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or Awakened India



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Prabuddha Bharata

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उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वराग्निबोधत



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

Prabuddha Bharata

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The Divine Message

THE SONG OF THE EVER-FREE

किं नाम रोदिषि सखे न च ते स्वरूपं

किं नाम रोदिषि सखे न च ते विरूपम् ।

किं नाम रोदिषि सखे न च ते वयांसि

ज्ञानामृतं समरसं गगनोपमोऽहम् ॥

Why do you weep, my friend ?

You have no form nor are you deformed.

Why do you weep, my friend ?

There is no aging for you.

I am Existence-Knowledge-Bliss and boundless as space.

किं नाम रोदिषि सखे न च ते वयांसि

किं नाम रोदिषि सखे न च ते मनांसि ।

किं नाम रोदिषि सखे न तवेन्द्रियाणि

ज्ञानामृतं समरसं गगनोपमोऽहम् ॥

Why do you weep, my friend ?

You have no physical or mental organism.

Why do you weep, my friend ?

You do not have any sense-organs.

I am Existence-Knowledge-Bliss and boundless as space.

किं नाम रोदिषि सखे न च तेऽस्ति कामः

किं नाम रोदिषि सखे न च ते प्रलोभः ।

किं नाम रोदिषि सखे न च ते विमोहो

ज्ञानामृतं समरसं गगनोपमोऽहम् ॥

Why do you weep, my friend ?

You have no lust or greed.

Why do you weep, my friend ?

You have no delusion.

I am Existence-Knowledge-Bliss and boundless as space.

from *The Avadhuta Gita*

Greatness of Ganesa

A legend says Sage Vyasa, having conceived the great epic *Mahābhārata* pondered over how to give the sacred story to mankind. He meditated on Brahmā, the Creator, who manifested before him. The great poet saluted Brahmā and prayed: "*Param na lekhakah kascid etasya bhuvi vidyate*"—"Lord, I have conceived an excellent work, but cannot think of an efficient writer who can take it down to my dictation."

Brahmā praised and blessed the Sage and said, "*Kavayasya lekhanārthāya Gaṇeśas- maryatām mune*"—"O Sage, invoke Gaṇapati and beg him to take your dictation." Saying this Brahmā disappeared. Vyasa meditated on the form of Ganesa who appeared before him. The Sage reverentially bowed to him and sought his help. "*Lekhako bhāratasya bhava tvam Gaṇanāyaka*"—"Lord Ganesa, I shall dictate the story of the *Mahābhārata*, and pray you be gracious to write it down."

Agreeing to Vyasa's suggestion, Ganesa replied: "Very well, I shall do as you wish. But my pen must not stop while I am writing. So you must dictate without pause. I can write only on this condition."

Vyasa acquiesced but wisely guarding himself, put a counter-condition: "*Tam devam abudhvā mā likha kvacit*"—"Be it so, but you must first grasp the meaning of what I dictate before you write it down."

Gaṇapati accepted this stipulation, then the sage started to unfold the story of the epic. The *Mahābhārata* says, "*Sarvajño'pi Gaṇeśo yat kṣaṇamāste vicārayan. Tāvaccakār Vyaso'pi ślokānanyān bahūnapi*"—"Vyasa would occasionally compose some complex verses which would make Ganeśa

pause awhile to grasp the meaning, and the Poet would avail himself of this interval to compose many verses in his mind." Due to the combined efforts of the celestial scribe and the inspired poet, Vyasa's *magnum opus*, *The Mahabharata*, took its final written form.

Sri Ramakrishna had the highest reverence for Ganesa. He often extolled the integrity of Ganesa's character, his total absence of passion, and his single-minded devotion to his mother, Goddess Durgā. Sri Ramakrishna used to cite the example of Ganesa to reiterate his own life-long filial attitude towards all women. When Ganesa was a child, one day in a playful but naughty mood he tormented and injured a cat. When he afterwards came to his mother, to his utter surprise and sorrow, he saw the marks of injury he had inflicted on the cat impressed on his mother's person. Very much pained, he asked the Devi the reason of it. Parvati then explained to her son, "My child, it is I who have become all beings. All female forms are part of me, and all male forms are part of Siva." Ganesa remembered these words of his mother forever. When he reached marriageable age, he refused to marry lest he should have to marry his mother. He maintained perfect *brahmacarya*, continence, and became foremost among the celestial beings. Thus narrating the greatness of Ganesa's illumination and his filial relation with all women without exception, the Master said: "My attitude to women is also the same; that is why I had the vision of the maternal form of the Universal Cause in my wedded wife and worshipped her and bowed at her feet."¹

1. Swami Saradananda, *The Great Master* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1978) p. 229.

Sri Ramakrishna also narrated in his inimitable way another story concerning Ganesa and his younger brother, Kartikeya. Parvati once offered a contest to both of her sons, showing them a precious necklace of gems of hers, "I shall give this garland of gems to the one who can circle the universe and come back to me first," she said. Kartikey, with a smile, jumped on his swift vehicle, a peacock, sure of victory. He thought of his elder brother's bulky body, pot-belly and his slow carrier—a mouse. Triumph writ large on his beaming face, he set off, to be the first to finish the journey. With his divine sight, Ganesa knew that Siva and Sakti permeated the entire universe and contained it within themselves. So he unhurriedly, with his leisurely gait, went round Siva and Parvati, worshipped them, and quietly resumed his seat. Highly pleased with the devotion of her son of divine knowledge, Parvati placed affectionately the garland of gems on his neck. After a long while Kartikeya returned from circumambulating the universe.

Before hearing these stories from the Master, "we did not have," wrote Swami Saradananda, "much devotion to, and reverence for, this pot-bellied elephant-faced god with exudation flowing from his temples. But since we heard the story from the Master's holy mouth, we have the conviction that Ganesa was truly fit to be worshipped before all the gods, as indeed he is worshipped."²

Ganesa looked upon all women as the manifestation of the Divine Mother. He, therefore, is an ideal of *brahmacarya* and of sannyasins too. This was a conviction Swami Vivekananda also held. While initiating Swami Sadashivananda into *sannyāsa*, Swamiji gave him the following instructions for meditation: "Now think of Sri Rama-

krishna, and transform me into him, and then him into Ganesa. Ganesa is the ideal of *sannyāsa*."³

Generally this Ganesa form of the Godhead is worshipped singly without a consort, as a *brahmacārin*. But in *Tantric* tradition, to uphold the supremacy of *Śakti*, he is shown with two of his symbolic consorts—*Buddhi* and *Siddhi*—the powers of Wisdom and Action, or *Jñāna-Śakti* and *Kriyā-Śakti*. The worship of this god falls on the fourth day of the bright fortnight in the month of *Bhādrapada* (August-September), conducted every year throughout India with much enthusiasm and gaiety. It usually precedes the worship of Durgā by about two months. Significantly, the festival of this deity coincides with the beginning of Vedic study afresh. Therefore, Ganeśa is known as the patron deity of learning and letters. Those who aspire to acquire knowledge—spiritual or secular, first invoke this deity to achieve success in their endeavours. He bestows *buddhi* (intelligence) in our hearts and *siddhi* (efficiency and success) for our outward actions. Gaṇapati personifies the lofty teaching of the *Bhagavad-Gita*: "*Samatvaṁ yoga ucyate...*"—"Yoga is unperturbed evenness of mind in all conditions." (II. 48) "*Yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam...*"... "Yoga is skill in action." (II. 50).

In life we require on the one hand, wisdom to guide us, and on the other, the transformation of that wisdom into skillful action. Mere intelligence without action is lame, as mere activity in the external world, without intelligence, is blind. A fruitful and meaningful life requires a prudent combination of these two. Our present civilization, for its prosperity and spiritual enlightenment, has to blend harmoniously these two ideals of *Jñānaśakti* and *Kriyāśakti* which this aspect of the godhead represents. Striving for

2. *Ibid.*, p. 227.

3. *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1964) p. 413.

material prosperity is good and desirable, but not coupled with an exclusive hedonistic philosophy of life. To correct ills springing from such an attitude, spiritual insight is necessary, but not the shunning of material welfare. Hinduism in its heyday combined these two seemingly unbridgeable and incompatible powerful drives of life. *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra* of Kaṇāda (third century B.C.) suggests *Abhyudaya*—material progress, and *Niḥṣreyasa*—the highest spiritual good, for man. History records that when Indian society was permeated with profound spiritual values, there was also material prosperity as well as an efflorescence in cultural life.

Wealth accumulated in the hand of a few, has led to all kinds of injustice, heartless exploitation, and has reduced the majority of mankind to the condition of bare survival. Wealth, if not properly put to the use of human welfare, becomes destructive of peace. *Buddhi*, therefore, the light of rational intuition, is to control the monster of greed and covetousness. When distribution of wealth has not been set right voluntarily by the wealthy class, ruthless revolutions have drenched nations with blood. Commenting upon the predicament of modern human society, Dr. Radhakrishnan writes:

We have a world of rationalistic prophets, of selfish individualists, of a monstrous economic system compounded out of industrialism and capitalism, of vast technical achievements and external conquests, of continual craving for creature comforts and love of luxury, of unbridled and endless covetousness in public life, of dictatorship, of blood and brutality, anxious to make the world a shamble, dripping with human blood, of atheism, and disdain for the soul, a world in which nothing is certain and men have lost assurance.⁴

4. *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, Edited by Radhakrishnan & Muirhead (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1952) p. 266.

Wisdom or spiritual insight can alone rescue us from this whirlpool. With the *Advaita buddhi* of oneness enshrined in our heart, and the *siddhi* fulfilment of our global civilization based on spiritual humanism, equilibrium can be regained. Such civilization alone can help everyone to manifest the inner divinity and rediscover the God-nature within. This is the goal of human life. Gaṇeśa, from his divine insight, showed that the Universal Mother is the Source of this manifested universe.

The upsurge and spread of materialistic philosophy in any age has neither been sudden nor the result of spurt of affluence. It is but a reaction. When spirituality of religion loses the seal of experience and authenticity and indulges in empty speculations, theological dogmas, tries to imprison the mind in a plethora of ungrounded beliefs and rituals, it becomes oppressive. It is a fossilized religion, which has lost its vitality and dynamism. Instead of spiritual authenticity, when thoughtless authoritarianism casts its ugly shadows to engulf the intellectual independence of man and suppresses free enquiry, the resultant response of society would be a revolt or rejection of religion. In the post-Upaniṣadic period the iconoclastic *Cārvākas*, Indian materialists, raised their voice against stultifying ceremonials and rituals, against the sacerdotal authority. The outburst of this movement stirred man from his intellectual slumbers and spawned awakening to question the ossified religious traditions. As if an answer to this confusion and turmoil, Mahavir and Buddha rose to placate the hearts of people. Due to such inflexible framework and rigid fundamentalism, Christianity in the West is losing some of the tightness of its grip, and a feeble pleading voice is heard in Egypt and some of the other Arab countries to reinterpret the Islamic theology.

In the nineteenth century the stagnation

accumulated over the centuries erupted once again in India, shaking the foundation of religion. The militant atheism of new-Cārvākas threatened to sweep the country and posed a mighty challenge. In response, Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, and others appeared to revitalize the sagging spirit of the times, and resuscitate the race caught in the throes of death. In the words of Swamiji, it was, "...a state of stagnation, rather than a toying ahead; a state of suffering more than of doing..."⁵ Sri Ramakrishna's life showed once again what true religion is. "Religion is realization," reminded Swamiji in thundering voice, "not talk, nor doctrine, nor theories—however beautiful they may be. It is being and becoming, not hearing and acknowledging; it is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes. That is religion."⁶

The all-round growth of human society can be possible only when that spiritual realization (*buddhi*) transforms itself into fruitful work (*siddhi*)—when people become morally good and industrious. Spirituality is not passivity nor is it a pretext for inactivity. In India, for centuries we have been misled to think that religion means abstinence from work. For this mass hypnotism we have paid the price—poverty. Spiritual persons have always been active—not the slavish activity prompted by desires, but in tireless working for the welfare of mankind. Till his last breath, though he suffered from unbearable pain of throat cancer, Sri Ramakrishna did not turn away a single soul in need of help. What nobler example can one cite of the Gita's perfect *karma-yoga* than that of Sri Sarada Devi! In spite of many ailments, and body shattered by incessant work, Swami Vivekananda never thought of a

moment's respite from his mission, inspiring and guiding people all over the world. It is Vivekananda, leader of mankind, who in the modern world revived the sublime qualities of Vināyaka. It is Vivekananda who brought down the precious truths of the Upaniṣads and taught us to apply them in our day-to-day life—which he called Practical or applied Vedanta. The test of truth is that it must lift us from our weal and woe, fear and weakness, selfishness and greed, and finally help us to take responsibility on our own shoulders. When we take the responsibility to shape our own destiny all the blessings from all gods and angels will be on our heads. Truth must broaden our minds, expand our hearts and strengthen our hands. Truth is religion. In the words of Swamiji, "The fictitious differentiation between religion and the life of the world must vanish."⁷

Illumining this vital theme he continued, "The ideals of religion must cover the whole field of life, they must enter into all our thoughts, and more and more into practice."⁸ Religion, to help mankind, must be ready and able to help him in whatever condition he is, in servitude, or in freedom, in the depths of degradation or on the heights of purity; everywhere, equally, it should be able to come to his aid.⁹

"The power of religion, broadened and purified, is going to penetrate every part of human life. So long as religion was in the hands of a chosen few, or of a body of priests, it was in temples, churches, books, dogmas, ceremonials, forms, and rituals. But when we come to real, spiritual, universal application, then and then alone, religion will become real and living; it will come into our very nature, live in our every move-

5. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989) Vol. IV, p. 140.

