



SAMVIT

[Knowledge that leads to enlightenment]



Sri Sarada Math, Dakshineswar, Calcutta-700 076
No. 13, March 1986

SAMVIT

[Knowledge that leads to enlightenment]



C O N T E N T S

	Page
Universal Prayers	1
Reflections	2
In Every House	7
From the Mahasamadhi (A Poem)	13
<i>Shiv Dhawan</i>	
Swami Trigunatitananda, Hero-Saint	15
<i>Brahmacharini Medha</i>	
Chaitanya, Ramakrishna and Advaitavada... ..	25
<i>Stuart Elkman</i>	
Science And Religion	29
<i>Rada Krishna</i>	
Brahma-Sutra-Bhashya of Sri Shankaracharya	35
<i>M.R. Yardi</i>	

No. 13
MARCH
1986

The semi-annual journal
of
Sri Sarada Math
Dakshineswar, Calcutta-700 076

			Page
God Is So Funny	41
<i>Brahmacharini Sutapa</i>			
The Master Protects	47
Swamiji's Prophetic Vision: Sri Sarada Math		...	49
<i>A.N. Ray</i>			
Vivek Chetana, Awareness of Vivekananda's Ideals		...	53
<i>Benu Datta</i>			
Sri Sarada Math & Ramakrishna Sarada Mission		...	57

Editorial & Publication Office
C-8A Hauz Khas
New Delhi-110 016

	Rates inclusive of postage			
India, Nepal & Bangladesh	single issue			Rs. 5.00
	two issues			10.00
	3 years			25.00
Sri Lanka	annual			Rs. 16.00
	3 years			48.00
U.S.A. & other countries	SURFACE MAIL		AIR MAIL	
	annual	\$ 4.00 £ 2.00	\$ 6.00 £ 3.00	
	3 years	12.04 6.00	18.00 9.00	

Information for contributors, subscribers and advertisers on p. 61



SAMVIT

स नो बुद्ध्या शुभया संयुनक्तु ।

May He endow us with good thoughts.

Shvetashvatara Upanishad III. 4.

Universal Prayers

सत्त्वं इद् वा उ तं वयं इन्द्रं स्तवाम नानृतम् ।

Let us extol this God who is Truth and not untruth.

Rig Veda VIII.iii.12.

उदुत्तमं वरुण पाशमस्मदबाधमं वि मध्यमं श्रथाय ।

अथा वयमादित्य व्रते तवानागसो अदितये स्याम ॥

O Supreme God, do Thou remove our upper, middle and lower fetters; the mental, physical and terrestrial bondages. O Boundless One, obeying Thy commands may we be free from sins and may we enjoy unlimited happiness.

Rig Veda I.xxiv.15.

REFLECTIONS

Remembering God

IN THE philosophical and devotional doctrines of mysticism, *smarana* or remembrance of God is considered an important discipline. The purifying effect of remembering God is all prevailling for it makes one sinless, and gives peace to the mind. It generates devotion and knowledge, accompanied by dispassion and experience. The devout aspirant, therefore, makes every effort to recollect the *lila* of an *avatara*. For the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, the year 1986 is specially significant because they will recollect that in this year falls the 150th anniversary of his birth, and also, the 100th anniversary of his *maha-samadhi*.

Joy at Birth

The spring of 1836 brought joy to everyone in the hamlet of Kamarpukur. The chilly winter was over and everything round about was vibrant with new life. From the small hut of Kshudiram Chattopadhyay and Chandramani Devi there came the blissful news that a son was born on 17 February. The astrologers pronounced that the auspicious Lagna Rashi or Zodiac of the child predicted that he 'would be virtuous and highly respected. He would live in a temple surrounded by many disciples. He would revive dharma and his teaching would be preached generation after generation and he would be universally revered as an incarnation of Narayana.'

His parents were full of joy and calm; the apprehension they had felt was turned into assurance for now they knew that the deity Gadadhar Vishnu of Gaya had fulfilled His promise to be born in their home.

When the Eternal Spirit embodies Itself we call it birth, when It leaves the mortal frame we call it death. Between the birth and death of this divine child—a stretch of fifty years—the world witnessed the destruction of the hydra-headed materialism, a wonderful revitalizing of man's declining faith in piety and virtue, and a new awakening of spirituality.

Before Mahasamadhi

Before Sri Ramakrishna gave up his body, he lay very ill in Cossipore, near Calcutta. On 7 March 1886 the devotees celebrated his last birthday with worship and prayer. There was no festivity because the devotees were drowned in a sea of grief. 'What does the life of

an *avatara* mean?' they wondered. On 14 March in intense suffering, Sri Ramakrishna in a very soft voice said to the devotees:

'I have gone on suffering so much for fear of making you all weep. But if you all say: "Oh, there is so much suffering! Let the body die", then I may give up the body. . . . The illness is of the body. That is as it should be; I see that the body is made of the five elements. . . . I am seeing many forms of God. Among them I find this one also (meaning his own form).'

The next day, 15 March, Sri Ramakrishna felt a little better. Speechless and grave, the devotees sat near him.

Sri Ramakrishna: 'Do you know what I see right now? I see that it is God Himself who has become all this. It seems to me that men and other living beings are made of leather, and that it is God Himself who, dwelling inside these leather cases, moves the hands, the feet, the heads. I had a similar vision once before, when I saw houses, gardens, roads, men, cattle—all made of One Substance; it was as if they were all made of wax. . . . If the body were to be preserved a few days more, many people would have their spirituality awakened. . . . But this is not to be. This time the body will not be preserved. . . . Such is not the will of God. This time the body will not be preserved, lest, finding me guileless and foolish, people should take advantage of me, and lest I, guileless and foolish as I am, should give away everything to everybody.'

Rakhal: 'Please speak to God that He may preserve your body some time more.'

Sri Ramakrishna: 'That depends on God's will.'

Narendra: 'Your will and God's will have become one.'

Sri Ramakrishna: 'And nothing will happen if I speak to God. Now see that I and the Mother have become one. . . . There are two persons in this. One, the Divine Mother. Yes, one is She. And the other is her devotee. It is the devotee who broke his arm, and it is the devotee who is now ill. Do you understand? . . . Alas! To whom shall I say all this? Who will understand me? . . . God becomes man, an *avatara*, and comes to earth with his devotees. And the devotees leave the world with him.'

Rakhal: 'Therefore, we pray that you may not go away and leave us behind.'

Sri Ramakrishna : 'A band of minstrels suddenly appears, dances, and sings, and it departs in the same sudden manner. They come and they return, but none recognizes them. . . . Suffering is inevitable when one assumes a human body. . . . Besides, this assuming of a human body is for the sake of the devotees.'

A Yuga-avatara with a New Spirit and Outlook

After Sri Ramakrishna entered *mahasamadhi* on 16 August 1886, a new spirit of divine consciousness spread in the world. People developed a new outlook on life and heard a new message of wisdom. Like the other incarnations who preceded him, Sri Ramakrishna faced the challenge of *adharma*, or decadence of the age, first, by not being affected by the dirt and dross of worldly life. For twelve long years he practised austerities, with his mind in complete absorption in God. Secondly, he promoted a revival of dharma. His teachings, which were based on scriptural authority, had passed through the crucible of personal experiences and hence carried conviction and authority.

The Shastras are the storehouse of ancient wisdom. In modern times, however, people do not study them and therefore reject them as meaningless. Sri Ramakrishna infused a new spirit into the old faith by restating the injunctions of the Shastras and by adopting the scientific process of experimentation, elaboration, modification or omission as and when necessary. In doing so he fulfilled the ancient law and made it suit the modern age more effectively. He himself speaks in his inimitable homely manner of the need of change in every age :

'A coin current in the time of the Nawabs is not legal tender during the rule of the English Emperors.'

Great importance has to be attached to this statement of his. By these words he does not reject the Shastras of different faiths. He means that scriptural injunctions have to be interpreted afresh and suitably modified from age to age to ensure their continued usefulness and their observance in the proper spirit.

During his spiritual *sadhanas* Sri Ramakrishna moved freely in the realm of all spiritual ideas; he understood the power of all great masters and grasped the essence of their teachings. He was, therefore, himself convinced that his prescription of developing a new outlook would be very effective in helping people to adjust themselves to changed conditions and then fulfil their spiritual goal in life.

Full of love and concern for the common run of men he explains :

'In these days, you cannot treat fever with *dasamul pachana*.* For if you apply such a remedy, the patient may expire before your medicine is ready. So it is D. Gupta's fever mixture for your life these days. . . . The prescriptions in the scriptures are very hard to practise in the present age. People are lacking in will and stamina. They are not capable of strenuous practice.'

Sri Ramakrishna's Message

Life flows on for the majority of mankind in a particular direction. People are always on the run. The good and the evil, the learned and the ignorant, the brave and the cowardly—they all run after something. Running, running, running without a stop; for what, they do not know. To reach the unconquered Himalayan peaks adventurous people go up the mountains—facing dangers, suffering physical hardships and risking their lives; or they dive into the unfathomable depths of the oceans or dare to go to the ever-cold Antarctica; or they pierce through the vastness of space, or they run the risks of political or business stunts. Thus they run after diametrically opposed passions in life. And yet no one is surprised to see the variety or dissimilarity or disharmony in all this. Why? Because it is a common sight, this is the order of life. The common motivation in these vastly different interests is, as the Upanishads have mentioned: love of the self. It drives them to achieve something in life.

In all these passions, love of God is relegated to a remote corner of the consciousness. In Sri Ramakrishna there was a reversal of this order of life because he believed that the primary aim of human life is to know the Self, to realize God. In the beginning, therefore, except for a chosen few, people called him a non-conformist and looked upon his life as strikingly original.

The rationale of his new message can be put in his own words as follows:

'The world itself is not bad, but worldliness is bad. After realizing God one does not identify the Atman with the body. These two are separate, like the kernel and the shell of the coconut when its milk

* A medicine prepared by the distillation of the roots of ten different herbs according to Ayurveda, the science of Indian medicine.

dries up—when the “milk” of worldly-mindedness has dried up, one gets Self-Knowledge.’

Love of God, therefore, has to be brought to the conscious level. This has to be achieved by following any of the prescribed paths to realization.

‘As many faiths, so many paths.’

This means that if God is one and eternal, if religion is taken to mean seeking God, and if people are allowed to choose their paths in their quest they can follow any path they like.

‘What if the path of a particular discipline is “not clean”? It is like entering a house through the back door by which scavengers come.’

No one, therefore, has a right to criticize another.

‘At Kamarpukur I have seen the mongoose living in its hole up in the wall. It feels snug there. But sometimes people tie a brick to its tail; then the pull of the brick makes it come out of its hole. Every time the mongoose tries to be comfortable inside the hole, it has to come out because of the pull of the brick. Such is the effect of brooding on worldly objects; it makes even the yogi stray from the path of yoga.’

The example of the mongoose to whose tail a brick was tied is given to emphasize the fact that strong body-consciousness and worldly wisdom prevent people from being fully absorbed in God. And yet, in all their pursuits in life, people want peace. Sri Ramakrishna reminds them of the simple fact that peace and happiness cannot be found in the temporary pleasures of the world. Only in a life wholly devoted to God, can it be found.

‘The nearer you come to God, the more you feel peace. Peace, peace, peace—Supreme peace! The nearer you come to the Ganga, the more you feel its coolness. You will feel completely soothed when you plunge into the river. But the universe and its created beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles, all exist because God exists. Nothing remains if God is eliminated. The number increases if you put many zeros after the figure one; but the zeros don’t have any value if the one is not there.’

Therefore, the goal of human life is God-realization.

Here, in short, is given Sri Ramakrishna's message for the present age. It carries the ancient message further on. In Nature things take their own course, and nothing can be achieved by skipping the stages of growth. In human life, too, people have to follow their own ways. But they have two advantages over Nature in the path of God-realization: First they can learn from enlightened teachers. Second, they can hasten the process of emancipation by *sadhana*. We can say, therefore, that Sri Ramakrishna preached no 'ism' or narrow doctrine but his teachings become a universal gospel, the basic meeting-point and the foundation of all 'isms'.

