkness in which they live.

At once the question arises—can such an energetic, powerful, and attractive person as Vivekananda ever be a saint in the meaning of Roman Catholics saints, for example, or the great bodhisattvas of the Buddhists or the Sufi saints of Islam? Yes, certainly he can. Whether a saint is energetic, powerful, and attractive does not enter into the question. If the possession of these and similar traits poses a problem, it is merely because these traits do not figure in the widely-held saint-stereotype.

Commonly, saints are thought of as sharing certain qualities and behaviours. For instance, he or she is peaceable, pure in heart, humble in spirit, poor as a church mouse, self-denying, heroically passive, preternaturally kind, intellectually artless, abandoned to God's will, prayerful, and God-loving. Ordinarily arrayed in the garb of a priest, monk, or nun, or else in castoffs, loin-cloth, or nothing at all, a saint has nothing in common with the general run of humanity, who, alas, bumble along in a world of sin, self, and woe. With attributes like these for a yardstick, the question of whether Vivekananda is a saint dies in the asking.

These popular notions of saintliness are best dealt with by pointing out that saints

1. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works*, 8 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1986), 1:38.

2. Sister Nivedita, *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, 5 vols. (Calcutta: Secretary of Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, 1967), 1:88.

3. Katharine Whitmarsh, infant "kneipper" and grandniece of Mr. Francis Leggett, to the author, June 7, 1990.

all over the world have very often been outspoken, energetic men and women. Even Saint Simeon Stylites, sitting on his pillar, stood upright and preached to listeners far below. As to power, the mightiest saints are those who, like Vivekananda, have moved the world—St. Augustine, Bodhidharma, al Ghazali, St. Bernard, Maimonides, Guru Nanak, St. Ignatius, and St. Teresa. Again, as far as being attractive goes, who among all humankind, past and present, can match the likes of Rabi'ya of Basra, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Catherine of Siena, Jnanadeva, St. Francis de Sales, Queen Mira Bai, or the Baal Shem Tov?

Granting, then, that a saint can be energetic, powerful, and attractive, as Vivekananda and others like him clearly were, it is time to formulate the questions which will get us to the heart of the matter. What in general is a saint? What traits, qualities, and habits make a man or woman a saint? What is the pith, the quiddity of a saint—any saint—without exception? What are the varieties of a saint? And along the way, how and to what degree does Vivekananda satisfy the requisites of sainthood? For good measure—where did the passive, low-keyed saint—stereotype come from?

First, in the matter of what, in general, a saint is. Saints come from all walks of life—one English saint was a retired hangman.<sup>4</sup> They belong to a small, select company of human beings who specialize in love of God. Ideally, these blissful ones ride the long low swells of concentrated, luminous emotion as they watch and wait for the moments when the moods of God will sweep them on high, rolling them over and over in the endless seas of God's own rapture. On occasion one or two become marooned in the Absolute. This is good fortune indeed, for the purer

their love, the profounder their union with God.

At its purest the saint's love for God is unqualified and absolute, one with God's own essence, and to God unutterably delicious. In the saint's own heart, his love for God is his single and matchless glory, the one condition he cannot do without, and the force which, in making him one with God, enables him to love all others as himself.

Now, in this pure and perfect love for God Swamiji gleams, leaps, and races like a child of the open sea. So many people—his fellow disciples, his own disciples, intimate friends, and even casual observers—have told of his madness for God, although he himself told little. In this respect he followed Sri Ramakrishna's dictum that one's life in God should remain a private affair. But even the rather large fund of information about Swamiji's love for God discloses only bits and pieces of what actually went on in the privacy of his inward worlds. Indeed, no less an authority than Sri Ramakrishna affirmed the unknowable nature of Swamiji's spiritual moods and experiences. According to him Swamiji's being was so immense that even tremendous tides of divine emotion caused little more than a ripple in his outward behaviour. On one occasion, when the youthful Vivekananda was complaining that others, but not himself, were enjoying religious ecstasy, Sri Ramakrishna said:

My child, when a huge elephant enters a small pond, a great commotion is set up, but when it plunges into the Ganges, the river shows very little agitation. These devotees are like small ponds; a little experience makes their feelings flow over the brim. But you are a huge river.<sup>5</sup>

More immediate but equally cogent evidence of Swamiji's love for God can be

<sup>4</sup> Donald Attwater, ed., *A Catholic Dictionary* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1961), 444.

<sup>5</sup> Swami Nikhilananda, *Vivekananda, A Biography* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1953), 25.



found in his own discourses and writings. Whether written by his own hand, as in his personal letters, or spoken in lectures and classes, the whole of his collected works seems to hum in a dimensionless force-field of love and devotion. One has but to read to feel the current. Not much thought is needed to know that his madness for God provided the starting point, vitality, and substance of even his reasonings and rebukes. All alike are made powerful by love. The plain fact is that every word uttered or action performed, was done out of his love for God. "Stick to God!" he wrote to the Hale sisters.

Who cares what comes to the body or to anything else! Through the terrors of evil, say—my God, my love! Through all the evils under the sun, say—my God, my love. Thou art here, I see Thee. Thou art with me, I feel Thee. I am Thine, take me. I am not the world's but thine, leave not then me. Do not go for the glass beads leaving the mine of diamonds! This life is a great chance. What, seekest thou the pleasures of the world!—He is the fountain of all bliss. Seek for the highest, aim at that highest and you *shall* reach the highest.<sup>6</sup>

Oddly enough, in the packed drama that was his life, Swamiji can be viewed as the truly helpless victim of his own madness for God. As such, he is undoubtedly the quintessential saint.