6. *Ibid.*, Vol. II p. 396.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 291.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 291.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 300.

ment, penetrate every pore of our society, and be infinitely more a power for good, than it has ever been before."¹⁰

Human excellence requires both spiritual knowledge (*buddhi*) and accomplishment (*siddhi*). Finding peace—bliss for oneself, the ideal of the East, is not enough. That peace should find a way to assuage the suffering of hearts everywhere. Acquisition of wealth for immediate happiness, the ideal of the West, is equally inadequate. It should provide food for the millions who are going hungry every day. In India religion must find effective expression in action, and in the West, the dexterity in action must be suffused with spiritual insight. Wisdom should control the play of mind and senses. *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* says: "*Buddhirntu sārathim viddhi, manahḥ pragrahaṁ eva ca*"—"Know the intellect as the charioteer and the mind, the reins." (I.3.3.) Vivekananda represented both these essential qualities—self respect, self-reliance, and the highest realization of truth. "Vivekananda," says Swami Ranganathananda,

both taught and exemplified in his life that the confluence of these two types of excellence constitutes true human excellence and total human fulfilment. Realizing the complementary nature of these two excellences, the power to act and the power to be, the power to reason and the power to worship, Vivekananda treats manliness as an essential requisite of spiritual life.¹¹

This comprehensive philosophy of life which Ganesa embodies, Vivekananda taught. His inspiring life and message have yet to enter fully into the bloodstream of this nation. Though there has been conflict

between traditional beliefs and new scientific attitudes, yet out of this purifying crucible will emerge an integrated vision fulfilling the prophesy of Swamiji. Science and religion, work and meditation, technology and humanist concern, will sustain each other. Thoughtful persons in the world are realizing that they have to be not only intensely practical in providing physical comforts, but also are in desperate need of the fulfilments offered by spiritual knowledge. These twin aspects find their wonderful expression in the mantra, "*Ātmano mokṣārtham (buddhi), Jagaddhitāya ca (siddhi)*"—"One's own spiritual freedom and the welfare of the world."

"India has to learn," advises Vivekananda, "from Europe the conquest of external nature, and Europe has to learn from India the conquest of internal nature. Then there will be neither Hindus nor Europeans—there will be the ideal humanity which has conquered both the natures, the external and the internal. ...The word freedom, which is the watchword of our religion, really means freedom physically, mentally and spiritually."¹²

If Ganesa were to speak, the refrain of his advice to spiritual aspirants would be like Vivekananda's—"Be up and achieve something, do not just sit idly, hoping; I am Vighneśwar, Remover of obstacles; I vouchsafe success to you in self-effort." It is through the Lord's grace that one is prompted to make self-efforts. Had Ganesa been idle he would have sat lazily, either blaming his slow carrier, or excusing himself from labour owing to the bulkiness of his body, when his mother Durgā asked him to circle the universe. But immediately he was up and achieved his aim with boldness and supreme wisdom. He is, therefore, the supernal representation of wisdom in action,

10. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

11. Swami Ranganathananda, *Swami Vivekananda and Human Excellence* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1990) p. 41.

12. *Complete Works*, Vol V, p. 216.

intelligence and self-effort. Human beings have to imbibe his great example and be manly to face difficulties and hardships. A brave person encounters obstacles and overcomes them because he invests all his energies and concentrates on the task before him. A stone never feels any difficulties. Growth means overcoming all those counter-forces which try to thwart it. The grace of Ganesa descends on such a person who is steadfast in his efforts and invincible in his faith.

Ironically, the profound significance of worship of this gentle deity, Ganesa, is too often obscured in witless din and bustle, or is smothered in the mechanical performance of sacred ritual. Without purity and efficiency, intelligence and self-effort, none can propitiate the powerful Ganesa. He is not deceived by the worship of unscrupulous persons, by dilatory students, or by those who procrastinate or shirk their duties. He is the Indwelling Spirit and knows all secret thoughts and desires. Worship of such Deity has nowadays become a lifeless affair, rather an event of entertainment. The usual way with people is to degrade any high ideal and

bring it down to their sensuous level. This phenomenon, unfortunately, is common all over the world. To appreciate lofty truth requires high spiritual culture and intellectual maturity. When spirituality turns into mere amusement—in any culture—the decadence of that race is inevitable. In India, whether it be Śivarātri, Durgā Pūjā, or *Ganeśa-Caturthī*, the unfailing feature of all these religious celebrations is an utter excess of noise, chaos and pandemonium. Such is the travesty of truth! The same casual attitude, we Indians display in every field of life. Our disorderly, dirty roads, bus and railway stations, temples and places of pilgrimage, public parks and offices, parliament buildings and state assemblies, and our educational institutions, reflect sadly our chaotic mind. The gods we worship with faith and devotion, in truth, are the embodiments of great principles—of love, care, industry and efficiency. We only worship the forms and keep ourselves miles away from practising those qualities ourselves! How many epochs of time will have to pass for us to learn!

(to be concluded)

Never talk about the faults of others, no matter how bad they may be. Nothing is ever gained by that. You never help one by talking about his faults; you do him an injury, and injure yourself as well...We have seen that it is the subjective world that rules the objective. Change the subject, and the object is bound to change; purify yourself, and the world is bound to be purified. This one thing requires to be taught now more than ever before. We are becoming more and more busy about our neighbours and less and less about ourselves. The world will change if we change; if we are pure, the world will become pure.

—Swami Vivekananda

The Indian Vision Of God as Mother

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

Motherhood of God infuses the sweet filial relationship more than any other conception of Divinity. Therefore it has captivated the hearts of East and West alike for millennia. The masterly exposition is based on the speech by Revered Swamiji, who is a Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

1. Introduction

In the West today, there is great interest in this wonderful idea that we speak of, and an approach to God as Mother, not only as Father. In fact, since the post-second world war years, big changes have been going on in Western religious thinking. Imagine the Christian church in America, Presbyterian or Methodist, passing a resolution that God can be called hereafter not only as Father but also as Mother. It is against the whole tradition of the two thousand years of Christian history. In all Semitic religions—Jewish, Christian, and Islamic, Father is the supreme word for God and Mother has no place there. But the concept of God as Mother was present in the various cults that existed in the Mediterranean region; all such cults were destroyed by Judaism and Christianity.

2. Evolution of the Mother Cults in India

Only in India were the original Mother cults preserved and developed and eventually given a very high status throughout our history. We can see the blending of the pre-Vedic Mother cults and the Vedic Father cults, and of the two peoples following these cults, mingling and merging in a few centuries to become the Indian culture and the Indian people. With the touch of the philosophy

of Advaita Vedanta, our Indian Mother cults developed into the full Śākta religion and spirituality, and spread to all parts of India in its Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, and Śākta forms, turning out devotees and teachers, simple as well as extraordinary, one of the greatest of whom was Śaṅkarācārya. This great Advaita teacher stressed this concept of God as Mother about twelve hundred years ago, and today we have in Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda, great teachers who have highlighted this idea once again. This truth is having increasing appeal to people in many parts of the world, that, behind this universe, there is a pulse of the Mother-heart; the pulse of the energy of compassion, love, and protective attitude—all that is associated with the idea of Mother.

Our great sages discovered the pulse of that *Śakti*, of that *Prakṛti*, of that Mother-heart, behind the universe. So they spoke and sang of God as Mother, as *Parā Śakti*, the Supreme Energy—*Parā Prakṛti*, the Supreme Nature, and Her unique manifestations as *Durgā*, *Kālī*, *Devī*, and *Rādhā*. India has cultured it throughout the ages. India speaks of God as Father; India speaks of God as Mother; India also speaks of God in the neuter, as 'It', as *Brahman*, as *Om Tat Sat*. Brahman is beyond all 'he' or 'she'. India presents the human soul also as essentially the sexless Self, on the realization of which truth, every man or woman trans-

* Based on a lecture delivered by Revered Swamiji at the Ramakrishna Math, Tiruvananthapuram, Kerala.

cends the limitations of masculinity and femininity which it relegates to the physical body. Some of the great writers in English, German, and other languages have also sometimes given a hint of the presence of this Mother-heart behind the universe. One of them is the famous German poet and dramatist Goethe in his famous book, *Faust*. The last line of that book is wonderful: "*The Eternal Feminine leads us on and on.*"

What a beautiful expression! There is an eternal feminine behind us, behind the passing manifestations of the world, and behind all the world's masculine and feminine. Another Western poet is Walt Whitman of America, who sings an invocation to the Divine Mother in his *Leaves of Grass* (Everyman's Library Edition, 1927, p. 279):

"Dark Mother, always gliding near with
soft feet,
Have none chanted for Thee a chant of
fullest welcome?
Then I chant it for Thee, I glorify thee
above all,
I bring Thee a song that, when Thou must
indeed come,
Come unfalteringly."

So everywhere, the concept of God as Mother has influenced human thinking, though it had to face suppression by powerful official church hierarchies in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Though suppressed again and again, it has raised its head again and again. The only country where it was not only not suppressed, but cultivated assiduously by great saints, sages, and thinkers, apart from the mass of the people, is India. That is why the whole subject of God as Mother gets a new strength by understanding India's approach to it.

3. *The Mother Goddess and the Current Women's Liberation Movement in the West*

One factor that is making for the prominence of this particular belief in God as Mother in the West is, what is called, the Women's Liberation Movement. Immense is its repercussions on all aspects of Western life, particularly in America. For centuries, everything in Western life and literature and religion was masculine-dominated; but after the Second World War, the protest against all this gender bias, as it is now called, set in and evolved soon into the current Women's Liberation Movement. During the last short twenty-five years of its existence, it has had its ups and downs, searching and probing for what exactly this liberation meant, and throwing up a plethora of books and distinguished leaders by the American womanhood. The movement got an impetus and shape and direction when Betty Friedan wrote her famous book *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, wherein she exhorted women not to be mere extensions of men; she and her colleagues also started for this purpose the NOW organization (National Organization of Women). That very author has recently written a new book in 1982, *The Second Stage*, the front page of which contains this *Sunday Times* reference to the author: "The most influential feminist of the last twenty years", and mentions her reassessment of the failures and successes of the movement. It registers the disappointment of the author for not getting the blessings to American women promised by the liberation movement even after twenty years. Making a distinction between feminine and feminist, she says (pp. 27-28):

"I believe that we have to break through our own *feminist* mystique now to come to terms with the new reality of our personal and political experience, and to move into the second stage..."

"*The second stage cannot be seen in terms of women alone, our separate personhood or equality with men.*"

"The second stage involves coming to new terms with the family—new terms with love and with work.

"The second stage may not even be a women's movement. Men may be at the cutting edge of the second stage.

"The second stage has to transcend the battle for equal power in Institutions. The second stage will restructure institutions and transform the nature of power itself." (italics by the author)

That conclusion has come from the great author of *The Feminine Mystique*, and she says now that the family must be kept intact and that there is no liberation for women without involving men also in the process.

Side by side with the efforts for women's liberation in the socio-political sphere, there has come the struggle to remove all gender bias in religion also. Why God should be described only as masculine, as the Father; why not speak of God in feminine terms, as the Mother? So books on the subject by women authors are coming out in a steady stream now in America. These books endeavour to revive the concepts of the Mother Goddess upheld in all pre-Christian religions, which were considered as superstitious by the Christian church and were wiped away; but now they are being revived once again. Naturally, the Western mind turns to India which has cultured and nurtured the whole range of the Mother Goddess cults all these centuries through authoritative books and theology and rituals. Books on God as Mother, as understood in India, are thus coming out in the English language. It is an extraordinary development; and one good thing that is revealed in these books is that, whereas, formerly, Western authors used to write scholarly books, but with little or no respect for our religious ideas—even belittling religion often—today they write with sympathy, appreciation, and even *bhakti*.

The following three books reveal this changed attitude. They reveal also the increasing Western interest in the concept of God as Mother:

1. —*God as Mother: A Feminine Theology in India, A Historical and Theological Study of the Brahmavaivarta Purāna*, by Cheever Mackenzie Brown, Foreword by Daniel H. H. Ingalls (published by Claude Stark & Co., Hartford, Vermont—05047, U.S.A., first printing 1974). The inner page vii carries this reverential inscription:

"To my parents, true amsās of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa."

In his *Foreword*, Ingalls says (p. xiv):

"What is strange about this Indian record is not so much the replacement of female by male heirophanies, a phenomenon that has occurred over most of the civilized world, as the fact that in India the Goddess reappears. In Mediterranean culture, her embodiments disappeared for good. Diana and Bercynthia, Isis and Cybele, were exiled with the coming of Christianity. Somewhat later, Islam was to prove as severe. Tabari tells us that the Prophet at first spoke of the principal goddesses of Mecca as "holy beings whose intercession is to be sought", but that these words were later expunged from the *Qur'an*. What we actually have in *Qur'an* 54-19-23 is an attribution of such statements to Satan, and the Prophet's followers continued to be intransigently masculine in outlook. In Christianity, female heirophanies reappeared in the figures of Mary and the female saints. But here one cannot speak of a reappearance of ancient Goddesses. The figure of the virgin and its supporting theology are subordinate to those of her son and his father. Diana is as surely dead as are the *puellae et pueri integri* who sang her praise."

