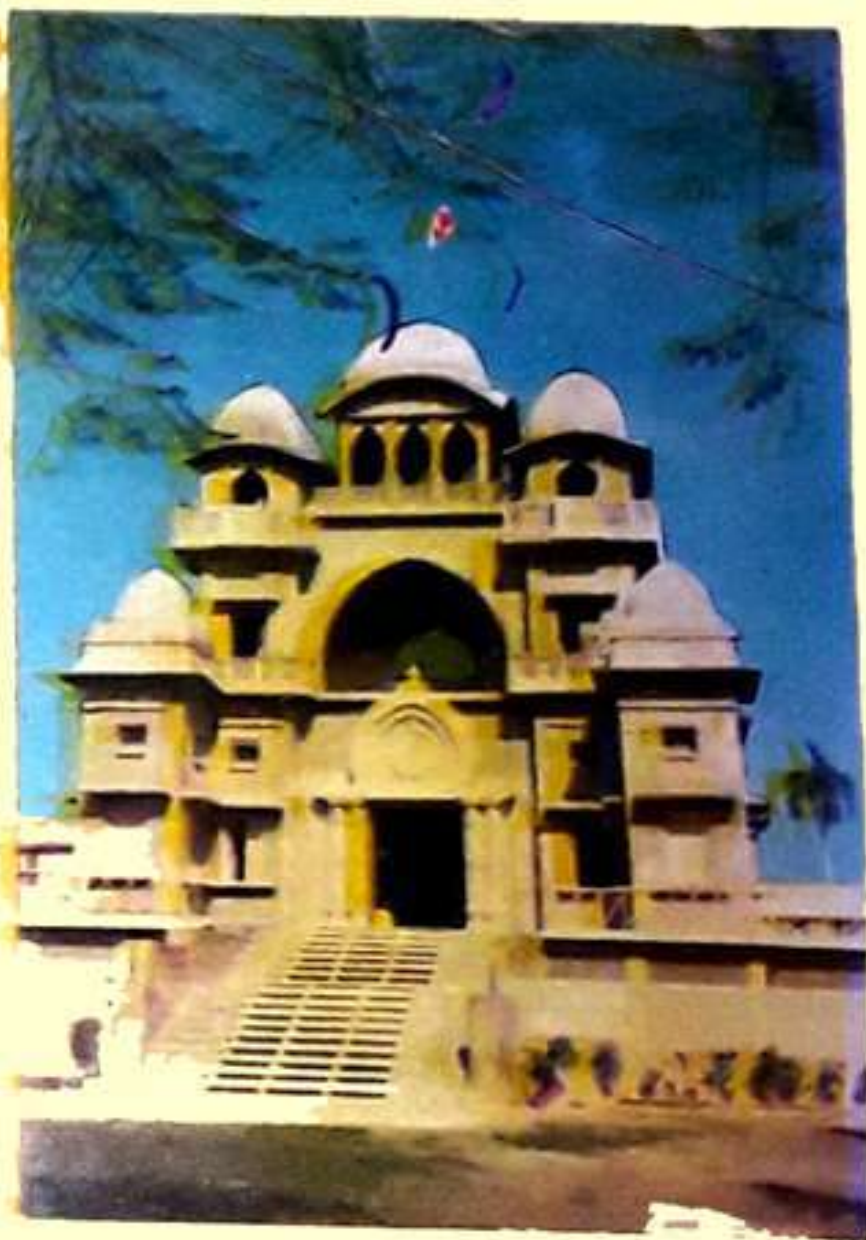




# SAMVIT

[ Knowledge that leads to enlightenment ]



Sri Sarada Math, Dakshineswar, Calcutta-700 076

Special Number  
No. 5, March 1982

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# SAMVIT

य नो बुद्ध्या धुनया संयुतवतु ।

May He endow us with good thoughts.

*Shvetashvatara Upanishad III. 4*

## Universal Prayers

एंद्र नो गधि प्रियः सत्राजिदगोक्षः ।

गिरिनं विष्वतस्पृष्टुः पतिदिवः ॥

Gracious God I beloved, winner of the greatest, not to be hidden, like a mountain grand from every aspect, Lord of Heaven, come you near us.

*Rig Veda VIII.xcvi.4*

• • •

त्वं हि नः पिता वसो त्वं माता वतक्रतो बभूविथ ।

अथा ते मुम्नमीमहे ॥

O giver of abodes I doer of many deeds I O gracious God I be unto us like our father, be unto us like our mother. Now we ask you for happiness.

*Rig Veda VIII.xcvi.11*

## REFLECTIONS

### Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi in Dakshineswar

FOUR PLACES associated with an incarnation's life are considered to be sacred, namely, the place of birth, the place of *sadhana*, the place of *lila*, and the place of *mahasamadhi*. Dakshineswar, a suburb on the outskirts of Calcutta, on the eastern bank of the Ganga, was the place of *sadhana* of *Yugavatara*, Sri Ramakrishna, the Prophet of the Age. And not for him alone was it a place of *sadhana*. It was so for Sarada Devi too, who was 'at once nun and wife, and always chief of his disciples'. It is not surprising, therefore, that Dakshineswar has been an eminent place of pilgrimage since the coming of these two holy personages there. In 1855 Sri Ramakrishna went to stay in the Kali temple built by Rani Rasmani in Dakshineswar. In 1872 Sri Sarada Devi joined him.

In his aphorisms on Bhakti, Narada says that holy people turn places of pilgrimage into centres of vibrant holiness (तीर्थीकुर्वन्ति तीर्थानि V.69). By their *sadhana* and worship they even make the inert images of the deities live—live in the literal sense of the word—for they breathe, talk, eat, move and sleep. The lives and records of Sri Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi vouch for this statement. Sri Ramakrishna lived in a room situated in the north-west corner of the temple courtyard, while Sarada Devi lived in a *nahabat*, a music tower, hardly eight metres away from his room. His room was spacious, with open verandahs on three sides, while she lived in a small, octagonal room, measuring hardly fifty square feet. True, round her room, was a verandah but, as was customary in those days, it was surrounded on all sides by a screen of bamboo. To his room flocked people day and night, to listen to his divine talk and music; but no one, except a woman or two, a relation or a devotee, ever visited her. He moved about freely in the temple grounds and even went into Calcutta or went on trips on the river in a steamer; she never ventured out, nor was she ever seen or heard by anyone. Thus they lived there together, though separately, and the spiritual power that was put in force

by them has moved the whole world. The names and influence of Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Sri Sarada Devi have floated down from the Ganga in Dakshineswar to the wide waters of the world.

### Sri Sarada Math

It was in this holy Dakshineswar where Sri Ramakrishna lived for thirty years and Sarada Devi for thirteen, that the authorities of the Ramakrishna Math, founded Sri Sarada Math, a Math for women, which was to serve a double purpose. First, the Math was to be a spiritual and final home for women who had left worldly homes and taken the vows of renunciation and service to follow Swami Vivekananda's motto : *आत्मनो मोक्षार्थं जगद्धिताय च*—to work for one's own salvation, and the welfare of the world. Second, it was to be a refuge for householder women where they could find rest and peace, inspiration and guidance, spiritual joy and the way to realization.

2 December 1954 was therefore a great day for all women, Maitreyis as well as Katyayanis.\* It opened a new chapter in the religious history of India, nay, of the whole world. For the foundation of Sri Sarada Math on that day gave recognition to the presence of the Divine Mother in all women, to whatever country or faith they belonged. Has it not been said in the *Devi Mahatmya*:

'All forms of knowledge are aspects of Thee; and all women throughout the world are Thy forms'†

At the back of this recognition of divinity in women is, of course, the Vedantic idea that the real human nature is divine, that One Reality underlies the entire phenomenon, and that efforts should be made to realize this. A bolder Vedantin than Swami Vivekananda was never born; he desired to see this Vedantic truth put into practice. Boldly did he declare, 'in the highest truth of the Parabrahman there is no distinction of sex. We only notice this in the relative plane.' As early as 1895 he wrote to his brother disciples, 'Hence it is that my first endeavour is to start a Math for women. This Math shall be

\* Maitreyi was a woman of knowledge and discrimination and chose to follow the spiritual path to obtain immortality. Katyayani was satisfied with worldly wealth and chose to remain as an ideal householder. These women are referred to in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*.

† विद्या समस्तास्तु देवि मेदाः । स्त्रियः समस्ताः सकृच्च जगत्सु ॥ XI. 6

the origin of Gargis and Maitreyis, and women of even higher attainments than these.\* He was, therefore, ready from the beginning to give a place to women in his Order 'with the Holy Mother as the centre of inspiration'. But as social conditions in this country in the last decade of the nineteenth century were not suitable for this purpose, it took about sixty more years for his dream to be fulfilled.

### The Family and Civic Ideals

The call to women to adopt the spiritual goal of liberation, based on the keynote of renunciation has always been heard in this country. But it has been heard sometimes loudly, sometimes faintly. It is a fact that it was practically unheard during Swamiji's time. Invasion upon invasion by foreigners had forced women to take shelter in the inner apartments of their households to protect their chastity and also their progeny. It is also a fact that the law-makers of India, in their zeal to cultivate the purity of the race, laid many social restrictions on women. But there were also champions for the cause of women. For example, Varahamihira in his *Brihat-Samhita* (chapter 74) says, 'Those who following the path of asceticism proclaim the demerits of women and are silent about their virtues, to them I ask—"tell me truly, what faults attributed to women have not been also practised by men?"' Men in their audacity treat women with contempt, but they really possess more virtues than men as Manu says.\* What an eloquent defence of women! But it was then that the family ideal became predominant in the life of Indian women.

In social evolution the dynamic element lies in the ideal behind it. It cannot be gainsaid that the impact of alien cultures and civilizations has created new values in the lives of the women of this country. They have accepted the civic ideal from the West, following which women serve society in various capacities besides fulfilling their family obligations. But in doing this they should not give up their own traditions, discard their old-time grace, tolerance, modesty and reserve, and become crude imitations of alien and aggressive cultures.

\* वेदज्ञानां प्रवदन्ति दोषान्ब्रह्ममायेन गुणान् विहाय ।  
ते दुर्वेदा ये मनसो वितर्कः सञ्जायमानि न तानि तेषाम् ॥  
प्रवृत्तं सत्त्वं कण्ठोऽङ्गनां दोषस्तु यो नाचरितो मनुष्यैः ।  
प्राप्यतेनैव पृथिः प्रवदा निरस्ता गुणाधिकास्ता मनुनाञ्च चोक्तम् ॥

In India, in the last fifty years, women have marched forward—from fulfilling family obligations to fulfilling social obligations. During Mahatma Gandhi's time, women in large numbers came out of their homes to serve their nation in its struggle for independence. They faced no social restrictions. Their right to serve their motherland was not denied to them, and so their contribution in the struggle for independence was great. It reminds one of Sister Nivedita's expectation that : 'It is essential for the joyous revealing of that great mother, that she be first surrounded by the mighty circle of her daughters, the Indian women of the days to come . . . . Her sanctuary today is full of shadows. But when the womanhood can perform the great *arati* of nationality, the temple shall be all light, nay, the dawn verily shall be near at hand.'

After independence, India's new Constitution gave the women their social, political, educational and economic rights on a par with men. They had not to undergo sufferings and indignities, like the pioneers of the women's liberation movement in the West. They had not to organize a Suffrage Movement to get the privilege to vote, as their sisters in the West had to do.

It was at this stage that a third ideal, as envisaged by Swami Vivekananda, attracted educated women in India. This was the universal spiritual ideal—the ideal that gives women the right to strive for enlightenment and ultimate liberation, without being entangled in worldly life. Sri Sarada Math stands as a vindication of this right. It calls to women everywhere in the world to mould their lives according to the motto of spirituality, sacrifice, self-control and service. But this is not to be an end in itself. It is the basic idea for the monastics of the Math. But Swamiji had bigger ideas. He said, 'The sannyasinis will, in time, be the teachers and preachers of the Math. In villages and towns they will open centres and strive for the spread of women's education.' In short, for them to strive for 'one's own liberation' is only half the race run; 'to work for the welfare of the world' is to reach the goal. The spiritually moulded lives of the sannyasinis are the springboards from which they jump into fields of activity for women's and children's welfare. Devotees in hundreds join their monastic sisters in this stupendous task.

Sri Sarada Math in its slow and steady progress during the last

quarter of a century has proved its usefulness and its value to society. The lives and activities of the monastic sisters and the lay disciples centre round the shrine of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda. It is the sanctuary whence they derive inspiration and strength. On the opening day of Sri Sarada Math, Swami Sankarananda installed three small pictures in a small shrine in the old building of the Math. But, with the ever-increasing numbers of monastic sisters and devotees, this shrine proved to be inadequate in size. Hence, the trustees of Sri Sarada Math decided to build a spacious temple.