In Every House

'ONCE WHEN Sri Ramakrishna was lying ill at Cossipore, a few devotees brought some offerings for Mother Kali of the Dakshineswar temple. On hearing that the Master was at Cossipore, they offered all the things they had brought before a picture of the Master and then partook of the *prasada*. On hearing about this Sri Ramakrishna remarked, "All these things were brought for the great Mother of the Universe. And they have offered them all here (meaning himself)!" ' The Holy Mother continued,

'The Master referred to this incident again and again. Afterwards, at a late hour in the night, he said to me, "You will see how in the course of time I will be worshipped *in every house*. You will see everyone accepting this (meaning himself). This is surely going to happen." ' He said another time,

'I shall make the whole thing public before I go. . . . When people in large numbers will know and whisper about (the greatness of) this body, then the Mother will take it back. . . . Devotees will be sifted into inner and outer circles towards the end.' The end came in 1886.

In 1885 Sri Ramakrishna went with his devotees to the annual festival of the Vaishnavas in the village of Panihati on the Ganga, a few miles north of Calcutta. About twenty-five devotees went in three boats for the two-hour journey. When Sri Ramakrishna arrived the *kirtan* party was lifeless. But after the large crowd of people which had gathered there saw Sri Ramakrishna's effulgent beauty in *samadhi*,

his face beaming with peace and bliss, and when they saw his charming dance, the *kirtan* party and all the people surrounded him and pointed at him. Crowds began to pour in from all sides and follow him with unblinking eyes. Many people became intoxicated with devotion and danced and sang in ecstasy.

The next day the anniversary celebration of the installation of the image of the Divine Mother took place at the Kali temple in Dakshineswar. There was much pomp and festivity that day but Sri Ramakrishna could not sleep that night because of the burning sensation he felt in his body from the touch of many people with impure desires.

About a year later, when he was lying ill in the Cossipore garden house he said, 'Those who came to me expecting some earthly gain have disappeared saying, "Ah, he is an Incarnation of God! How can he be ill? This is all Maya." But those who are my "own" have been suffering a great deal in seeing this misery.'

The Holy Mother said, 'The Master's disease was due to accepting the sins of others. He used to say, "It is due to Girish's sins. He would not have been able to bear all this suffering." The Master had the power to die at will. He could have easily given up the body in *samadhi*. But he would say, 'It will be nice if I unite all these youngsters together in a close bond of love.' Until then, merely a "how-do-you-do" relationship existed between them: "Naren Babu, how are you?, Rakhal Babu, how do you do?" and so on. That is why the Master did not give up the body sooner, in spite of so much suffering.' Once, he told the Mother, 'I am being subjected to all the sufferings that there can be; none of you need have it again. I have taken upon myself the miseries of the whole world.' He further said, 'An administrator has to run to wherever there is any disorder in the estate,' and pointing to the northwest, he often repeated that he would have to go to that region on the next occasion. He said, 'I shall have to come to that side in two hundred years. Many will be liberated then. Those who do not get liberation at that time, will have to wait very long for it thereafter.'

On another occasion, the Holy Mother said, '... many white-skinned devotees will come to him (Sri Ramakrishna). Don't you see, for instance, many Christians getting attracted towards the Master? He had said he will stay for a hundred years in the hearts of the devotees and then come again. I told him, "I do not want to come again!"

Lakshmi too said that she wouldn't come again, even if she were chopped into shreds like tobacco leaves! The Master smiled and said, "How can you escape? Our roots are twined together like the Kalmi plant (a kind of aquatic plant). A tug at one end will bring the whole lot up!"

Once, in Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna, in ecstasy, told Mathur Babu, 'As long, O Mathur, as you live, I shall be here (at Dakshineswar).' Mathur was disturbed to hear this for he had the conviction that the Divine Mother embodied in Sri Ramakrishna was always protecting him and his family. 'Therefore, when he heard it, Mathur thought that the Master would forsake his family after his (Mathur's) passing away. He then said very humbly to the Master, "What is this, father? My wife and son, Dwaraka are very much devoted to you!" Seeing that Mathur was distressed, the Master said, "Very well; I will be here as long as your wife and Dwari live." And in fact, it actually turned out to be so.'

Sri Ramakrishna spent the last days of his illness in a garden-house at Cossipore. The Holy Mother said, 'At the Cossipore Garden the Master spent the last days of his life. The place is associated with so much meditation, *samadhi* and the practice of austerities. It is a place permeated with intense spiritual vibration. One realizes God-consciousness by meditating there. . . . The expenses of the Cossipore household were very high. Three separate menus had to be prepared: one for the Master, one for the youngsters like Naren, and one for the rest. Subscriptions were raised to meet the expenses. One of the devotees dropped away for fear of having to pay!'

Sri Ramakrishna, who could not bear to touch money, kept an eye on the wordly and spiritual condition of each devotee. He told Balam at Cossipore: 'Look here, it is quite against my liking that the public should arrange my daily meals by subscription, for I have never lived so. . . . it had been arranged ever since the time of Rasmani that the monthly pay of seven rupees I used to get when I performed the worship should be given to me together with the *prasada* of the deities as long as I lived there. It may, therefore, be said that I lived in a way on a pension (He used the word "pencil") there.' After inquiring of the Holy Mother how much she required for her monthly maintenance, Sri Ramakrishna had the temple authorities keep aside that amount each month from his fee as priest as a pension for her. He told her

towards the close of his life, 'After my time, you go to Kamarpukur and live upon whatever you get, be it mere boiled rice and greens, and spend your time in repeating the name of Hari.'

Sri Ramakrishna asked Narendra to look after the young devotees saying, 'I leave them in your care. See that they practise spiritual exercises and do not return home.' He asked them to beg their food.

'One day Gopal Senior expressed his desire to the Master to distribute ochre clothes and Rudraksha rosaries among *sannyasins*. Pointing to his young disciples, Sri Ramakrishna answered, "You won't find better monks than these anywhere. Give your clothes and rosaries to them." Sri Ramakrishna distributed them to his disciples.'

At Cossipore, Narendra experienced Nirvikalpa *samadhi*. When he went to Sri Ramakrishna he was told, 'Now the Mother has shown you all. But this realization of yours shall be locked up for the present, and the key will remain with me. When you have finished doing the Mother's work, this treasure will again be yours.'

About eight or nine days before his passing, Sri Ramakrishna asked Yogin to read to him from the Bengali almanac the dates from the twenty-fifth *shravana* (9 August) onwards. Yogin read until he came to the last day of the month. The Master then made a sign that he did not want to hear any more.

Four or five days after this, the Master called Narendra Nath to his side. There was nobody else in the room. He made Narendra sit before him and gazing at him fell into *samadhi*. Narendra Nath felt a subtle force like an electric shock penetrating his body. Gradually he, too, lost outward consciousness. He did not remember how long he sat there. When he came to normal consciousness he found Sri Ramakrishna weeping. On being asked why he wept, the Master said, 'Today I have given you my all and have become a Fakir! Through this power you will do immense good to the world and then only shall you go back.'

A couple of days later the idea entered Narendra's mind of testing Sri Ramakrishna's statement that he was an Incarnation. He said to himself, 'If in the midst of this dreadful physical pain he can declare his Godhood, then I shall believe him.' Strange to say, the moment this thought came to him, Sri Ramakrishna, summoning all his energy said distinctly, 'He who was Rama and Krishna is now Ramakrishna in this body—but not in your Vedantic sense!'

From time to time, Sri Ramakrishna gave certain indications of the time of his passing away. He said, 'When I shall take food out of anybody's and everybody's hand, pass nights in Calcutta and give a portion of my food to anyone else first and then take the rest myself, know that the time of my passing away is fast approaching.' Towards the end of his life these events came to pass. He was invited to the houses of people in various places in Calcutta, he took food of all kinds, except rice, from anyone and everyone, and spent nights in Balaram Babu's house. Once, when Narendra was ill with indigestion and did not come to visit him in Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna sent for him and fed him a portion of the rice and soup cooked by the Holy Mother for his own bland diet, and took the remaining portion himself. The Holy Mother objected to this and expressed a desire that she should cook for the Master again, when he said, 'My mind did not shrink from giving a portion of the food to Naren first. So there will be no harm in it. You need not cook again.' The Holy Mother said later, 'Although the Master said so, I felt uneasy on remembering his words spoken long ago.'

The Holy Mother related, 'At the time of his illness, the Master expressed the desire to eat Amalaki, (a fruit not then in season). Durgacharan procured some after searching for them for three days without food and sleep. The Master asked him to take his meal and himself took some rice in order to turn the food into *prasada*. I said to the Master, "You are taking rice quite well. Why then, should your meal consist only of farina pudding? You should take rice rather than pudding." "No, no," said he, 'I would rather take farina during the last days of my life.' '

When Pandit Shashadhar and Sri Ramakrishna's disciples asked Sri Ramakrishna to concentrate on his throat with the resolve that the disease be cured, Sri Ramakrishna replied, 'This mind has been given up to God once for all. How can I withdraw it from Him to turn it on this worthless body?' Narendra asked him to pray to the Divine Mother for his recovery for their sake. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'I told Her, (Mother Kali) "I cannot eat anything because of this pain. Please arrange that I may eat a little." She showed me you all and said, "Why, you are eating through so many mouths." I was ashamed and could not utter another word.'

The Holy Mother said, 'After the passing away of the Master, I

was at first greatly frightened. But he started appearing often before me. Then I gradually got rid of that fear. One day the Master appeared before me and asked me to feed him with *khichuri*. I cooked the dish and offered it before Raghuvir in the temple. Then I mentally fed the Master with it.'

A devotee remarked, 'Once when I was offering food to the Master, I noticed a stream of light falling on the offering. Referring to this, I asked the Holy Mother, "Mother, is that experience of mine a mere fantasy, or is it true? . . ." The Holy Mother answered, "No dear, these are all genuine." ' The disciple further asked, 'Does the Master receive the food that I offer to him? Do you, too, receive what I offer to you?' 'Yes', replied the Holy Mother. 'How can I understand this?' asked the disciple. To this, the Holy Mother answered, 'Why? Have you not read in the *Gita* that God receives the fruits, flowers, water and other things that are offered to Him with devotion? . . .

'Do you remember those words of Sri Ramakrishna? He said he would reveal himself to all that take shelter under him, reveal himself at least on their last day. He will draw all unto Him.'

I am bringing to Europe, as yet unaware of it, the fruit of a new autumn, a new message of the Soul, the symphony of India, bearing the name of Ramakrishna. It can be shown (and we shall not fail to point out) that this symphony, like those of our classical masters, is built up of a hundred different musical elements emanating from the past.

Romain Rolland

From The Mahasamadhi———

SHIV DHAWAN

We are often perplexed by the Lord's cosmic plan,
He the All-loving, why does He bestow suffering on man?
Why does the All-merciful torment a saint in every age?
answers to these are found in the *mahasamadhi* of Sri Ramakrishna
—the Dakshineswar sage.

Cancer gripped Sri Ramakrishna, although to Mother Kali he prayed,
Christ, though the Son of God, was on a cross displayed.
This does not mean there is nothing beyond the grave,
for in their suffering, a priceless message to mankind they gave.
While serving their Master, disciples speculated on the nature of his pain,
Was he the Lord Himself incarnated, or a man plain?
Three entirely different schools of thought did abound,
but in none of them the key to Thakur's real nature could be found.
Girish was the leader of the first group that did say,
everything was predetermined—all was a *lila*, a sportive play.
The second group claimed that Ramakrishna fulfilled a mystical
purpose unknown
while Naren held that only the body was suffering, no esoteric
meaning was shown.

All views are one sided, each as true as the other,
lila, mystical purpose, are merely names for the injunctions of the
Divine Mother.

Answering a query, Ramakrishna said he could not refuse this bitter cup,
for to honour the Ordinance, someone else would have to drink it up.
T'is clear that this fountain of love, wracked with pain within,
worked for the redemption of man, by taking upon himself their sins.
Oh what a weakling is man, how much does he lack,
that the Lord himself has to carry his sins on his back.

Incredible it may sound, and the sceptic may demand evidence more,
refer then to Ramakrishna's vision of his subtle body covered with sores.
The disciples realized that the profane, purified by his touch went
joyously away,
while their agonizing sins needing a house, on Thakur's body did prey.

Shashi's power of endurance and indefatigable service were second
to none,
through alleviating the Master's suffering, he knew he could realize
the One.