The author, Cheever, begins his *Introduction* to his book with these words:

"Recently, it seems, theologians in the West have seriously begun to ponder whether the ultimate reality in the universe is male or female, or somehow includes or transcends both. What difference, we may ask ourselves, would it make to us personally if the supreme Reality were a Woman, instead of a Man, or some union of the two? How would it affect our faith, our attitudes and conduct towards men and women in our everyday lives, our ultimate fate? Would it alter our perception of the relationship of man and nature, spirit and matter, mind and body, intellect and feelings, subject and object? Such diverse concerns are more interrelated than they may at first appear. In any case, many Hindu thinkers, teachers, and writers, from at least the early Christian centuries, have deeply involved themselves with the problem of the feminine and masculine dimensions of ultimate reality and their ramifications within different aspects of life."

2. —*Devī Māhātmya: The Crystalization of the Goddess tradition*, by Thomas B. Coburn, with a Foreword by Daniel H. H. Ingalls, published by Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, First Edition: 1984, Reprinted: 1988.

The author commences his *Prolegomena* to his book thus:

"The central concern of this study is with a text from classical India. More specifically, it is with the vision of the ultimate reality in the universe that is articulated in the *Devī Māhātmya* (DM). ...The outstanding feature of its vision is that the ultimate reality is understood as female, as the Goddess."

3. —*The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power within the Feminist Movement* (Edited by Charlene Spretnak, Anchor Books, Doubleday, New York, 1982).

The author writes in the *Introduction* (Ibid., p. xxiii):

The title, "*The Politics of Women's Spirituality*" refers to our attitude toward life on Earth (i.e., spirituality) and the perception, manifestation, and use of power (i.e. politics) that stem from that attitude. The world-view inherent in feminist spirituality is, like the female mind, holistic and integrative. We see *connectedness* where the patriarchal mentality insists on seeing only separations. An excellent example of the integrative approach to issues was the unity statement of the Women's Pentagon Action in November 1980, which addressed the network of horrors that flow from patriarchal values, the domination and exploitation of "the other": foreign countries, women, minorities, and the earth (see "Spiritual Dimensions of Feminist Anti-nuclear Activism").

In the the first chapter on "*What the Goddess Means to Women*", Charlene Spretnak writes (pp. 5-6):

"Being a retired Catholic with an interest in Buddhist meditation, I attempted to express my feelings about spirituality and nearly always they would ask, 'Do you have a book?' They felt that a holy book of any sort...would signify legitimacy. Sometimes I sense that same reaction among contemporary theologians, and people in general, toward Goddess spirituality...to which I respond: 'We are older, much older, than books.'

"Many of the sacred myths of the Goddess that were told by our pre-patriarchal ancestors have survived and are now being gathered into books, although much of the Old Religion has been destroyed during the suppression of the patriarchal era. Ancient Mirrors of Womanhood: Our Goddess and Heroine Heritage and Lost Goddesses of Early Greece are examples of such collections. To sift through the surviving fragments of the ancient Goddess spirituality is a sobering experience. How close we came

to losing that wisdom forever, to believing the patriarchal assertions that their politics of separation are the natural—the only—way to live.

“Patriarchal governments and religions regard the current Goddess revival with deep-seated fear. Nothing threatens their power structure so resoundingly as the ancient consciousness that they believed had been crushed....”

“Feminists do not claim to own the Goddess. She has meaning for all people as a symbol of the holistic nature of life on Earth, in which all forms of being are intrinsically linked and are one (see Introduction). She also has special meaning for women as an expression of the power of the female body/mind. As such, it is not difficult to deduce why almost none of the history presented in the following selections appears in patriarchal textbooks. I am not suggesting a ‘conspiracy’ among scholars but, rather, a pervasive cultural attitude that all pre-patriarchal religions were less worthy than the Judeo-Christian system. For example, one never reads of ‘the religion of Artemis’ and ‘the cult of Jesus’; it is always the other way round. Similarly, the ancient Near Eastern words for ‘sanctified women’ or ‘holy women’ were translated by patriarchal scholars as ‘temple prostitutes’....”

“Contemporary Goddess spirituality, with its roots in pre-patriarchal culture, embodies a multiplicity of meaning for women. She is ever, she is all, she is us.” (italics by Charlene Spretnak)

In her earlier book *Lost Goddesses of Early Greece, A Collection of Pre-hellenic Myths*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1981, Charlene had quoted from Gunther Zuntz's book: *Persephone—Three Essays on Religion and Thought in Magna Graecia* (p. 12):

“To be gripped by the realization of deity in woman, the spring and harbor of life,

mankind did not have to wait for the invention of agriculture. Everywhere, from Spain to Siberia, so many palaeolithic documents of this devotion have emerged, and with traits so specific recurring in neolithic relics, as to forbid the facile inference that this change, however epochal, in man's living habits could by itself account for what is loosely called ‘the cult of the Mother Goddess’. ...What evidence there is—and it is not a little—points to concerns more comprehensive and profound. This is the oldest godhead perceived by mankind.”

Charlene dedicates this book of hers significantly thus: *“for our foremothers from the beginning”*.

4. *India Sings the Glory of the Divine Mother*

Coburn's book is a scholarly presentation of India's best song on the *māhātmya* (glory) of the Devī, the Divine Mother. There is no doubt that the presentation of this subject of Divine Motherhood in the ancient and later Indian culture, and in Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda in the modern age, will have a great appeal to the Western mind in the coming decades. It is interesting to note from the report published in an American Journal that the American churches have recently published a new edition of the *Holy Bible* eliminating all gender bias with respect to God and have added the word Mother to wherever the word Father occurs.

Sister Nivedita quotes Swami Vivekananda's words about the reality of the Divine Mother (*The Master as I Saw Him*, p. 170):

“You see, I cannot but believe that there is somewhere a great power that thinks of Herself as feminine, and called Kālī, and Mother. ...And I believe in Brahman, too.”

(Continued on page 348)

The Mother of All

SWAMI ATMASTHANANDA

(continued from the previous issue)

How did Holy Mother receive those hapless souls who were looked down upon and spurned by highbrow society?—is the touching subject matter of this concluding part.

The Holy Mother was the Mother of actors and actresses too. Among them Binode Behari Som, known popularly as 'Padmabinode', had, as a student in M's school, received the blessings of Sri Ramakrishna. He acquired fame for his acting in "Praphulla", "Macbeth", and other plays, but was addicted to heavy drinking. Every night when he passed by Mother's house on his way home he was fully intoxicated. He would sometimes call loudly to his 'dost' (chum), Swami Saradananda. On the Swami's orders, however, nobody in Mother's house responded to him. One night, standing in the street outside, Padmabinode started singing with great fervour the song beginning with the line "*O compassionate Mother, wake up! Open the door of your cottage...*" Hearing this beautiful song which expresses the pathetic cry of a forlorn child for its mother, the Holy Mother could not contain herself. She got up, rolled up the blind and opened the window. The reeling Padmabinode then exclaimed in joy: "Have you got up, Mother? Have you heard your son's call? Now accept this salutation of mine." So saying, he began to roll prostrate on the street. Then singing the refrain of another song, with a jibe at his 'dost', Padmabinode went away, overjoyed at the kindness of the Mother. The whole episode was re-enacted on more than one occasion.

At the invitation of Girish Chandra Ghosh, the Holy Mother went to his Star Theatre, as Sri Ramakrishna had earlier done. She

saw the dramatic performances "Vilva-mangal", "Pāṇḍava-gaurav", and one or two others. Once Girish, unable to bear so many sufferings of life, approached the Mother for permission to renounce the world. He used all his skill in reason and persuasiveness to convince the Mother that the time was ripe for him, but she remained unmoved and did not allow him to become a sannyāsin. When Holy Mother visited Girish's home during Durgā Pūjā, all of the actresses and actors of the Star Theatre came to touch her holy feet and receive her blessings. Once the Mother went to the Minerva Theatre at the instance of the actor, Aparesb Mukhopadhyay, to see the drama "Rāmānuja". The actress Niradasundari played an important role in it. After the play the Mother wanted to meet her, and the actress came hurriedly to Holy Mother, still wearing her costume and makeup. The Mother embraced her daughter warmly. This overwhelmed the poor actress who had never received such pure and genuine affection in her life. Another renowned actor, Amritlal, used to say openly that the Holy Mother was his greatest inspiration as an actor. In a poem he wrote: "*Infusing power in the hearts of people, wielding freely the pen [of destiny], you have taught the song of divine sport to so many.*" Once the actress Tarasundari came to Udbodhan to meet Holy Mother. While she was there, at the Mother's instance she impersonated a male character in the drama "Jana" and entertained the ladies with

her acting. The Mother treated her as her own daughter. Another actress, Tinkori, who played the role of a crazy woman in "Vilvamangal", also used to come to the Holy Mother. Once the Mother wanted her to sing, and she sang the song of the crazy woman which began, "*Lead me by holding my hand...*" The Mother was deeply moved by the soulful song and exclaimed, "My daughter, what a wonderful song you have sung!" Whenever these women who were looked down upon by cultured society came the Mother would personally arrange that they were fed sumptuously, and after the meal she herself would give them betel-nut with spices (*pān*). The actor Aparesh Chandra wrote:

"Ordinary people look at only the outer cover ; God looks at the inner stuff. And it is precisely because God alone sees the inner life of man that I myself have been able to see this fact ; the compassion of the Mother of all the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, my beloved Mother who took on to her lap fallen women, the actresses of theatres—that compassion knows no boundaries and distinctions, that compassion does not honour any rule or law, that compassion does not discriminate between the fit and the unfit, the thorny thistle and flowering herb, but purifies, sanctifies and divinizes whomsoever it touches."

A young initiated disciple of the Holy Mother belonged to the low caste of Yugis. Therefore he hesitated to move freely in the Mother's home at Jayrambati and this did not escape the notice of the Mother. One day she said to him: "Why do you hesitate just because you are a Yugi? What of that, my son? You belong to the Master's fold. You are a child of his family, so just you think that you have come to your own family." The Mother used the endearing expression "*gharer chele*" (child of the

family). It shows how she could make herself near and dear even to people in all walks of life. On another occasion, during the auspicious second day worship of the Durgā Pūjā, devotees started making offerings of flowers at her feet. One man was seen, however, to stand aloof. The Mother learned that he had come from Tajpore and belonged to the lowly *Bāgdi* caste. She asked him graciously to offer flowers, and he cheerfully complied. When the Mother was staying at Kamarpukur (soon after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna) a maidservant known by the name 'Sagar's Mother' used to do shopping and some odd jobs for her. The Mother used to keep aside a portion of the noon meal for Sagar's Mother, and when she came, Mother would hand it to her saying affectionately, "Put this in your mouth first and drink some water, and then begin your work." When the Holy Mother stayed at Koalpara Jagadamba Ashrama a very poor woman belonging to the *Dome* caste sought her help. She had been abandoned by the man with whom she had been living. The Mother sent for the man and reprimanded him in a gentle voice, "She has sacrificed everything for your sake," she told him, "and you too have accepted her service so far. Now if you abandon her, you will be committing a great sin and won't get refuge even in hell." These words, charged with Mother-power, brought about a change in the man and he accepted the woman once again. The Holy Mother's attendant Swami Saradeshananda has written:

At the Mother's house [in Jayrambati] fishermen, fishmongers, whoever went there, everyone of them was Mother's son or daughter. They all got the same loving attention as did the devotees and disciples. That compassionate, loving look of the Mother nobody can ever forget, either in this world or in the next world. Even if one forgets it for some time, as soon as

difficulties arise in life, that tender look will flash in one's mind once again."

Sri Sarada Devi was thus the Mother of the lowly and downtrodden.

The Mother's love was not restricted to human beings alone; it embraced all living beings. She felt herself to be Mother also to lowly creatures—cats, parrots, cows and all—not in a metaphorical sense, nor in an artificial way. It was natural and spontaneous with her, like the air that she breathed. She could not bear to see even a cat ill-treated. Radhu had a pet cat which used to remain at the Mother's feet free of all fear. She would keep apart one cup of milk for it every day. The cat, however, used to surreptitiously enter into the kitchen and eat things stealthily. For this, some of the disciples of the Mother would occasionally strike the cat, which pained the Mother very much. She would say, "Stealing is its inborn nature, my son. Who will feed it with love and care?" Once while leaving for Calcutta, she told Brahmachari Jnan: "Look, Jnan, don't beat the cat; I dwell in the cat also." There was in the Mother's house a talking Myna (a kind of starling). It was called by the name Gangaram. Mother herself used to give it food and water, and water for its bath every day. Whenever she would approach its cage, it too would cry "Mother! Mother!" The Holy Mother treated even ordinary inanimate things with respect. In her eyes everything in the universe had its inherent value and dignity in the divine plan. A woman was sweeping the courtyard at Jayrambati. After she finished she threw aside her broom somewhat carelessly. The Mother saw it and pointed out to her the need for regarding all work as sacred, and the importance of doing work with care and alertness. Being herself the Fount of Śakti, she saw everything as a manifestation of that Divine Power.