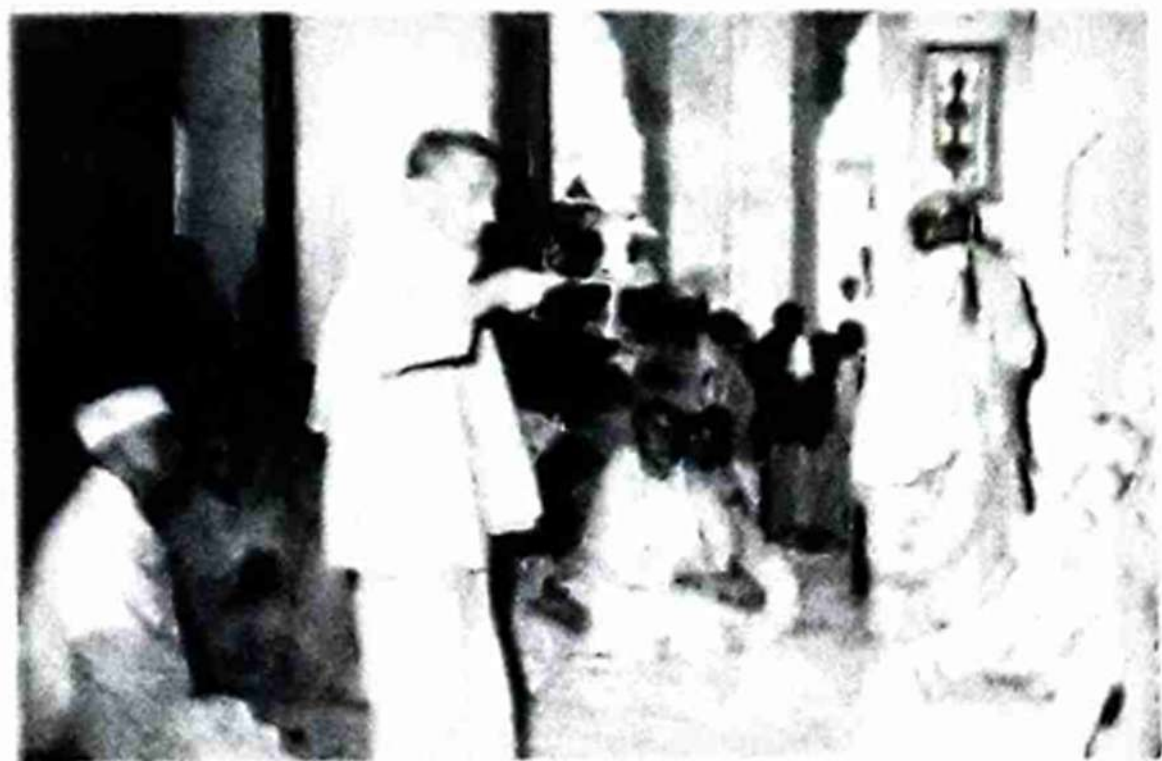
#### New Temple—Foundation and Consecration

In March 1976, the foundation of the new temple was laid and, within a short span of six years, it was consecrated. It was a great occasion for Sri Sarada Math and also for Dakshineswar. On Thursday, 5 November 1981, this little suburb was full of activity. About four hundred and thirty devotees from all parts of India, and some from abroad, started pouring into this small place. They came by train, bus, car, cycle-riksha, and on foot. They were all pilgrims come for a five-days' stay at Dakshineswar. Five big institutions and about twenty generous devotees opened their doors to welcome these daughters of Ramakrishna-Sarada amongst them. Hundreds of volunteers briskly went about organizing their work. Hundreds of visitors from Calcutta came too. The objective of the visitors and volunteers was the same—to reach Sri Sarada Math and register their presence. For on Friday, 6 November, the new temple was to be consecrated by His Holiness Srimat Swami Vireshwarananda, President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. On that day, even before the *sahanai* broke into the melodious early morning *raginis*, hundreds of people had collected on the Math premises. By daytime, thousands had collected. During the four days of festivity, till 9 November, Sri Sarada Math grounds were overflowing with people from morning to night.

The new temple, raised as a pinnacle to the glory of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda has added importance to Dakshineswar as a place of pilgrimage.



Altar of the Shrine in the New Temple



Shri Swami Vireswaramandaji Maharaj performing the arati



Crowds collected on Sri Sarada Math grounds on 6.11.81.



The Pandits doing *Sapta-Shati-Homa* in the *Yajna-mandapa* on 6.11.81.

## Sri Sri Ma, The Holy Mother

KALA MATHRANI

IT HAD always struck me as strange that Sri Ramakrishna married when he had already dedicated himself to the Divine Mother. Yet, it was he who happily, and in a merry mood, directed his mother to his preordained bride's home in the village of Jayrambati. His mother hesitated when the Brahmin girl turned out to be barely five years old but she had no option. Ramakrishna had said she was reserved for him, 'marked with a straw' like a fruit reserved for God. So the wedding between twenty-three year old Gadadhar Chattopadhyaya with the lovely little Sarada Mukhopadhyaya was duly solemnized. As Sati was Shiva's *shakti*, Sarada was Sri Ramakrishna's. For thirty-four years after his death Sarada spread his spiritual message, teaching it according to her own practical common sense, and thus consolidated the new wave of spiritual and social regeneration in India.

### Her Role as the Support of a Religious Order

Sri Ramakrishna himself initiated his first disciples whom he trained to be monks, and Sarada continued the work. After taking *sannyasa*, these disciples had to go with their begging bowls for their alms. Sarada hated to see anyone go hungry, least of all the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. She therefore prayed to him to bless them that they would never be in want of food. She did not want these *sadhus* to go begging and wandering aimlessly about. There were plenty of such *sadhus*. She was thankful when Swami Vivekananda finally set up an organized Ramakrishna Order in Belur Math. She also supported him in his ideas of service for suffering humanity, for she felt that selfless work was itself a valid spiritual practice, a *sadhana*. The aim of the centres of this Order was not merely to help its members to attain spiritual realization, but to give spiritual guidance, and work for the welfare of the rest of the world. The centres were created to cater to the total needs of humanity—physical, mental and spiritual. For to ignore the spirit would be to neglect the very essence of man.

During the last year of Sri Ramakrishna's illness, Sri Sarada and the disciples together nursed him. Sri Ramakrishna commended

them to one another before his death, and thus there grew a splendid relationship between the budding Order and the guru's wife. The disciples discovered how kind and angelic she was. Although she did not wear the ochre robe, she became Sri Sri Ma or the Holy Mother, the spiritual head of the whole organization. Sri Sarada Devi was a divinity to the new monks and lay devotees; they worshipped her as the living goddess Durga during the Puja festivals.

### Her Early Training

Sarada Devi's mother and father had premonitions of the birth of a 'beautiful golden girl bedecked with golden ornaments', and they welcomed her as Goddess Lakshmi incarnate. Sarada was so well-behaved and diligent that her mother wanted her to be her daughter in her next life also. Sarada being the eldest child in the family had to help her parents a lot. Besides cooking and caring for her four brothers, she husked paddy, cut fodder for the cattle and spun sacred thread from their own cotton fields. Her father, a devotee of Rama, did not like to accept presents indiscriminately but was only too happy to share a smoke with anyone. In the 1864 famine he opened up his granary to feed the starving people though he was far from prosperous. As the ravenous crowds could hardly wait, eleven-year-old Sarada fanned and cooled the hot *khichuri*. To her mother their house was God's house, where she perpetually stored provisions to feed God's devotees.

### Training in Kamarpukur and Dakshineswar

While Sarada inherited her large-heartedness and holiness from her devout parents, it was Sri Ramakrishna who taught her how to manage her future household economically. While living in his village, Kamarpukur, thirteen-year-old Sarada learnt how to respect elders, revere Brahmins and *sannyasins* and love youngsters, and she learnt all the details of religious rituals. Never once did Ramakrishna speak harshly to her. His ready wit and jovial nature made his instruction an unforgettable pleasure. Her comprehensive curriculum included the trimming of lamps, spicing of curries and his special way of rolling betel leaves. He also showed her how to get on and off a public conveyance without leaving things behind. Nothing was too small, for Ramakrishna wanted Sarada to be perfect in her predestined work. It was, however, not so easy for her to get over the

maternal instinct, particularly as society condemned childlessness. Once, when he was pointing out that women experience frustration when they bear children and then weep over their premature deaths, Sarada pertinently asked, 'Will all of them really die?'

Of course, Sri Ramakrishna saw that Sarada Devi felt fulfilled in her life. If she did not have children of her own, Sarada had to look after the baby of one of her demented relations and she experienced all the ups and downs of family life. If she was not encouraged to go to a *yatra*, a village play, Ramakrishna reenacted the whole drama himself, so that, spellbound, she forgot her earlier disappointment. She never imagined that she, a woman, could do any sight-seeing but, in later years, she made triumphant pilgrimages all the way to Rameshwaram and visited the established mission centres of the Ramakrishna Order in Madras and Bangalore. She then initiated innumerable devotees in the South, in spite of the language barrier, and she enjoyed the temples as 'the *lila*, or play of Ramakrishna' everywhere she went—in Puri, Varanasi and Vrindavan. Towards the end of her life, when service to the devotees became difficult because of her rheumatism, she prayed to Sri Ramakrishna to mind his growing family himself. She daily blessed Ramakrishna's devotees all over the world, and relied upon his promise that even at the last moment he would give salvation to her disciples. What more can a loving mother wish for her children?

Sri Ramakrishna completed Sarada's temporal and spiritual education in Dakshineswar when she went to live there. The five days' journey on foot from Jayrambati had made her ill with fever, but Ramakrishna was solicitude itself. He nursed her to health in his own room before letting her join his mother in the music tower of the Kali temple. Relations between them were bonded at a completely different level from that of a normal married couple. Living intimately with Sarada was, to Ramakrishna, the last of his string of spiritual disciplines. To Sarada it was a 'lesson in the enjoyment of life through renunciation. It was a joy to serve Ramakrishna. He used to address her respectfully. He always saluted her as the Divine Mother, after she massaged his feet. He made tender inquiries if she had the slightest headache. He taught her to make jute sling-bags to pass her idle moments and keep vain thoughts at bay. Later, whe

her work increased because of the growing number of his disciples, he sent one of the younger boys to help her to knead dough.

Living in Dakshineswar was not easy, as the music tower in which she lived was as small as a cage. She had to rise at 3 a.m. to go with a lantern for a pre-dawn bath in the Ganga, looking out for crocodiles. Ramakrishna was very particular about her *japa* and meditation. He taught her, with diagrams, the meaning of the six yogic *chakras* and he taught her the goal of human life and of her own life in particular. It was because he made her realize the unity in the diverse forms of divinity that she became even more sympathetic toward the village deities and could later appreciate Easter resurrection hymns sung by her western devotee, Sister Nivedita.

Sri Ramakrishna made Sarada Devi conscious of her own divinity by worshipping her as the Universal Mother. Though she was the consort of an *avatara*, an incarnation of God, she was never puffed up with pride. She would receive the adoration of her visitors and then go into the kitchen to prepare a meal for them. She remained shy, self-effacing and humble. Even the resident officer of the temple, who had heard that she lived there, never saw her. Sri Ramakrishna was pleased with the way she had adjusted herself to the cramped circumstances and retained her privacy, modesty, courtesy and kindness in spite of all the irritations and loose talk of the constant flow of visitors. She felt that Ramakrishna had put a pitcher of bliss in her heart and this sustained her through all the petty difficulties which she tided over without complaining. It was Ramakrishna who worried about her restricted life in the temple compound and encouraged her to walk a bit, when no one was about. She stood for hours behind the bamboo screen in the verandah in the music tower, listening to the *kirtans*, solo and choral, with Ramakrishna's extempore additions, which were sung in his room. She was content to cook for him and serve him and his guests and his mother without being seen or known. She found her home in Dakshineswar exciting, with its spiritual atmosphere and with all types of aspirants and adepts who came to Ramakrishna.

Ramakrishna's simple but efficient training and the influence of his great personality during her most formative years was her mainstay in her dealings with his and her disciples, her relatives and the

general public. The link between them was spiritual; it was he who helped her to get over her initial diffidence by telling her whom to initiate and with what *mantra*. His training gave her an independence of thought and self-confidence which enabled her to hold her own against all the pressures of orthodoxy. Ramakrishna visited her in visions after his death, telling her not to mourn as they were not really separated. This is why she did not cut her hair, as was the custom of widows, nor wear a completely white cloth, but let a narrow red border remain: a clever compromise with custom and Ramakrishna's wishes. He would not let Sarada Devi take off her golden bracelets either. Once, in broad daylight, when he was in a trance he had a vision of Sita as a lovely, luminous figure. The smile on her face expressed a unique combination of love, sorrow and compassion. This, it is said, is how Ramakrishna got his unforgettable sweet smile—it was Sita's gift to him in that vision. For Ramakrishna, Sarada was also Sita, so he ordered a pair of bracelets for her similar to those he saw Sita wearing. The bracelets were Sarada's emblem of divinity and symbolized her connection with Ramakrishna from age to age.

#### Spiritual Ministration

Sri Ramakrishna told Sarada that purity was only in the mind and so she told her relatives to utter God's name if they felt that they had become physically polluted. The mind did not become defiled unless heinous crimes had been committed. Among her disciples, she advised widows, weak with deliberate undernourishment, to take the Master's name and then eat something at night. She said it was a sin to starve the body. And if the body were destroyed, with what would they do their *sadhanas*? But she did not mind that they cut their hair, as it was a luxury to look after it. She did not approve of the practice of severe austerities to be performed by every monk. Like the Buddha, she favoured the middle path. She told the monks that working for Thakur (the Master) was itself a *sadhana*. Thus she held the same views as Swami Brahmananda who said, 'Why need you do that? We have done it all for you'.

She had mixed feelings for the Swadeshi movement. Spinning was necessary to make one self-sufficient as in the pre-British days, but she did not believe in the boycott of foreign goods, for were not

the foreigners also her children? Nor did she like to force coarse cloth on young girls, who longed to wear foreign finery, though she herself, was simplicity itself. She preferred that the *brahmacharis* at Koalpara constructively spin and weave rather than shout slogans. She then started the worship of Ramakrishna's picture there, to make the boys realize that he was their ideal and if they were attached to him, they could never go wrong.

The monastic members of the Koalpara Ashrama were not so learned as the monks at the Belur Math, but Sri Sarada Devi told them, neither was Sri Ramakrishna. He incarnated to save the rich, the poor, the learned and the ignorant. Sarada loved them all dearly, she said, as she fed them with delicacies. As her brothers were busy with their own growing families, she soon shifted to Koalpara, a village near Jayrambati, to be near her young *brahmacharis* there, who were serving her so faithfully. She saw to it that the head of the Ashrama looked after their diet and health. She asked the boys to forbear everything. The brotherhood could be bound only by mutual respect and love and not by mere rules and regulations. She arranged that they be taught English so that they could communicate with foreign visitors. All the villagers, rich and poor, received medicines free from the Ashrama's dispensary. The rich could afford to pay but if they, too, begged for free medicine, they were not to be refused. In this way she settled all the ticklish problems in her vast spiritual domain.

She had a knack of dealing with erring humanity. She even brought Muslims within the embrace of her tender affection. She not only accepted the robber Amzad's gift of bananas, but served him food and then cleaned the place after his meal, greatly to the horror of her caste-conscious relatives! He became such a close devotee that he walked in and out of the place as freely as any inmate. For the Holy Mother had declared, in no uncertain terms, that Amzad was as much her son as Swami Saradananda. In Koalpara she was more easily accessible without the protection of Swami Saradananda, and soon she had a regular stream of visitors of her own. They marvelled at her homely saintliness. They perhaps missed the high ecstatic moods of Sri Ramakrishna but she was an example to the world in her simplicity and saintliness. She kept herself aloof from her brothers' quarrels over property; she settled the quarrels for them, but



**Pravrajika Mokshaprana (in centre) coming with the holy  
relics in procession to the Temple**



The Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, at fifty-two

did not bother about her share of the property, for, she said, 'rats build holes and snakes live in them'. She suffered a lot because of her relations, but she did her duty towards them with detachment. She sympathized with people in their difficulties. Deaths of relations and disciples made her sad. But she soon recovered her equipoise, for had not Ramakrishna taught her about the deathless *atman* in all of us? She kept up correspondence with her devotees; letters were read out and replies dictated by her. Thus she became a force not only in the Ramakrishna Order, in the countryside amongst the villagers and the Koalpara Ashrama, but also with people from larger Bengal. Her words and deeds were full of godliness, based on perfect self-control. Her personality integrated her inner and outer life. This is why she still inspires so many of us who try to emulate some of her qualities.