Like his love for God, Vivekananda's love for his neighbour was also beyond his control. But it was, in addition, so plain and so pervasive that it needs little comment except, perhaps, mention of its universal significance. From the perspective of the world's great heroes of God, beginning with the Rigveda's self-sacrificing Purusha, Swamiji's brief life and sudden death can be interpreted as a sacrifice of god-like sanctity and holiness. But here, however, it must be pointed out that Swamiji did not at all enjoy playing the eternal victim. In fact, he had fits of

impatience over his failure to control his feeling for everybody down to the heroic worm. Partly because he could not bear the anguish it caused him, and partly because such anguish went against reason, he came to regard such love as out-and-out bondage. In a letter to Mrs. Bull he railed against the plight he was in:

My mistakes have been great; but every one of them was from too much love. How I hate love! Would I never had any Bhakti! Indeed, I wish I could be an Advaitist, calm and heartless. Well, this life is done. I will try in the next.<sup>7</sup>

In less rebellious moods, as when he wrote to Sister Nivedita about his inability to find rest or peace, he used the metaphor of ritual sacrifice.

...it is easier to be reconciled to one's fate as a sacrifice. We are all sacrifices—each in his own way. The great worship is going on—no one can see its meaning except that it is a great sacrifice. Those that are willing, escape a lot of pain. Those who resist are broken into submission and suffer more. I am now determined to be a willing one.<sup>8</sup>

Whether Swamiji was a willing or an unwilling sacrifice did not make a whit of difference to his saintly intimacy with God—intimacy being another of sainthood's prime requisites. Now it is true enough that he did not approve of God's ways very much, even declaring when but a raw youth: "The plan of the universe is devilish. I could have created a better world."<sup>9</sup> But nevertheless he had the run, as it were, of God's house and grounds. He knew God, lived with God, moved with God, listened to God, talked back to God, sang to God, was God's general, God's anointed leader, God's child, God's slave, God's dogsbody, and God's dog.

7. Ibid., 420.

8. Ibid., 422-3.

9. Swami Nikhilananda, trans., *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1969) 966.

6. CW, 1986, 6:262.

There seemed to be little about God that he was not familiar with—admittedly a tremendous assertion—but true for all that.

Furthermore, Swamiji rarely stood on ceremony with God, or God with him. When, for example, the Supreme Goddess, Kali finally broke down his resistance to her, this is how Swamiji described it:

I had great misfortunes at that time you know. My father died, and so on. And She saw Her opportunity to make a slave of me. They were Her very words,—“To make a slave of you.”<sup>10</sup>

At that time Kali took hold of his wrists. For the next seventeen years Swamiji always felt two hands holding his wrists; six months before he died they had stopped.<sup>11</sup> The Divine Mother also asked him once, rather testily, when he was lamenting the destruction of her shrines, “Do you protect me or do I protect you?”<sup>12</sup> By the same token, Swamiji had his own way of dealing with Kali:

On a certain solemn occasion, he entrusted to a disciple a prayer to Her that in his own life had acted as a veritable charm. “And mind!” he added suddenly, turning with what was almost fierceness upon the receiver, “make Her listen to you, when you say it! None of that cringing to Mother! Remember!”<sup>13</sup>

This rather rough dealing with the Mother of the Universe does not mean that Swamiji did not love Her as infinitely rapturously as any ecstatic saint of Bengal. He did indeed. He just did not swoon. For three months in Kashmir, for example, he never let on to his three Western disciples, Mrs. Bull, Miss MacLeod, or Sister Nivedita, that “he was always conscious of the form of the

Mother, as a bodily presence,” visible among them.<sup>14</sup>

Because of evidence like this—coming straight from Swamiji’s lips—many people have decided that at heart Swamiji was nothing more than Mother’s simple, saintly boy, whom She, in collusion with Sri Ramakrishna, fitted out with intellect and energy to fight a few hard battles against humanity’s spiritual ignorance. And in truth, many of Swamiji’s words seem to lend themselves to this view. “It is the heart, the heart that conquers, not the brain,” he wrote to Swami Akhandananda. “Books and learning, Yoga and meditation and illumination—all are but dust compared with love.”<sup>15</sup> Again, his famous letter to Miss MacLeod from Alameda, more than confirms this simple-boy-saint view of Swamiji:

After all, Joe, I am only the boy who used to listen with rapt wonderment to the wonderful words of Ramakrishna under the Banyan at Dakshineswar. That is my true nature, work and activities, doing good and so forth are all superimpositions. Now I again hear his voice; the same old voice thrilling my soul. Bonds are breaking—love dying, work becoming tasteless—the glamour is off life. Now only the voice of the Master calling,—“I come, Lord, I come—”<sup>16</sup>

Alongside the saint’s intimacy with Divine Being, whether as a boy, a man, a god-man, or none of these, is another saintly requirement, namely, the seeing of visions. These visions, internal, as in prayer and meditation, or external, with the eyes open, have always caused a certain amount of anxiety among the holy. Are they from God or are they from the Devil or some other nameless third? Indeed, religion has long tried to deal with the differences between genuinely spiritual visions and those which are either devil-sent, pathogenic as in schizophrenia, or induced by drugs.