It is true that the Holy Mother had had a foretaste of motherhood even during her stay with Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar by caring for the young disciples of the Master like Latu, Rakhal, Baburam, Purna and others. But her heart was not completely satisfied with that. Once in a while when she was living alone at Kamarpukur, the thought would occur to her, "I have no son, and nothing else; who knows what is in store in the future?" One day the Master appeared to her in a vision and said, "Why do you worry? You want one son, but I have left for you all these jewels of sons. In time so many will address you as mother." On an earlier occasion, when Sarada Devi's mother Shyamasundari lamented in Sri Ramakrishna's hearing that her daughter would never hear anyone call her by the sweet name, mother, the Master said to her: "Dear mother-in-law, you need have no disappointment on that score. The time will come when so many children will call her 'Mother' that she will be unable to bear it... you will see this come true." These prophetic words of the Master actually did come to be literally fulfilled. Men and women, young and old, rich and poor, monks and lay-persons, saints and sinners—hundreds of them thronged to her presence. For those scorched in the midday sun of worldly suffering, she was like the cool light of the moon. Their suffering became her own. The cry of suffering humanity followed her like a shadow wherever she went. She did everything in her power to relieve sufferings of people around her. She gave everyone refuge in her lap and suffered vicariously for them. The world has never seen human love of that divine magnitude and intensity. That love knew no distinctions, no bounds. It was pure, unconditional and ever free. It asked nothing in return but gave itself freely to one and all.

Here is a wonderful new phenomenon. According to certain schools of Vaiṣṇavism,

Sri Krishna is not an Avatara but the Lord Himself, the Origin of all Avataras. Sri Ramakrishna can be regarded as the Incarnation of Divine Mother Kali. In that case Mother Kali and Mother Sarada Devi may be regarded as one. If this view is accepted, then the Holy Mother becomes the Originator of the Avatara of the present age. This is, perhaps, the reason why in Sri Ramakrishna one finds prevailing so much modesty, sweetness, and the attempt to establish *Dharma* through peaceful means, without any inclination to punish the wicked. This new Incarnation of Mother-Power redeems people by transforming their consciousness, by giving a Godward turn to their evil propensities, and hence, no need to destroy the wicked.

So this is the new Gospel, the new Message, the new Hope for the modern age: this time the Divine Mother of the universe Herself has assumed the dual forms of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi, to uplift humanity and lead them along the path of truth to the Ultimate Reality and ultimate fulfilment. The boundless motherhood, the inexhaustible Mother-Power, the limitless compassion and blessedness of the Divine Mother of the universe has this time assumed the human form of the Holy Mother. This

is what, in the final analysis, makes Sri Sarada Devi the Mother of All.

The God of All, Sri Ramakrishna, used to climb to the roof of Rani Rasmani's house to call out his future disciples. This Mother of All gave this assurance through the *Devī-Sūkta*:

*Ahaṁ rāṣṭrī sangamanī vasūnām
Cikituṣī prathamā yajñayānām
Tām mā devāḥ vyadadhuh purutrā
Bhūristhātrām bhūryāveśayantīm*

I am the Queen Regnant of the whole universe, the Bestower of wealth, the Supreme Power and hence the prime Object of all oblations. It is Me that the gods and sages worship in various ways. I manifest myself in myriad forms and exist in all beings as the Soul of all souls.

It was this sublime, transcendental, supreme Truth of Divine Mother-hood that the Holy Mother Sarada Devi tried to manifest in every small act of her life, unobtrusively, spontaneously, behind the veil of unparalleled, we may say, superhuman modesty. The pure love of her great Heart is now in flow tide. And her divine assurance, "Always remember, my child, that you have a Mother" has begun to reverberate even in the distant corners of the world. Glory unto the Mother!

This is the first lesson to learn ; be determined not to curse anything outside, not to lay blame upon anyone outside ; but be a man, stand up, lay the blame on yourself. You will find that is always true.

—Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda and The Imitation of Christ

PRAVRAJIKA BRAHMAPRANA

(Continued from the previous issue)

Not only was Swami Vivekananda captivated by Thomas à Kempis's expression of *dasya bhakti* in *The Imitation of Christ*, but the "reader's heart," he wrote:

will be profoundly stirred by the author's thoughts of burning renunciation, marvelous surrender, and deep sense of dependence on the will of God.¹

It may well be said that of all books, *The Imitation of Christ* had one of the most profound influences on the life of Swami Vivekananda. The influence of that book, carried with him throughout India—read and reread, studied, memorized, and meditated upon—deepened the Swami's own devotion to Christ, giving him an unalloyed knowledge, a magazine of power that made his teachings explode like bombs on the Christian world. "Do you believe what Christ says," Vivekananda once asked his Western audience:

'Sell all that thou hast and give to the poor?' Practical equality there; no trying to torture the texts, but taking the truth as it is.²

"I have heard it said," the Swami relentlessly continued:

that that was preached only to the handful of Jews who listened to Jesus. The same argument will apply to other things also. Do not torture texts; dare to face the truth as it is. Even if we cannot reach to it, let us confess our weakness, but let us not destroy the ideal. ...There it is—'Sell

all that thou hast and give to the poor and follow me.' Thus trampling on every privilege and everything in us that works for privilege, let us work for that knowledge which will bring the feeling of sameness towards all mankind.³

If *The Imitation of Christ* could inspire Swami Vivekananda with devotion and fire him with renunciation, so also it reiterated the message of his Master—to bypass the intellect and go deep within. Though Thomas à Kempis was himself recognized by the Swami as "a genius," it was à Kempis's yearning for God that marked that genius. "My son," à Kempis wrote, "let not the sayings of men move thee...."⁴

I am He that teacheth man knowledge; and I bestow on little children a clearer understanding than can be taught by man. ...I teach without noise of words, without confusion of opinions, without ambition of honour, without the scuffling of arguments.⁵

The theme of "head versus heart," so aptly expressed in *The Imitation of Christ*, was a message Swami Vivekananda also preached to his monks and to the world. He would tell his young monastic disciples:

One man contains within him the whole universe. One particle of matter has all the energy of the universe at its back. In a conflict between the heart and the brain, follow your heart.⁶

3. Loc. cit.

4. *The Imitation of Christ*, III: 43. 1.

5. Op. cit., III: 43. 2-3.

6. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, pp. 419-20.

1. *The Complete Works*, Vol. VIII, p. 160.

2. *The Complete Works*, Vol. I, p. 429.

Again, in his lecture on "Practical Vedanta I," Swamiji enjoined his audience, "It is through the heart that the Lord is seen, and not through the intellect."

The intellect is only the street-cleaner, cleansing the path for us, a secondary worker, the policeman.... He is only to stop disturbances, to check wrong-doing, and that is all the work required of the intellect.... Do you feel?—that is the question. If you do, you will see the Lord. It is the feeling that you have today that will be intensified, deified, raised to the highest platform, until it feels everything, the oneness in everything, till it feels God in itself and in others....⁷

The Swami added, "Those of you who have read Thomas à Kempis know how in every page he insists on this...."⁸

Passages from *The Imitation of Christ* express a deep sense of self-surrender, heavily punctuated with spiritual insight. Intense desire for God, coupled with self-introspection was another work of Thomas à Kempis's genius. "Through levity of heart," à Kempis wrote:

and small care for our failings, we become insensible of the real sorrows of our souls; and so oftentimes we vainly laugh, when we have just cause to weep.⁹

The Imitation of Christ presents Thomas à Kempis as a master psychologist, borne of deep meditation:

A man is hindered and distracted, in proportion as he draweth external matters unto himself. (II:1.7.) The more a man is united within himself, and becometh inwardly simple and pure, so much the more and higher things doth he understand

without labour; for that he receiveth intellectual light from above.¹⁰

Like à Kempis, Swamiji's teachings revealed his keen powers of introspection. "Self-restraint is a manifestation of greater power than all outgoing action," Swamiji explained in a lecture that parallels the above-passage:

All outgoing energy following a selfish motive is frittered away; it will not cause power to return to you; but if restrained, it will result in development of power. This self-control will tend to produce a mighty will, a character which tends to make a Christ or a Buddha.¹¹

Many times, in simple, aphoristic language like à Kempis, Swamiji could bring religion home to even a child by explaining reasons behind rituals, meanings within myths, and revelations effecting philosophies.

Despite Swamiji's devotion to Thomas à Kempis, he accepted only those writings verified by his own knowledge of God. Once an Indian visitor, having heard of the Swami's deep regard for *The Imitation of Christ*, felt assured in stating that "spiritual progress was impossible unless one thought of oneself as the lowest of the low." Swamiji, in his characteristic way, responded:

Why should we think ourselves low, and reproach ourselves? Where is darkness for us! We are verily the sons of Light! We live and move and have our being in the Light which lighteth the whole universe!¹²

Though Swamiji was the first to critique what he considered a false humility, he praised the spirit of humility that he saw in *The Imitation of Christ*. À Kempis wrote:

7. *The Complete Works*, Vol. II, p. 306.

8. *Ibid*, p. 307.

9. *The Imitation of Christ*, I: 21. 2.

10. *Ibid*, II: 1. 7.; I: 2. 3.

11. *The Complete Works*, Vol. I, p. 33.

12. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, p. 231.

He is truly great, that is little in himself, and that maketh no account of any height of honour.¹³

Indeed, it was this kind of humility that Swamiji unconsciously exemplified. Once the Swami was holding forth at the palace of Raja Dhyān Singh, before a gathering of two hundred residents of Lahore. He was praising someone at length, when a member of the gathering objected: "But Swamiji, that gentleman has no respect for you!" The Swami at once replied, "Is it necessary to respect me in order to become a good man?" The man was immediately silenced.¹⁴

Swamiji's humility was paramount. Many distinguished guests used to come to Belur Math. Among them was the Buddhist missionary Anagarika Dharmapala, who first stopped at the monastery to request Swamiji to accompany him to the old cottage on the recently-purchased Math grounds, where Mrs. Ole Bull was staying. "It was raining in torrents," we read in *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*:

After waiting for an hour the Swami and Dharmapala, with a few others, decided to start. Their way lay across very uneven and muddy ground, particularly in the compound of the new Math, which was being levelled. Drenched with rain, his feet slipping in the mud, the Swami enjoyed himself like a boy, shouting with laughter and merriment. Dharmapala was the only one who was not bare-footed. At one place his foot sank so deep in the mud that he could not extricate himself. The Swami, seeing his plight, lent his shoulder for support and, putting his arm round the visitor's waist, helped him out. Both laughing, walked linked together the rest of the way.

13. *The Imitation of Christ*, I: 3. 6.

14. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, p. 288.

On reaching the cottage, all went to wash their feet. When the Swami saw Dharmapala take a pitcher of water for that purpose, he seized it from him, saying, "You are my guest, and I must have the privilege of serving you!"...All those who witnessed the scene were amazed at the Swami's humility.¹⁵

One of Swami Vivekananda's favourite passages from *The Imitation of Christ* was:

We have taken up the Cross, Thou hast laid it upon us and grant us strength that we bear it unto death.¹⁶

This passage perhaps best sums up Swamiji's own brand of humility—the strength with which he bore all trials and tribulations. In a broader sense, it also foretells the nature of his own life's mission—a divine mission that brought suffering and drew strength.

Swami Vivekananda was born on earth to accomplish great things—to establish a new Order of monasticism, awaken the consciousness of his sleeping motherland, revitalize and broaden Hinduism, and to spread the message of Vedānta to the world—which he did tirelessly through lectures, classes, writings, interviews, and a prolific correspondence.

As the foremost disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda was both the leader of his master's modern monasticism, as well as Sri Ramakrishna's messenger to the world. Swami Brahmananda once described the sacrificing nature of his beloved brother-disciple. "Ah!" Maharaj remarked to a young monk:

Swamiji gave his heart's blood to build this monastery so that you young men might have the opportunity to devote your

15. *Ibid*, p. 322.

16. *The Complete Works*, Vol. VI, p. 207.

lives to God and practice spiritual disciplines. In fact, in his effort to make your life easier he over-exerted himself and shortened his own life. What intense love he had toward all mankind!

Swami Brahmananda continued:

Sri Ramakrishna was revealed to the world at large through Swamiji. Know that their words and teachings are not different.¹⁷

Fame was another Cross the Swami patiently bore. In a letter written to Mrs. George Hale, on August 23, 1894, he confessed:

In India I have become horribly public—crowds will follow me and take my life out....Every ounce of fame can only be bought at the cost of a pound of peace and holiness. ...Why Mother, I confess to you: no man can live in an atmosphere of public life, even in religion, without the devil of competition now and then thrusting his head into the serenity of his heart. Those who are trained to preach a *doctrine* never feel it, for they never knew *religion*.¹⁸

This was the Cross of Vivekananda, the World Teacher, who was once the young, wandering sannyasin with only the Gita and *The Imitation of Christ* as his possessions. Swamiji's longing for a return to those days, was expressed in the next paragraph of the same letter, "I have such a beautiful edition of Thomas à Kempis," he wrote.