She expressed herself through the rites, manners and customs of her own rural background, but her message is clear to all. Her infallible formula for all was just to think of the Master, do what they thought right and not to worry about what others said. She herself offered all her cooked food first to Sri Ramakrishna. She gave her disciples *mantras* to subdue the senses and purify the mind, but the ultimate God-realization, she stressed, could come only with devotion and love. And how was one to love? She looked for people's good points rather than their defects. Not seeing faults in others, she consciously prayed hard to straighten the windings of her mind and to purify her heart and make it white as the moon's rays: 'The moon has its spots; may my mind have no spot at all.'

The Holy Mother, at the age of fifty-two, was still very beautiful, glowing with love. It is an aesthetic experience to study her photograph. The noble forehead, the fine features all radiate unruffled contentment and placid kindness. The trusting, transparent eyes look straight into you, affirming her faith in herself and you. Her very slightly tilted head indicates sympathy and compassion. Her hands are humbly folded in calm composure. Looking at her picture we feel the benediction of her inner strength and serenity. We see a character in which domesticity and divinity are inextricably intertwined. Her last words sum up the philosophy of her life:

IF YOU WANT PEACE, DO NOT FIND FAULT WITH OTHERS. RATHER FIND FAULT WITH YOURSELF. LEARN TO MAKE THE WORLD YOUR OWN. NOBODY IS A STRANGER, MY CHILD, THE WHOLE WORLD IS YOUR OWN.

## The Ideal and the Practice

PRAVRAJIKA MOKSHAPRANA

THOUGH THE work of Sri Sarada Math and the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission undertaken so far has stabilized and is steadily progressing in all directions, the thought comes to my mind again and again: are we doing all this work unselfishly? The immense growth in population has made life difficult. People today, overwhelmed in the face of harsh realities and drastic decisions, lack fineness or subtlety in thought and feeling. Fortunately, today our country has reached some amount of economic freedom and ease. But is material prosperity able to fight our poverty of higher values of life? We have always heard that poverty destroys all that is good. If this is true, can we say that prosperity brings about all good? We see that this has been true neither in the past nor in the present. Sri Ramakrishna says, 'How much charity, contemplativeness and compassion is there? A person spends thousands of rupees on his daughter's marriage, but his neighbours have nothing to eat. He thinks twice before giving even a handful of rice to them and says, "What can be done if they have no food to eat? Let those wretched people live or die, it is sufficient if my family and I keep well." And these people talk of showing compassion towards all!'

Sri Ramakrishna, on his pilgrimage to Vaidyanath, was so moved to see the poor undernourished people that he told Mathur Babu, 'If you do not give them oil, clothes and food, I will not go with you.' Mathur Babu was a miser. Moreover, he had come on this pilgrimage with many people which would naturally involve spending much money. So he did not readily agree. But when Sri Ramakrishna said firmly that he would not proceed further, Mathur finally agreed.

One aim of going on a pilgrimage is to give in charity to the *sadhus* and *bhaktas*. In order to know the attitude of those pilgrims towards the *sadhus*, Sri Ramakrishna used to ask them what they had given to the *sadhus*. These rich people were reluctant to give even two pice to the very poor wandering *sadhus* who beg for a paisa or two for a smoke. Sri Ramakrishna once said, 'Those who have

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money are in reality Mother's trustees, they should give something in charity. But they do not like to give anything to the *sadhus* and *bhaktas*. Rajendra Mitra earned Rs. 800 a month in those days. When he came back from Prayag after attending the Kumbha Mela, I asked him, "What kind of *sadhus* did you see in the Mela? You measured them by your own measuring tape; is it not so?" Rajendra said, "I did not see good *sadhus*. There was one, surely, but he also accepted money." If no one gives money to *sadhus*, how will they eat? No one has to pay any money here, that is why they all come. I think that since they love their money very much, let them have it.'

This is the usual picture of society. But at the present time this greed has increased, not decreased. The reason is, as I have said before, that though the economic condition of the people has improved to a certain extent, there is no change in their mentality. On the contrary, they have become more self-centred. Because of various kinds of struggles and strivings through which they have passed since Independence, their hearts have contracted, not expanded. Intellectual activities have increased in many ways, but they are not directed towards the welfare of the people or the uplift of the country; their goal has been limited to individual betterment. That has resulted in self-centredness. In the last few years we have become more and more aware that this self-centred gross-mindedness, this self-imposed limitation has done us harm rather than good. There are some people who are opportunists and will always remain so. But there are those who are more highly evolved. They have come under the influence of Sri Ramakrishna's inspiration.

I am asking those of us who have come within the influence of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother and Swamiji : is it not proper for us to follow the path shown by them? Were they parochial in their attitude? Did they make any distinction between individuals? Their exclusive desire was to serve mankind in various ways without regard to time, place, or position. They pour out their infinite compassion on us but we accept it according to our capacity and fitness. But how much are we able to receive? If only we could accept their ideal our lives would be fulfilled. If we once understand this we would not be able to live within gross limitations.

In the world we are either elated with worldly happiness or dejected because of suffering. In other words, we are only engrossed

in our own selves. As the poet Rabindranath sang :

‘I am sinking every moment,  
As I have burdened myself with *myself*.’

Life after life we have been doing this. Now, in this life we have taken their names. We have come under their influence. Why should we not make an effort to make our lives worthy? Why should we not be coloured in their colours? Why should we not try to broaden our minds, to expand our hearts? Sri Ramakrishna severely rebuked even a person like Swamiji who said he wanted to remain absorbed in *samadhi*, with these words: ‘Fie on you! You are so selfish. How can you talk like that?’

Sri Ramakrishna said to the Holy Mother, ‘The people of Calcutta are like worms, squirming in the dark; you have to take care of them.’ As the Holy Mother had followed in the footsteps of Sri Ramakrishna all her life, it is incumbent on us to try to understand the deep significance of these words. In these words the idea is the broadening of the mind and the expansion of the heart.

To speak about ourselves again, the confusion and discontent in our minds have to be removed. We are educated and cultured. If we understand the difference between good and bad, then why can we not tune our minds to a higher key? We know the life of the Holy Mother; why can we not try to follow her step by step? Usually, we blame the environment. We think that our minds would become noble only if we were brought up in favourable conditions—in freedom, in prosperity. But think of the Holy Mother. Her outside world was absolutely limited. She lived in an octagonal room which measured about 7' x 7' and which was surrounded by a small verandah which was covered by a curtain of bamboo blinds. Therefore, it is no use for us to complain about our living conditions. Her education went as far as reading a primer, which again, was snatched away by Hriday as he thought studying was only the prerogative of men. From sunrise to sunset, Holy Mother's work was to cook. Even after many years, rarely did Sri Ramakrishna take her out to the neighbours' houses through the back gate of the Kali temple for an hour or so. That was her only outing. After a full morning's work from three a.m. till noon and again from three o'clock in the afternoon till night, she went on with her work. It was after years that, on Sri Ramakrishna's

request some young disciples, or elderly ladies like Gopal Ma or Yogin Ma helped her. There was for her no outing, no cinema, no theatre, no visiting neighbours every day. As long as her mother-in-law lived, she served her day and night. You have already read about all these things.

What a wonderful life of dedication! To give oneself completely to the service of others, never thinking of one's need or comfort! What an unselfish life! Through her acts of service she actually gave them succour. Sri Ramakrishna had asked her to do so, and to sacrifice herself for the welfare of the universe. It is a wonder! How could a young girl of nineteen understand that she had not come to drag her husband down into the mire of the world, but to help him in his spiritual ministration? Who taught this uneducated poor village girl to keep the vow of complete sacrifice for the sake of others? This trait we see in her from the beginning of her life to the end. During a famine, when hungry people could not eat the hot *khichuri* that her father had served, did not eleven-year-old Sarada, with her little hands but a mother's heart, fan the *khichuri* to cool it? Similarly, till the last day of her life, she cooled the burning hearts of the devotees by fanning them with the wind of grace. Her last words to women were, 'If you want peace of mind, do not see the faults of others. Consider the whole world to be your own. No one is a stranger.'

She herself had clasped to her heart the whole world as her own. She was a real mother to the poor, the helpless, the sick, the miserable, the suffering. Her motherly heart was always ready to help her children—and literally there was no distinction in her mind between good and bad among them. A drunkard, out of shame, could not visit her during the daytime; but at night, completely intoxicated, he approached her house and sang:

'Wake up, O Mother, full of compassion. Open the door of your house.

I cannot see in the dark. My heart is constantly trembling.'

In the middle of the night the neighbours were fast asleep, but the Mother of the Universe, who looks after her children day and night, could hear the beseeching words of her son. She opened the window and looked out. Standing on the opposite side of the road, her devotee bowed down low, offering his salutations. The Mother

graciously looked down at him and with a joyful heart, singing to himself, he went away.

A calf was hungry and it was calling its mother. Its cry reached the ears of the Holy Mother and she answered. 'I am coming, my child.' And she rushed out to see that the calf got its mother's milk.

In the hut of a poor couple, opposite her house, a man was beating his woman. Her cry drew the Mother's attention and she scolded the man, 'She has left everything and come to you and now you are beating her. Be careful! Don't beat her any more!'

Mother was busy with a hundred household duties. Round about her was a group of devotees. One among them was fasting. His only desire was to offer flowers at her feet and then break his fast. Mother understood his desire. She sat down and called him, 'Come my son, do what you wish.'

She was never angry or irritated; she was never discontented; she had no pride of position but accepted people's adoration in a simple way, as she had accepted Sri Ramakrishna's worship. This is our Mother. With an all-embracing heart, she is waiting for her children; for we may call on her at any time. She is always protecting us in happiness and misery. She used to look at the moon and pray, 'Make me pure; even the moon has stains, may I be stainless.' So, let us all pray to Mother, 'O Mother, protect us from faithlessness and unbelief. May we have faith in one another and love for one another!'

Sri Ramakrishna, who came to establish harmony in all religions, who came for all without any distinction of race or creed, who drew all to him in the past, will be doing the same for all time. He conquers the world with love. The only weapon in the hand of this greatest of all *avatars* is LOVE. We are very small, but did not a squirrel come forward to help Sri Ramachandra to build the bridge? Let us also help him in his conquest of the world by loving one another and having faith in one another. The work he has started will go on. Our right is only to be witnesses to his work and instruments in his hands.

## The Temple Relates Man to God

### BRAHMACHARINI SUTAPA

A PLACE of pilgrimage, a *tirtha*, is situated on the bank of a river where the presence of the invisible infinite Being is felt and, assuming a form and personality, It plays there. In the Vedas and Puranas it is enjoined that a temple be built where there is a pond or a river. The inner significance of this injunction is that one should always bathe in the water of knowledge in the *tirtha* of the mind, *manasa tirtha*.

‘God comes near the places which have water and gardens in them, either natural or artificial.’\*

‘The gods always play where groves are near forests, rivers, mountains, and springs, and in towns with pleasure gardens.’†

Ideally situated on the eastern bank of the Ganga, the mother of rivers, with a pond and colourful, fragrant gardens, in Dakshineswar now stands a temple to the Divine Mother in the form of Sri Sarada Devi. This newly erected temple is the fulcrum upon which the sanyasins and devotees of Sri Sarada Math of the Ramakrishna Order support their lives and activities; it embodies the energy from which they derive their inspiration. As Swami Vivekananda said in regard to the Belur Math: ‘The power that will have its rise from here will flood the whole world and turn the course of men’s lives into different channels’.<sup>1</sup> This divine energy is now centred in a new temple. The presence of the holy relics and pilgrims in the natural beauty of this site on the bank of the Ganga creates an atmosphere that makes the temple a *tirtha-sthana*, a centre of living faith.

### Harmonics of Structure and Function

The function of a temple is, through the suggestions of its religious symbolism and the harmony of its structure, to orient the

\* सल्लसोद्यानपुस्तकेषु कृतेष्वकृतकेषु च । स्थानेष्वेतेषु साक्षिष्यमुपगच्छन्ति देवताः ॥

*Brihat Samhita*, LVI. 3.

† वनोपान्तनदीर्षलनिर्गरोपान्तभूमिषु । रमन्ते देवता नित्यं पुरेषूद्यानवस्तु च ॥

*Bhavishya Purana*, I. cxxx. 15.

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devotee to God. The harmony expressed by the temple is the centre within man where heart and reason join in the depths of his being. When the grouping of spatial elements is harmonious, a sense of equilibrium is created. The perception of this equilibrium produces the cessation of cognition which gives the notion of eternity. The psychological effects of forms, colours and sensations suggest states of consciousness, planes of existence and stages of contemplation. This aesthetic principle was true of religious architecture in the pyramids of the Egyptians and was adopted by the Greeks and Romans. Religious symbolism through the psychological medium of a harmony of architectural structure was used as the most important means of instruction at initiations into sacred mysteries and of acceptance into esoteric societies.

The architects of the European Renaissance also studied proportion in general but particularly with respect to the human body. Studies by Leonardo da Vinci are evidence of this. According to the Vedic conception also, a temple is the visible body of the invisible divine Being, a visible representation of which is worshipped in it. Going round the temple, *pradakshina* or circumambulation, is reverently performed with the mental repetition of a *mantra*. The temple itself, according to this conception, is not merely a place for devotion, but also an object of devotion as is the visible image within it and the invisible all-pervading Being.