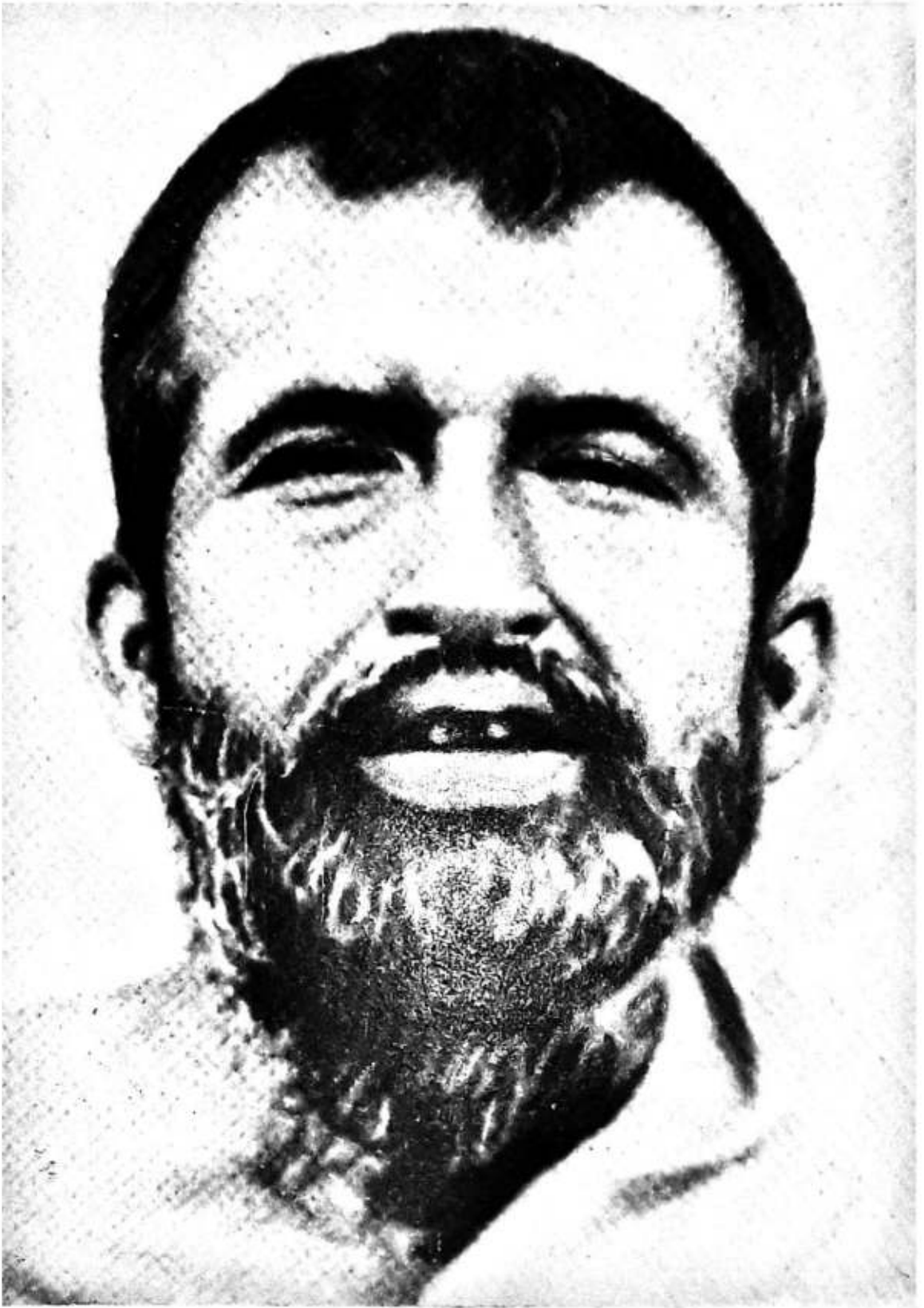
By letting Shashi attain perfection through serving him, he
thus showed that service to the Guru was the highest form of Bhakti.
Ramakrishna mortally ill, never let his goal be overshadowed by pain,
and through his discourses lovingly lifted disciples above the
earthly plane.

Having transferred his Shakti to Naren, his worldly task came to an end,
revivifying Vedanta as an instrument of worldwide regeneration, to
his Mother's lap he did ascend.

Like Ramakrishna all our lives for a vision of the Mother we must cry,
and having seen Her, and grasped Her lotus feet, let us in Her lap die.

The time was ripe for one to be born, who in one body would have the brilliant intellect of Shankara and the wonderfully expansive, infinite heart of Chaitanya; one who would see in every sect the same spirit working, the same God; one who would see God in every being; one whose heart would weep for the poor, for the weak, for the out-cast, for the downtrodden, for every one in this world, inside India or outside India; and at the same time whose grand brilliant intellect would conceive of such noble thoughts as would harmonize all conflicting sects, . . . and the most wonderful part of it was, that his life's work was just near a city which was full of Western thought, a city which had run mad after these occidental ideas, a city which had become more Europeanized than any other city in India. There he lived, without any book-learning whatsoever; . . . but the most brilliant graduates of our university found in him an intellectual giant. He was a strange man, this Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

Swami Vivekananda



Sri Ramakrishna



Swami Trigunatitananda in San Francisco

Swami Trigunatitananda, Hero-Saint

BRAHMACHARINI MEDHA

SWAMI TRIGUNATITANANDA could have stepped out of the pages of the *Odyssey* or the *Mahabharata*, so heroic was his personality and so dramatic his story. In this saint's life there was no dearth of colourful events or imaginative ideas, it was brimful of them. Possibly this was because he participated in the spread of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta during its dynamic early days, when the divine power was very close to the surface. Possibly also because he was by nature a spirited person, who sought out knowledge and service as a kind of joyful adventure. In any case, the records we have, whether in his own words or those of his contemporaries, depict him as a saint of heroic proportions, accomplishing great deeds, working against apparently insuperable odds. His life was an even fifty years long; it spanned a dramatic period of his native land, India, and his adopted country, America. Consciously, cheerfully, unreservedly he gave his life to God and mankind. Of course, that in itself is extraordinary; also it all happened in such a way that it reads like high drama.

Education and Renunciation

He was born on 30 January 1865, into an aristocratic and religious Calcutta family named Mitra. His given name, Sarada Prasanna, meaning 'grace of the Divine Mother in Her wisdom aspect', seems an apt one, considering his lifelong devotion to learning, as well as to the Divine Mother Herself. His father was of a religious disposition and educated the boy in the Hindu tradition as well as the modern English one. We get a charming picture of the Hindu part of his education in the *Prabuddha Bharata* (February 1928). There we see the young Sarada picking flowers, arranging the offerings for his father's morning worship, then sitting beside him, observing the ritual, listening, and learning long passages from the scriptures. He early became an avid student of books, Sanskrit, Bengali, and English, in all fields of knowledge. He also loved music, and committed to memory more than one hundred Sanskrit hymns. Later, music and books became important tools of his spiritual ministry.

Brahmacharini Medha is a member of the Vedanta Convent, San Francisco, California, U.S.A.

In December of 1884 when he was about twenty, one of his school masters, the famous 'M' who wrote *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, introduced him to his Master and thus initiated the larger dimension of his education, that is to say, spiritual wisdom. His discipleship with Sri Ramakrishna lasted only a year and a half, but he had further instruction from Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, and the opportunity to serve her later on. Moreover, his great brother-disciple, Swami Vivekananda, gave him much practical instruction for his spiritual career, as a student and teacher of Vedanta. Occasionally, during his San Francisco days, he himself intimates that he was receiving direct divine guidance in his work there.

Sarada Prasanna was one of the first of Sri Ramakrishna's young disciples to renounce the world, as well as one of the youngest. In December of 1886, the year their Master passed away, he went with Swami Vivekananda and several other brother disciples to visit Antpur, Swami Premananda's ancestral home. There, on Christmas Eve, sitting together around an all-night *dhuni* fire, the brothers were inspired by Swamiji's exalted talk on Christ and resolved to leave home and dedicate their lives to God. Back at the monastery they took the vow of *sannyasa* in a formal way. Swamiji gave Sarada the name Trigunatitananda. Renunciation of family was not easy for Sarada. The family had put up a record-breaking battle to keep him in the world, arranging his marriage, fetching him back when he ran away to Puri, locking him in his room, even hiring priests to perform a six-week-long series of ritualistic worships to induce him to reverse his decision to renounce. Sri Ramakrishna had warned him that his family would resort to anything, and one would think that, seeing all this, he would be disgusted with them; but Sarada loved his parents and expressed fear that this love would pull him back to the world. Here we see two strong traits of his character manifesting themselves: love and courage. Courage won out, of course, because he never turned back.

Classical Sadhana

The life of the new Swamis in the first Calcutta monasteries was strenuous, spirited and exalted, and Swami Trigunatita thrived in this spiritually and intellectually stimulating environment. At first, though, he wanted to live a solitary wandering life, partly to lengthen the distance from his family, and partly, one thinks, to enjoy the adventure and spiritual benefits of such a life. He did in fact run off once in May

of 1887, to the great consternation of Swamiji, who wanted the brother disciples to stay together. Taking only an extra piece of cloth and a photograph of his Master, he visited the Dakshineswar Temple and spent one night in the open, but soon returned to the monastery. Swami Brahmananda, among others, persuaded him to stay: 'Where do you want to go, running away from here? Here you are in the company of holy men. Where will you find another like Narendra?' Where indeed! 'M' gives a first-hand picture of Sarada's aborted pilgrimage set against the intense yet happy life with Swami Vivekananda at the Baranagore Math. It is a picture of earnest young men engaged in lively talk, laughter, and music, along with the quieter individual pursuits like meditation and study. One can see Swamiji giving them all a thorough training. Yet they were not just servile followers; there was plenty of give and take. Witness Sarada taunting Narendra: 'Sometimes you say that God does not exist, and now you are saying he is very near us! You are not consistent, you keep changing your opinions.' Then, 'M' records, all laugh.

'M' remarks on Sarada's intense individual *sadhana* in the monastery, as do some of the early novices who lived with him. They tell of his deep study of many books, noting that one of the rooms in the monastery was called 'Sarada's book room'. Swami Bodhananda tells how Swami Trigunatita gave him a gerua cloth to wear and took him on his begging rounds, asking 'rice or pice' from the houses two miles away from the monastery.¹ Again, Swami Virajananda uses him as an example of the severe practices of all the monks when he says:

'Oh, what an austere life the *sadhus* lived! Sarada Maharaj lived for several months in a dark, damp, solitary room below, in the outer court. Bolting the door from within and observing the vow of silence he underwent a rigorous type of spiritual *sadhana*. His food was a single plantain and one or two glasses of water. He could hardly be seen by men. So absorbed was he in *japa* and meditation.'²

Evidently Swami Trigunatita considered such retreats beneficial. Years later, he along with his students, used to spend a day, sometimes several days in retreat at Shanti Ashrama in California. All his life the Swami's personal habits were austere. For example, in San Francisco his sleeping arrangement—for what little sleep he allowed himself—was a bedroll on the floor of his office, which he put away in the day.

Swami Trigunatita began his wandering days about the same time

as Swamiji started his. In 1891 he went to Brindavan and other northern Indian places of pilgrimage. Then in 1895 he made the very arduous journey to Mount Kailas and Lake Manasarovar in Tibet. Not much has been published in English about his solitary wanderings. There are some letters written during this period to Pramadas Mitra, Swamiji's friend in Varanasi, which this gentleman's son gave to the Math; these, however, await translation into English. The January 1928 *Prabuddha Bharata* recounts some hair-raising tales about him, some of which must have taken place during his lone travels, but exactly when or where is not specified. At present we must be content with the general theme which the stories convey; that the Swami in his usual adventurous way sought out risky situations to test his own courage and the grace of his Master.

When he returned to Calcutta from his wanderings he did not always stay at the monastery. Sometimes he would stay at the homes of devotees, holding classes on Vedanta, sometimes he would live at Holy Mother's Calcutta house. We can often learn of his whereabouts during the decade from 1893 to 1902 by studying the reminiscences and biographies of the Holy Mother. For example, in Swami Virajananda's reminiscences of the Mother we learn that in 1893, when she was living in a rented house in Belur, Swamis Yogananda and Trigunatita were living on the ground floor, the former managing household and the latter doing the marketing and other outside jobs.³ Then in Swami Gambhirananda's life of the Holy Mother we learn that Swami Trigunatita was in her party in 1894 when she went to Bihar for two months; again in October of 1900, when she was recovering from cholera, the Swami went to Jayrambati to bring her to Calcutta. In a chapter of this biography entitled 'Burden-bearers', Swami Gambhirananda states that Swami Trigunatita assisted Swami Yogananda as her attendant until the latter's death in March of 1899, and then served as her chief attendant until he left for America in November of 1902.