How I love that old monk. He caught a wonderful glimpse of "behind the veil"—few ever got such. My, that is religion. No humbug of the world. No shilly-shallying, tall talk, conjecture—I presume,

I believe, I think. How I would like to go out of this piece of painted humbug they call the beautiful world with Thomas à Kempis—beyond, beyond, which can only be felt, never expressed.¹⁹

But Swami Vivekananda was not to leave this world until he bore his Cross to its final destination. This sacrifice reveals the grandeur of his compassion along with his breathtaking compassion for mankind.

Swamiji risked broken health to endure a crushing schedule—"cyclonic" lecture tours, demanding correspondence, pressures of administrative work in East and West, and the irregularity of food and sleep this lifestyle imposed. The Swami endured American racial discrimination and slanderous Christian missionaries. He came home to homage and ovations to find himself outcaste by orthodoxy—the target of jealous Hindus and American Mission vilifiers. Only a World Teacher who knew that he was born to give his message to the world could bear such a Cross, when silently he lived in the "memories of long nights with Sri Ramakrishna under the Dakshineswar Banyan."²⁰ "And I have been told," the Swami further promised in a letter to Sister Christine,

by one, who has been the personal God to me, that I am to come once more yet.²¹

Perhaps the greatest test of Swami Vivekananda's humility and strength was his acceptance of those who betrayed him. It is this aspect of the Swami's life that touches so dramatically near to Christ's. In Swamiji's correspondence, we cannot help but feel the impact of this *lilā* of the Cross.

The first defector was Leon Landsburg, Swami Kripananda, on whom Swamiji had

17. Prabhavananda, Swami *The Eternal Companion* (Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1970), p. 182.

18. *Prabuddha Bharata*, 1980 (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1980), pp. 69-70.

19. Loc cit.

20. 12 April 1900, VSSC archives.

21. *Prabuddha Bharata*, 1977 (Letter of 29 August 1898), p. 397.

bestowed sannyas at Thousand Island Park. Landsburg's paranoia first soured their relationship. Later, it was severed by the tormented Landsburg's published diatribe—all in the name of Vedanta—against Americans in general, Theosophists, and spiritualists in particular—a grave transgression that could only be corrected by the Swami's outward indifference towards his beloved disciple. In early August 1896, after a long and heated correspondence with Mrs. Ole Bull, whom he considered his only remaining friend, Landsburg lost not only her respect, but her friendship. It was at this time, when Swamiji was in Switzerland, that he heard, as it were, his disciple's cry of anguish and immediately sent him his blessings by mail. In a letter to J. J. Goodwin, written on August 8, 1896, Swamiji divulged the lofty plane from which he observed Landsburg—a state that fashioned his forgiving heart, unfettered by the world's petty quarrels. "It is in the nature of things that many should fall," Swamiji wrote:

that troubles should come, that tremendous difficulties should arise, that selfishness and all other devils in the human heart should struggle hard when they are about to be driven out by the fire of spirituality. The road to God is the roughest and steepest in the universe. It is a wonder that so many succeed, no wonder that so many fall. Character has to be established through a thousand stumbles.²²

Two years later Miss Henrietta Muller, one of the Swami's "gifts of England to India" defected by making a formal newspaper declaration on December 25, 1898, in the *Indian Social Reformer*. "To our Christian brethren," the *Reformer* gloated:

we beg to offer a Christmas present in the shape of the news, which we have just received from the most authentic source,

22. *The Complete Works*, Vol. VIII, p. 383.

that Miss Muller has completely severed her connection with Swami Vivekananda's movement to spread Hinduism, and that she has returned to her Christian faith...²³

Again, Swamiji's Christlike forgiveness was evident in a 20 June 1900 letter to Sister Christine, he confided:

Did you hear of my friend Miss Muller? Well, she left me in India, and, they say, tried to injure me in England. This morning I got a letter from her that she is coming to the States, and wants to see me badly! Her defection was a great blow to me, as I loved her so much, and she was a great helper and worker....She wants to come by the end of June. I, of course, want her to come earlier.²⁴

Two years later, less than three weeks before his own passing, Swamiji reported the defection of his sannyasin disciple Marie Louise. In a 14 June 1902 letter to Mrs. Ole Bull:

I wanted to write many things, but the flesh is weak. Marie Louise has become a devotee of Sri Caitanya and I hear that several wealthy men have taken her up. ...She had a desire for money, so may the Lord give her much money.²⁵

What is the relevance of a Landsburg, a Muller or a Marie Louise to us? What is it that makes their betrayals touch our hearts nearly a hundred years later? In Vivekananda's divine play, all those who met and served him enacted not only their own human roles, but a more universal drama for future generations to observe and profit by.

In a sense, Swamiji's greatest friends and disciples are our higher ideals and aspirations. But just as we share in their glory,

23. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, p. 414.

24. *Prabuddha Bharata* (1978), p. 71.

25. *The Complete Works* (Bengali Edition), Vol. V, p. 180.

so also Swamiji's wayward disciples were no less instructive. Their personalities—even today—are uncanny reminders of our own tendencies to darkness, delusion, and doubt. Landsburg, Muller, Marie Louise and others, by living out their own *karmas*, have, in a sense, liberated us from their errors. They are our tragic examples.

As these disciples enacted their roles of betrayal and slander against Vivekananda, we can then unearth the Swami's response and our own example to live by.

Perhaps the most heartrending defection was that of Mr. E. T. Sturdy. In the fall of 1899, we read in *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*:

The emotional shock of an unexpected encounter with Swami Kripananda, who earlier had betrayed him, together with a bitter letter of recrimination and dissension he had received around this time from Mr. Sturdy, could not have left [Swamiji's] highly sensitive body unaffected.²⁶

How ironic that à Kempis's chapter "Against the Tongue of Slanderers" would have been a forecast and forewarning. Undoubtedly Swami Vivekananda was to draw on this passage again and again:

He that neither coveteth to please men, nor feareth to displease them, shall enjoy much peace.

If thou dost walk inwardly, thou wilt not much weigh fleeting words outwardly.²⁷

It seems that these passages of à Kempis were guiding his pen, when Swamiji responded to his beloved disciple Sturdy on September 14, 1899. "I am sorry we could not come up to your ideal," he wrote.

But my experience of life is we so rarely find a person who comes up to that. Then

26. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, p. 490.

27. *The Imitation of Christ*, III: 28. 2.

again it is almost impossible for anyone to keep steady on the plane we assign to him in the ideal. We are so human, and liable to change for good or worse. At the same time, like the earth's rotating, we are always leaving the changes in us out of [our] calculation, and attribute it all to external ideals.

Swami Vivekananda inadvertently revealed the irony of his betrayal. For was it not his Christ-like compassion that had contributed to his ill health that disillusioned his defectors? He continued his letter:

Mrs. Jonson [another English Vedanta member] is of the opinion that no spiritual person ought to be ill. It also seems to her that my smoking is sinful & c., & c. That was Miss Muller's reason for leaving me, my illness. They may be perfectly right, for aught I know, and you too, but I am what I am. In India, the same defects, plus eating with Europeans, have been taken exception to by many. I was driven out of a private temple by the owners for eating with Europeans. I wish I were malleable enough to be moulded into whatever one desired, but unfortunately I never saw a man who could satisfy everyone. Nor can anyone who has to go to different places possibly satisfy all.

Swamiji continued:

When I first came to America, they ill-treated me if I had not trousers on. Next I was forced to wear cuffs and collars, else they would not touch me... They thought me awfully funny if I did not eat what they offered... I can understand well how differences of opinion, tastes and ideals should naturally arise in the course of years, but how so much hatred and dislike may slowly, and without any warning expression, gather round little, trifling personal peculiarities, I cannot understand. No matter what the occasion, Swamiji

never failed to enlighten the ignorant. Sturdy's disillusionment was no exception: I so long thought [Swamiji wrote] it was only the fault of enslaved races like mine, but that manlier races like yours should also have it, and suddenly bring it to light without any previous warning, makes me sad.

He continued:

Of course, it is my Karma, and I am glad that it is so. For, though it smarts for the time, it is another great experience of life, which will be useful, either in this or in the next.

If you....repent of the help you gave to my work, only give me time—I will try my best to pay it back. As for me, I am always in the midst of ebbs and flows. I knew it always and preached always that every bit of pleasure will bring its quota of pain, if not with compound interest. I have a good deal of love given to me by the world; I deserve a good deal of hatred therefore....

Swamiji's forgiveness was to become one of his most eloquent messages to the Christian world, empowered by a loving kindness that untied all the knots and twists of

Sturdy's doubting heart and led him to the admission years later: "I made a terrible mistake."²⁸ But Vivekananda was never to hear this, for he had long since left this world.

Fortunately, however, Sturdy saved his guru's private letter, which has since become a treasure for all to share. It is part of Swamiji's spiritual legacy as a World Teacher, and bears the unmistakable stamp of another time, another country, and another World Teacher's unfathomable forgiveness. "As for me," Swami Vivekananda wrote:

I stick to my nature and principle—once a friend, always a friend—also the true Indian principle of looking subjectively for the cause of the objective.

I am sure that the fault is mine, and mine only, for every wave of dislike and hatred that I get. It could not be otherwise. Thinking of you...for this calling once more to the internal,
I remain as ever with love and blessings,

Vivekananda.

28. Unpublished conversations of Swami Prabhavananda, Vedanta Society of Southern California, Santa Barbara.

The purer the mind, the easier it is to control...Perfect morality is the all-in-all of complete control over the mind. The man who is perfectly moral has nothing more to do, he is free.

—Swami Vivekananda

Literature and Values

DR. N. R. SHASTRI

Literature has value, not only in terms of its expressing beauty and truth, but also in terms of the good and the blissful. The author of this insightful article is Reader in the Department of English at Osmania University, Hyderabad.

A value system is generally a set of values related to a specific aspect of society. They may be monetary, religious, moral, ethical, cultural, aesthetic and the like. There are two sets of values to which humanistic studies are applied in the educational institutions: aesthetic values, and moral and ethical values.

Aesthetic values are concerned with the quality of works of art, musical compositions, writing, cinema and of performances within the arts. Moral and ethical values as extracted from works of art might be called 'applied humanities'. Such works as painting, sculpture, music, dances, plays, novels, poems and films are studied for what they reveal of the human enterprise, attitudes about love, pleasure, war and peace, right and wrong and so forth.

Throughout history, artists, novelists, composers, dramatists, poets and film-makers have used their art forms to express moral conflict. The arts have been a seedbed for painting and growing human values in successive generations of human beings. They also provide seedlings of change in social and cultural values, and reflect the disintegration of values too.

In his mural, *Guernica*, Pablo Picasso depicted the horrors of war following the first saturation bombing of the entire town of Guernica, Spain, by German planes under the General Francisco Franco on April 26, 1937. The effect of war on human beings

has been a popular theme in literature from Euripedes' *The Trojan Woman*, through Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* to Stephen Crane's *Red Badge of Courage* and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*.

Contemporary American values are depicted in art through the giant Campbell's soup cans and Brillo boxes of Andy Warhol, the comic strip paintings of Roy Liechtenstein, and the various Pop art and anti-art movements. The visual arts reflect the values of a society and culture through its activities and images. They also reflect the breakdown of value systems through what Erich Kahler calls "the disintegration of form".

Conflicts between individuals with opposing value orientations provide the basis of much of our literature. They are fought in the living room of Edith Wharton, in the New England settings of Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Eugene O'Neill and the various European hillsides and towns of Hemingway. The constancy of conflict between two generations within the same family are exemplified in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*.

How do these value conflicts arise? The ancient Greeks believed that there are three eternal or universal truths, or what they called 'eternal verities': truth, beauty and goodness. The conflicts arise because of the diverse nature of human needs, which are not the same as human values. They are

nonetheless intricately interrelated. Milton Rokeach in *The Nature of Human Values* suggests that values are the representations of human (individual), societal and institutional needs. They result from both sociological and psychological forces acting upon the individual.

It is sometimes argued that value education programmes can be integrated with the existing subjects like social studies, literature, history, philosophy etc. For students of literature in particular, great literature raises certain fundamental social and moral problems like the inner conflict of Hamlet, Macbeth, Raskolnikov or the social injustices raised by Dickens, Balzac and Gaskell. Teachers concerned with great literature cannot avoid discussing the motives, intentions and conflicts of characters with their students and thereby raising issues of controversial and ethical nature.

It is in this context one has to carefully examine the role of study of literature vis-a-vis value instruction. To regard the study of literature merely as a means of raising moral, ethical questions would surely be to debase both literature and morality. Fiction, drama and poetry are real for their intrinsic value as literary works, for their richness and language, their structure and perhaps the reflection of the author's personality or social consciousness. Literature surely should not be used purely instrumentally as a means to some other end. Similarly, if values are to be taught as part of a student's education, then some deliberate attention must be paid to the nature of values with their own peculiar concepts, methodology and evaluation criteria.