When Swami Vivekananda planned the temple for Sri Ramakrishna to be built at the Ramakrishna Math, he called upon Swami Vijnanananda to draw a plan, culling the best features of Indian architecture. It is after this plan that all successive temples, wherever they are, have been built by the Ramakrishna Order. Three features of these temples, according to Swamiji's idea, are: the domical roof over the *garbha mandir*, the decorative motifs of Indian design, and the *natmandir* built contiguous with the *garbha mandir*, as in the Christian church and the Buddhist Chaitya hall. In Hindu temples, where there is no congregational worship, the *garbha mandir* and the *natmandir* are traditionally separate structures. The temples of the Ramakrishna Order are a departure from this tradition because of communal participation in morning and evening hymns sung at the *arati*. Swami Vivekananda's idea was that the temples of the Order be 'an epitome of Indian culture just as the Master himself embodied

the realization of the country's religious aspirations throughout the ages'.<sup>2</sup> They are an eclectic blend of styles: Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic and Christian, representing the Vedic maxim and universal truth which Sri Ramakrishna demonstrated—that Truth is One.

The Sarada Math temple faces the Kali temple where Sri Sarada Devi lived with Sri Ramakrishna. This new temple was also built according to Swami Vivekananda's plan. Entering the Math from the south gate, one approaches by a wide and monumental stairway, a horseshoe facade resembling those of the Ajanta and other rock-cut caves of the Buddhist period. Over doors of a copper hue against the light reddish-brown Chunar sandstone of the outer walls, rises a superstructure of pillars and arches, domes and pinnacles, tier above tier like the *gopuram* of South Indian temples which, in effect, welcome the devotees. Indian architecture, often with seven storeys (*bhumis*) seems to be analogous to the seven worlds leading to the acme of Being. This also corresponds to the *chakras* or psychic centres, one above the other in the body, through which consciousness ascends from material to mental to spiritual, culminating in the *sahas-rara chakra* in the head.

By the main door of this one-hundred-foot long temple one enters the *natmandir* or prayer hall, a long nave based on the design of the Christian church and Buddhist Chaitya hall. It has two rows of rectangular columns, the capitals of which are decorated with a design of full-blown lotuses. Buttresses on two sides of the capitals gracefully curve towards the base of the vaulted arch of the roof, leading the eye upward. Each column has a bell in relief just below the capital, which symbolizes spiritual awakening. The columns separate the *natmandir* from the side aisles on the east and west. The first pillars near the entrance and the last pilasters of the *natmandir* are buttressed by elephants in a lattice-work background of leaves. The scalloped arches outside this hall and the windows and arches of the shrine recall the Rajput and Mogul styles of architecture. There are decorative *kulungis* or niches in the walls, traditional in Indian architecture. There are lattice work clerestory windows above the windows and doors on the eastern and western walls. The teak-wood doors for circumambulation of the *garbha mandir* have panels decorated with motifs of lotuses alternating with *vajras*, thunderbolts.

The significance is that our characters should be as strong as the

*vajra* and gentle as the lotus. The temple, the palace (*prasada*) of the presiding deity, the city of Brahman, is the body. The small cavity of the heart, the centre of Being in the devotee, is the dwelling-place of Brahman or, as Sri Ramakrishna says, the drawing-room of God. Traditionally, the proportion of the size of the deity in the *garbha mandir* to the whole temple suggests the proportionate size of the lotus of the spiritual heart to the human body. 'The Purusha, who is the size of a thumb, is like a flame without smoke.'<sup>6</sup> The chamber of the shrine-room suggests a cave which yogis resort to for meditation, where they can be free from disturbance. In Indian temples the main shrine is a small dark chamber which has a high superstructure. The meaning is that in darkness the devotee seeks the light of knowledge. When light is waved before the image it suggests spiritual illumination or the revelation of God. Thus the art of ritual and structure, function and form, is significantly combined.

The sanctuary of a temple or a stupa usually contains relics and is regarded as the centre of the creative transforming force which, like the mother's womb, germinates the spiritual seed, the *mantra* or holy name. In the *garbha mandir* (literally, womb) of this temple is the photograph of the Divine Mother in the form of Sri Sarada Devi, placed on a marble lotus, with the pictures of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda placed on wooden *singhasanas* or lion-thrones on either side of her. Here, as to a queen, she is offered the best of everything: flowers, fruits, clothes, ornaments and entertainment; and here, as the queen gives audience to her subjects, she receives devotees and grants their desires.

Over the door of the *garbha mandir* is a painting in white-gold on glass from Nandalal Bose's painting of Sarasvati, the goddess of *sattva guna*, white-gold representing her indrawn nature. Kali, the embodiment of the *tamasic* quality of the goddess, is painted over the door on the east of the *garbha mandir*; Jagaddhatri, *Raja-guna-mayi*, is painted in red over the door on the west. Other goddesses depicted over the outside of these doors are Annapurna, who is Annadayini, the giver of food, and Sharada of Shankaracharya, who is Brahma-vidya-swarupini, the giver of spiritual knowledge. Outside, on the

<sup>6</sup> वाङ्मयः दुर्लभो ज्योतिरिषाधुमः । *Katha Upanishad* II, L 13.

east, the goddess Kanya Kumari stands with her *japa mala* in her hand. She is Tapasvini Parvati.

A stairway from the *garbha mandir* leads down to the storeroom. Another stairway leads up to the *shayan ghar* or the retiring-room of the deity. The main dome of the temple is located over the *shayan ghar*. There is a system of smaller domes over the facade and the *garbha mandir*, below the main dome, alternating with *chales*, in shape representing the thatched roofs of Bengal village architecture. These create a visual rhythm which makes for perceptual grouping in the hierarchy of the whole structure. The pattern of the whole can be pursued down to visual relationships with the smallest details contributing to the harmony of the structure. In the Buddhist *Milin-dapanha* (II.1.3) it is said:

'Just as all of the rafters of a building with a domed roof go upto its roof-plate, incline towards its roof-plate and are assembled at its roof-plate, the roof-plate is called the apex of all, even so, Your Majesty, every one of these skilful habits (of spiritual *sadhana*) has the state of unification as its forefront, inclines towards the state of unification and bears upon the state of unification.'

This union or relationship of the active life with the contemplative life of the person is contained in the temple. The shape of the *garbha mandir* with its domed roof suggests a seated human figure in the posture of meditation. The dome with its *shikhara* or pinnacle which, like the stupa of Buddhist architecture, represents the axis of the universe, a spiritual essence, with the thread of which the textile of the world is woven.

The whole structure of Sri Sarada Devi's temple at Dakshineswar has an awesome dignity yet intimate warmth befitting the deity. The details of the decorative motifs lend a delicate feminine sweetness to the sublimity of the grand structure.

The harmony of spatial relations was arranged according to a graded expansion of perception to create a living impression, to shape it into a spiritual consciousness. The temple's structural symbolism, biologically and cosmologically, conveys the meditative state of the mind immersed in the stillness of the Goddess. Contemplation, aided by the beauty of the temple, may take one beyond the heavenly realms, beyond the duality of form and Formless. Sri Ramakrishna used

to sing, 'In dense darkness, Mother, Thy formless beauty sparkles'. The function of the house of the body, the temple of the Divine Mother, or the universe as a whole, is to provide shelter for the individual on his path of transition from one state of being to another; to provide a medium for transcendental experience through which he gains knowledge of his eternal, all pervading divine nature.

### References

1. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati 1979), VII, 157.
2. Swami Gambhirananda, *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission* (Calcutta 1967), 347.

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## To Leap Above Time

SWAMI SHRADDHANANDA

TIME is our great friend and companion. Without it, we cannot function in life. But still, time often torments us in many ways. When time flies, and we cannot keep up with its speed, we are oppressed. Sometimes, on the other hand, time does not move. This is another kind of oppression. Ultimately, time gives us its final thrust—death.

Really speaking, it is the mind which projects the speed of time. If that is so, then mind can also control time, can jump over time, can even eliminate time. These possibilities we find not only in the spiritual experiences and utterances of great seers, but to some extent in our daily lives as well. For example, when we are absorbed in some writing or reading or in a state of profound emotion, we totally forget time. Again, in deep sleep we are not conscious of time, of our waking world, of the body even. According to our watch, we may have slept eight hours, but that experience of sleep is actually timeless.

In our everyday life, time has to stop periodically. Escape from time is a blessing to us. It soothes our nerves and renews our energy.

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Of course, there are many people, extremely practical in nature, who resent this loss of time. In Russia, recently, some scientists have been conducting experiments to see how far possible it is for man to do away with sleep, if not altogether, at least to cut it down to the minimum number of hours, thereby gaining more time for work. Whatever such over-zealous people might think, it is a fact that man needs to be oblivious of time, occasionally, for the benefit of his body and mind. The feeling of boredom is one example, in point, of how time can oppress us most cruelly. Are there not occasions when, with nothing useful to do, with no friends to talk to, with no place to go, time hangs heavily on us and we fret and fume at it? Time-sense is important in life, but continuous time-consciousness is distressing. We need breaks in our connection with time.

It is natural for man to be sometimes inclined to leap above time. In Shakespeare's *King Henry IV*, the rebellious noble Hotspur utters these lines just before dying in a combat:

But thought's the slave of life, and life's time's fool;  
And time, that takes survey of all the world,  
Must have a stop.

Act V, Scene IV

Man is thoroughly encumbered by thought all through his life. In how many ways does thought drag and push him in hundreds of directions! Worries, anxieties, desires, passions, prejudices, hopes, frustrations—these are only a few of the numberless forms that thought—that is to say, our mind—assumes under different situations. So long as man is awake or even when he is dreaming he cannot run away from mental activities. Thought is necessary in life, but it can also be a burden. How often we groan under the tyranny of thought. How often we wish that we could be free from all thoughts, and thereby attain peace. But normally that is not possible. Life is bound to come to a standstill, without purposive guidance at every step. It is thought that conducts this guidance. So, thought is the most important tool of life; nay, it is concomitant with life. It is life's indispensable workman—'slave'.

Life, again, is not free. It is 'time's fool'. It issues at a point of time, and continues with the successive beats of time. It is constantly at the behest and mercy of time. One day the final signal comes, and life stops—precisely at a particular point of time. Our life-span is the duration between it's point of emergence and it's point

of cessation. Desperately we struggle to prolong our life. It is so dear to us. But, really speaking, we have little hold on it. It is time that controls our life-span. However precious our life may be to us, we cannot preserve it indefinitely. In fact, we are losing our life every moment—with every breath. When we consider our great fascination for life, and at the same time our helplessness in its ebbing away at the touch of time, we cannot but say with the dying Hotspur—'life's time's fool.'

Is time an independent entity? From all the evidence we possess, this seems to be the case. Time appears to be the supreme controller of things. 'It takes survey of all the word'. All movements happen in time—it is the matrix of all change. Take away time, and the whole world process stops. No wonder, in many ancient writings, time has been honoured as a great Deity. We read in the *Bhagavad Gita*: कालः कलयतामहं 'Of measures I am Time' (X. 30). And again, प्रहमेवास्यः कालः 'I am the mighty inexhaustible Time' (XI.32).

In the *Sreemad Bhagavatam* we read, कालो यन्मीरय उत्तमपुरुषस्त्वं 'Thou art That Supreme Person, Time, moving with immeasurable speed'. Yet, in the heart of man, there lies buried a deep resentment against time. Man refuses to believe that time is the supreme arbiter of his destiny. Sick of being played upon by time, man may sometimes even throw at it a challenge. The words of dying Hotspur, 'time must have a stop', may be taken as an illustration in point. It is the voice of rebellious man, beginning to understand the tyranny of thought, and the mockery of life, through the trickeries of that despot, Time.

God's standard and unit of time is different from ours; our million years is just two seconds to God. But Vedanta says, if man is a spark of God, then, as soul, he is also timeless. The more we contemplate on God as the Timeless, the more we become conscious of our own spiritual nature. We feel that God is not the God of today and tomorrow; He is our eternal companion; He was with us even before we were born. As man more and more has this intuition of eternity, he begins to feel himself ever more free from the bondage of time—that time which is binding his body, his mind and his life principle.

When we are meditating on God, we must not calculate time. Initially, of course, we can make a resolution to meditate for, say half an hour. But, while meditating, we should not be afraid to think that the object of meditation, God, is timeless. Sometimes, if the

meditation is very deep, an hour may pass. There is no cause for concern on this account. We are truly fortunate, as spiritual seekers, if in meditation, contemplation, prayer or repeating the name of God, we have been able to leap above time.

Leaping above time can be done effectively only by spiritual experience, either by bhakti yoga (devotional communication with God) or by jnana yoga (knowledge of our True Self). Although God works in time, He is beyond it. We read in the Old Testament of the Bible:

'Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever  
Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even  
from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God.'  
'For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday  
when it is past, and as a watch in the night.'

*Psalms XC:2,4.*

In meditation we need to think of the many attributes of God: God as Sat-Chit-Ananda, as the Eternal Reality, the Light of Consciousness, the Creator, the Master, and so forth. Another aspect of God's glory is that He is Timeless. By giving God this attribute, we ourselves grow and have glimpses of our own nature. We discover that we are not bound by death, that in the core of the personality is a light, the light of the Spirit. As Lord Jesus Christ said, 'I am the light of the world,' then addressing the devotees, he said, 'Ye are the light of the world.' In other words, when man comes to spiritual life, he discovers that his true identity is not the body. He feels that the timeless God is with him even when this body dies. In his daily life, when he is working and time is following fast, his mind is in the eternal. In the Indian spiritual tradition, there is a name for that eternal: Maha Kala, the Great Time or timeless time. If, in our spiritual life, we can play our part and try to be conscious in the back of our minds, of that timeless time, God, we may sometimes experience God as the Eternal Witness, the witness of all this play, this march of time. If that experience of eternity is with us, life becomes very sweet and harmonious, and we become fearless and strong. Swami Vivekananda mentions in his wonderful book, *Karma Yoga*, that as you work incessantly, and as selflessly as possible, you should nevertheless feel an eternal calmness at the back of your mind, no matter how busy you are. Just as we can look at the stars and see the unchanging space as the background, similarly we can have that experience of eternity with regard to time. Maha Kala is even

present at the back of fleeting time.

When we feel the timeless, even for very short periods as in aesthetic experience, it brings us great peace. We may listen to the performance of a master musician and lose track of time. The aesthetic joy coming to us through music or art is really that Timeless, God. In spiritual life, though, this experience is more systematic. Aesthetic experience can bring us joy and calmness, but it does not go very deep. It cannot really transform our *samskaras*, the latent tendencies of the mind. Spiritual experience transforms the personality, because love of God is not compatible with the lower expressions of our nature. The great Indian saint, Tulsi Das said that just as night and day cannot co-exist, so in the same way, Rama (God) and *kama* (sense passions) cannot co-exist. When you feel the genuine love of God, your lower animal nature will recede.