(To be concluded)

10. Sankari Prasad Basu, ed., *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, 2 vols. (Calcutta, Nababharat Publishers, 1982), 1:157.

11. The author’s notes of a lecture by Swami Ashokananda, “Swami Vivekananda, His Life and Teachings,” San Francisco, Jan. 23, 1955.

12. *Nivedita*, CW, 1:96.

13. *Ibid.*, 115-16.

14. *Ibid.*, 257.

15. *CW.*, 1978, 6:400.

16. *Ibid.*, 431-32.



# PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY

All must accept the message of the Master and Swamiji. Swamiji was born to preach the Master's ideas of peace and harmony. You will see how in course of time the Western countries will take to these ideas. This is just the beginning—the prelude. The western people are intellectual and are bound to accept the broad, universal principles of the Master's teachings which alone can establish peace in this world. In different countries many people are being influenced by the ideals as lived by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and are giving them out with a stamp of their own. Let them do as they please. Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji never cared for name or fame. They came for the good of the world.

With the passing of days we realize why the Master practised various forms of spiritual discipline. All religions are true and through all of them people can realize God, the embodiment of Truth. He did not practise different religions in order just to discover and realize the harmony of religions. His spiritual practice had a deeper meaning. That is why men belonging to different sects of Hinduism have made him their ideal. He is also the ideal of many Christians. They worship him as Jesus and you must remember this was not the result of somebody's preaching. Tell me who can preach Sri Ramakrishna? Who can reveal the one who is Truth itself? The Lord says in the Gita (xv. 6), "Him the sun cannot reveal, nor the moon, nor the fire."

*O Lord, I do not know Thy nature nor what Thou art. Whatever Thou art, Mahadeva (Great God), my salutations to Thee again and again.*

Actually, we have to say the same thing regarding the Master. Who will understand him? I have met several other Mohammedan

devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. One I met in Kaddpa—he is highly esteemed and has received the title Khan Bahadur from the British Government. He belongs to the Sufi sect of Islam, but is very devoted to the Master. In Kaddpa is a little ashrama dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna. The Khan Bahadur, the local collector (also a Mohammedan) and several others were responsible for the founding of this ashrama.

Religion is, as Swamiji said, a matter of realization and experience. Before realization the intellect rules. This the Master explained in his simple way, "The vessel makes a gurgling sound when being filled with water, but once full, it is completely quiet." What an apt illustration! Even his simplest utterances had such a deep meaning! The *Upanishads* also say: "*This Self is not to be realized by scholarship, reasoning or an extensive study of the scriptures.*" It is too true. How can man understand the Self by his limited intellect? It is impossible.

My children, I repeat: At the end of the day, even if for a short while, lay aside everything and commune with God. In the beginning you may have some difficulty in practising meditation in this way, but there is no reason to stop trying. Pray to Him, and He will give you peace. Out of His compassion He will strengthen your heart and make you one with Him. With the practice of meditation peace of mind will grow, and then alone will you be in a position to undertake humanitarian activities in the right spirit. Know for certain that this world and all living beings are His. He is the creator, you are His servants. You are blessed to the extent that He, in His grace, allows you to serve His creatures.

Swami Shivananda (*For Seekers of God*)