Like Swami Yogananda, Swami Trigunatita was in a specific sense Holy Mother's disciple, since Sri Ramakrishna instructed her to give him initiation. His attendance on her may be termed the well-known spiritual practice of service to the Guru. We have a few story-book instances of his devoted service to her recounted by Swami Gambhirananda. In one we see him laying a cloth under a flowering tree to catch the falling blossoms for her worship. In another, as her stalwart

bodyguard on a trip to Jayrambati, he lies down in a rut of the road so that the Mother's cart can pass smoothly over it; the Mother has to stop this rash but endearing act with a scolding. He continued to serve her during his San Francisco days by sending money every month.

Service to God in Man

Thus we see that the Swami practised earnestly most of the classical forms of *sadhana*; study, discussion, pilgrimage, meditation, *japa*, retreat, service to the Guru. What is even more noteworthy, though, is that he was one of the first to practise Swami Vivekananda's new form of *sadhana*; service to God in man, particularly man in distress. While Swamiji was in America writing his fiery letters to his brother monks to be up and doing in this respect, Swami Trigunatita was already up and doing. He was taking classes and trying to publish papers to spread the message of Sri Ramakrishna. He served the distressed with his work on famine relief in 1897 among the villages of Dinajpur, a district two hundred miles north of Calcutta. This service was done so magnificently that it received the commendation of the existing British Government and, of course, the highest praise from Swamiji. Sprinkled throughout Swamiji's letters to the Math one sees mention of Sarada's work. In a letter written in 1895, for example, when listing the outstanding qualities of his brother monks, he writes, 'How extensively has Sarada travelled and sown seeds of gigantic future works.' Then in 1898 when Swami Trigunatita was trying to start a Bengali paper, Swamiji wrote to Swami Brahmananda on 17 July, 'Poor Sarada has already been disappointed once. What harm is there if we lose a thousand rupees by supporting such an unselfish and hard-working person?' Also among Swamiji's letters are several to Sarada himself, encouraging and directing him in words worthy of study by any worker in the field of religion.

A Bengali magazine was one of Swamiji's cherished projects, and it was through the superhuman labours of Swami Trigunatita that it finally came about. Shortly after the first issue of *Udbodhan* was out Sarat Chandra Chakravarti had a delightful and significant talk with Swamiji about it, which luckily he recorded for posterity. There Swamiji praises Swami Trigunatita to the skies: 'Do you think these *sannyasin* children of Sri Ramakrishna are born simply to sit under trees lighting *dhuni* fires? Whenever any of them will take up some work, people will be astonished to see their energy. Learn from them how

to work. Here, for instance, Trigunatita has given up his spiritual practices, his meditation and everything, to carry out my orders and set himself to work, do you see? He will not stop short of success!' Then Sarat Chandra unabashedly says, 'But sir, it looks rather odd in our eyes that *sannyasins* in ochre robes should go from door to door as the Swami is doing,' which remark triggers Swamiji's beautiful description of the Ramakrishna Mission's proposed service to humanity through publications.

That Swami Trigunatita's work on the *Udbodhan* was indeed tremendous we know from his assistant and successor, Swami Shuddhananda. He tells that Swami Trigunatita himself did all the jobs necessary to publish it: he wrote articles, he procured them from others, and he edited them; he managed the printing, he set type, and walked the streets of the city soliciting subscriptions and monetary help. Simultaneously, he attended to other matters such as Holy Mother's needs, allowing himself only one-half hour's sleep a day on a bench in the Udbodhan office. His frequent companion was Mr. Fever, as he humorously called it, which probably came from the malaria he contracted in his Dinajpur days. Unsparing of himself, he worked to put the magazine on a firm footing. *Udbandhana*, 'noose', Swamiji had jocosely called the magazine. The nickname stuck, so that when Swami Trigunatita was writing in 1904 from San Francisco to a friend in India, he claimed he was never going to get caught in that 'noose' again. Actually his resolve was short-lived, because only five years later he began publishing the *Voice of Freedom*, another magazine for which he laboured long and hard. His work in the field of publication alone is enough to canonize him; certainly anyone acquainted with the publication of periodicals would nominate him patron-saint of publishing.

Mission in the West

There is no doubt that when Swamiji asked Swami Trigunatita to go to America to take charge of the young Vedanta Society of San Francisco he was choosing a thoroughly trained and experienced worker, and a very bold and imaginative one. As it turned out he was just the man for the job. Historians and sociologists tell us that America at the beginning of this century, the time of his ministry, was at a great turning point: the frontier had come to an end and the country was now turning its gaze, as it were, outwards to other nations of the world. Another radical change was taking place : as the 1910 census revealed,

it was becoming a nation of city-dwellers rather than farmers. Swami Trigunatita doubtless saw these broad trends and worked with the current of them. The Swami's natural mental habitat was the realm of large ideas. He thought in international, intercultural, if not cosmic terms, and there is this flavour of broadness in everything he wrote or did or built. He believed that Vedanta was a world-liberating religion. He thought America, next to India, had the greatest spiritual potential, and so it had an important part to play in the spread of Vedanta throughout the world. He thought that the Swamis in America and the American Vedantins should live and practise and work not just for their own welfare but for the welfare of humanity. Illustrative of this spirit was the temple which the Swami and the members of the San Francisco Vedanta Society built. It was, to use the Swami's own words, 'dedicated to the cause of humanity', and with all its towers and turrets 'it may be considered as a combination of a Hindu temple, a Christian church, a Mohammedan mosque, a Hindu Math or monastery and an American residence.' As regards his own part in the building of the temple he emphatically stated that if it was for him but not for future people to enjoy, and that if there were the least tinge of selfishness in it it would fall. True to his prophetic statement, six months after its dedication, the temple miraculously survived the 1906 earthquake unscathed.

The Swami, believing that he should circulate in American society, gave lectures in such places as the University of California and women's clubs, and to political groups and educational conferences in addition to what might be considered his proper place, religious organizations. We have a number of photographs of the Swami in California, taken in various kinds of garb and stance: a business suit and bowler hat, a robe and turban, a tuxedo, work clothes, even in jodhpurs on horseback. In all of them, if we study the eyes, face and carriage of the body, caught in that instant of history, we see shining forth the purity and majesty of a knower of the Self, testifying, as it were, to the fact that wherever a man might be in this world, that universal divine Self is his centre.

San Francisco, the Model

In keeping with the movement of American population to the urban areas, the Swami believed that Vedanta should be firmly established in the city, though not at the same time sacrificing the country retreat.

If we take an overview of his work we see that even as he was a great trail-blazer in the Ramakrishna Mission work in India, he was a bold pioneer in its American work. He established in the San Francisco Bay Area a permanent centre for the dissemination of Vedantic ideas. Many of the things he began or built in California have set the example for future Vedanta centres all over Europe and America. He built the first temple in the Western world, established a system of lectures, classes, and celebrations, gave individual spiritual instruction, started a magazine, a monastery, a convent, and a colony of Vedanta students. Simultaneously, he developed the Shanti Ashrama, founded by Swami Turiyananda, and held yearly month-long retreats there. He also travelled the four hundred miles to Los Angeles many times to establish a centre there, and brought a Swami from India to maintain it. Although the Los Angeles centre and some of the San Francisco institutions did not last, perhaps, as Swamiji had said of the Indian work, 'he was sowing seeds of gigantic future works'.

The obstacles to his work in San Francisco were large, earth-shaking, in fact. The period of his ministry, 1903 to 1915 was a dynamic period for the people of San Francisco. The 1906 earthquake and fire, which destroyed much of the city, imposed austerity upon them and at the same time proved a stimulus to growth and development. Along with rebuilding their city, they wanted to rebuild their lives. Many serious spiritual aspirants came to the Swami for guidance, and of course he was more than equal to that challenge. At the same time, money for his undertakings was scarce, and he had the constant worry of where to get funds. But he was dauntless.

Swami Turiyananda, his predecessor, had called him a beautiful soul, who would be of great help to the Americans. A very likable person, he charmed any group or individual he encountered. Thus he acquired many friends among the citizens of the San Francisco Bay Area, from the children on the block to the mayor of the city. With his students he was at once affectionate and strict. He expected the best from them. The idea behind his teaching was that you can learn to be spiritual just as you can learn to play a musical instrument. Practise hard and you can realize God : it is as simple as that. Setting this high goal before them, he patiently and relentlessly prodded the students on. And being his student was never a cold, impersonal affair. Mrs. Thomas Allan, in her reminiscences of the Swamis in America, says he was 'like

a very loving mother concerned about every detail of your life'.

Our understanding of Swami Trigunatita and his work in California has increased a hundredfold with the recent acquisition of some letters he wrote to a friend in India, which have recently been published in *Udbodhan*, but unfortunately have not yet come out in English. The letters show how his friend, Purna Seth, helped the Swami a great deal by sending the items he requested for the work or for his personal use: books, phonograph records, sheet music, worship utensils, musical instruments, spices, dried foods, a shaving mirror, a hookah, shoes. Purna Seth also contributed to the passage money for the assistant Swamis who went. The Swami writes to him in colloquial Bengali, humorously, affectionately, intimately. In these wonderful letters we can see in great detail what the Swami is doing, how he is thinking, planning, and working. His joyful enthusiasm never falters from the time he dashes off from India 'with tails up like monkeys' through the twelve strenuous years of work in America. For example, on 4 March 1903, two months after his arrival in San Francisco, he writes to his friend telling how he and the devotees celebrated Sri Ramakrishna's birthday, a custom which, incidentally, he continued to the end. The whole twenty-four hours they fasted. During the day they had a fifteen-hour programme of meditation, music and reading, interspersed with seven talks he gave on his Master, two of which, he ingenuously writes, 'were so good that everybody cried.' And on 29 January 1912 he writes that yes, surely, he would like to visit India but the pressure of work is such that as soon as he finishes one big responsibility, Sri Ramakrishna gives him another, and he humbly bends his shoulder to accept the burden. 'Lately Sri Ramakrishna is playing tricks on me. Even in the matter of foul play the Master is an expert.' From the beginning we see his health was poor, but he makes light of it to his friend. 'Mr. Fever,' he says, 'has not forgotten to visit me almost every day.' In May of 1903 he says that the doctors have found that he has Bright's disease and a faulty valve of the heart, for which they have prescribed medicines which do not work. 'So there are these troubles, but I don't believe in these things. When I have too much pain I just lie down for a while.' His bold imagination is also revealed in these letters. For example, in January of 1912, he proposes a plan to his friend, prefacing it with the statement: 'Now, don't think I'm crazy but . . .'. Then he tells how he wants to effect a cultural blending of East and West

by bringing Indian boys and girls to America to be educated and married, and vice versa for American youngsters. And it wasn't just a speculation; he asked his friend for one of his little sons and one of his little daughters.

A Hero to the Last

A heroic soul he was! In mind, in heart, in will-power, in spirituality, in any realm where a man can stand tall he was extraordinary. His command over his mind and body were phenomenal. One instance of this is told by one of his disciples. He had developed a quaver in his voice when he lectured, which he deliberately tried to eliminate. When he failed to do so, he confessed that whenever he came on the platform the Divine Mother appeared to him, which filled him with such love that his voice quavered. Just imagine what self-mastery it took to speak at all in such a circumstance! His death also was in character. One of his students had become mentally unstable and the Swami recommended he find a job in the country where his surroundings would be soothing. Instead he got a job in a mine, went completely insane, and came to a service at the temple to lay a live bomb at the Swami's feet. The bomb killed the student instantly and mortally wounded the Swami. On the way to the hospital, in spite of his painful injuries, the Swami asked compassionately about this man. That was on the Sunday after Christmas, 27 December 1914.

On the afternoon of 9 January the Swami told the disciple who was attending him that he would leave his body the next day. Swami Trigunatita's last act of self-mastery was choosing the day of his departure from this world: Swamiji's birthday which, according to the Indian calendar, was on 10 January in 1915. A hero's offering on an auspicious day.

References

1. *Vedanta Kesari*, September 1972.
2. *Ibid.*.
3. *Ibid.*, July 1954.