In order to leap above time, we have to come to our spiritual life at its depth, to know as Sri Ramakrishna said, that the goal of human life is to realize God. This world is not our permanent home, and we shall be in God when the play of time is over. So, only in our spiritual life can we speak of immortality, of timelessness. This experience is not a poetical fancy or a theological abstraction. It is real.

The above reflections are with regard to a spiritual seeker in the path of *bhakti yoga*. But the follower of *jnana yoga* too seeks to leap above time. He first discriminates between the Seer and the seen. The Seer is his Self—pure consciousness, and the seen is all objects and phenomena that we perceive through our senses and the mind. The Seer is the unchanging witness of the flow of time in the three states of our experience—waking, dream and deep sleep. In meditation he negates the 'seen' and tries to stand on the 'seer'. This negation naturally needs great detachment (*vairagya*).

When our self-knowledge reaches ultimate maturity, we then know, in the words of the Upanishads, that everything is the Self. We ordinarily experience reality in broken ways, but Vedanta says reality cannot be fragmented. Only our ignorance fragments it. In truth, there is no change, there is no time, there is only the One Self. When man knows that, he is absolutely free. Even when he sees this manifold, he is not distracted. Just as a person, appearing in many costumes—sometimes as a buffoon, sometimes a soldier, a fisherman or a

businessman—remains the same man, similarly the seer of truth knows and feels that it is the Self appearing as all the parts of the world.

What the Supreme Self is cannot be described by words. When we were at the stage of meditating on God objectively, we needed to think of His attributes. But in the highest knowledge of the Self, we know that God is our True Self. It is our True Self whom we had projected as God in order to meditate and pray. When I have discovered my true nature, I have no problem, I have no want, no words, no thought. Thus, in the *Chandogya Upanishad*, a student asks his teacher, 'If the Supreme Brahman is the highest level, beyond words and mind, then what is the ground of that Brahman? And where does that truth stay?' The answer given by the Sage is that It stays in Itself, because there is nothing else but Brahman. Since there is no question of separation, no word is necessary. In the experience of identity there is no scope for language, for thinking. So, in the highest spiritual experience of Self, there is no word, no description. Therefore, the Upanishads say that if you want to use any words, then all you can say is *पराङ्मनसो गोचरं*, 'beyond the reach of mind and speech'.

Thus in spiritual experience we can leap over time. In the path of devotion, when God-consciousness becomes intense, the devotee is not mindful of time. Time-sense may be there, but it is neither oppressive, boring, nor fearful. Time appears to be the play of God. Death cannot frown any more, for death does not cut off the eternity of God and the devotee.

In the path of Knowledge, the seeker, knowing himself as [the Self—the totality of everything—is able to convert time into consciousness. Time then is a projection of Self. It does not flow any more. It has stopped. And with the stopping of time, there is no change. All experience is one experience—the experience of the non-dual Self.

## The Universal Appeal of 'The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'

BIMLESWAR DE

'M' the writer of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* first met Sri Ramakrishna on 26 February 1882, exactly a hundred years ago. It can be said that the seed of *The Gospel* was sown in his mind that very day.

ORIGINALLY WRITTEN in Bengali, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* was published in five volumes under the title *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*. It is rightly recognized as one of the masterpieces of the spiritual literature of the world. Its writer, Mahendra Nath Gupta, popularly known among the devotees of Ramakrishna as Master Mahashaya or 'M' was a well-versed scholar and the headmaster of a well-known school in Calcutta. He met Sri Ramakrishna in February 1882 and maintained close contact with him till Sri Ramakrishna's earthly existence came to an end in 1886.

People of various sorts used to assemble at the Dakshineswar temple, where Sri Ramakrishna lived, to listen to his divine teaching. The author of the Gospel noted down all that he could of the Master's conversations and dialogues and what he wrote was published eleven years after Sri Ramakrishna passed away.

About the authenticity of what has been recorded, there is not an iota of doubt. When the manuscript was read by Sri Gupta to Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother blessed him with the following words:

'All the words that you heard from him are true. You need not fear. It was he who had told you all these words. It is he who is getting them published out of necessity. People will not be awakened to consciousness until these words are published . . . . When I heard them from you, I felt that it was he who was speaking them.'

The publication was entitled *Kathamrita* which means 'words of nectar'. It is not at all an exaggeration inasmuch as these words, when read by a spiritual aspirant, produce in him the feeling that he is drinking from a fountain of nectar. These recorded conversations are so intensely appealing that the reader is impelled to read them regularly and thus gain spiritual nourishment.

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One may ask: What is unique about the *Kathamrita*? The first thing that unfailingly strikes the reader is the simplicity and spontaneity of expression. Profound religious truths are communicated in language that is intelligible to the common reader as well as to the intellectual. The contents of the dialogues are not new. They are truths enshrined in the religious scriptures, the Vedas and Upanishads, and they constitute the fundamentals of the Sanatana Dharma, the *summum bonum*, the deeper meaning and purpose of earthly existence. But Sri Ramakrishna realized these abiding truths through his intense *sadhana* which lasted twelve years. He therefore had first-hand experience of them. When he talked about these truths, and he used to do so at all times and at different places in and around Calcutta, the impact on the listeners was irresistible. It is no wonder, therefore, that Mahatma Gandhi said that Ramakrishna's teachings bring us face to face with God.

People of various types—aspirants and the inquisitive, educated and uneducated, rich and poor—used to visit Dakshineswar to listen to Sri Ramakrishna's inspired utterances. He would talk on such subjects as the nature of the Supreme Being, the paths of realization, the relationship between Brahman and Kali, and so on. He spoke in such simple language, interspersed with copious illustrations, that the listeners experienced no difficulty in understanding their implications.

The Master highlighted the essence of Dharma in his apt and inimitable expression *জীব জ্ঞানে জীব সেবা*, service to living beings as manifestations of God, and the harmony of religions by saying *জতো মত ততো পথ*, there are as many paths (to God) as there are religious views or creeds. Needless to say, the effect was that 'those who came to scoff remained to pray'. To drive home the spiritual meaning of his teaching, he used to take recourse to parables just as the Buddha, Jesus Christ and others had done more than two thousand years before. These parables constitute one of the major attractions of *The Gospel*. Another feature is that the Master's teachings are embellished with devotional songs. He had a sweet and soft voice and he would sing devotional songs composed by such medieval *sadhakas* of Bengal as Ram Prasad and Kamalakanta. Because of these his talks never appeared abstruse and dull to the audience.

Achintya Kumar Sengupta, a litterateur of great repute, in his book in Bengali entitled *Kavi Ramakrishna*, 'Ramakrishna, the Poet',

remarked that it was customary to quote analogies used by the immortal Sanskrit poet, Kalidasa, as of supreme beauty. But after the sayings of Ramakrishna came out in printed form, Ramakrishna became Kalidasa's rival in the use of analogies. Of the innumerable analogies used by the Master to drive home the meaning of spiritual ideas, one may be mentioned. The author of *The Gospel* once put a question to the sage: 'Has the Supreme Power form, or is it formless?' In answer to the question Sri Ramakrishna said: 'It is both, and also something beyond.' To make the meaning clear he used a remarkable analogy: The ocean is formless, without any limits. But it assumes forms as floating chunks of ice when the intensity of cold increases. So the Supreme Power assumes 'forms' (personal gods) when unalloyed devotion (बुद्धा भक्ति) reaches its peak. What an apt and artistic use of analogy!

There are repetitions in *The Gospel* but, as pointed out by the recognized exponents of the Master's sayings, such repetitions were made with a purpose. Human memory is short and unless things are repeated they do not endure in the mind. Besides, such repetitions have the sanction of the Shastras. In the *Gita*, Lord Krishna tells Arjuna:

'That very ancient Yoga has been taught by Me to you this day . . . '\*

Lord Krishna repeated in the *Gita* all that was said in ancient times and what He said is what constitutes Sanatana Dharma, the perennial religion. In the same manner, Sri Ramakrishna explained in more ways than one, according to the receptive capacity of his audience, the essentials of Sanatana Dharma. But what he said was characterized by transparency and spontaneity inasmuch as they were truths which he himself had realized. In fact, he restored Sanatana Dharma to its pristine glory at a time when it stood in danger of being supplanted by the onslaught of western culture. So profound was the impact of the Masters's life and message that the author of *The Gospel* quoted the following lines from the *Srimad Bhagavatam* in his introduction:

'The nectar of your story, the praise of poet-seers,  
Elixir to parched souls, delight of listening ears,

\* स एवायं मया तेन्य योगः प्रोक्तः पुरातनः । IV.3.

The cleanser of sin, is grand and glorious;  
They who spread it wide on earth are generous.\*

Men need not despair, thinking that their lives are doomed. They will derive fresh hope and inspiration if they listen to Sri Ramakrishna's words.

*The Gospel* attracts people from far and near to come and drink from the spiritual fountain flowing crystal clear through Sri Ramakrishna's immortal sayings.

\* तव कथामृतं तप्तजीवनं कविभिरीक्षितं कल्मषापहं ।

श्रवणमंगलं श्रीमदाततं भुवि गृणन्ति ये भूरिदा जनाः ॥ X. xxxi. 9.

## Swami Vivekananda: Hope of America—I

GARGI

THIS WORD 'hope' implies, of course, that any given state of affairs, whatever it may be, leaves something to be desired; it implies a lack and a need. And as I see it—as, in fact, most people see it—the present lack in American life is acute, and the need desperate. I would go so far as to say that the overall situation is one of 'either-or'—either America as a whole discovers an unshakable, deep-lying, and permanent basis and support for her ideals and her inherent genius, or those ideals and that genius will self-destruct, just as do all things in this world that are not deeply rooted and nourished. And in that destruction—for America is not an inconsiderable power in world affairs—she will drag much of the world down with her.

I do not think this 'either-or' situation is unique in history or peculiar to modern America. It seems, rather, to be an operation of natural law: there seems to come a point in the lives of materially

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based and oriented nations—in the lives, even, of widespread civilisations—when they either enter a period of decadence (very often fatal) or undergo a revolutionary change and surge upward with renewed vigour and purpose. This critical time comes, I think, when every possible avenue of material progress has been explored and when at its blind end the human soul still finds its longing for truth and for joy unsatisfied. When a people have nowhere left to go, when there are no more dreams to follow, when in the midst of material plenty and cultural affluence they find no fulfillment or peace, then that people either goes down the cosmic drain or turns toward God.

The swing of a highly materialistic culture toward spiritual values and goals is, of course, not a usual event; more often, a culture that has lost its hope and enthusiasm simply dies. But I do not think this will be the case with America, for not only is America inherently great, America also has been greatly blessed. If a seed of spirituality has been planted in the heart of a nation, then times of inner erosion can act as awakeners of that seed: it will surely stir and sprout. Such a seed was planted in the heart of America some ninety years ago by the towering prophet of this age—Swami Vivekananda. That is the wonderful hope.

As is well known, the great Swami came to America in 1893. He spent about two and a half years there, lecturing, holding classes, making many disciples, many friends, and inevitably, many foes. At the end of 1899 he again came to America. This time he stayed for about six or seven months, again preaching strenuously. True, the Swami's work there did not cover a very long period of time: all told, it added up to only a little more than three years. But they were years of intensive work; during them he expended himself without stint, shooting one bolt of enormous spiritual energy after another through the very soul of the nation. And those bolts were made the more powerful and telling by his love.

The Swami had deep feeling for the American people. He spoke to them in their own cultural language, he understood their needs, he scolded them for their faults, he admired them for the greatness of their ideals and character, for their vitality and initiative, and he felt they were worth giving the best years of his life to. 'They loved me, and I love them a great deal', he once said. 'I felt as if I was one of

them.' Surely a country that has been loved and blessed by so great a prophet can never really decline: surely the spiritual energy that he charged it with will suddenly surge forth. In fact, I believe this is beginning to happen—and none too soon!

### Religion, Science and the Common Man

Religion—that is to say, religion as a meaningful and dynamic current in the mainstream of western life—stopped flowing long ago. Indeed, for the past three or four centuries the theories and findings of science have been steadily, and sometimes dramatically, diverting that current (or damming it up) at its very source. Science, or rather, the scientific, objective outlook that typifies our modern civilization, has spelled the death of God: no longer is He a living, motivating force in our everyday, or even once-a-week, lives. I do not think this needs elucidation; it is a much discussed and written about fact. But I do not believe that it is a fact tolerable to the human soul. When religion loses its life, a light goes out in the hearts of men. However crude a religion may be, man reaches through it to the Supreme Being—to Being Itself. However cleverly he may talk, however sophisticated his reason and his science may be, the cry of man's soul for some supreme and responsive divine Being goes on. That longing may not be articulate or even conscious, but its frustration can bring about a basic and corroding sense of despair, and that kind of despair is, I think, one of the deep-lying disorders in the present condition of our culture.

Another is the disappointment we are feeling in the promise of science itself. If science knocked out religion, it did so with the hearty assurance that it would provide mankind with all that could possibly be desired. There was no limit to the wonders to come. Above all, man was going to know in full the secrets of himself and of the universe. At the end of the nineteenth century, and far into this century, everyone was elated over this prospect—understandably so. The search for ultimate truth is as basic a motive power in human life as is the search for ultimate Being, and the promise of science seemed a magnificent star to hitch our wagons to. Paradoxically, however, the farther the scientist has probed into the secrets of the universe, the farther has reality receded from his grasp and the more certain has he become that nothing certain can be said about anything

at all. In fact, the very notion that science can reveal ultimate truth has been entirely discarded (if it was ever entertained) by reputable scientists—and this not only because each uncovered depth of reality points to a deeper and yet deeper mystery beyond itself, but because the human mind—the mind with which we observe the material universe—that mind by its very structure acts not as a window on to reality but as an opaque screen through which tiny pinholes of light from the vast realms of the Real can be seen—distortedly.

What is actually going on in the depths of matter, how matter is behaving in its secret insides, can perhaps be described in abstract mathematical symbols and equations, but the human mind can form no picture, no concept, of this behaviour; nor can it form any meaningful idea of what it is that is behaving. Whatever may be the wonders science has revealed to us—and those wonders are wonderful indeed—it has nonetheless brought home to us the humiliating and inescapable conclusion that our rational minds—whatever their degree of brilliance—are only small parts of a vastness they can never hope to grasp. In short, science cannot give us the ultimate knowledge we aspire to; nor can organized religion, in its present moribund state, give us the ultimate Being we crave to love and commune with. What to do?