Moreover, the issue between literature and morality has been debated from time to time with sufficient zeal. One extreme view is that literature is primarily a moral or propagandist force. A work of literature ought to embody as numerous collection

of moral ideas as it possibly can. A modern variation of this view in literature is but a rendering of the class struggle and has value only if it is vigorously proletarian. As the Soviet writer, Kusinov points out, "The idea of a work is false if it is false from the standpoint of consciousness of the given class; it is true if it corresponds to that class' veritable consciousness: it is not false if the author is deeply convinced of its truth." At the other extreme, there are critics who argue that literature should have no overt or covert propagandist purpose, secular, political or religious. Art is for Art's sake alone, and beauty should be the sole criterion for judging art of literature. Therefore, morality and literature, according to them, should not be linked together.

At the same time, it is argued by some that morality and literature are not to be divorced in the way in which some of the aesthetes sought to divorce them. A work of literature need not be moral in the sense in which a pulpit sermon or tale is moral. Morality grows out of the work of art itself, rather than its being superimposed. Literature is criticism of life, in the sense that moral conflicts are presented in terms of reality 'freed from the seeming idiosyncracies of chance'. For example, we know that Macbeth is a murderer and remains so till the end. We also know the moral of his crime; Wages of sin is death. But Macbeth the murderer is also a human being and the tragedy is that a man cast in so heroic a mould should nevertheless commit so sordid a crime as the murder of his defenceless guest and kinsman and king, and thereby destroy himself completely. Shakespeare does not admire Macbeth as a Magistrate does, but presents the case with its hallowed intensity and fervour, with sympathy and sincerity for misguided human beings.

It is in this light that one has to consider the import of mimetic theories. The 'imita-

tion' as Aristotle conceived it, was representation of life. It was selective and purposive and great poetry was somehow more real than life, presenting to the reader a higher realism—a realism charged with significance. Tragic poets like Aeschylus and Sophocles portrayed the passions of pity and terror in order to effect a purification, a purgation, a kind of transcendence of emotions or what may be called in technical terms, catharsis. Poetry was thus essentially a moral force and great works of literature presented these versions of reality in aesthetic form and linguistic structure.

We may consider in this context, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* which appeals to our aesthetic sense. It acquires aesthetic value in its treatment of the theme. The play is a study of an individual's character at a critical point of his life, a study of the spiritual crisis in Hamlet's life. It is a crisis that brings out the best and worst in him and makes him the most fascinating character created by a great artist. The play also poses certain problems of conduct, though they are not satisfactorily answered. The basic human ties are seen to go awry and are rent asunder. A brother murders his elder brother, a wife is guilty of adultery and incest, a lover insults the name and image of his love, friends dwindle into spies, a father thinks the worst of his son and daughter, a son submits his mother to the rigors of an inquisition. The play thus offers the reader certain situations that inevitably awaken the moral being in him, compelling him to observe closely this clash of mighty opposites of evil and good. The play is not only true to our sense of reality and has beauty of form and organization, but is also a power that awakens our moral sense profoundly.

Viewed from the aesthetic perspective, the value of a good poem is that its language extends, shapes and illumines our experience. The cynicism of the Duke in 'My Last

Duchess' or the visionary rapture of Dylan Thomas, become part of our own experience, because of the artistry of their language. T. S. Eliot and his 'Four Quartets' compares a God to a river:

I do not know much about gods ; but I
think that the river
Is a strong brown god—sullen, untamed
and intractable.

The larger context of the poem deals with the speaker's sense of the presence of divine power in the world. The poet makes his sense of that abstract power concrete by saying that he thinks of that power as a river—'sullen, untamed and intractable'. The poet's attitudes are caught so precisely and vividly that we are convinced of their reality and they become part of our experience and knowledge.

Moreover, any evaluation of the importance and truth of poetry depends, by and large, on evaluating the experience we have with its language. For instance, we may consider for comparison two lines from Shakespeare's plays. Hamlet's observation when he considers himself surrounded by enemies, that "one may smile and smile and yet be a villain" has a particular kind of ambiguity. To Hamlet the observation applies to practically everybody; to us it applies, according to our experience, to fewer people. But to all readers the observation seems immediately to be true. It is, however, something we already know and is of no particular interest for the knowledge it imparts. We value it for the pacing and conciseness of language. In the larger context of the drama, it tells us much about Hamlet's emotional state and idealism as it does about his ability to perceive the truth. As part of *Hamlet*, it has its place in the grand design of a great tragedy. By itself, however, it lacks the greatness of the following quotation from *King Lear*:

When we are born, we cry that we are come
To this great stage of fools—

Lear's observation is more complex than Hamlet's. It is more densely metaphysical, more surprising, even audacious, and more comprehensive. It refers to more of man's experience; its frame of reference is larger, grander and more spiritual. Even though its tone is elevated, its central image is drawn from common experience. It achieves a different order of truth than Hamlet's line achieves, and as a result more people could call it 'great'.

While we immediately recognize the truth of Hamlet's line, we are not so quick to accept Lear's metaphor. It may be that babies taken from the womb cry from pain of the cold air and the difficulties of learning to breathe, and it may be, as Freud suggests, that the baby taken from the womb senses a loss of security. But it is not literally true that babies cry *because* this is a great stage of fools. Lear speaks not just in metaphor but in madness, and our reflex is to keep a safe distance from such intensity of emotion. But the beauty of the line is amazing and haunting because its intensity is an essential part of its greatness. Its truth, being locked safely in metaphor, is not something we care to analyse as we could a rhetorical statement. It pushes beyond the boundaries of our conscious experience into the disorderly area of our unconscious fears, and there the language shapes an insight. We validate its truth from experience that we are not conscious of having had. The greatness of the line is in its magnitude, in its intensity and power, but chiefly in the ease with which our imagination is engaged to give comprehensive form to the anxieties and despairing moments of all men.

The truth of great poetry may be a personal and relative truth. But great poetry has other qualities as illustrated in Lear's line. In the magnitude and intensity of Lear's line

we witness a great poetic imagination, create an artistic shape of enduring value, and see intense universal experience shaped into comprehensive form.

Therefore, it is unwise to treat aesthetic and moral values as totally independent of one another. On the contrary, they are inextricably interrelated and reveal the personality of the artist. As Charles Morgan aptly puts it,

Man cannot begin to think less of art without at the same time, beginning to think, more or less, of religion, of love, of equality of possessions, of power, of all else by which his mind and spirit are engaged.

In the words of Sri Aurobindo,

Art is not only technique or form of beauty, not only the discovery or the expression of beauty—it is a self-expression of Consciousness under the condition of aesthetic vision and a perfect execution. Or, to put it otherwise, there are not only aesthetic values, but life values, social values that enter into art...And there are also gradations of consciousness which make a difference, if not in the aesthetic value, or greatness of a work of art, yet in its content-value. Homer makes beauty out of men's outward life and action, and stops there. Shakespeare rises one step and reveals to us a life-soul and life-forces and life-values to which Homer had no access. In Valmiki and Vyasa there is the constant presence of great Idea-Forces and Ideals supporting life and its movements which were beyond the scope of Homer and Shakespeare...If we take these three elements as making the whole of Art, perfection and expressive form, discovery of beauty, revelation of the soul and essence of things and the powers of creative consciousness and Ananda of which they are the vehicles, then we shall get perhaps a solution which includes the two sides of the controversy and reconciles their difference. Art for Art's sake certainly: Art as a perfect form and discovery of beauty; but also Art for soul's sake, the spirit's sake, and the expression of all that the soul, the spirit wants to seize through the medium of beauty.

In conclusion, we may say that a work of art is not only beautiful and true but also a vehicle of moral form of powerful import.

Vivekananda's Way to Russia*

DR. ROSSOV VLADIMIR ANDREEVICH

I am very glad to deliver this speech in the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, in the Vivekananda Hall.

I propose to tell you about the influence of Indian philosophy and culture, specially Vedanta Philosophy, on Russian scientists and Russian thought. This subject is little known to the Indian people. What can we do? We all are growing under the rays of Indian wisdom as all living beings are warmed by the sun. But now I have not much time to touch upon this deep subject of Swami Vivekananda's influence. I keep this thought for my future speeches and my future book, *East Recalled*. Now I would like to tell you the history of Swami Vivekananda's way to Russia.

At the end of the nineteenth, and at the beginning of the twentieth century, while Swami Vivekananda was preaching in America and in India, as you know, at the same time another brilliant man—a military man—was living in Russia. His name was K. J. Popov. He was very educated and well-known in the world of intelligent people. He had a beautiful wife, who was a chemist by profession. She perished during her experimental laboratory work. Her husband, Mr. Popov, was shocked by grief. He tried to contact his wife's soul. He wanted to meet her in the higher world. He travelled and tried to find the people who could help him hear his wife's voice from the other world.

Mr. Popov travelled around Europe and visited many theosophical and spiritual centres. But he could not meet anywhere anybody who could help him in his difficult situation. At last he reached Italy where he was told to visit India and Indian Yogis. He took a ticket, boarded a ship and started towards India. Mr. Popov arrived at Bombay port. At the same time Swami Vivekananda had returned from America. Their ways crossed. Mr. Popov talked to Swamiji and asked about his wife. How Swami Vivekananda replied we do not know. After this meeting, however, Mr. Popov was calm, and he was no more eager to meet his wife. Thus, this meeting gave him some inspiration. He didn't try further to reach the opposite bank of the river, the bank of death. And he dedicated his life for the service of mankind, which from then on he considered as service to God. Mr. Popov came back to Russia. He resumed his life at his native place, near Kiev, and began to translate the books of Swami Vivekananda.

After sometime, in 1906, the first book of Swami Vivekananda was published in the Russian language. One after another appeared other books, like *Philosophy of Vedanta*, *Karma Yoga*, *Raja Yoga*, *Bhakti Yoga*, and *Jnana Yoga*. After ten more years, in 1916, in the same place another army man—a doctor—came back from the war-field to his parents' village, also near Kiev. His name was B. L. Smirnov. Afterwards, he became a famous Academician, who translated into

* Short speech delivered at Ramakrishna Mission Institute of culture, Calcutta on 16 March, 1991.

(Continued on page 351)

Nation Pays Its Homage

By conferring upon the late Rajiv Gandhi (Aug. 20, 1944—May 21, 1991) posthumously on 6th July 1991 the highest civil award '*Bharata Ratna*', the Nation acknowledged with heavy heart the selfless service rendered by its dutiful, noble son. The fiendish assassination on 21st May of the young, enthusiastic and visionary former Prime Minister has stunned India as well as the world. The country is still in the grip of shock-waves, and writhing under the gloom of sorrow. A promising life was cut short in its prime of youth, falling victim to a threatening climate of violence that has steadily overtaken the subcontinent. With one blow the uncertainty loomed large over the destiny of 844 million people and their hopes shattered to smithereens. The country placed its faith in that youthful leader, invested its weight on those strong shoulders. Alas! In an overnight that robust body was blown to pieces and had to rest on the shoulders of pall bearers!

A few years ago, in 1984, his Mother, Indira Gandhi, too, was felled by senseless extremists. India reeled under grief, not knowing where to turn for solace and succour. As a reluctant politician Rajiv took up the mantle and tried to dispell the gloom of despair and despondency, stem the extremism, satisfy genuine and imaginary discontent brewing in the hearts of some sections of society. Many peace accords were signed during his period of leadership ; many sincere efforts were made by him to bring about global peace. The same person who strived, trotted over the globe for peace, became victim of the violence, ironically.

For the last decade or so India has been undergoing a painful period of turmoil. Violence in its various ugly manifestations—brutal killings, bomb blasts, kidnappings, would no more strike us with surprise. The newspapers and the electronic media are full of such ghastly events. Killings have become an everyday affair, like theft and looting. None seems to take these things seriously. This savagery has not remained an exclusive prerogative of extremists, but the virus has spread deeper in our society. The recently concluded general elections were attended by an unprecedented wave of killings, rigging, booth-capturing, and intimidation. These disturbing and dangerous trends threaten to eclipse all the healthy norms of democracy in the nation. Frequent orgies of communal rioting, notorious criminals fighting against free elections and coercing the voters, political parties employing or even patronizing thugs with criminal records, impotency of state and central administration to curb mounting black money and widespread corruption have crumpled the fabric of national conscience. Thoughtful Indians have, not unnaturally, become disgruntled with the state of affairs.

Of late, there is too much politics and less sincere administering in the country. Society has been vitiated by dirty politics. Throwing to the winds decent respect for truth and honesty, many weakhearted opportunists are entering politics for the purpose of enjoying power and making quick money and are not above stooping to unscrupulous actions. It would be a prudent step that our people

should be educated and warned to beware how their trust is being betrayed.

India has to blame herself for this impasse. For ages, this sacred and peace-loving land of Buddha, Mahavira, Chaitanya, Guru Nanak, Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, and Mahatma Gandhi has given us example and precepts. The world has always looked with hope towards India for guidance. Today, we have become reduced in the eyes of the world. We must try to recover our feet and vision with vigour and self-confidence.

India is essentially spiritual. Without

spirituality we are lost. The time has come for us now to purge ourselves of all impurities and violence. It is our prime duty now to purify our individual and national heart and mind. We must listen with renewed faith to the teaching of *Vedānta*, our national heritage, to the oneness of God and Man, which has all the while been teaching us to live for *Bahujana hitāya ; bahujana sukhāya*—for the good of many, and the welfare of many. Unless we do it, we leave to our posterity a bleak future and a nation vulnerable to further degradation.