Chaitanya, Ramakrishna and Advaitavada

STUART ELKMAN

TWO OF Sri Ramakrishna's firm beliefs were that all spiritual paths ultimately culminate in the experience of the non-dual Absolute and that those who attain the heights of spiritual experience will speak of their experience in similar terms, or as he put it, 'there, all jackals howl alike.' Ramakrishna's view of Sri Chaitanya, whom he considered to be a divine Incarnation, was no exception to this rule. Swami Saradananda quotes Ramakrishna in *Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master* as saying,

'Just as the tusks of an elephant seen from the outside are for killing his enemies and the inner ones not so seen are for the purpose of chewing his food, so, in the case of the great lord (Chaitanya), dualism was an outward attitude, and non-dualism an inward one.'¹

And yet, when we read the biographies of Chaitanya, we find little indication of such an inward attitude. On the contrary, Krishnadas Kaviraj, Chaitanya's most important biographer, portrays Chaitanya as almost hostile to the views of the Advaitins. We find, for example, that Chaitanya was very critical of the Advaitic interpretation of the *Brahma-Sutra* as explained to him in Puri by the renowned Navya Nyaya scholar and Vedantin, Vasudeva Sarvabhauma. After listening in silence for seven days to the scholar's exposition, Chaitanya is reported to have stated that he understood Vyasa's *sutras* well enough, but found that the commentary (presumably Shankara's) had only obscured the meaning. Chaitanya followed this up with a lengthy refutation of some of the principal doctrines of Advaita, such as the identity of the *jiva* and Brahman and the doctrine of *vivartavada*, or illusory creation.²

How much of such accounts can be attributed to the sectarian enthusiasm of Chaitanya's biographers, some of whom never even met him, and how much to the actual beliefs of Chaitanya is difficult to say. Krishnadas Kaviraj wrote his *Chaitanya Charitamrita* many years after Chaitanya's death, and the historical accuracy of several of his

The 500th birth anniversary of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was celebrated in 1985.

Dr. Stuart Elkman received his Ph.D. in Sanskrit and Indian Philosophy from the University of Pennsylvania. He is devoted to the ideals taught by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

descriptions, especially those which are not found in the other biographies, is virtually impossible to verify. The reliability of Krishnadas's depiction of Chaitanya's anti-Advaita attitude, however, is open to certain questions, particularly when we consider some of the other events and circumstances of Chaitanya's life, many of which have been recorded by Krishnadas himself.

The first piece of evidence we should consider concerns Chaitanya's *mantra diksha* from Ishvara Puri, a disciple of the then renowned Madhavendra Puri. Though both were highly devotional in nature, Ishvara and Madhavendra presumably took their *sannyasa* initiation with the Puri branch of the Shankara *Dashanami* Order. This fact was clearly not acceptable to many of Chaitanya's followers, and questionable *guru-paramparas*, line of gurus, tracing Madhavendra Puri to the Madhva Sampradaya were created, first by Kavi Karnapura in his sixteenth century work, *Gauranganoddeshadipika* and later by Baladeva Vidyabhushana in his *Govindabhashya* in the early eighteenth century. Krishnadas, however, says nothing about Madhavendra's sectarian affiliation, and it is clear from his account of Chaitanya's visit to the Madhva monastery in Udipi, where he criticizes the teachings of the Madhva school severely, that Krishnadas did not consider Chaitanya to be affiliated with the Madhva Sampradaya, either through his *parama-guru*, Madhavendra, or on doctrinal grounds. Possibly, Madhavendra was a devotional Advaitin with Vaishnava leanings similar to the great *Bhagavata* commentator, Shridhara Swamin.

While the sectarian affiliation of Chaitanya's *diksha* guru is thus somewhat uncertain, it is generally agreed that his *sannyasa* guru, Keshava Bharati, was a monk of the Shankara Bharati order. Several of the biographers of Chaitanya indicate that a *mahavakya* (presumably *tat tvam asi*) was employed in the *sannyasa* ceremony; and if Krishnadas's accounts are to be believed, Chaitanya always considered himself to be a member of the Bharati Order and a 'Mahavadi *sannyasi*,' although he used the term somewhat disparagingly.

Perhaps the most significant indication of Chaitanya's sympathy for Advaitavada is his love of the *Bhagavata Purana* and commentary by the *bhakti*-oriented Advaitin, Shridhara Swamin. Chaitanya's regard for Shridhara is clearly seen in an incident involving one Vallabha Bhatta (perhaps the great Vallabhacarya) in Puri. According to Krishnadas's account, Vallabha approached Chaitanya one day boasting of a

commentary he had written on the *Bhagavata* in which he had refuted the views of Shridhara. Chaitanya, punning on the word *Swami*, which means husband in Bengali, replied, 'One who does not honor one's Swami (i.e., Shridhara Swamin) is no better than a harlot.'³ Chaitanya went on to praise Shridhara, calling him a world teacher (*jagat-guru*) and claiming that it was through his grace that he (Chaitanya) had understood the *Bhagavata*.⁴

If one examines Shridhara's commentary on the *Bhagavata*, it becomes clear that he was a non-dualist nearly as radical as Shankara, differing from the latter mainly in the emphasis which he placed on the role of *bhakti* in spiritual life. Later philosophers of the Chaitanya school have all echoed Chaitanya in their praise for Shridhara, without, however, taking his Advaitic beliefs seriously. Jiva Goswamin, the school's most important philosopher, is typical, claiming in his *Krama-Sandarbha* only to clarify or supplement Shridhara's interpretations, while actually writing an independent work. Jiva is more open in his *Bhagavata-Sandarbha* regarding his dissatisfaction with Shridhara's Advaitic leanings, and claims that Shridhara's non-dualistic interpretations were meant merely to entice the Advaitins to read the *Bhagavata*, and thus, need not be taken seriously. Regardless of the merit of such statements, it is clear that Chaitanya's respect for Shridhara was an established tradition which later thinkers of the school could not ignore, despite the philosophical difficulties which ensued.

If indeed Chaitanya cherished non-dualism as an inner attitude, why then do we find only these few indications with the remaining evidence pointing to the fact that he was a pure dualist? Traditional rivalries between the Vaishnava schools and the Advaitins may account for this phenomenon to a certain degree, but do not constitute the whole picture. Ramakrishna used to say of Chaitanya that he was 'divine love incarnate' and that 'he came down to earth to teach people how to love God.'⁵ Perhaps he simply did not concern himself with expounding philosophy to his followers, who identified his devotional attitude with a rejection of non-dualism; unfortunately he had no Mahendra Nath to record his words for us to know. However, the life of Ramakrishna is more than ample proof that a realized soul can attain the heights of non-dual knowledge and cherish an attitude of devotion to a personal God at one and the same time. Chaitanya no doubt objected to the dry study of Vedanta, just as he did to the practices of all

spiritual paths when performed without devotion or sincerity; but to conclude from this that he rejected the conclusions of Advaita is far too bold a step and wholly inconsistent with his regard for Shridhara. Unfortunately, Chaitanya's actual 'inner attitude' remains a matter of speculation for us today. If, however, there is any truth to the statement there, 'all jackals howl alike', then perhaps our best indication of Chaitanya's inner mood is the life of Ramakrishna wherein devotion and non-dual knowledge were perfectly harmonized. This comparison is even more appropriate when we consider the great love which Ramakrishna had for Chaitanya and the many points of resemblance between the lives of these two great souls.

References

1. (Madras 1952), 597-8.
2. Krishnadasa Kaviraja, *Chaitanya Charitamrita*, Madhyalila 6/130-80 (Khadagpur 1977).
3. Ibid., Antyalila 7/111.
4. Ibid., Antyalila 7/128-32.
5. Swami Nikhilananda (transl.), *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, (Madras), 330.

'M: "But what about Chaitanyadeva? You said he had both knowledge and devotion."

MASTER (sharply): "His case was different. He was an Incarnation of God. There is a great difference between him and an ordinary man. The fire of Chaitanya's renunciation was so great that when Sarvabhauma poured sugar on his tongue, instead of melting it evaporated into air. He was always absorbed in samadhi. How great was his conquest of lust! To compare him with a man!"

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna

Science And Religion

RADA KRISHNA

THE YEAR was 1633, the country, Italy; the person brought to trial, a sixty-nine year-old Italian mathematician and physicist by the name of Galileo Galilei. It was the second time he had been brought to trial.

In 1616 the all-powerful Catholic Church had placed the Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus's work on its list of forbidden books. (It remained there till 1835—for 219 years). In the same year Galileo Galilei had been convicted of heresy for arguing that the sun was at the centre of the universe, and he was found 'at least erroneous' for arguing that the earth was not at the centre of the universe but was, in fact, in motion.

In 1633 Galileo was again brought to trial on grounds of his new findings, once again supporting the theories of Copernicus, who said the planets revolved around the sun. The court concluded that he was 'vehemently suspected of heresy' and he was forced to kneel and forswear the scientific findings and then face life-imprisonment. House arrest in Florence was substituted for the prison term.

The antagonism between 'Religion and Science' goes back to those days. The rise of science grew out of a recognition that the simple explanation offered by religions was not orderly and could not be understood as having meaning.

Charles Darwin's thirty-five days on the Galapagos Island, six-hundred miles west of Ecuador, changed the world. Darwin and Alfred Wallace formulated the theory of natural selection in the mid-1850's after their observation of the great diversity of animal and plant life. Science acquired a new prestige from then on.

Today when we discuss 'Science' and 'Religion' we have to explain what stage in science we are talking about and what religion we are talking about.

Writing in the interesting book, *The Time Light Bodies Took to Fall*, William Irving Thompson states, 'We in the West live in an age which has doubt about people's ability to reach out of the physical and material world and touch anything at all. *The first-rate scientists have*

Rada Krishna is a Civil Engineer in the U.S.A. He has lectured at several of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centres in California with which he has had close association since 1946.

passed beyond these doubts. But it is popular science, usually fifty years behind the times, that influences the average mind, and popular science is still caught in the kind of materialism that confines us to a space-time box.'

We have to look at what these first-rate scientists are saying now. We have to explore the very recent scientific findings in the last few years. The rate of expansion of scientific knowledge has been phenomenal since the second world war; in fact it seems to have accelerated even more since the 1970s.

Dazzling developments in space travel, computers, miracle-medicines not to speak of the awesome forces unleashed from the very core of matter have captured our imagination. Utilitarian science or technology has to some extent even distorted true understanding of science.

In the *Newsweek* magazine of 19 July 1982, George Will writes—'The space programme is the greatest conceivable adventure; yet the government scants it and philistine utilitarians justify it because it has yielded such marvels as nonstick frying pans! We live in (let us say the worst) an age of journalism; an age of skimmed surfaces, of facile confidence that reality is whatever can be seen and taped and reported. But modern science teaches that things are not what they seem; matter is energy; light is subject to gravity; the evidence of gravity waves suggests that gravitic energy is a form of radiation; to increase the speed of an object is to decrease the passage of its time. This is science, compared with it space elves are dull as ditch water.'

And about 'Religion'. How I wish there were universally accepted definitions of 'Religion', 'God', 'Salvation' et cetera! Only one who has lived in several different parts of the world for a long time can see what these words mean to people in different places and in different societies. Two people may be using the same word—'God' or 'Heaven', but having very different understandings in their minds.

The Economist of 25 December 1982 published a special survey by Stephen Hugh-Jones on the state of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. To bring out the diversities in understanding of the words 'religion', 'god' and so on, let me quote a few sentences from that article—

'Much of world-history has been made by people who defined themselves, not only but importantly, by their particular view of God. Not just ancient history either!

'For a start, Judaism is very much a matter of practice. Secondly, its practice develops: outsiders who expect to find in it the religion of what they will call the Old Testament, (and Jews, the Hebrew Bible), will find they are mistaken.

'Central to Christianity is not the oneness of God, but His incarnation in the person of His son, Jesus Christ.

' "Every method of education founded on the denial of original sin and of grace, and relying on the sole powers of human nature, is unsound," declared Pope Pius XI in an encyclical in 1930.

'But the Koran is another matter. For Moslems, the Koran is revelation, a literal transcription of the word of God, delivered in Arabic, through the mouth of the Prophet. The revelation he received is final and complete. For Islam, all three communities are "people of the book", the recipients of God's word. Moses and especially Jesus—Isa ibn Mariam—are honoured prophets, the Jews and Christians, simply people who did not understand their message correctly, and later, when the full and final revelation was available, through Mohammed, refused to listen to it.

'Religious belief not merely describes politics but shapes it, and is shaped by it.'

My concern in this article is not with these approaches to religion —'the religion of the people of the book'.