#### Can Affluence Cure All Evils?

One thing western man has attempted to do—and this rather valiantly, though naively—has been to make the best of things. As we know, the prevailing idea in the last century was that the human being was innately good and infinitely perfectible. One had only to perfect the social and economic environment and lo! the goodness of man would shine forth in unobstructed splendour. There would be no more greed, no more jealousy, no more lust for power, no more violent competition; there would be only love and charity and swift progress toward a heaven on earth where everyone would enjoy himself to the full before dying. Theories like this are, of course, still current and still taken seriously; but on the whole the dream of the empirical man's innate, unalloyed goodness and of his perfectibility has been rudely shattered. For one thing there came Sigmund Freud. Although many of Freud's theories have been altered or modified by his successors, the general idea that the ordinary human subconscious is

a dungeon of tenuously secured monsters has been all too well verified by the mind-numbing, unspeakable events of the twentieth century. But let us say, for the sake of argument, that an ideal society could be created in which human beings were conditioned to behave co-operatively and nobly at all times. It seems to me that such a Utopia would be a very deadly thing. Without the stimulus of either human competition or a spiritual ideal and goal the human spirit would suffocate; the good life would become intolerable.

But it is not, I think, possible for goodness to exist on a material level without the complement of evil. The monsters I mentioned are not about to be programmed out of existence by altering the social environment; they are built-in and ready to leap into action at the slightest provocation. Many of us know it, or should know it, for many of us—at least those of us over forty—have seen such monstrous action on a mass scale. One result of these particularly stunning revelations of the human psyche that the twentieth century has offered has been a shamefaced retreat by many thousands of men and women (thoughtful as well as thoughtless) to the concept that man is basically corrupt and absolutely helpless to redeem himself. This loss of faith in man as man, and the subsequent surrender to evangelical cults, which reason and education had earlier militated against, was, and is, a confusing and deeply traumatic experience. The American character is basically self-confident, self-reliant, and rational; the American does not easily beat his or her breast in guilt and beg an authoritarian God or Messiah for salvation. A religion of penitence and mystery is all out of shape for him, and in order to follow it he must contort himself. We cannot go back to what we have outgrown without damaging our integrity. But to thousands there has seemed no other way.

On another, but equally important, level the American feels frustrated in his search for the good life. The achievements of applied science have let him down. In present-day America there are, literally, no conveniences, no goods, no services, no entertainments that are not readily available to almost everyone. The common man is rich, his children are well fed and well educated—more or less; his diseases are cured or controlled; his wife has all sorts of labour-saving, liberating devices in her kitchen and laundry—if she cares to set foot

in those places—and all these services and things are paid for—or will be paid for in good time. One does not know how long this national affluence can last—but at the moment (and on the whole) the middle and labouring classes in America do not know the meaning of real noverty. This state of things is certainly to be rejoiced at, and its continuation and spread is to be hoped for and worked for. Yet the happiness and social peace that was supposed automatically to accompany material prosperity simply does not exist. There is enjoyment of sorts, yes; but there is no joy. And the disappointment is keen.

So much, then, for the present state of affairs. In three basic respects the American has found himself frustrated: in his search for ultimate Being, in his search for ultimate Truth, and in his search for lasting joy and peace. Most deadly of all, he has come close to losing his spontaneous and energizing faith in himself.

#### Swami Vivekananda's Solution

With the eye of a great prophet, Swami Vivekananda saw that the materialistic road America was travelling would lead to disaster. He was not in the least impressed by the optimism of the late nineteenth century. He clearly saw the actual facts and their consequences, and he was much concerned. One cannot but feel that he wanted to save the American genius in all its richness as keenly as he wanted to save the Indian genius, for each was equally important to the new and perilous age into which the world was entering. But to save the American genius was no easy task.

As I see it, the Swami's gigantic mission was to alter at its deepest source the whole thought-current of the western people, and this without in any way disturbing their inherent greatness—their long-evolving capacity for rational thought, their powers of scientific analysis, their innate ability to invent and explore, to brave any storm and hurdle any obstacle, their passion for freedom, their capacity for compassion, their yearning for truth. Swamiji knew there was only one way to save these priceless, long developing human qualities from erosion, and that was to root them in the unshakable, adamant rock of Advaita Vedanta. Nothing else could hold them firm—nothing else *can* hold them firm—against the terrible blows this present age is dealing them and will continue to deal them.

The central core of Vivekananda's teachings in the West was, of course, very simple. 'My ideal indeed can be put into a few words', he wrote, 'and that is: to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life.' Behind this lay the even simpler Upanishadic truth: 'That thou art.' Man is 'one with the Infinite Being of the universe.'

## Puranas: Their Place and Significance

M. D. PARADKAR

THE VEDAS and the Vedantic literature form the basis of Indian culture. The great sage Vyasa pinpointed this with the well-known words: 'One should endeavour to know the subtle meaning of the Vedas by the study of the Itihasa (history) and the Purana'.\* Nevertheless, a discerning student has to admit that the *Smritis*, codes of Hindu law, together with their *nibandhas*, treatises, in the *Dharma-Shastra* literature in later days, gave importance to the *traivarnikas*, the first three castes. Historically, for placing the members of all classes, also, of all castes, on an equal footing, at least in the spiritual domain, credit must be given to the two national epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* as well as to the Puranas. It is the *Padma Purana* that boldly declares, 'This is the path common to all that can directly bestow emancipation'.† The ninth chapter of the seventh section of the *Bhagavata Purana* spoke of the *chandala* devotee as being superior to the Brahmin bereft of devotion.‡ In fact, the Puranas not only formed the ethical core of later Indian society but also fostered the sense of a general appreciation of the

\* इतिहासपुराणाभ्यां वेदं समुपबृंहयेत् ।

† एषः साधारणः पन्थाः साक्षात् कैवल्यमिच्छिदः ।

‡ विप्राद् द्विषद्गुणयुतादरविन्दनामपादारविन्दविमुखाच्छ्वपच वरिष्ठम् । 10.a.

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goodness of the common man of this vast country and taught him the lessons, 'love thy neighbour' and 'be full of the milk of human kindness'. It is in this sense that many times it is stated that the Hindu dharma of the present day has its roots in the Puranas.

### What are the Puranas?

The etymological explanation of the term *purana* given by Yaska is दुरा नव भवति, that through which the old becomes new again. In a sense, Purana is old, but retains the spirit of newness by emphasizing the essential oneness of all men irrespective of their caste and creed, a sentiment which is modern in every age. The use of the term Purana in the sense of a religious book dates back to the days of the *Chandogya Upanishad* (7.1.2) wherein Purana was declared to be the fifth Veda. The word Purana in the plural appears to have been mentioned first in the *Ashvalayana Grihya-Sutra* (4.6). The mention of Purana in the *Apastamba Dharma-Sutra* shows that the Puranas in the Sutra period discussed Dharma-Sutra topics and also told stories of kings and their kingdoms. Smritis like the *Manu-Smriti* and the *Yajnavalkya-Smriti* refer to the Vedas and the Puranas together.\* The author of the *Mahabharata*, in the *Svarga-Arohana-Parva*, equates the fruit of listening to the *Mahabharata* with that of listening to the eighteen Puranas. Taking into consideration that the *Mahabharata* text, consisting of a lakh of verses, had already been composed in the fourth century, as is vouched for by inscriptions, one can safely assume that some Puranas must have been written by that time. A well-known definition of the Puranas was given by Amarasimha of the fifth century, mentioning primary creation (*sarga*), the periodical annihilation and re-creation of the world (*pratisarga*), genealogy of gods and sages (*vamsha*), cosmic cycles presided over by different Manus (*manvantaras*), and accounts of royal dynasties (*vamshanucharita*) as the five topics discussed in the Puranas. It must be remembered that this definition does not cover the subjects of many extant Puranas. A *mahapurana* like the *Bhagavata* adds five more topics to this list and includes: ways and means of livelihood (*vritti*), different incarnations of God protecting people (*rakshantara*), concentration (*nirodha*), the means of emancipation (*mukti*) as well as Brahma or

\* यतो वेदः दुरायाणि विद्योपनिषदस्तथा । *Yajnavalkya*, IV.189.

the ultimate support (*apashraya*). It must be observed that even these ten characteristics cannot include vows, holy places, rites for the dead, and so on, that are discussed in some of the Puranas, not to speak of Puranas discussing the geography of India in detail. In fact, Dr. Haraprasad Shastri says that, 'Anything old may be the subject of a Purana and it covers all aspects of life.' In addition to this, when one finds subjects like architecture (*Vastu-vidya*) and archery (*Dhanur-vidya*) discussed in some of the Puranas and details of astronomy (*Jyotisha*) as well as the science of interpreting various marks on the body (*Samudrika-vidya*) enumerated in some others, one is convinced that these works can rightly be called lexicons of Indian culture.

#### Evolution of the Puranas

Like the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, the Puranas appear to have gone through stages of evolution. The first stage belongs to the days of Vedic literature, where the lineage of ancient sages and kings was depicted and different stories were told with a view to bringing out the importance of the institution of *yajna*, sacrifice. This can be styled the Adi-purana stage, where not only the Brahmins but members of all classes, such as Sutas, Magadhas and Shudras, contributed their quota to the development of the *yajna*. The second stage belonged to the author of the *Mahabharata* who tried to make the Adi-purana coeval with his own day, retaining the newness of the Puranas. The third stage of evolution appears to have determined eighteen to be the number of the Puranas. The mention at this stage of the tenth year after the coronation of the Andhra king Yajñashri shows that during this stage composers of the Puranas had brought the genealogy of kings from the days of the famous Pandavas up to those of the Andhra kings of the Kali Yuga. The fourth stage covers the period from the Gupta kings up to the days of Harshavardhana, in the seventh century. During the Gupta period the Brahmins were responsible for redacting the Puranas and composing the Upa-puranas. The first and the last stages of the evolution of the Puranas speak of the genealogy of Hindu kings from 800 to 1200. It is in this stage that the Puranas become sectarian and confined to caste and creed, resulting in interpolations and reducing the original ideas to a level that was not always commendable. The idea was to make the teachings acceptable to the

common man. This explains the addition of tales, (Akhyanas) and anecdotes (Upakhyanas) which sometimes appear incredulous and ridiculous to the modern reader.

#### Number and Classification of the Puranas

Indian tradition assigns some kind of holiness to the number eighteen. The eighth chapter of the *Shatapatha Brahmana* speaks of the evolution of seventeen kinds of worlds from Prajapati. Together with Prajapati one arrives at the number eighteen. The year consists of twelve months and five seasons, amounting to that same number by adding the year (*samvatsara*) to it. The *Mahabharata* has eighteen sections (*parvas*) and the *Gita* consists of eighteen chapters (*adhyayas*). No wonder that the Puranas as well as the Upa-puranas are also said to be eighteen in number. A verse in the *Devi Bhagavata* cleverly suggests the names of these eighteen Puranas:

मद्वयं भद्वयं त्रैव त्रययम् वचतुष्टयम् ।

अनापलिङ्गकानि पुराणानि पञ्च पञ्च ॥

The term *ma-dvayam* suggests *Matsya Purana* and *Markandeya Purana*; *bha-dvayam* refers to *Bhavishya Purana* and *Bhagavata Purana*; *bra-trayam* evidently indicates *Brahma Purana*, *Brahma Vaivarta Purana* and *Brahmanda Purana*; and the expression *va-chatushtayam* is intended to refer to the *Vayu Purana*, *Vishnu Purana*, *Vamana Purana* and *Varaha Purana*. The term *a-na-pa-linga-ku-skani* includes *Agni Purana*, *Narada Purana*, *Padma-Purana*, *Linga Purana*, *Garuda Purana*, *Kurma Purana* and *Skanda Purana*.

Attempts to classify these Puranas have also been made. The *Padma Purana* says that the Puranas connected with the glory of Vishnu are styled *sattvika*, those that speak of Shankara as the deity are styled *rajasa*, and the rest are called *tamasa*. The Puranic scholar, Dikshitar, has spoken of *Brahma Purana* and *Padma Purana*, dealing with Brahma Deva as the deity, as belonging to one category; *Brahma Vaivarta Purana*, with the sun as the deity, as belonging to another; *Agni Purana*, glorifying Agni, as of a third category; *Shiva Purana*, *Skanda Purana* and others with Shiva as the deity, as of a fourth category; and *Narada Purana*, *Bhagavata Purana*, *Garuda Purana* and *Vishnu Purana*, speaking highly of Vishnu, as belonging to the fifth category. The rest have been put under the sixth category. This classification

is based on similar statements in several books written in Tamil. Dr. Haraprasad Shastri has spoken of six different categories of Puranas after analysing their contents, but is forced to declare some Puranas to be miscellaneous. It is better to say that the Puranas, being encyclopaedic in character, really defy any classification.

#### Content of the Puranas

As we have said, the Puranas deal with five topics. It cannot be denied that they primarily deal with the genealogies of the ancient kings of India right up to the Gupta period and thus partake in ancient and medieval history. It is true that Puranic history is full of imaginary or hyperbolic descriptions of the glory of these kings, but in the view of Pargiter and others these descriptions need not be dismissed as totally unreliable. The description of Bharatavarsha in Jambudvipa appears to be true to India's geography. In fact, scholars like V. K. Rajwade have tried to draw attention to the element of truth contained in the descriptions of mythical mountains and seas like Meru and Dadhi Samudra.