VIVEKANANDA'S WAY TO RUSSIA

(Continued from page 349)

Russian the epic *Mahabharata*. The young doctor came there to meet Mr. Popov, who gave him his translations of the works of Vivekananda to read. From this time Smirnov started his lessons in Sanskrit language. His daily routine was to wake up early in the morning to help his parents plough the land. But before that he spent twenty minutes everyday before sunrise studying and learning Sanskrit. He soon translated *Nala and Damayanti* in Russian. After a decade *The Bhagavad Gita* and the volumes of *The Mahabharata* appeared. In all there were more than ten volumes of translated works, literary and artistic. This is just a glimpse of history which I gathered

from the letters of Academician Smirnov.

I want to draw your attention again towards the personality of Mr. Popov. We do not know his fate, he disappeared in 1919. Nothing of his archives or his notes have survived. But his translations of the works of Swami Vivekananda are still there. These books influenced deeply the cultural heritage of Russian literature and science, through L. N. Tolstoy, N. K. Roerich, V. I. Vernadsky, and others. It was a result of a direct powerful impulse of the mission and vision of Swami Vivekananda. This is now transferred to us generation after generation. And these ideals are living today within us, in our hearts.

Unpublished Letters

*From Josephine MacLeod to Miss Mead
(Sister Lalita)*

c/o 269 Madison Avenue
New York
September 7, 1902

Hatfield House,
Massena Springs,
St. Lawrence Co.,
New York

My dear Miss Mead,

I have waited to write you and your sisters till I could tell you the details and life of the last few weeks and hours of Swamiji. Now, I know indeed that the cablegram from Nivedita reading: "Grieve not, all victory and benediction" that she sent me is true. His death was indeed a triumph and all India has thrilled to it.

Having his health reestablished for many weeks, strong and vigorous and meditating daily, with all his disciples and brother monks after a plunge in the Ganges at 4 a.m. by 4:30 they were all in the worship room in meditation daily. The last ten days especially did he meditate much, saying a great "tapasya" was upon him, and he must prepare for death. Nivedita who returned from the Himalayas the Friday before his death said he came to her little house—17 Bose Para Lane, Baghbazaar, Calcutta on "Saturday morning (June 28) at 9—went over the whole house, explaining everything, examined everything, sat down on his own rug here, played with some Lucknow figures I had brought, expressed delight with the microscope and magic lanterns and camera and told me to bring him the microscope next day, asked me about what I planned—I said

'University Settlement work rather than a school,' he said, 'right.' As he went I said, 'Swami, you must come back and bless the work,' and he said, 'I am always blessing you.'"

Sunday morning, June 29, "I went early to the Math, 8 or 8:30 and stayed till 5. ...That day, I think I must have told you. He said a great Tapasya was coming over him. Had I not been there at near noon he would still have been in the chapel. He felt that death was drawing near, but I never dreamt of less than 3 or 4 years.

On Wednesday the 2nd of July when Nivedita went to the Math he fanned her during her meal and washed her hands afterwards and when she remonstrated, he said, "Jesus washed the feet of *his* disciples!" He blessed her ever so sweetly as she left. Taking her head in his hands.

On July 4th, the day he died, besides meditating 3 hours in the morning, teaching the Vedas and Sanskrit grammar during several hours in the afternoon. "He walked two miles with one of the monks, talking all the time about the rise and fall of nations from Babylon and Egypt downwards. On his return he spoke again of how well he had been feeling all through the day, and free, and after evening meditation, he lay down in his own room with one of the young disciples to fan him and after an hour the brahmacharin, thinking him to be sleeping, saw his hands tremble a little and he gave out a deep breath and he did not breathe at all for a minute or so. Then another deep breath and his head rolled off the pillow and all was still. The man thought this unusual and called for help. All came to find Swami lying flat on his back. His eyes fixed on the centre of his eyebrows. His face all radiant with a divine

calm, the beauty of which can never be fathomed, nor the like of which has one ever seen before. Everyone could well see he was in samadhi and thought he would rise again. They tried all the means, but he never spoke again.

The body was cremated the day after, in the afternoon, on our own grounds. The samadhi happened at 9:10 in the evening of July 4th.

I have told you all about how the words of Sri Ramakrishna have been fulfilled—that the moment he would know himself he would free himself of his mortal coil!

Swami Turiyananda has arrived—two days ago—you can imagine his disappointment. Yes, the *raison d'être* of life is gone, except for the keeping up of his work. But where is the power to come to us to do so? Perhaps he will send and guide and protect!

With blessings and prayers that you might be given the light and the strength in this crisis. Yours sincerely, Saradananda.”

I have thought it wiser to quote the very words of Swami Saradananda. It is Saradananda that Ramakrishna always coupled with Swamiji. Swamiji being the cup, Saradananda the saucer, the cup and saucer.

Swamiji loved you—you three sisters—with such tenderness. “You were the women of which America could be proud—the silent courageous worker—fearless and self-reliant—and so pure”, and “the married one nursed me with such kindness. You will never guess.” And then your way of leagueing together to give him a dollar a month of your hard earned money. It was that prac-

tical intelligent use of life that he saw epitomized in you all! He said to me once, “I can never love the rich and happy but it is the hard working American girl that I love—that my heart yearns to help. The rich, no, they are not for me”, and I always knew he thought of you in those moments.

Dear Miss Mead—while he lived you served him and now he is dead. My heart turns to you with an inexpressible tenderness. I do not know which way my life will turn. I believe one can only do well what one *loves* to do. So I will wait till this first anguish is over before I try to make a future. When you are free—if you ever are—I would willingly help you to go to India if you care to give yourself to his country. There are only two or three people whom I would ever help to go there. Their burdens are so heavy. I would not add to them by sending anyone to them who would ever criticize *anything* they do. Poverty with us is *riches* to them—one meal a day—comfort—but if one could love them with the love that brings hope and faith and strength then I should say go and I will help to send you there.

Will you kindly let me know what you have of Swamiji's lectures in California and can you have them typewritten and send them to me? I will pay for them. And would you write me an account of his stay with you—any simple thing he said or did? I am here for my health and am somewhat better. Write me at New York City and always believe in the sincerity of one who loves him.

J. MacLeod

A Review Article

DR. SATISH K. KAPOOR

VIVEKANANDA—The Prophet of Human Emancipation (A study on the social philosophy of Swami Vivekananda) By Santwana Dasgupta, 1991; W2A(R) 16/4, Phase IV (B) Golf Green, Calcutta-45. Pp xii plus 493, Rs. 150.

India in the nineteenth century presented a disconsolate picture of itself. It appeared like a mummy of a civilisation which once was rich in all aspects of human activity. Chains of political slavery were rivetted round the necks of Indians. Exploitative groups were rampant. Possessed of a demonomania for Western culture, the people had lost contact with their valuable heritage. The educated sections took pride in deriding Vedanta's world-view, the concepts of *ritam* and *satyam* (the right and true), and the spiritual approach to social reform. Religion and science seemed as incompatible as 'peace and progress', 'polytheism and monotheism', or 'theism and atheism'. All this posed a challenge to the human spirit, and generated a renaissance which culminated in the gospel of Swami Vivekananda. The rational outlook of Raja Ram Mohun, the militant zeal of Swami Dayananda, the esoteric approach of theosophists, the universalism of Sri Ramakrishna—these and many other traits and strands of thought were amicably blended in the 'Cyclonic Monk' who has been aptly described as the Prophet of Human Emancipation by Santwana Dasgupta.

Works of devotees are often tainted with hyperbole, mythopoeia and unsustainable statements. But the book under review does not contain any of these flaws. Santwana Dasgupta applies her ratiocinative faculty, the best possible manner, to make an objective study of Swami Vivekananda's social philosophy, and proves that it is an

anodyne for ailing humanity. Other models of social change—Marxian, Freudian, Weberian or Sorokinian—touch upon the fringes, and fail to bring about needed root-and-branch-reform. But the ideas put forth by Swami Vivekananda can transform society by improving the quality of individuals.

Although the book does not claim to be 'the last word' on the subject, it is a comprehensive study of Swami Vivekananda's social, political, economic, historical and cultural ideas. Divided neatly into eight parts, Part I provides an overview of the Indian renaissance of the nineteenth century, role of early reformers like Ram Mohun, the making of Swami Vivekananda and his interpretation of man, religion, and the evils of society, Vedantic dialectics *vis-a-vis* Hegelian and Marxian dialectics, and finally, the *raison d'être* of convergence between science and Vedanta. Parts II to V discuss lucidly Swami Vivekananda's ideas on history, world civilisations, social evolution, forms of government, nationalism, universalism, socialistic and capitalistic models, and economic issues. The remaining parts take note of the role of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in bringing about socio-economic and cultural metamorphosis in the land of their birth and outside. In the final analysis, Swami Vivekananda does not emerge as a theoretician or an armchair socialist, but as a 'prophet of resurgence' whose gospel is meant for mankind as a whole. To quote her: "I do not think that Swamiji has given [only] a few stray

thoughts on social reform. I firmly believe that he has given us a comprehensive social philosophy of everlasting value, built on the strong foundations of Vedanta."

Santwana Dasgupta portrays Swami Vivekananda as a Synthesiser, who helped in integrating conflicting social, religious and political ideologies of his time—individualism and socialism; nationalism and internationalism; national unity and ethnocentrism; mysticism and rationalism, and so on. His concept of development based on 'self-sustenance', 'self-esteem', and 'freedom' stands in sharp contrast to some Western models which appear to be structurally perfect but whose bases are shallow. "Without self-sustenance, no development is conceivable, without self-esteem no development can be sustained, and without freedom no development is meaningful," she says. It may also be noted that Swami Vivekananda's concept of freedom has a much wider connotation than the Marxian view, which primarily lays emphasis on economic aspects. Freedom was regarded by Swamiji as the first condition of growth, and growth was not to be interpreted only in physical or economic terms. It must start from the inner being of a person and bring about total change in him.

Santwana Dasgupta rightly emphasises that Swami Vivekananda's knowledge was not based merely on religious texts, as in the case of some of his contemporary reformers. He was well versed in natural and social sciences, and impressed everyone by his vast erudition and phenomenal memory. "Museums, universities, institutions, local history, found in him an eager student," writes Sister Nivedita. Although Swamiji did not have time to concretise his social thoughts into some form of a treatise, his perceptions of a new world order have stood the test of time, based as these were on rational and scientific grounds.

The anthropocentricity in Swami Vivekananda's works, placing man above nature, society, tradition and environment, is well brought out by the author. "Man must struggle for liberation, must fight his way out...because this struggle is the nectar of his life. He has to move on and on without a moment's break." Strength, fearlessness and freedom were the three cardinal points of Swamiji's philosophy. He firmly held that man was the creator of his own destiny, and that fatalism could prove suicidal. "All strength and succour you want is within yourselves....The Infinite future is before you."

The author's explication of Swami Vivekananda's view of religion is quite impressive. To begin with, she takes up different theories about the origin of religion—the theory of nature or ancestor worship, for example, and then brings in Swamiji's observation that religion originated in the struggle to transcend the limitations of the senses. Unlike Karl Marx, who argued that religion was rooted in fear, Swamiji believed that it originated in fearlessness. Besides, religion does not consist of doctrines, dogmas or priestcraft; it lies in realisation, in being and becoming. The learned author makes a succinct appraisal of Swamiji's concept of a universal religion and discusses such related aspects as the necessity of such religion for mankind, the difference between religion and creed, affinity between religion and science, and the absurdity of materialistic approaches. In her view, Swamiji's concept of religion encompasses Śakti, joy, life, strength, virility and freedom. That broadly explains why he disapproved of original sin, salvation, of rewards in heaven or punishments in hell and such other doctrines.

What is remarkable about the book is that it juxtaposes Swami Vivekananda's ideas with those of other modern thinkers. Refer-

(Continued on page 359)

REVIEWS & NOTICES

PERSPECTIVES ON RAMAKRISHNA-VIVEKANANDA VEDANTA TRADITION—EDITORS, M. SIVARAMAKRISHNA AND SUMITA ROY. Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd; L-10 Green Park Extension, New Delhi 110016; 1991. 265 pages, Rs. 200/-.

Under the aegis of the Ramakrishna Seva Samiti of Hyderabad, a two day seminar in December 1990 was organized to deliberate on key aspects of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Sri Sarada Devi. The present book is the fruitful result of the proceedings. The papers published here cover a vast canvass and encompass a wide gamut of themes. Thirty-four scholarly articles discuss different topics and some of them are really splendid. The book contains seven sections. For Sections I and II the subject matter of discussion is the profundity of Sri Ramakrishna, and III, IV and V cast illumination on Vivekananda's writings, works and visions. Youth and their problems are covered in Section VI. The last section is devoted to the pertinent subject of women and their crucial role in shaping a morally healthy society, and their upliftment without excessive dependence on an external agency.