Lest someone thinks that a most scientifically advanced country like the United States is totally free from such understandings, let me quote from the *Los Angeles Times* of 12 June 1982:

The Reverend Bailey E. Smith, the outgoing President of the Southern Baptist Convention, says it is 'inexcusable' for Southern Baptists to be humanists, teach evolution or say the Book of Genesis is not fact. 'There is only one kind of Christian on earth and that is a born-again Christian. If you have not been born again, you are not a Christian', the speech said. 'A person without Jesus Christ is one heartbeat from eternal hell'. Extreme views are not at all uncommon even in this part of the century when rationality and science have made great strides. In fact irrationality and science seem to co-exist quite comfortably!

The 'Religion' that I am concerned with in this article is of the 'other kind'. The difference has been brought out in a few lines, in a book published by the Federal Government of the United States Area

Handbook for India. In the chapter, 'Basic Concepts of South Asian Religions' it states:

'The spiritual striving of Hinduism and related faiths differs from that of the West both in form and in basic direction. Not only are the answers to man's religious quest unrecognizable in Western terms, but the questions are also.

'The result of the spiritual and intellectual efforts of hundreds of millions of people over a period of millenia, this religious tradition is undoubtedly more subtle, complex and various than that of the West. Attempts by foreigners to perceive it across the chasm of their differing assumptions are generally doomed to superficiality at best, for Indian religious thought has explored in detail areas of experience that most Western religions bypass.'

Such exploration has been made by Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Taoism, Jainism and a few other religions. Its spirit was best expressed by Swami Vivekananda:

'If there is a God, we must see Him; if there is a Soul, we must perceive it; otherwise it is better not to believe. It is better to be an outspoken atheist than a hypocrite!'

Again—'Religion is not in doctrines, in dogmas, nor in intellectual argumentation; it is "being" and "becoming"; it is realization.'

To bring out the distinction from religions which have their basis in books, Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer states:

'We have no uncontradictable and unquestionable documents, no special revelations and our scriptures are not final excepting in so far as their revelations and those doctrines are and can be manifested in the life of the man experiencing their impact on his soul.'

The greatest exemplar of this approach in this age is Sri Ramakrishna. Understanding it in the light of the experiences of Sri Ramakrishna and the teaching of Swami Vivekananda, we shall call this 'Vedanta', the name by which it is popularly understood in the West.

When we examine the recent developments in physics, astronomy, biology and psychology we find astounding facts; facts that in some way seem to be on lines similar to the investigations and explanations of Vedanta. It is fascinating to contemplate on these subjects, in parallel—each arrived at its observations using its own methodology!

I must hasten to add that the number of people in the West who

understand, appreciate and even practise the Vedantic approach to religion, whether it be in the form of Hinduism, Buddhism of various types including Zen, or Taoism, though small, is significant and it is on the increase. Scholars have written books like *Tao of Physics* and *Dancing Wu Li Masters*, expressing their fascination with their scientific observations, and to put it simplistically, their parallels with Eastern thought.

Yet, 'objective' science is still evolving. There is no finality in the realm of science. Observations like, 'Now my suspicion is that the universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we *can* suppose,' have been made by scientists. That statement by J.B.S. Haldane, made a few years ago, is pretty similar to Swami Vivekananda's observations, made in a talk in Los Angeles on 5 January 1900:

'Whichever way we turn in trying to understand things in their reality, if we analyze far enough, we find that at last we come to a peculiar state of things, seemingly a contradiction; something which our reason cannot grasp and yet it is a fact. We take up something—we know it is finite; but as soon as we begin to analyze it, it leads us beyond our reason, and we never find an end to all its qualities, its possibilities, its powers, its relations.'

Can 'Science' be a substitute for 'Vedanta'? The definite answer is 'no'. Vedanta's objective is more encompassing than that of science. While science wants to investigate matter, body, the universe and the contents of the universe that I perceive directly and indirectly, Vedanta wants to investigate and find out even who this 'I' who perceives, is.

But the methodology of both are very similar in a deeper sense. The true scientist challenges, questions fearlessly. The true Vedantin proceeds in the same way. As Dr. Radhakrishnan put it, 'The Hindu philosophy of religion starts from and returns to an experimental basis'. When Sri Ramakrishna doubted whether the basalt image of Bhavatarini was 'real' or whether she was a creation of the priests, he did not run to the books to find an answer. He could easily have trapped himself in a myriad of books. He could have convinced his mind with quotations. He knew enough wandering pilgrims, even as a boy, and could have accepted their word. But he would have none of it. The spirit of questioning, doubting and the urge to find out for himself were very strong in him, he was like a flaming rocket in his quest. To me his was a scientific quest. We find the same quest in young Narendra Nath.

The other important criterion of science is its 'repeatability'. Truth must transcend colour, sex, nationality and time; otherwise it cannot be absolute truth; it cannot be 'scientific' in its approach. When young Narendranath came to Sri Ramakrishna and asked, 'Have you seen God?' if his answer was 'Yes, but you cannot, you have to believe what I say', then Sri Ramakrishna could have been rejected. But his message is quite the opposite; 'It is your right to know the truth, it is your duty to investigate it and you will touch the same mighty ocean of truth.'

Let us contemplate on a few recent scientific developments simultaneously with Vedantic observations.

Matter and Energy

Nothing has shaken the modern world more than the discoveries of Einstein. The very foundations of our thought were shaken by the twin surprises in physics that came close together—Albert Einstein published his first paper on relativity in 1905, and the Danish Nobel laureate, Niels Bohr gave the first quantum-mechanical description of the atom in 1912. But it was several decades before the public came to grips with the relativity theory. We have not yet recovered from the total shock of it even today.

Matter is energy. Matter can be converted to energy according to the famous equation $E=MC^2$. This is being achieved in all nuclear power plants everyday! Imagine, if we develop the technique we can convert this very piece of paper into invisible electricity and maybe light or any other manifestation of energy. In fact, put more precisely, science says matter is the 'form' of energy! Does it sound like the familiar Vedantic concepts—'*rupa*' (form) and '*nama*' (name)?

Yes, Einstein came to this conclusion in 1905. But Swami Vivekananda, in a lecture titled 'The Real Nature Of Man', in London, years earlier, stated, 'It is possible to demonstrate that what we call matter does not exist at all. It is only a certain state of force.' Here obviously Swami Vivekananda is using the word 'force' to mean 'energy'. How did this non-scientist, in the normally assumed definition of the term, arrive at that conclusion?

It is interesting to find out how the scientist, Einstein, the non-religionist, came upon his great theory. Mr. Marianoff has written a biography of his father-in-law, Albert Einstein. Marianoff writes, 'I had often seen him in abstract meditation, often physically weary, but

never had I felt so much peace about him as at that moment,' (referring to the days when Einstein had succeeded in formulating his theory). 'The room was filled with stillness. "How is it, Albert, that you arrived at your theory?" Einstein answered, "In a vision".'

Brahma-Sutra-Bhashya of Sri Shankaracharya

M.R. YARDI

—7—

Brahman as Bliss

IN THE last article we saw that Brahman which is the cause of the world is not only a real but also an intelligent principle. Sri Badarayana now proceeds to demonstrate that the Upanishads repeatedly affirm that this Brahman is pure bliss. In *sutra* I.i.12 (आनन्दमयोऽध्यासात्) he declares that 'the Self consisting of bliss is Brahman on account of repetition.' The word आनन्दमय occurs in the second chapter of the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, where we get a progressive description of the nature of self as consisting of food (अन्नमय), life (प्राणमय), mind (मनोमय) and of understanding (विज्ञानमय). Then we are told that 'different from this self, consisting of understanding, there is another inner self which consists of bliss. It is therefore argued that this self consisting of bliss is different from the supreme Self, as it forms a link in a series of selves, beginning with the self consisting of food, which are all different from the supreme Self. Even though it is stated to be the innermost self of all it makes no difference because the self consisting of bliss is said to have joy and so on for its limbs and is further described as embodied. And the contact of what is embodied with pleasure and pain cannot be prevented. Therefore this self consisting of bliss is nothing but the empirical self, subject to rebirth.

To this *prima-facie* view, the *sutrakara* replies that this is not so, as the word 'bliss' is repeatedly applied to the supreme Self in the scripture. After introducing the subject of the self consisting of bliss,

M.R. Yardi, a Sanskrit scholar, is the author of *The Yoga of Patanjali*, a critical authoritative text. This article is the seventh of a serial which continues from March 1983.

the *Taittiriya Upanishad* (I.ii.7) goes on to say that 'he is the essence of joy', (एवो वै सः) and adds, 'Only after attaining to this essence of joy does one become blissful'; 'who could live, who could breathe, if he had not had this in the cavity (of his heart)'; 'He who knows the bliss of Brahman fears nothing'. We also read in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (III.ix.28) that 'knowledge and bliss is Brahman.' Though it is a link in a series of selves, it is said to be the innermost of all. Because of this link, there is an attribution of limbs and body to it. For the sake of easy comprehension, we are led from one self to another until we reach the Highest, as for instance when a person wishes to point out to another the star Arundhati (one of the Pleiades), he first draws his attention to other stars which are close enough to Arundhati, and then finally to Arundhati. For these reasons, the self consisting of bliss is the supreme Self.

The objector, however, is not satisfied. He contends that the affix *mayat* denotes modification or effect, and that since the Highest Self is not a product, the word *anandamaya* cannot apply to it. The *sutra* I.i.13, (विकारमन्दाच्चेति चेन्न प्राचुर्यात्), states in reply, 'If it is said that the word (*mayat*) denotes modification and so the term (*anandamaya*) does not (denote the Highest Self), then (we reply) it is not so as the word also denotes abundance.' The word *mayat* here means *prachurya* or abundance, which finds support in Panini's *sutra* V.iv.21 and also in common usage. When we talk of a sacrifice as *annamaya*, it means a sacrifice abounding in food. In a passage in the *Taittiriya Upanishad* (II.viii.1), we are told that there is a gradation of joy experienced by different classes of beings beginning with man, the joy felt by one class being a hundred times greater than the joy of the immediately preceding class, and that only the bliss of Brahman, which comes last, is immeasurable. The *sutrakara* adds two further reasons in *sutras* I.i.14 and I.i.15. He says that Brahman is bliss, because Brahman is declared to be the cause of it (तदेतुष्यपदेशाच्च) and because the same (Brahman) which is described in the *mantra* is also sung (in the Brahmana) (मान्त्रवर्णिकमेव च गीयते). The scripture (*Taittiriya Upanishad*, I.ii.7) declares Brahman to be the cause of bliss. The Self which causes bliss must itself abound in bliss, even as a person who bestows wealth on others must himself possess abundant wealth. Moreover the same Brahman which is referred to in the *mantra* portion (ii.1) of the *Taittiriya Upanishad* is also referred to in its Brahmana portion (II.v.1). In

the absence of contradiction it is reasonable to assume that the *mantra* and the Brahmana passages have the same sense, for otherwise we shall be led to the unwanted conclusion that the aphorist has dropped the topic with which he started and switched over to an entirely different subject. On this Brahman which is bliss rests the knowledge of Bhrigu and Varuna (भारुगो वारुणो विद्या), since as stated in the *Taittiriya Upanishad* (III.vi.1) Bhrigu performed austerities and came to realize that Brahman is bliss.

The *sutrakara* then proceeds to consider whether the term *anandamaya* could apply to the individual self which is subject to rebirth. He says in two *sutras* I.i.16 and I.i.17 that (the *anandamaya*) cannot be the other (Self) on account of its inappropriateness (नेतरोज्जुषत्तेः) and also on account of the declaration of difference (भेदव्यपदेशाच्च). In regard to the Self consisting of bliss, the *Taittiriya Upanishad* states as follows: 'He desired, "May I be many; may I grow forth." (II.vi.1) He concentrated Himself in thought, and after thus brooding over Himself, He sent forth whatever there is.' Now to think of things to be created, to create a wide variety of such things and to make the things so created non-different from Himself cannot possibly be the work of anyone other than the highest Self. Moreover, the individual self and the Self of bliss are represented as distinct in the same *Upanishad* (I.ii.7). It is stated there that the *anandamaya* is the essence of joy; only after attaining this essence, the individual self becomes blissful.' Now, the one who attains cannot be that which is attained. Sri Shankara, however, goes on to argue that there is no real difference between the two on the basis of a passage in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* that 'there is no other seer than He' (III.vii.23). According to him this difference is fictitious and is due to the fact that the individual Self is conceived to be embodied and so thought to be the agent and the enjoyer due to ignorance. But there is nothing in these two *sutras* to justify the view that the distinction between the two is fictitious.