#### Theory of Evolution

It is well known that the Puranas describe the evolution of the universe as well as its dissolution. It would be improper to forget the scientific quality of these descriptions. The Puranas declare that evolution and dissolution continue to follow each other in due order. This is evidently in accordance with the law of the conservation of energy. The Puranic statement that Brahmadeva created the universe from the navel of Vishnu has also to be understood in the proper spirit. The lotus in the navel really stands for the earth; the navel symbolically stands for the central place and Vishnu indicates the Sun. The sentence, '*Yajna* is indeed Vishnu; *that Yajna* is this Sun' (यज्ञो वै विष्णुः । स यज्ञोऽप्तावादित्यः) should not be forgotten. The idea of Vishnu pervading the three worlds is really tantamount to the sun pervading the world with its light. Thus the navel of the sun is nothing other than the earth. The idea that the earth is an evolute of the sun is acceptable to modern science. From this point of view the Puranic statement can be said to contain a scientific truth couched in typical Puranic language. According to the Puranas, Brahmadeva is the creator of the whole universe which is 'wonderfully various and variously wonderful'. It is significant that Brahmadeva created this universe after

having performed penance for one hundred years. The *Vishnu Purana* declares that trees, shrubs, creepers and such, which he created first, belong to the tamasic creation. Then Brahmadeva proceeded to create animals, but was not pleased with having succeeded in creating them. Then he created the gods who belong to the *sattvika* creation. The *Purana* declares that Brahmadeva was not satisfied even after this higher type of creation and hence proceeded to create human beings. This shows the superiority of human beings. Similarly, the description of the universe as an ancient tree in *Vayu Purana*, with intelligence as its trunk, the senses as the nests on it, the five elements as its branches, and objects of enjoyment as its leaves, is excellently philosophical. The propriety of considering dharma as well as *adharma* as the flowers, and pleasure and pain as the fruits, of this great tree can hardly be denied. In fact, such descriptions judiciously combine philosophy and practical wisdom.

#### Geography of the Puranas

The geography of the Puranas, like the history, has its novelty. The identity of Hemakuta with Hindukusha, Nishadha with Mount Suleman, Nila with Karakorum and Indra-dvipa with India cannot be summarily dismissed. That the Ramyaka of the Puranas corresponds to the Italy of today and that Ketumal really stands for Europe has been pointed out by Colonel Wilford. Ramachandra Dikshita's essay on the *Vayu Purana* contains a laudable attempt to interpret Puranic geography in the modern way.

The geographical description of the world in the Puranas cannot be dissociated from imagination. The description of Jambudvipa or Asia, and of Bharatavarsha, reveals that the authors of the Puranas were well-acquainted with this ancient land. They were also interested in bringing out its glory with admiration and love; the *Vishnu Purana*, for example, describes it as the holy country which is the pathway leading to heaven and liberation.\*

#### Relevance of the Puranas

The Puranas were intended to cater to the needs of all the followers of the Hindu religion and they show that all the three

\* गायन्ति देवाः किं गीतकानि धन्यास्तु ते भारतभूमिभाग ।

स्वर्गापवर्गास्पदमार्गभूते भवन्ति भूयः पुरुषाः सुरत्वात् ॥ II.iii.24.

well-known paths of knowledge, action and devotion lead to the same goal of emancipation. Thus the systems of Vedanta and Samkhya as well as Yoga find full elucidation in these works. But it is abundantly clear that their emphasis here is on Bhakti or devotion, and they have subordinated Jnana and Karma to Bhakti. The *Bhagavata Purana*, proverbially known as the Gita of the Bhaktas, unmistakably gives the palm of superiority to Bhakti and declares through Prahlada that 'Mukunda cannot be pleased by learning; neither can charity nor austerity or vows lead a person to him. He is pleased only by unflinching devotion; all else is meaningless'.

### The Language of the Puranas

A word must be said about the simple and yet picturesque language of the Puranas. The inexorable law of karma is expressed in simple language which can be easily understood by the farmer. 'A person obtains the fruit of his actions in the manner in which the farmer sows the seed and obtains a crop in conformity with it.' In this world, some people come together and some are separated from each other apparently by chance. This is aptly compared with the formation and erosion of sand by the speed of the current of a river. The author of the Purana who, upon seeing that the momentary lightning does not find a permanent place in the sky, was reminded of the rule that the vicious cannot find any lasting friendship with the virtuous, is a close observer of life, having the ability to express eternal truths in language that is at once appealing and elegant.

Thus the Puranas have been responsible for placing before the common man not only the ideal stories of kings belonging to both the solar and the lunar races, but they revelled in singing of the glory of rulers like Rantideva who were ready to give up their kingdoms and honour, even liberation, and were eager to undergo cycles of life and death for the sake of relieving the distressed. The credit for providing places of pilgrimage for the common man in the various nooks and corners of this vast country, and thus inculcating in him a sense of the integration of the whole country, must be given to the Puranas. The Puranas have also thrown open the gates of emancipation to all, irrespective of caste and creed, by combining philosophy and poetry in a way which all can understand. No wonder the Puranas deserve to be treated as the fifth Veda.

श्रीसारदापञ्चकम्

ब्रह्मविद्या वेदान्तशाखा

त्रिभुवनवर्णीयां

विश्ववन्धात्ममूर्ति

त्रिजघदघहरा तां नित्यपूतिप्रदात्रीम् ।

धमलधवलचित्तां

योगिराजैः प्रणम्यां

कुमलितमिरराकां नोमि सौम्यातिसौम्याम् ॥

भुवनविदिततंत्रः

प्राचिनिदृष्टसारं

कनुषमलयुतानां मादृशां यातु काम्यम् ।

प्रकटितमिव

प्रेम्णा कर्मध्यात्मदीप्तं

जयतु जयतु मातस्त्यागनृपकलङ्गे ॥

वित्रितनिखिलमोहा

ज्ञानदीप्तिः दयाद्रां

स्वमुखनिरन्निनाषा त्व हि स्नेहार्णवामि ।

दुरितदलनदशा

स्वाङ्कुलसर्वपारा

प्रिय परहितमत्ते ! दहसे मानुकम्पा ॥

वितरसि

परप्रेम्णा ज्ञानवैराग्यराशि

घटयसि खनु चित्रं मंगलं मन्त्रतीनाम् ।

मधुरसरलबास्यंवीक्षणैस्तत्त्वदानं—

हंरसि मनुजचित्ति नीलया स्नेहधन्याम् ॥

कुमुदलनितस्वाङ्के

न्यस्तहस्ताब्जयुग्मा

विकसितविमलाक्षी शुक्लवासो वसाना ।

चलितबिकुररम्या

हनाहिता ध्यानमग्ना

स्फुरतु हृदयमध्ये सारदा मानुकम्पा ॥

## **Five Verses for Mother Sarada**

**PRAVRAJIKA VEDANTAPRANA**

**(A free rendering)**

**Chosen amongst the three worlds, whose beauty is adored by all,  
She who removes the sins of the Universe and ever confers the  
blessing of piety,**

**She of clear pure consciousness, worshipped by the best of sages,  
She who is like the full moon for the darkness of evil thoughts,  
To her of gentle serenity, I make my bow.**

**She who is known to all, whose essence is understood by those  
who seek,**

**May she become the goal of my search, I who am full of dark  
ignorance.**

**Glory be to your resplendent spirit which you reveal with love,  
Oh Mother! you are adorned by the single ornament of renunciation.**

**You are the ocean of love, never thinking of your own self.  
The flame of your wisdom dispels all ignorance.**

**You have the power to vanquish evil by taking unto yourself all  
sinful thoughts,**

**Rapt in doing good to others, you are consumed by the intensity of  
your compassion.**

**Out of your supreme love you impart knowledge and dispassion,  
Indeed you accomplish wonderful good for your children,  
With your sweet simple words, perception and wisdom,  
You easily conquer those hearts which have been blessed with your  
love.**

**Seated on the hard plain ground, immersed in meditation,  
Resting your lotus-hands upon your gentle lap,  
Clad in sparkling white, your eyes open and bright, and your tresses  
flowing loose,**

**May you, Sarada, the Mother, ever shine in the depth of my heart.**

## A Parable Interpreted

R. DAS

*A MAN wanted to smoke. He went to a neighbour's house to light his charcoal. It was at the dead of night and the neighbour was asleep. He knocked for a long time and at last someone came down to open the door. At the sight of the man the neighbour asked: 'Hello, what is the matter?' The man replied: 'You know how fond I am of smoking. I have come here to light my charcoal.' The neighbour said, 'Ha, ha! You are a fine man indeed! You took the trouble to come and knock at my door. Why, you have a lighted lantern in your hand!'*

*What a man seeks is very near him, still he wanders about from place to place.*

Sri Ramakrishna

### What You Are Seeking Is Within You

Sri Ramakrishna was a poet, a *kavi*, meaning a seer who sees everything in detail as well as in its totality. Every word he uttered was inspiring, every song he sang was penetrative, every thought he expressed revealed the highest Truth. Moreover, his words had an emotional appeal, going beyond externals and looking within. His parables were drawn from the common experiences of domestic and social life, and explained, beautifully and lucidly, the deepest philosophical truths, so relevant to the needs of modern life. He would often narrate these stories in the course of a conversation and tell them so vividly that his listeners would grasp the true import of his teachings and go away immensely benefited and fully satisfied. When asked how he could give such apt illustrations to explain a particular philosophical truth or to solve a vital problem, he would often say that just before telling a story the full picture of the events of the story would flash before his eyes. He firmly believed that these pictures were revealed to him by the Divine Mother herself. The parable given above as an example depicts spiritual wisdom. The story has deep philosophical significance and a practical, yet lofty, ideal.

God dwells in our hearts. Sri Ramakrishna describes Him as the 'Ocean of Love and Bliss'. He says that God is a *kalpataru*, the

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R. Das is deeply devoted to the ideals taught by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

divine Wish-fulfiller from whom we get the 'four fruits of life', namely, moral, economic and aesthetic excellence as well as liberation. God is the supreme joy of our heart, the one to be loved, the eternal among the changing, and the light in darkness. He is our inner resource. Utterly ignorant of this supreme source, we try to seek happiness from environmental conditions and go outward for help and protection, just as the man in the parable ran to his neighbour to light his charcoal, forgetting altogether that he had his own lamp with him from which he could have lighted as much charcoal as he wanted. Sri Ramakrishna therefore says: 'What a man seeks is very near him, still he wanders about from place to place.'

But why do we have this out-going tendency? Why are we completely forgetful of the divine light in our hearts? The *Katha Upanishad* gives the answer:

'The self-existent Lord projected the senses outwards. Therefore one sees outer things and not the inner Self. A rare, discriminating man, desiring immortality, turns his eyes inwards and sees the indwelling Self.' (II. 1. 1.)

Eager to get lasting happiness from the outside world, ordinary men seek pleasures and long for possessions, but unfortunately they never find them. This is the greatest human tragedy. Sri Ramakrishna compares such a person with the camel that likes to eat prickly shrubs even though his mouth begins to bleed.

According to the Vedanta philosophy, all our experiences of objects, all our relationships in this world, are only due to the existence of the indwelling Atman which is pure Consciousness. 'He shines, so all these shine; through his lustre all these are variously illumined', says the *Katha Upanishad* (II.2.15). Objects themselves do not have the capacity to impart bliss or happiness. It is only because of the light of the Atman reflected in the mind that pleasure appears to come from objects. As the mind is finite, the pleasure it derives from the outside world is also limited and impermanent. 'The Infinite is the source of joy. There is no joy in the finite. Only in the Infinite is there joy', says the *Chandogya Upanishad* (VII.23.1). It is not possible, therefore, to derive that Infinite Bliss through the senses and the mind by their contact with the limited objective world. It is said in the *Katha Upanishad* (I 2.10): 'What is eternal cannot

be obtained by the non-eternal'. Only by realizing the Atman can we get that Supreme Bliss.

The ignorant man, not knowing this grand truth, tries to seek that *ananda* or the perennial happiness from external sources. For this reason he cherishes innumerable desires in his heart to achieve material prosperity. Ultimately he does not get abiding happiness from his desires. He becomes frustrated, disappointed and miserable. Will man suffer endless misery due to his ignorance and limitations? Sri Ramakrishna gives man this hope:

'All will surely realize God. All will be liberated. It may be that some get their meal in the morning, some at noon and some in the evening, but none will go without food. All, without any exception, will certainly know their real Self.'

The Vedanta also says that man is struggling to manifest his divinity within him consciously or unconsciously. While the spiritually ignorant man does it unconsciously, the wise aspirant does it consciously. The former passes through innumerable experiences of pain and pleasure in repeated births and deaths till he becomes aware that God-realization is the real purpose of life. The teachings of the Vedanta inspire everyone to speed up the process and consciously cultivate the habit of practising inwardness, that is, practising control of the mind and sense organs, disciplining the will and emotion, and, above all, developing love for God. There is a famous song by Kabir which says:

'O servant, where dost thou seek Me?

Lol I am beside thee,

I am neither in temple nor in mosque:

I am neither in Kaaba nor in Kailasa,

Neither am I in rites and ceremonies,

Nor in yoga and renunciation.

If thou art a true seeker, thou shalt at once see Me:

Thou shalt meet Me in a moment of time.

Kabir says, 'O Sadhul God is the breath of all breath.'

## Conversations that Inspire

*IN HIS fifteenth year Rama set out on a pilgrimage. When he returned his father, King Dasharatha, noticed that Rama was always immersed in contemplation and was averse to doing his duties. He repeatedly said that his life had been spent in vain and that the world was unreal. When this was conveyed by the king to Vasishtha, the royal preceptor, and also to Vishwamitra, the great sage, Vasishtha understood the cause of Rama's dispassion and told Dasharatha:*

**Vasishtha:** Rama has developed *vairagya*, dispassion towards the world, because of ignorance. Once he attains the knowledge of Brahman and understands that It interpenetrates all existence then he will perform all actions with great joy.

*Rama was called before them.*

**Vishwamitra:** Open your heart to me. What is the cause of your grief, Rama?

**Rama:** Please listen to me. I shall tell you. This world is unreal. There is not even an iota of happiness in this world. Men are steeped in ignorance and infatuation. They are born to die, and they die to be born again. Therefore everything is illusory in this world. I have developed discrimination. So I have discarded all thoughts of sensual enjoyments. One should know the deceptive nature of the mind. It is the mind alone that pictures the existence of the world as a reality. Atman alone is real. I am quite disgusted with this illusory world. I am trying to find out the means which will relieve me from the pains of this formidable round of worldly life, *samsara*. This thought consumes me like wildfire. I have therefore given up everything and now, like a lamp without oil, I shall let my body waste away. O Venerable Sage! Teach me so that I may soon become devoid of grief, fear and worldly troubles and may have the light of Truth. Tell me if there is any state of existence attainable which is above the sufferings and sorrows of life.

**Vishwamitra (to Vasishtha):** You remember, Vasishtha, the instructions we received and the stories full of knowledge that we heard from Brahma. Now you should teach these things to Rama. They will help him to attain peace of mind. Only he who is desireless and who has controlled his senses will be benefited by the initiation of a preceptor. But instruction given to an unfit student who is not disgusted with the world becomes as polluted as milk kept in a bag made of the hide of a dog.