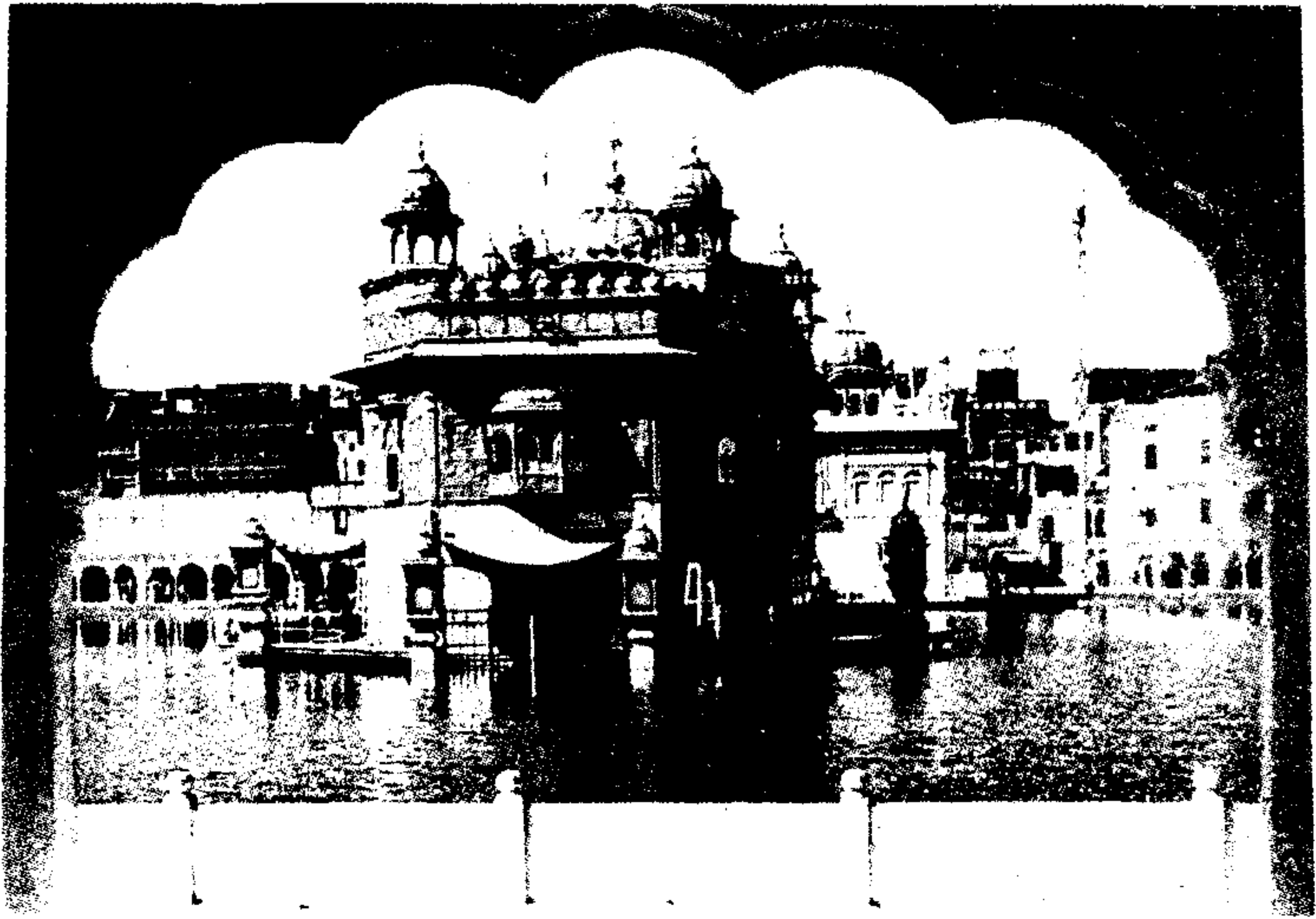


Guru Nanak  
( 1469 - 1539 )

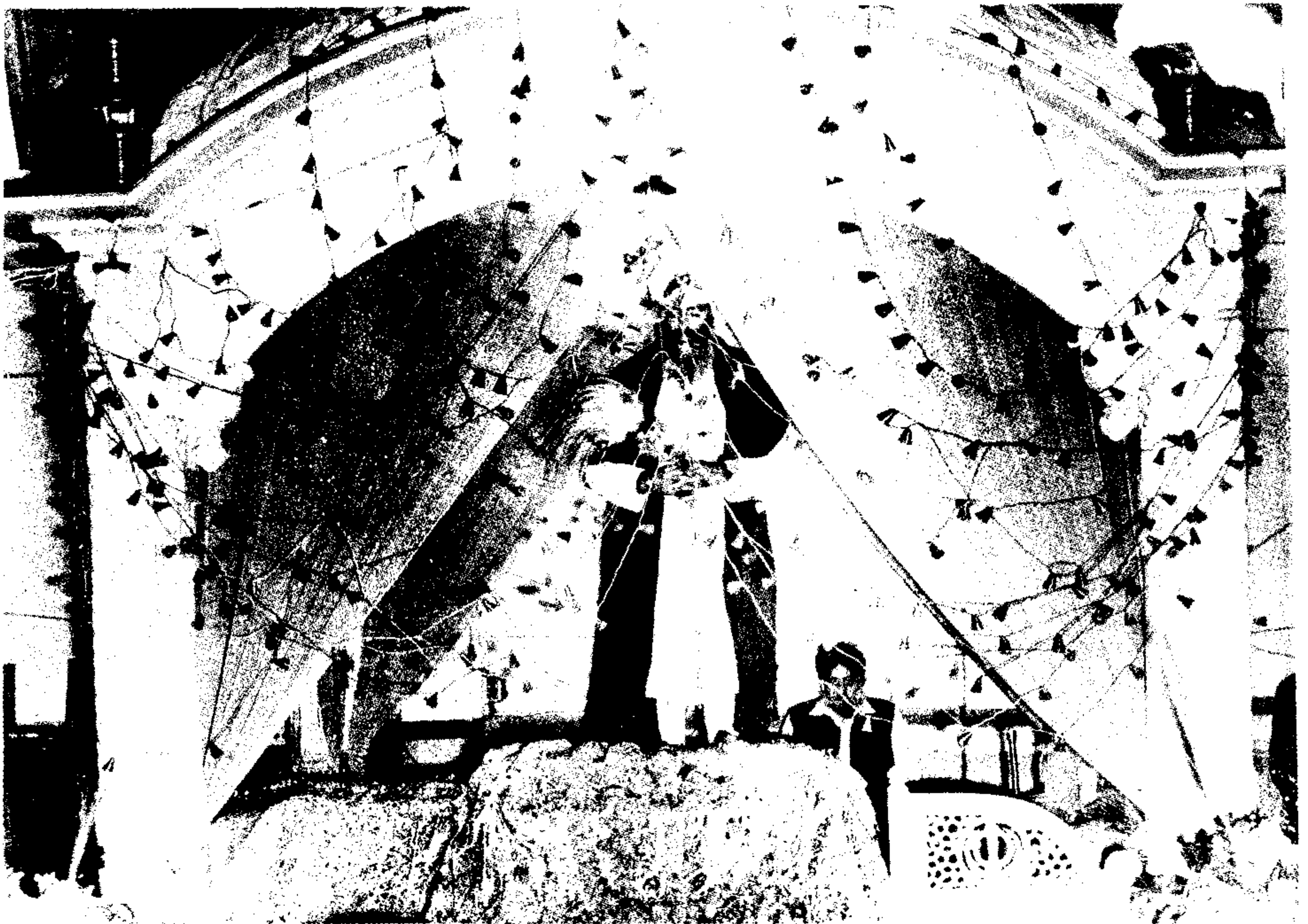


Guru Gobind Singh  
( 1666 - 1708 )





Golden Temple, Amritsar



Gurudwara Bari Sikh Sangat at Calcutta.