It may be further argued that *anandamaya* may apply to Samkhya's *prakriti*, i.e., primordial matter, of which the *sattva* constituent conduces to pleasure. The *sutrakara* rejects this argument in *sutra* I.i.18 (कामाच्च नानुमानापेक्षा), which states, 'On account of desire, it has no connection with what is inferred.' Samkhya's *prakriti* is referred to as *anumana*, as its knowledge is based on inference. As creation was preceded by the desire to become many and to grow forth, the non-

intelligent *prakriti* cannot be the cause of the world. Both Sri Ramanuja and Sri Nimbarka argue that it becomes necessary to postulate Samkhya's *prakriti* as the material cause of the universe if *anandamaya* is held to be the instrumental cause of the world. For the supreme Self such a postulation is not necessary, as He can create the world out of Himself by recourse to His inscrutable power.

The aphorist further reinforces his argument by *sutra* I.i.19 (अस्मिन्नस्य च तद्योगं नास्ति), where he says, 'It (i.e., the scripture) teaches the union of this (individual self) with that (highest Self)', and so *anandamaya* cannot possibly refer to the individual self or Samkhya's *prakriti*. For this he relies on the following passage in the *Taittiriya Upanishad* (II. vii.1) : 'When he finds rest and freedom from fear in that which is invisible, incorporeal, undefinable and supportless then he becomes fearless. For if he makes the smallest distinction in it, there is fear for him.' The meaning is that, on the attainment of knowledge, he becomes united with and finds peace and rest in the Self consisting of bliss, the highest Self and not the individual self or Samkhya's *prakriti*.

Sri Shankara seems to have followed the *vrittikara* (possibly Bodhayana) in giving the above interpretation of the *sutras*. In his further comment on the same *sutra* he gives an alternative explanation (इदं त्विह वक्तव्यम्). One cannot argue, he says, that the suffix *mayat* means a modification or a product in the earlier compounds and means something different, i.e., abundance, only when we come to *anandamaya*. The words ending in the affix *maya* belong to a series, and it would be inconsistent to suggest that the last word of the series applies to Brahman. The argument is as inconsistent as the statement that a woman is half-aged (अर्धवयस्येत्यादि). If *anandamaya* is said to refer to Brahman on the basis of the governing influence of the *mantra* passage with which the Upanishad begins, then even the selves preceding it should also denote it. It may be argued that for other members of the series there is an inner self, while no such inner self is mentioned for the *anandamaya*. But limbs are ascribed to it, and Brahman is said to form only its tail and support. It would, therefore, appear that *anandamaya* is not Brahman but has Brahman only for its support. Since Brahman is said to have joy and so on for its limbs, we should have to assume that the Brahman meant here is distinguished by qualities (*savishesha*). However, this assumption is contrary to a passage in the same Upanishad, (II.ix.1) which declares that Brahman transcends

mind and speech. Sri Shankara, therefore, concludes that the affix *maya* in the word *anandamaya* denotes a mere product, just as it does in the previous compounds.

Sri Shankara then goes on to explain the above *sutras* as follows (सुत्राणि त्वेवं व्याख्येयानि). Brahman, in the statement 'Brahman is the tail; the support', occurring in the *anandamaya* passage, refers to the supreme Self because of repetition. For in the concluding *shloka*, 'he becomes himself non-existing', we come across the repetition of the word Brahman only. Now it is necessary to meet the objection that Brahman is said to be the tail (*puccha*). This is not difficult to explain as the word denoting 'the limb' has been inserted into the passage on account of the word *prachurya*. Now, *prachurya* means here not abundance, but *prayapatti*, i.e., the repetitious occurrence of that word while describing the selves. The repetition of this word in the *anandamaya* passage cannot convey the meaning of a limb, as the preceding *sutra* has already proved Brahman to be the supreme Self. Further, Brahman, being the cause of whatever there is, cannot at the same time be called a limb, in the literal sense of the word, of the self consisting of bliss. How is it then that Brahman is here said to be the tail of the Self consisting of bliss? To this, our reply is that the word *puccha* here denotes that which is of the nature of a tail, the extreme end, the culmination, so that Brahman means here the support, the last resort, the resting-place of all worldly bliss.' This interpretation is hardly convincing, as the same arguments which are advanced by Sri Shankara against *maya* being taken in a sense other than effect can be more appropriately raised against *puccha* being taken in a sense other than the tail. The *sutrakara* evidently means to convey in these *sutras* that *anandamaya* is bliss and the interpretation given by the *vrittikara* and accepted by Sri Ramanuja, Vallabha and others, seems to be proper. As observed by Dr. Radhakrishnan, this interpretation goes against the unqualified (*nirvishesha*) character of Brahman as held by Sri Shankara and hence this strained explanation is given by him to avoid that implication.

Sri Shankara's objection is, however, restricted only to the interpretation of *anandamaya* as Brahman. He regards Brahman as bliss, as is clear from the following passage in his comment on *sutra* I.i.19 : 'Nor again is there a frequent repetition of the word *anandamaya* in the scripture; only its crude form without the affix (*ananda*) is repeated all along, as will be seen from the following passages in the *Taittiriya*

Upanishad, 'He is the essence of bliss', (iii.7); 'Now this is an examination of bliss' (ii.8); 'He who knows the bliss of Brahman fears nothing' (ii.9); 'He realized that bliss is Brahman'. He further clarifies his view in his comment on *sutras* I.iii.8 and I.iii.9. These two *sutras* mean that Brahman is above the state of deep sleep, on account of the instruction (ब्रूमा सम्प्रसादादव्युपदेक्षात्) and on account of the appropriateness of His attributes (वर्मोपपत्तेश्च). Both these *sutras* explain that the term *bhuman* applies not to *prana*, vital air, but to the highest Self. The description of *bhuman* as the Truth, as resting in His own greatness, as being omnipresent and as being the self of everything can belong to the highest Self and none else. Etymologically too, the two words Brahman and *bhuman* seem to be synonyms. Brahman is derived from the root *brih*, to grow, to become many. The word *bhuman* too means the state of becoming many, as *bhu* is the contracted form of *bahu* according to its derivation given by Panini (*sutra* VI.iv.158). In the *Chhandogya Upanishad* (VII.i.3) it is said that Narada begs the divine sage Sanatkumara to lead him over to the other shore of grief. We are told in the end that after his imperfections had been rubbed off, the revered Sanatkumara showed Narada the other side of darkness. The word for darkness, *tamas*, denotes ignorance which is the cause of grief. The scripture always speaks of this bliss as constituting the very nature of bliss. We read in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (IV.iii.32), 'This is his highest bliss; all other creatures live on a small portion of it.' In the passage of the *Chhandogya Upanishad* under discussion too, it is said, 'That which is *bhuman* is bliss; there is no bliss in that which is small (finite).' These two scriptural passages provide a rational explanation as to why pain and misery are the lot of all beings except Brahman. By denying unmixed happiness to all beings which are finite and perishable, the scripture holds Brahman alone as absolute bliss in its plenitude.

God Is So Funny

BRAHMACHARINI SUTAPA

DAY AFTER day : laughter, side-splitting laughter! Sri Ramakrishna's delusion-dispelling laughter rings through his conversations on every page of his *Gospel*, where we read prefaced to nearly every paragraph: 'Sri Ramakrishna, smiling', and at the end of every other paragraph: 'everyone laughs'; 'laughter', 'laughter'!

Once, when Swami Vivekananda was speaking confidentially to Sister Nivedita about Sri Ramakrishna, the Swami abused himself for 'being filled and poisoned with the Western reaction' of the days of his youth, so that he was always examining and questioning whether Sri Ramakrishna was holy or not. 'After six years', she writes, 'he came to understand that He was not holy, because He had become *identified with holiness*. He was so full of gaiety and merriment and he had expected holiness to be so different.'¹

Sri Ramakrishna said that it pricked his flesh like thorns to be called a guru, master or father. Rather, he was thought by his intimate disciples to be their friend, companion and playmate, aside from the fact that he could awaken the love of God in their hearts and any moment give them the vision of their chosen ideal. They would be so intoxicated with joy in his presence that the rigour of their *sadhana* would be made light. He was an uncompromising disciplinarian, waking them night after night to come out and meditate under the stars after spending the entire afternoon singing *kirtan*. Most of them were college students. When did they study and when did they sleep? He taught these young men as well as householders through mimicry, banter, jokes and funny stories. The result of this method of teaching was that householders would no longer take this world nor themselves so seriously. Thus their worldly bonds were loosened, and the young men who were to become all-renouncing monks would be warned of the dangers and dalliance of life in the world. By combining the funny with serious reflection on the most ordinary incidents of daily life and revealing the highest ideal of divinity in everything, Sri Ramakrishna influenced people of all stages of spiritual evolution and they were entertained as well as inspired.

Swami Vivekananda said, 'the only true teacher is he who can

Brahmacharini Sutapa is a member of Sri Sarada Math, Dakshineswar, Calcutta.

convert himself, as it were, into a thousand persons at a moment's notice. The only true teacher is he who can immediately come down to the level of the student and transfer his soul to the student's soul and see through the student's eyes and hear through his ears and understand through his mind. Such a teacher can really teach and none else. All these negative, breaking-down, destructive teachers that are in the world can never do any good.²

Everyone who talked with Sri Ramakrishna came away with new courage and strength. He never disturbed the faith of anyone, but lifted them from where they were.

The intimate disciples of Sri Ramakrishna came to him when they were mere boys, so it was fitting that he entertained them, telling jokes and funny stories. His keen power of observation made it possible for him to reveal the sheer vanity of wordly people. One day a young man arrived, a relative of one of Sri Ramakrishna's young disciples. He was foppishly dressed. Sri Ramakrishna addressed the disciple: 'You see, a young man was going along the road. He had put on a pleated shirt. And how he strutted! Now and again he would display the shirt by removing his scarf, and then look around to see if anyone was admiring him. But when he walked you could see that he was knock-kneed. (All laugh.) The peacock displays its feathers; but its feet are very dirty. (All laugh.) The camel is very ugly. Everything about it is ugly.' The young man retorted: 'But it acts well.' Then Sri Ramakrishna answered: 'Yes. But it browses on briars. It will continue to eat thorns though its mouth bleeds.'³

Another day he said: 'The entangled souls repeat those very actions that make them suffer so much. They are like the camel. . . . Such a man. . . may ruin himself by his daughter's marriage, but still he will go on having daughters every year. And he says: "What can I do? It's just my luck!" When he goes to a holy place he doesn't have any time to think of God. He almost kills himself carrying bundles for his wife. Entering the temple, he is very eager to give his child the holy water. . . but he has no time for his own devotions.' 'They slave . . . to earn food for themselves and their families; and they earn money by lying, cheating, flattery. They laugh at those who think of God. . . and talk only of worldly things at the hour of death. While dying they rave nonsense. Perhaps they cry out in a delirium, "Turmeric powder! Seasoning! Bay-leaf!"'

Thus, for the purpose of teaching his disciples, Sri Ramakrishna made fun of the worldly people who came to the Kali Temple. When he saw that such people were impatient, sitting in his presence, he would tell them to visit the temples, or as Sri Ramakrishna observed, they would whisper to their friends who brought them there. 'I will go out to the boat; meet me there when you have had your fill of this'. Sri Ramakrishna himself told the following story :

'One day Keshab came here with his followers. They stayed till ten at night. We were all seated in the Panchavati. Pratap and several others said they would like to spend the night here. Keshab said: "No, I must go. I have some work to do." I laughed and said: "Can't you sleep without the smell of your fish-basket? Once a fishwife was a guest in the house of a gardener who raised flowers. She came there with her empty basket, after selling fish in the market, and was asked to sleep in a room where flowers were kept. But, because of the fragrance of the flowers, she couldn't get to sleep for a long time. Her hostess saw her condition and said, "Hello! Why are you tossing from side to side so restlessly?" The fishwife said: "I don't know, friend. Perhaps the smell of the flowers has been disturbing my sleep. Can you give me my fish-basket? Perhaps that will put me to sleep". The basket was brought to her. She sprinkled water on it and set it near her nose. Then she fell sound asleep and snored all night.'

At this story the followers of Keshab burst into loud laughter.

What a mart of joy Sri Ramakrishna created around him, even when he was very ill! One day, when the doctor came, Sri Ramakrishna's disciple Master Mahashay, (M.), remarked : 'When the doctor comes here he loses his wits. He never talks about medicine. When we remind him of it, he says: "Oh, yes, yes! I shall have to give the medicine."'