Not all the papers delve deeply into their chosen topics. Some stop only at the surface—being only informative. Many of them are fairly exhaustive and enlightening, e.g.: Dr. Rama Nair's "Ramakrishna on the Nature of Language and Mystical Experience," "The Place of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna in Religious Literature," by Swami Brahmasthananda; Smt. Shanta Subha Rao's "The Parables of Sri Ramakrishna," Dr. Tutun Mukherjee's "The Folk Elements in Ramakrishna's Tales," "Songs in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna," by Swami Paramarthananda, G. V. Reddy's "The Temples of Sri Ramakrishna: Their Evolution and Significance," and "Western Biographies of Ramakrishna," by Sujatha Nayak. Dr. Makaranda Paranjape's article on "Vivekananda's Letters: An Introductory Reading" is thoughtful; and equally refreshing is the paper on "Youth at the Crossroads," by Swami Someswarananda.

Most of the participants, who spoke and presented their papers at the Seminar are

from the English Departments of Osmania and Hyderabad Universities. Naturally, the display of scholarship has taken upperhand after underplaying the importance of simplicity and lucidity. The forthrightness of the message of these great teachers of humanity, in a few papers, has been obscured by the opacity of technical interpretation. Quotations by well-known authors is good, but too much dependence on them chokes the voice and clogs the mind of a writer. However, the meticulous attention paid by the Editors, Prof. M. Sivaramakrishna and Dr. Sumita Roy in preparing the book call forth our whole-hearted praise. Thanks to their commendable efforts.

There is no gainsaying that this flawlessly printed and handsomely produced volume is a unique contribution to the growing Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. The book sheds fresh innovative light on a subject so sacred, so deep. The importance of which can hardly be underestimated in our time.

S.M.

UNFORGETTABLE YEARS, translated and edited by A. R. NATARAJAN. Published by the Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning, Palace Orchards, Bangalore 560-003, 1990. 167 pages; Rs 30/-.

An absorbing book which contains reminiscences of twenty-nine devotees of Ramana Maharshi. Some of them are still living. Most of these memoirs appeared in Telugu, Tamil and English periodicals. Now they appear in a single volume, translated admirably.

The sage sitting in a remote corner of India, drew innumerable earnest souls to his radiant divine presence. Many, in the beginning, sought his divine help to alleviate their mundane sufferings. He did fulfil their desires in order to bolster their faith in the Supreme Power. Then, silently, unobtrusively, he extricated their externalized consciousness and helped them to focus it in the subjective domain. The Knower, the Experiencer, is the substratum of everything. Maharshi's path of self-enquiry is to return to the source

from which the pseudo-entity 'I' or the experiencer shoots forth.

Sri Ramana's resplendent nature and humane concern for everything living and non-living comes alive in these scintillating pages. These devotees lived with the sage for many years and watched him day and night, occasionally with a critical eye. Therefore, their words carry spiritual fragrance and convey intimate portraits. Through these reminiscences we watch the great sage dressing vegetables and cooking food for devotees, imparting in the kitchen the down-to-earth lofty truths of Vedanta, in the Ashrama fondling animals and lovingly feeding them, totally immersed in correcting proofs or masonry work, listening to the sorrows and troubles of people and soothing their hearts, making fun and spreading cheerfulness by his sparkling wit, solving abstruse philosophical problems with utmost ease, or sitting like a statue, stillness personified, for hours in the Hall, inundating the world with love and light. Whatever he touched he sanctified it; whatever he did he ennobled it.

—a book that brings a fresh, cool, welcome breeze.

S.M.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF THE 'FREE PROGRESS SYSTEM' AS EVOLVED IN SRI AUROBINDO INTERNATIONAL CENTRE OF EDUCATION: BY DR. CHANDRAKANT P. PATEL. Published by Sri Aurobindo Study Centre P.O. Bokhira (Porbandar) pin 360-579, Gujarat. 1986, Pp. 290. Rs 100/-.

The book under review is a Ph. D. thesis accepted by the Saurashtra University. The author, while doing research, studied deeply the fundamental principles of education which make a human being 'perfect' in body, mind and spirit—as enunciated by Sri Aurobindo's 'Integral Philosophy of Education'. Sri Aurobindo's idea of perfect education is being implemented through the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. It is called 'Free Progress System of Education'. The author has mainly explored and described the psychological basis of this system.

Dr. Patel has studied how the 'Free Progress System' has been working in different levels from kindergarten up and in different areas, from physical to spiritual. The study includes the discussions on curriculum, techniques of learning and teaching, method of discipline, teacher's role and the response of the students towards the spirit underlying the whole project—the perfection of life. The working and activities of the educational system of Sri Aurobindo's Ashrama has been represented in detail from which we may have an idea of an experiment on a new type of 'man-making character-building education'. Having extensively dealt with the whole system, the author comes to the conclusion that "the free progress system is a grand success as far as the mental knowledge of the student is concerned".

The book, being a research thesis, may not be interesting to the general readers, but it will certainly inspire other researchers to follow the methods of educational and psychological study in similar institutions in modern India.

Dr. Satchidananda Dhar

HERACLITUS: BY SRI AUROBINDO, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Fourth edition, 1989. Pp. 46, Rs. 10/-.

This book is a small but illuminating treatise on the philosophical thought of the Greek philosopher, Heraclitus. Aurobindo initially establishes that Heraclitus' aphorisms have to be interpreted in terms of mysticism. They are reminiscent of the symbolic and intuitive style of the Vedas. Indian philosophy stressed on an eternally One and the eternally Many. Heraclitus, too, believed in 'The idea of the One, which is eternally becoming Many, and the Many which is eternally becoming One...' (page 11) The Upanishads, too, describe the Cosmos as being in a state of perpetual universal motion and becoming, *jagatyām jagat*.

By a system of logical analysis, Aurobindo establishes that Heraclitus' contention is not simply that the One is always Many, the Many always One, but in his own words: 'Out of all, the One, and out of One, All.' Aurobindo then deals with Heraclitus' theory of relativity. To Heraclitus it is Force which

eternally creates, destroys and re-creates the universe. Such a world is governed by Reason, where absolute standards of good are judged by a divine way of looking at things.

Aurobindo's incisive enquiry results in the conclusion that the weakness in Heraclitus' philosophy is its inability to look beyond the concept of universal force and universal reason. It was incapable of enriching one's practical life. Heraclitus affirmed 'that the many are bad, the few good and that one is to him equal to thousands, if he be the best.' (page 33) Indian thought, on the other hand, saw 'the universal delight active in divine love and joy,' (page 42) which can establish the ecstasy of *mokṣa*. Mere rationalism can result in divergent schools of analytic thought, but 'inspired philosophy can seize hold of the highest secret, *uttamam rahasyam*.' (page 42) Indian philosophy is closely linked with ethics, unlike Western philosophy, its purpose being to educate and enlighten man.

Heraclitus offers fresh insight into the spiritual depth and beauty of Indian philosophy. It is also an invaluable asset in the study of Western philosophical thought. Aurobindo's lucid language, and his technique of comparative analysis with appropriate analogies from Indian philosophy, captivate the reader's interest throughout the course of the book.

Dr. Rama Nair

EDUCATION, PART ONE—ESSAYS ON EDUCATION WITH COMMENTARIES: By The Mother, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashrama, 1989. Pp. 201, Rs. 25/-.

In the Introduction, the Mother says that these essays 'are meant for people who lead an ordinary life, ...I mean people who are primarily interested in a purely physical material life, but who try to attain more perfection in their physical life than is usual in ordinary conditions.' (page 1) Accordingly, a complete education should deal with the five principal activities of the human mind—the physical, the vital, the mental, the psychic and the spiritual. 'To know oneself

and control oneself' (page 3) is the first step towards the acquisition of an integrated physical and mental education.

The mind, according to the Mother, is not an instrument of knowledge, but it must be moved by knowledge which belongs to a much higher domain than that of the human mind. In order to receive knowledge from above and manifest it, the mind has to be still and attentive, for 'it is an instrument of formation, of organisation and action, and it is in these functions that it attains its full value and real usefulness.' (pp. 5-6) The Mother defines this new education as supramental education. Such an education is a continuous process. The task of the spiritually enlightened would be to activate the consciousness of the unenlightened towards the appearance of a divine race upon the earth. The aim of true education is, therefore, that perception of Truth which consists of Love, Knowledge, Power and Beauty. This realisation '...will be instrumental to the supramental realisation upon earth.' (page 62).

These essays and commentaries exemplify the Mother's deep commitment towards the gigantic task of re-educating humanity. The commentaries are marked by lucidity and an intense spiritual vision. By postulating a new theory, the Mother has universalised and humanised the concept of education. A refreshingly new dimension has been added to it. This book is an indispensable guide to those of us who want to cultivate the art of mental discipline to spiritually progress in this increasingly materialistic world.

Dr. Rama Nair

CONVERSATIONS—1929, 1930-31: By The Mother, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1989, pp. 181, Rs. 18/-.

These conversations deal with a variety of subjects related to the development of mental discipline and true spiritual self-realization. The Mother's analysis is based on profound spiritual insight and a deep practical wisdom. For instance, the Mother unequivocally dispenses with the traditional modes of spiritual progress through the practice of 'austerity', 'asceticism', 'renunciation', and 'self-morti-

fication'. Instead, she advocates the path of total surrender to the Divine will through yogic discipline. Yogic discipline is needed for "...the progressive incorporation of the Supreme and the establishment of His reign upon earth." (page 2)

The Mother's view on religion forms one of the most interesting aspects of these conversations. The Mother states that it is religious fundamentalism that stands in the way of spiritual life. True religion belongs to the higher mind of humanity. Religion may be divine in its ultimate origin, but in actual practice it is more human than divine. The inner value of things can be realised only by a truly objective and detached mentality. Therefore, yoga should be practised by one who has nothing to support him except his faith in the Divine.

The relevance of the Mother's observations cannot be minimised in today's excessively materialistic world. The Mother's treatise for the betterment of humanity is not based on abstract metaphysics and a theoretical spiritual dogma. It is, instead, based on a sympathetic perception of an ordinary man's spiritual traumas in a world which seeks progressively to trap him in its materialistic jaws.

This book comes as a boon to those who are eager to learn, and to assimilate its truths into their own being. Its spiritually revitalising force can leave an indelible impression on the reader's mind.

Dr. Rama Nair

A REVIEW ARTICLE

(Continued from page 355)

ences to Karl Marx, Arnold J. Toynbee, Oswald Spengler, Maciver, T. H. Green, Bosanquet, Harold Laski, Sorokin, Fritjof Capra and many others are scattered throughout. Chapters on sociological and economic ideas of Swamiji make excellent reading, although one may not agree with all that has been said in them. Santwana Dasgupta's rejection of E. P. Chelishev's view that Swami Vivekananda was a utopian thinker (as also of Prof. Benoy Kumar Sarkar's observation that Swamiji was a romantic and not a scientific socialist) deserves special notice. Another important fact brought out

by her is that even though spirituality does not fit within the dialectics of Karl Marx, socialist countries have developed a liking for Swamiji's views on human emancipation, progress and peace.

The book can be profitably used by students, academicians, planners and politicians. Santwana Dasgupta deserves kudos for presenting Swamiji's views in a systematic manner. Even printing mistakes which appear on almost every page do not, in any way, mar its value. But they need to be rectified in the next edition.

PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY

DEVOTEE (to Sri Rámakrishna): "Sir, we hear that you go into samadhi and experience ecstasy...see God. If you do, please show Him to us."

MASTER: "Everything depends on God's will. What can a man do? While chanting God's name, sometimes tears flow and at other times the eyes remain dry. While meditating on God, some days I feel a great deal of inner awakening, and some days I feel nothing."

"A man must work. Only then can he see God. One day, in an exalted mood, I had a vision of the Haldarpukur (lake). I saw a low-caste villager drawing water after pushing aside the green scum. Now and then he took up the water in the palm of his hand and examined it. In that vision it was revealed to me that the water cannot be seen without pushing aside the green scum that covers it; that is to say, one cannot develop love of God or obtain His vision without work. Work means meditation, japa, and the like. The chanting of God's name and glories is work too. You may also include charity, sacrifice, and so on."

"If you want butter, you must let the milk turn to curd. It must be left in a quiet place. When the milk becomes curd, you must work hard to churn it. Only then can you get butter from the milk."

DEVOTEE: "That is true, sir. Work is certainly necessary. One must labour hard. Only then does one succeed. There is so much to read! The scriptures are endless."

MASTER: "How much of the scriptures can you read? What will you gain by mere reasoning? Try to realize God before anything else. Have faith in the guru's words,

and work. If you have no guru, then pray to God with a longing heart. He will let you know what He is like.

"What will you learn of God from books? As long as you are at a distance from the market-place you hear only an indistinct roar. But it is quite different when you are actually there. Then you hear and see everything distinctly. You hear people saying: 'Here are your potatoes. Take them and give me the money.'

"From a distance you hear only the rumbling noise of the ocean. Go near it and you will see many boats sailing about, birds flying, and waves rolling.

"One cannot get true feeling about God from the study of books. This feeling is something very different from book-learning. Books, scriptures, and science appear as mere dirt and straw after the realization of God.

"The one thing needful is to be introduced to the master of the house. Why are you so anxious to know beforehand how many houses and gardens, and how many government securities, the master possesses? The servants of the house would not allow you even to approach these, and they certainly would not tell you about their master's investments. Therefore, somehow or other become acquainted with the master, even if you have to jump over the fence or take a few pushes from the servants. Then the master himself will tell you all about his houses and gardens and his government securities. And what is more, the servants and the door-keeper will salute you when you are known to the master."

from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*