Carving of  
serpents on a  
1200 years old  
mud-brick temple  
in Peru



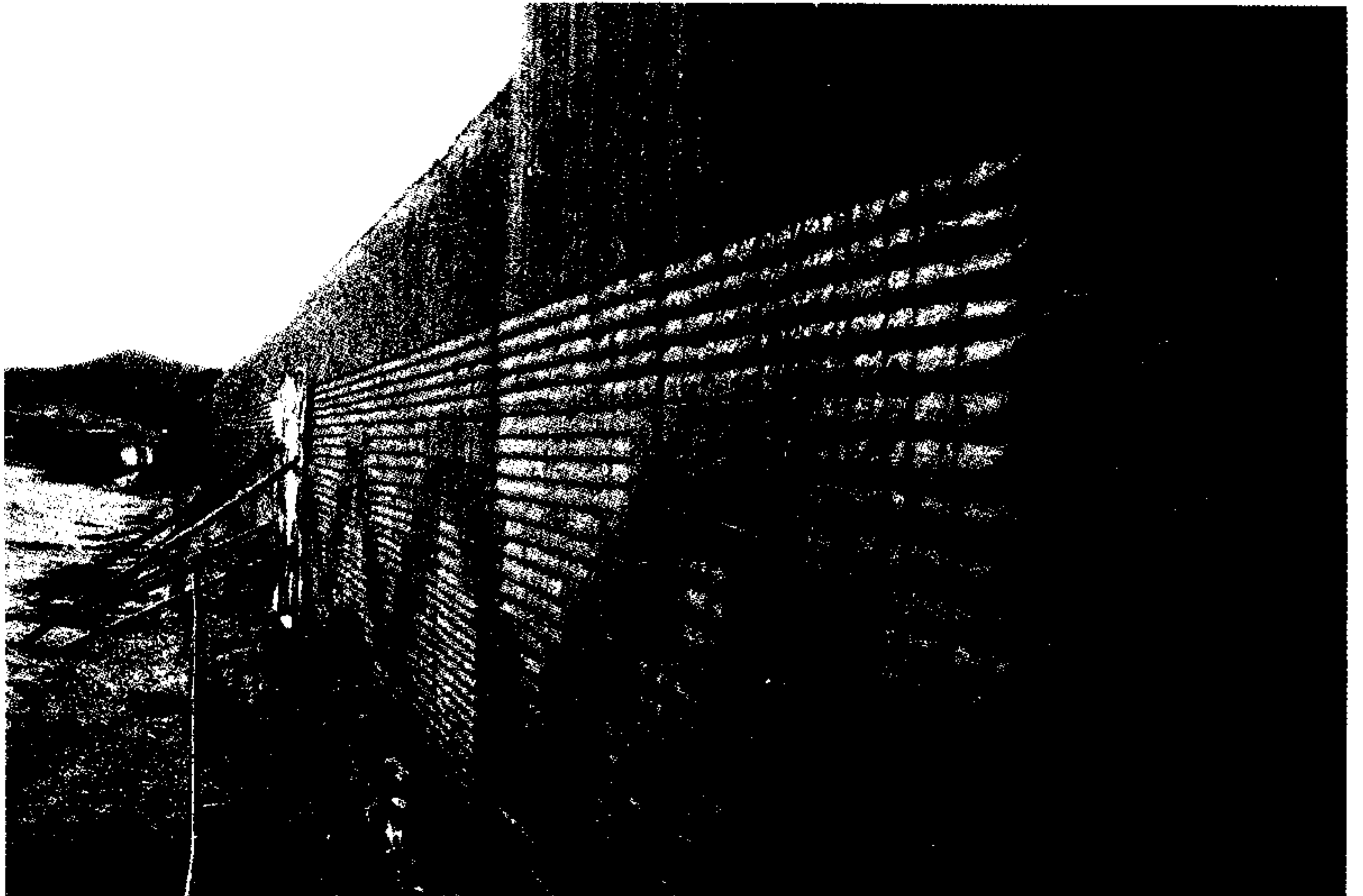
600 years old earthen  
brick wall with  
stone foundation,  
Racchi, Peru