**Vasishtha:** O Sage, I will do as you desire. Listen, O virtuous Rama. Love for worldly life is the cause of misery. It stings like a cobra, it cuts asunder like a sword, it pierces like a javelin, it binds like a rope, it burns like fire, it deludes like the night; in short, there is no misery which a worldly man does not experience. True and lasting happiness which men seek does not reside in the things of this world. The objects of our enjoyment appear to be pleasant only when we have a desire for them; but real happiness is experienced when there is no desire for any object in our minds; it is abiding bliss which is the very nature of our Self, and to secure this we have to go nowhere outside. Due to ignorance of the Self and false knowledge of the world we suffer all sorts of pain. But there is a way out and it consists in the right inquiry into the nature of the Self.

The imperishable Brahman can be attained only through one's own efforts. Fate is a non-entity. Our fate is nothing but the inevitable consequence of our own already accomplished efforts. Our past actions determine our destiny in our next life. So-called fate can be easily overcome by our present efforts. Of the two influences—past and present—the latter is superior because the past has already been determined, but the present is still under our control. O Rama, abandon impure desires, cultivate pure desires and regularly practise meditation on Brahman.

There are four preliminary requirements that one desirous of *moksha*, liberation, should have. They are *shama*, peace, *vichara*, self-inquiry, *santosh*, contentment and *sat-sanga*, association with the wise. The practice of even one of these virtues will lead to the fulfillment of all the other virtues and will lead you to liberation.

When *shama*, serenity of mind, is attained, all the senses also become calm and quiet. If a person is established in serenity, nothing

can upset his mind. He has always an unruffled mind, even when he is insulted, persecuted or assaulted.

*Vichara* is self-inquiry. It dispels ignorance and bestows knowledge. The nature of this self-inquiry is to ask such questions as: 'Who am I? Whence has come this bondage in the name of *samsara*?'

*Santosha*, contentment, is the best virtue. Greatness and glory attend a contented man, like servants. Calm descends only on an aspirant who is endowed with contentment. He is free from cares and anxieties. The sight of the calm countenance of a contented person gives delight to those who come in contact with him.

*Sat-sanga*, association with the wise, enlightens the path of goodness and good conduct. Its light destroys ignorance and darkness. If you have the company of sages, you need not perform austerities and go on pilgrimages. Therefore, O Rama, control your mind and diligently develop the above fourfold means to Self-realization.

## SRI SARADA MATH, DAKSHINESWAR

### CONSECRATION OF A NEW TEMPLE

IN JAYRAMBATI, her village home, the Holy Mother saw in a dream three goddesses. She said:

'... three of them arrived—Jagaddhatri and Her two companions, Jaya and Vijaya. I remember it distinctly. They said to me, "Shall we go away then?" "Who are you all?" I asked. One of them said, "I am Jagaddhatri". In reply I said, "No, why should you go? Stay here. I did not ask you to go away."'

From that time onwards the Jagaddhatri Puja became an annual function in the Holy Mother's home and she used to take an active part in the celebration. She went to Jayrambati every year to perform the worship. This year, on this day dear to the Mother, the Jagaddhatri Puja day, 6 November 1981, the Ramakrishna Sarada Temple was dedicated at Sri Sarada Math in Dakshineswar. The temple opening was celebrated for five days and attended by thousands of devotees from far and near.

### 5 November

From the earliest Vedic age to our own times a Vedic hymn used to be, and is still, recited with the rituals connected with architecture. It consists of the worship of the Vastu-Purusha and is called Vastu Yaga. The hymn is:

‘Lord of the house, recognize us for thine own, bless our coming in . . . cherish us as a father cherishes his children.’

‘Lord of the house, may we rejoice in thy pleasant friendship : protect us when we work and when we rest—and do you gods always protect us with your blessing.’\*

The day before the temple was opened, on 5 November at 8 a.m., the Vastu Yaga, which purifies the very ground on which the temple stands, was performed by pandits in the Yajna Mandapa, or temporary shelter for the purpose, near the north-eastern corner of the temple.

During the day about 430 women who came from every state of India and some from abroad were lodged in 19 camps organized in and around Dakshineswar. 300 women from localities as far as South Calcutta and 85 men volunteered their help.

On this occasion, *sannyasinis* from all the centres came to participate. The total number was 82, including three from the Sarada Convent, California, U.S.A. Including the *brahmacharinis* and probationers, 132 members of Sri Sarada Math attended the function.

### 6 November

On the Ganga's shore, at Sri Sarada Math, bells rang and conches blew, breaking the eternal sound of early morning into fragments of time, heralding the present momentous event. At 6:45 a.m. thousands had gathered to watch the *pradakshina*, circumambulation of the temple by the monastic members of Sri Sarada Math around the new temple. At the head of the procession from the old shrine came the auspicious cow and calf, festively decorated images of gentleness and passivity. A full vessel, *purna kumbha*, was carried behind them, symbolizing fulfilment of the ideal. Behind them came a group of

\* वास्तोष्पते प्रति जानीह्यस्मान्स्वावेक्षो धनर्मावः भवः नः । . . .

. . . धवरासस्ते सख्ये स्याम पितेव पुत्रान्प्रति नो वृषस्व ।

वास्तोष्पते बभ्रुया संनदा ते सस्त्रीमहि रक्षया गातुमत्वा ।

पाहि जेम उव योमे वर नो वृष पात स्वन्तिभिः सदा नः ॥ *Rig Veda* VII. liv. 1a, 2b, 3.

*sannyasinis* chanting Vedic mantras. They were followed by *sannyasinis* holding a *pradip*, an oil lamp, symbolizing the light of spiritual illumination, and Ganga water. Flower petals and *khol*, puffed rice, were sprinkled in front as Pravrajika Mokshaprana, President of Sri Sarada Math carried the holy relics under a decorated *chatra*, a royal ceremonial umbrella, fanned on both sides with *chamaras* and peacock-feather fans. The pictures of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda from the old shrine were solemnly carried on wooden thrones under ceremonial umbrellas. Behind them were other *sannyasinis* carrying puja materials, followed by twelve *sannyasinis* carrying ochre coloured flags. At the end of the procession came *sannyasinis* and *brahmacharinis* singing bhajans.

After circumambulating the new temple three times, the procession moved up the steps to the door of the new temple and, at 7.30 a.m., Swami Vireswarananda, President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, opened the main doors of the temple and carried the holy relics across the *natmandir* to the shrine at the far end. The pictures from the old shrine were placed in the new shrine in front of the new pictures, a large photo of Sri Sarada Devi, seated on a white marble lotus in the centre and smaller pictures of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda on wooden *singhasanas* on either side of her.

Revered President Maharaj meditated for some time. Then the deities were invoked in the new pictures and he offered *arghya* and prayers. He then performed *arati* with lighted camphor and *chamara*. Throughout this worship Vedic *mantras* were chanted by the *sannyasinis* and *brahmacharinis*. After him, senior sadhus of the Belur Math, namely, the two Vice-Presidents, Swami Bhuteshananda and Swami Gambhirananda, and Swami Abhayananda and others, offered *arghya*. The President of Sri Sarada Math, the Vice-President, and other senior *sannyasinis* also offered *arghya*. About 60 Swamis from the Ramakrishna Math, Belur, graced the occasion with their presence.

In the shrine, on the right side sat the senior Swamis and on the left, the senior Pravrajikas. After the worship was over the Swamis and Pravrajikas chanted, *Jai Sri Guru Maharaj ji ki jai. jai Mahamayi ki jai. jai Swamiji Maharaj ji ki jai.*

At 8 a.m., while preparations for worship were being made in the shrine, in the decorated celebration tent Swami Vireswarananda

released a Souvenir to commemorate this occasion. He gave a short benedictory speech in which he said:

'I am happy to consecrate this temple in which the photos of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother and Swamiji are installed, with the Holy Mother in the centre.

A few years back I had the good fortune of laying the foundation for this temple. Many of the elderly Swamis who were present on that occasion are also present here today. On that occasion, on behalf of the elderly Swamis and on my own behalf, I had expressed the desire that we would like to see the temple completed soon so that we may have a look at it before we depart from this world. I am thankful to the Sarada Math authorities for having made this dream of ours a reality today.

... Temples have come into existence because humanity wanted to see God in a finite form in a definite place where it could feel His presence. Particularly in India, whose ideal is *moksha*, these temples have played a very great part in the life of the individuals and the nation.

Swamiji said, 'Religion is the backbone of the nation and if that is right, everything is right'. There was a great decadence in religion in this age, and to fill up this deficiency, three great spiritual personalities were born, Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother and Swamiji, whose lives and teachings will once more raise this fallen nation, not only that, but will usher in a new civilization in this world. Once the Holy Mother saw a vision. She saw a young girl aged about ten years, dressed in a red bordered sari, sweeping the ground with a broom in one hand, while in the other she had a pot containing some liquid. The Mother asked the girl, 'What are you doing?' She replied, 'I am sweeping this place clean of all rubbish, and sprinkling it all over with nectar from the pot so that a new crop can be raised.' We do see the signs of it in different parts of the world today. The old civilization is crumbling and being swept away, and a new one arising, based on the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother and Swamiji. May they bless us all so that we may live up to the ideals lived and preached by them, and thus help to usher in a new age for our own good and for the good of the world.'

At 2.30 a.m. a special *puja* and *homa* began in the shrine. The picture of the Holy Mother was draped in a white silk sari with a

wide red border, which, set off against the light lemon colour of the walls and the light orange of the canopy above, made a brilliant and beautiful colour scheme. Sri Ramakrishna's picture, on the right, was draped in white silk and Swami Vivekananda's on the left, in ochre coloured silk.

Simultaneously, outside the temple, in the Yajna Mandapa, pandits performed the Sapta-Shati Homa, invoking the presence of the Divine Mother with the chanting of the *mantras* of the *Chandi*.

All the public celebrations that followed were conducted in a beautifully decorated tent put up on the lawn on the west of the temple. At 8.30 a.m. the chanting of Sanskrit hymns by a *brahmacharini* was followed by the recitation of the *Katha Upanishad* by a *sannyasini*. Other *sannyasinis* then read from the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi in English and Bengali.

To commemorate this historic occasion, a 'Special Cover' and a special cancellation stamp were issued by the Calcutta General Post Office. At 10.30 a.m. the Post Master General, West Bengal Circle, ceremonially presented an album of this first postal envelope, bearing the design of the new temple, to the President of Sri Sarada Math. *Bhajans* and *kirtan* continued until noon. At 12.30 about 6,000 people were seated to partake of *prasad* and thousands more received *prasad* in their hands.

In the temple there was Ramnam Sankirtan at 4 p.m.; the evening *arati* at 5.30 p.m. and Kali Kirtan at 6.30 p.m. At 10 p.m. Kali Puja was specially performed which continued till the early hours of the following day.

### 7 November

On Saturday there was *Gita parayana*, chanting of the *Gita* from 9 a.m. to 9.30 a.m. *Bhajans* were sung by *sannyasinis*, which were followed by two discourses. Pravrajika Ajayaprana spoke in English and Pravrajika Pradiptaprana spoke in Bengali on Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda.

From 4 to 5 p.m. a *bhajan* party from Trichy, led by Akhila Narayanswamy, sang devotional songs. A programme of films was shown in the tent from 6.30 to 8 p.m. The topics were the opening of Sri Sarada Math in 1954 and the foundation ceremony of the new temple at Sri Sarada Math in 1976. By the courtesy of the

Ramakrishna Mission Baranagar Ashrama and the Janasiksha Mandir, Belur, the following films were also shown: the dedication of the temple at Kamarpukur in 1951, Swami Vivekananda birth centenary celebrations held in 1963 and a documentary on the life of Swami Vivekananda.

### 8 November

On Sunday, after the *Gita parayana* and *bhajans*, *sannyasinis* gave spiritual discourses. Pravrajika Amalaprana spoke in English on the *Bhagavata*, and Pravrajika Bhaswaraprana spoke in Bengali on Bhakti Yoga as based on the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother.

At noon about 2,000 women and children of Dakshineswar were specially invited for prasad.

From 3.30 to 4.15 p.m. devotees from New Delhi sang *bhajans*. From 4.15 to 5.15 p.m. four devotees spoke on 'Sri Sarada Devi and the Spiritual Awakening of Women'. Indu Ramchandani from New Delhi and Dr. Bhavani Belvady from Bangalore spoke in English; Gita Ghosh from Durgapur and Kana Banerjee from Berhampore spoke in Bengali. After *arati* Mira Banerjee, a well-known vocalist from Calcutta sang devotional songs.

### 9 November

After *Gita* chanting and *bhajans* by *sannyasinis* in the morning, Pravrajika Anandaprana of the Sarada Convent, Hollywood, U.S.A. spoke on the 'Ramakrishna Movement in America'. Pravrajika Vishuddhaprana spoke in Bengali on the Vedantic teachings of the Upanishads.

After the evening *arati* there was a cultural programme. Students of the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Sister Nivedita Girls' School enacted some scenes from the life of Sri Ramachandra in Sanskrit, and the children of the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Siksha Mandir staged a dance-drama on Krishna-lila.

After this performance, Pravrajika Shraddhaprana, Assistant Secretary of Sri Sarada Math and the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission addressed the guests who had come from far and near and thanked all who had given their unstinted help on this occasion. After her, Dr Bhavani Belvady of Bangalore spoke in English and Kana Banerjee of Berhampore spoke in Bengali on behalf of the devotees.

To conclude the celebrations, there was Daridra Narayana Seva (feeding of the poor) organized at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple on 22 November.

On behalf of Sri Sarada Math our thanks go to all those persons, institutions and Government and Municipal Departments with whose co-operation the celebration was a success. Our special thanks go to Messrs. Ananda Bazar Patrika Limited for their generous help and co-operation in all matters.

There are occasions on which, with eyes open or closed, one finds oneself in a place which seems to be the very centre of the universe: one seems to be at an eternal point of time and place from which all events originate. When a mass of thousands share this feeling, from the unity of their joy is released a manifestation of energy. All those who witnessed the opening of the new temple at Sri Sarada Math felt that the energy inspired by Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda would flow through the world from this place far into the future.

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### APPEAL FOR TEMPLE FUND

Through the efforts of all our friends and devotees all over the world, the new temple was completed on the inside and consecrated on 6 November 1981. The stone work of the temple on the outside is still not done, except up to the door level of the garbhamandir. It will take 3 more years to complete it. We appeal to all our generous friends and donors to remember to donate and thus enable us to finish this holy undertaking.