800 years old earthen  
brick walls in Chan  
Chan, Peru

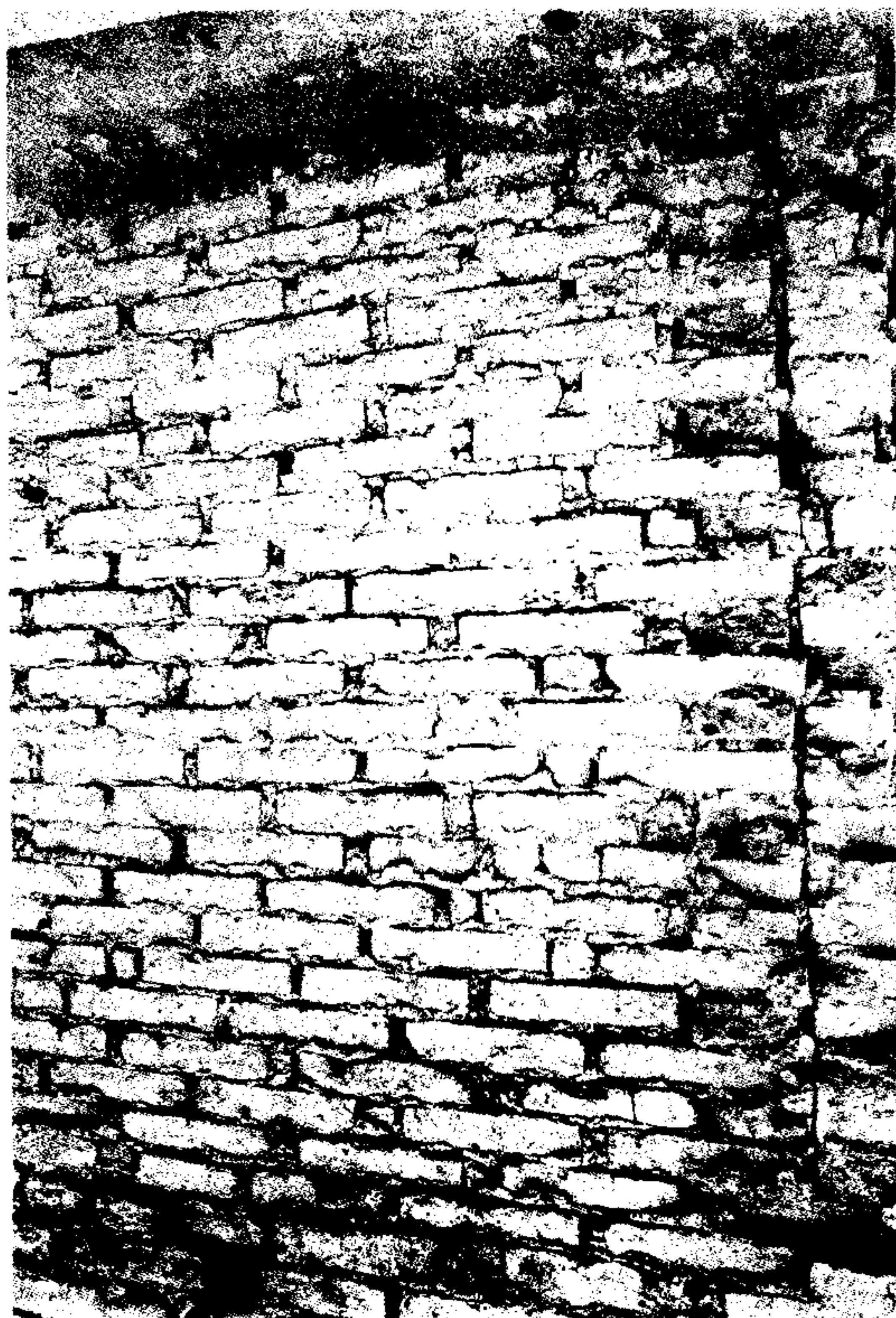
Well preserved  
motive showing  
ocean waves  
and fish on the  
Chan Chan Walls







The concrete foundation of the right-hand wall is not eroded, whereas the above foundation of the left-hand wall is badly eroded

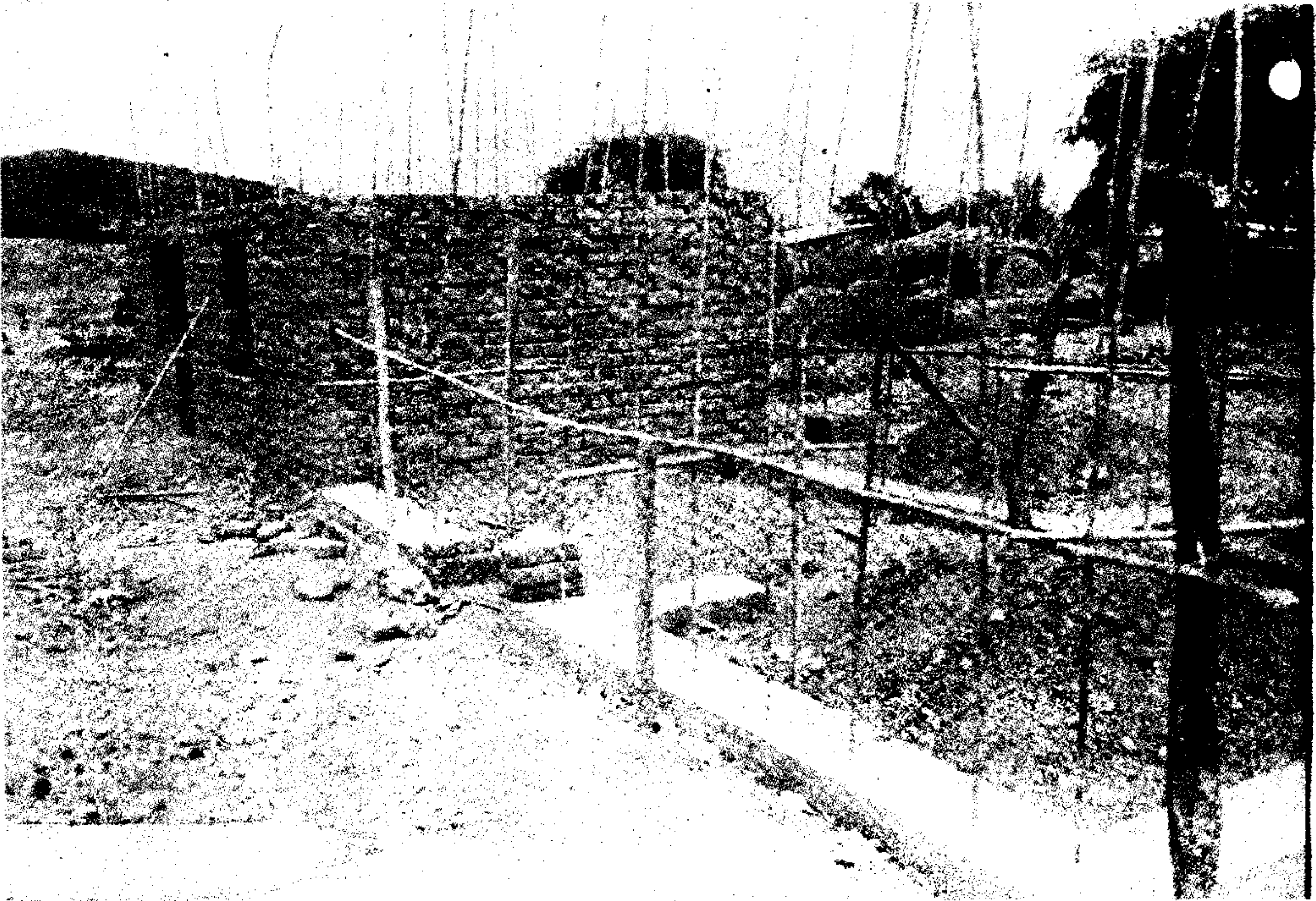


Severe microcracking in the mud-mortar used for joining the bricks





Piles of unfired clay are better than clay topping to prevent water leakage

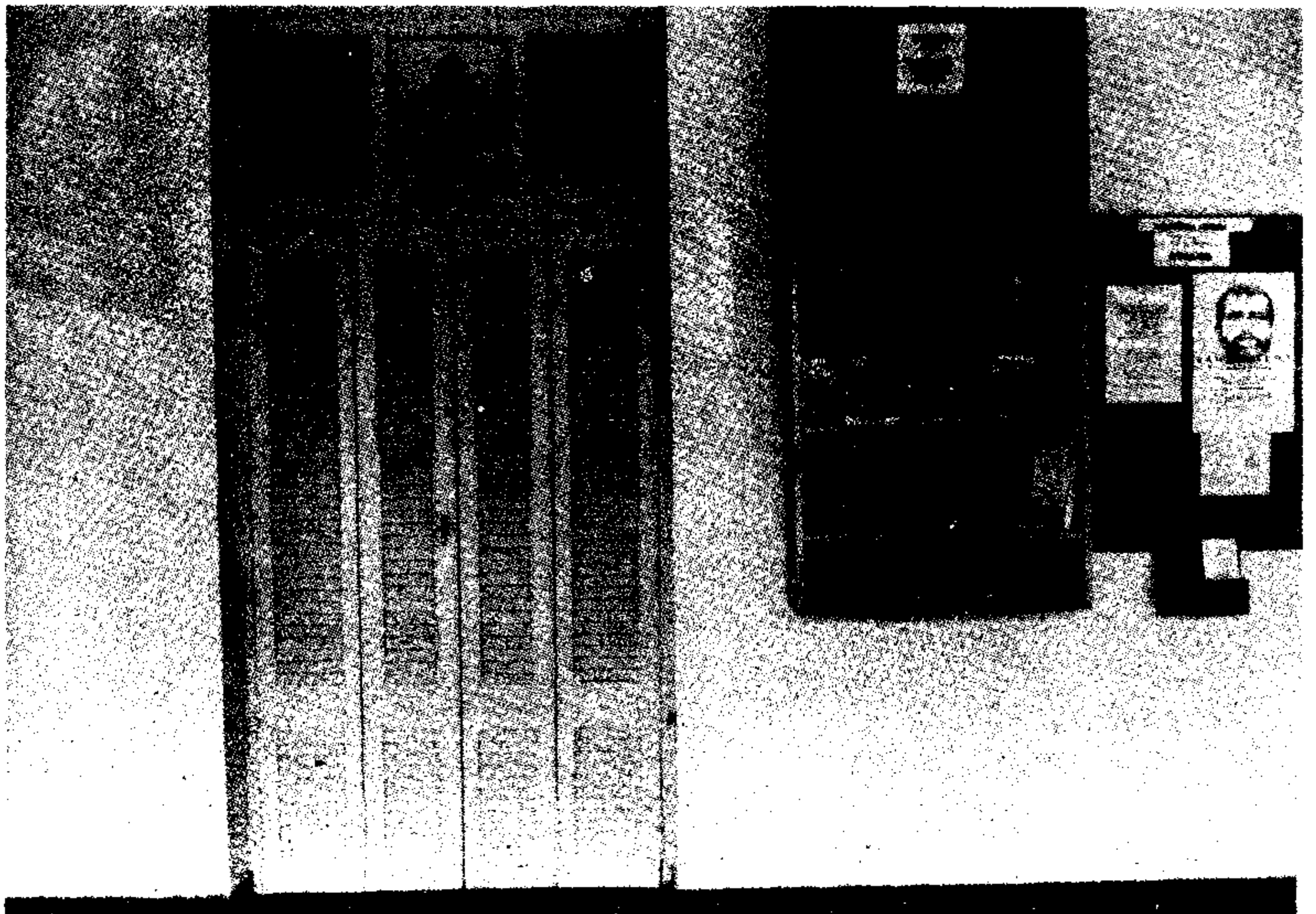


Bamboo reinforcement cast into a concrete foundation can help to tie a mud-brick wall to the foundation



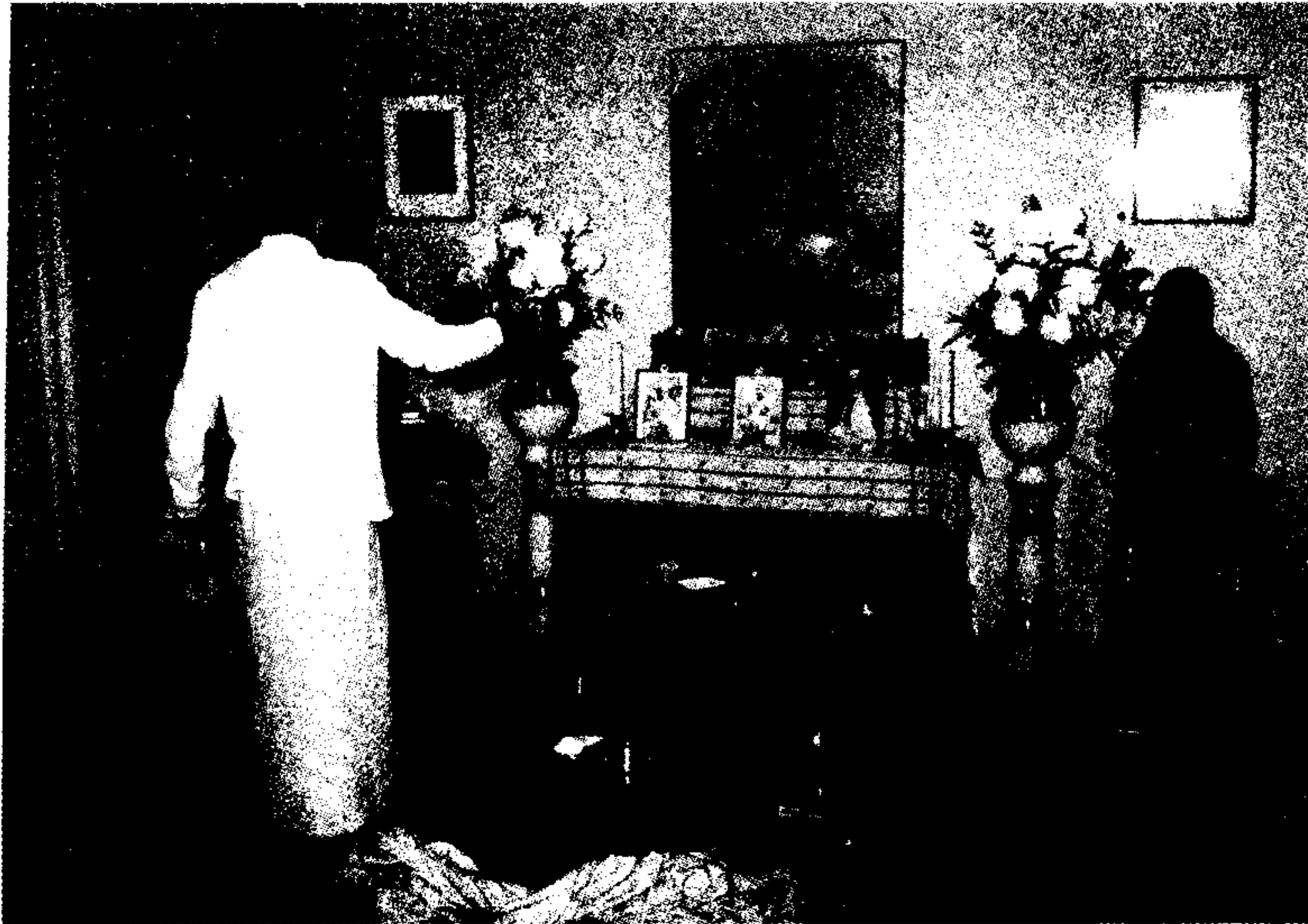


Main Building of the Ashrama



Entrance to the Shrine Hall





Shrine



Seminar on Holy Mother





Sri Ramakrishna lost in ecstasy in course of a religious song and dance in the house of Keshab Chandra Sen  
First Photograph (1879)



Sri Ramakrishna, Studio Portrait  
Second Photograph (1881)



Sri Ramakrishna, in Dakshineswar  
Third Photograph (1883)





Two group pictures taken after Sri Ramakrishna's death at the Cossipore garden house, August 16, 1886  
Fourth Photograph (1886)



Fifth Photograph (1886)



View of Bhavatarini and Radhakanta Temples and Natmandir. X marks the place of Third Photograph



Lily Cottage (Keshab Chandra Sen's House)  
Place of the First Photograph