While Sri Ramakrishna was talking to the doctor, a group of devotees were singing in the parlour. When they returned to his room, Sri Ramakrishna said to them : 'I heard your music; but why did you make mistakes in the rhythm? I once heard a man who was an adept in discord. You sang like him.' (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna was once sitting on the small couch in his room in Dakshineswar with his devotees. He was in a very happy mood, imitating the woman who is a professional *kirtan* singer : how she is lavishly dressed and sings standing with a coloured handkerchief in her

hand, 'Now and then', he said, 'she coughs to draw people's attention and blows her nose, raising her nose-ring. When a respectable gentleman enters the room, she welcomes him with appropriate words, still continuing her song. Now and then she pulls her sari from her arms to show off her jewels.'

The devotees were convulsed with laughter at this mimicry by Sri Ramakrishna. Paltu rolled on the ground. Pointing to him, the Master said to M. : 'Look at that child! He is rolling with laughter.' He said to Paltu with a smile : 'Don't report this to your father, or he will lose the little respect he has for me.'

He told them, 'There are people who indulge in all kinds of gossip at the time of their daily devotions. As you know, one is not permitted to talk then; so they make all kinds of signs, keeping their lips closed. In order to say, "Bring this", "Bring that", they make sounds like "Huh", "Uhuh". All such things they do! (Laughter.)

'There are women who come to the Ganges for their bath and, instead of thinking of God, gossip about no end of things. "What jewels did you offer at the time of your son's marriage?"—"Has so and so returned from her father-in-law's house?"—"So and so is seriously ill", 'et cetera.

Sri Ramakrishna explained once that everyone follows his own nature. For example, at certain religious festivals, people of different sects come and gather before the various images in different places; the Vaishnavas before Radha-Krishna, the Shaktas before Shiva-Durga and the devotees of Rama before Sita-Rama. 'But,' he said, 'it is quite different with those who are not spiritually minded at all. In the *baroari* (festivals which are celebrated with public subscription) one sees another image also—a prostitute beating her paramour with a broomstick. Those people stand there with gaping mouths and cry to their friends : "What are you looking at over there? Look at this!" (All laugh.)'

For the entertainment of Bankim Chandra, the writer, and others, he told a funny story :

'Once a barber was shaving a gentleman. The latter was cut slightly by the razor. At once he cried out, "Damn!" But the barber didn't know the meaning of the word. He put his razor and other shaving articles aside, tucked up his shirt-sleeves—it was winter—and said : "You said 'damn' to me. Now you must tell me its meaning." The

gentleman said : "Don't be silly. Go on with your shaving. The word doesn't mean anything in particular; but shave a little more carefully." But the barber wouldn't let him off so easily. He said, "If 'damn' means something good, then I am a 'damn', my father is a 'damn', and all my ancestors are 'damns'. (All laugh.) But if it means something bad, then you are a 'damn', your father is a 'damn', and all your ancestors are 'damns'. (All laugh.) They are not only 'damns', but damn—damn—damn—damn—damn." (Loud laughter.)'

Balaram, a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, invited Sri Ramakrishna and many devotees of his house for a festival. Narendra was about to leave and announced that he had to go home. Sri Ramakrishna said : 'Yes, yes, my child! Why should you listen to us? "The words of those who have gold in their ears are valuable; no one listens to him who hasn't even a rag round his waist." (All laugh.)'

Narendra kept quiet a few moments. Then he said : 'There are no instruments to accompany me. Shall I just sing?' Sri Ramakrishna answered : 'My child, this is all we have. Please sing if it suits you. You must know how Balaram arranges things.

'Balaram says to me, "Please come to Calcutta by boat; take a carriage only if you must." (All laugh.) You see, he has given us a feast today; so this afternoon he will make us all dance! (All laugh.) One day he hired a carriage for me from here to Dakshineswar. He said that the carriage hire was twelve annas. I said to him, "Will the coachman take me to Dakshineswar for twelve annas?" "Oh, that will be plenty", he replied. One side of the carriage broke down before we reached Dakshineswar. (All laugh.) Besides, the horse stopped every now and then; it simply would not go. Once in a while the coachman whipped the horse, and then it ran a short distance. (All laugh.) The programme for the evening is that Ram will play on the drum and we shall all dance. Ram has no sense of rhythm. (All laugh.) Anyhow, that is Balaram's attitude—sing yourselves, dance yourselves, and make yourselves happy! (All laugh.)'

Other devotees arrived. One, Mahendra, saluted Sri Ramakrishna from a distance; Sri Ramakrishna returned the salute. Then he salaamed Mahendra like a Moslem. Sri Ramakrishna remarked to a young devotee near him, 'Why don't you tell him I have salaamed to him? He will appreciate it. (All laugh.)'

Sri Ramakrishna was rarely without a smile. When he was not

absorbed in the bliss of his inner mood, he created a light and joyous atmosphere around himself. That is how he spent his days with the devotees. But in the evenings his mood changed and, towards dusk, as he became indrawn, he would begin chanting the names of gods and goddesses. At midnight he would wake his young disciples and meditate with them in the Panchavati. So, living with him day and night, they became absorbed in his moods of happiness and bliss.

While he talked to them, one moment laughing and joking as one of the boys, the next moment, before their eyes, his face would glow, brighter and brighter, and he would melt into an inner state of divine ecstasy, enjoying the vision of Bhavatarini, the 'Blissful Mother'—How could he be sad? For one takes on the qualities of that upon which one meditates.

As Nivedita heard it from Swami Vivekananda : '... day by day, unutterable love and burning renunciation were woven into the texture of their lives, till one exclaimed, "It was not *what* he taught them but the *life* they lived with him!" '4

Years later, when Vivekananda was in the Leggett's house in New York, very early one morning as Hollister, the teenage boy of the family went past the Swami's room, he heard peals of laughter from within. So he asked at lunchtime, 'Swami, who were you speaking to?' Swamiji said, 'What do you mean, speaking; when?' And the boy said, 'Who was in your room so early this morning?' Swamiji replied, 'Nobody. I was meditating.' 'But,' asked the boy, 'What was all that laughter about?' Swamiji said, 'Oh! God is so funny!'

References

1. *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, Sankari Prasad Basu, Ed. (Calcutta 1982), Vol. I, 215.
2. 'My Master', *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Calcutta 1963), Vol. IV, 183.
3. All the words of Sri Ramakrishna quoted here are from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, translated by Swami Nikhilananda.
4. Sister Nivedita, *Kali The Mother* (Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati 1950), 71.

The Master Protects

Sarada Prasanna, later known as Swami Trigunatitananda, was very adventurous. His life-sketch by Brahmacharini Medha of San Francisco is printed elsewhere in this issue.

SARADA'S FATHER, unable to find a way to involve his son in the world, secretly began to try to arrange his marriage. Finally, he divulged his plan to Sarada and Sarada immediately started looking for a way to prevent it. He went to his room and sat at the window, searching the sky with his thoughts for almost an hour. Then, letting out a deep sigh, he strode steadily out of the house. Before going, he left a letter on the table which read :

'My respected father and loving mother,

I will not be able to marry. As I do not want to be bound in the net of delusion of the world, today I am going in the direction in which my horizons lead me.'

On 3 January 1886 Sarada left home. He went first to the Cossipore garden house of his Master to get his blessings and then started to walk towards Puri. After a few days he reached Panshkura, from where he wrote home the following letter :

Respected father and loving mother,

Your ungrateful son, floating in the ocean of sorrow, has run away; please forgive him if you can. My countrymen—my brothers and sisters—are struggling to keep afloat in various kinds of suffering and misery; when they are in this condition, I cannot stay home like a sloth. My mental condition is just as before. Do not worry about me—I am very well. And do not follow me either, because I am moving on as soon as I post this letter. I can never be certain where I will go. Please give mother and my elder brother and sister my respectful pranams. Please also accept them yourself. My love to my younger brothers and sisters.

Your hopeless son,
Sarada

Although Sarada did not give news of his destination, his father, searching for him in Cossipore, learned that he had gone to Puri. Consequently, his father and mother set out for Puri to bring him back. Soon after they reached Puri, Sarada's mother was able to meet him.

In answer to her loving inquiries, Sarada, in an impassioned outburst, narrated to her this incident which he experienced on his way to Puri. He told her :

‘I wrote to you last from Panshkura. But for two days after that I didn’t get anything at all to eat. I was too hungry and fatigued to go on; yet I continued in the hope that before dusk I would find a village. But at dusk I saw before me only a vast jungle! In the midst of it there was a small winding path. I went along that path, depending upon the All-powerful Lord, but, unfortunately, as far as I went I saw the denseness becoming denser. Finally in the darkness I lost my sense of direction. What could I do? I prayed to the Great Lord and Master and began to take my Guru’s name. Finding no other resort, I climbed up onto a branch of a large tree and fell asleep. Suddenly, I heard someone call me. Who could recognize me in the dark of night? A voice came to my ear, “O respectful *sannyasi*, are you hungry? Here, I have a piece of candy. Eat it.” Saying this, the person went away and returned with a jug of water. After handing it to me, he disappeared. In that dense forest, a man’s sudden appearance and his compassion completely bewildered me. I could not understand how it happened. But for a long time I remained staring, unblinking, in the direction of the place where he stood, thinking about Most Merciful God’s compassion. Anyway, after sucking this small piece of candy my hunger was appeased.

‘The whole night passed like this. Getting up in the morning, I began to search the forest in every direction, but in that dense wood, there was nowhere any sign of man or human habitation.’

Some years later, in 1895, Swami Trigunatita’s desire to go on pilgrimages was still not satisfied. He went on a journey to Tibet to see Ladakh, Kailas and Manasarovar. He faced many dangers on this difficult journey and, especially in some places, was saved, it seems, only by the help of divine intervention.

One day, just at dusk, Swami Trigunatita was travelling along a path which took him to the broad rapids of a mountain stream. He saw that in order to cross it there was a single old dam which was broken in a few places. Thinking he would in no way be able to traverse it, somehow he proceeded by moonlight, leaping across the broken places as he came to them. In this way, he reached the middle when a black cloud completely covered the bright moon and like a new-moon night,

everything was covered with darkness. To put one foot forward on that dam in the darkness meant sure death. Swami Trigunatita helplessly remained standing still, and mentally repeated his Master's name. Then, unexpectedly, he heard someone say, 'Follow me!' Suddenly, he could not understand how, like a small doll, he began to move and instantly reached the other bank of the river. The next moment the black cloud parted and the moonlight clearly spread in all directions; however, on the river bank, he could not see a sign of anyone.

Swamiji's Prophetic Vision: Sri Sarada Math

A.N. RAY

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA claimed to be a voice without a form, for the voice was in reality that of his Master, Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna came to this earth to establish the Motherhood of God. History cannot furnish any other instance like Sri Ramakrishna's worship of Sri Ma as Shodashi. He said that Sri Ma represented the Motherhood of God. The idea of Brahman and Shakti as one and not two entities can be understood by the concept of the unity of the Fatherhood and Motherhood of God. The two are not identical but complementary parts which make a perfect whole.

Swamiji said Sri Ma was the Shakti for the regeneration of India; and for this regeneration the uplift of women was essential. He emphasized purity of women as the ideal of India. He also said that no country could prosper where women were not worshipped. The gist of this worship was to do good to women and to give them self-esteem.

Education is the basis of improvement in the status of women. Swamiji was greatly impressed when he went to the Mahakali Pathshala (school), which was run by Tapaswini Mataji in Calcutta. She looked upon the education of girls as serving the goddess Uma in the *kumaris* (girls). This ideal appealed to Swamiji's vision of the future of India. He wanted a girls' school of this type where girls would receive a spiritual as well as worldly education. Some girls, after

A.N. Ray was formerly Chief Justice of India. He is deeply devoted to the ideals taught by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

completing their education in such a school, would go back home and marry. Others would lead lives of celibacy, become nuns and teachers and also preachers of the women's Math.

Schools which are founded and administered by the authorities belonging to the Ramakrishna Order, (both the Ramakrishna Mission and the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission), impart education which will build the character of the students and develop faith in themselves. Character is formed when education helps students to control their will, their current of thoughts and expression in words. To grow in faith in oneself is to become aware of the potentialities of human life through the threefold cord of reason, intellect and conscience.

The seeds of the Ramakrishna Math were sown at Cossipore during the last year of Sri Ramakrishna's *lila*. Swamiji and his brother disciples received their training in asceticism and monasticism based on the two pillars of renunciation and service. After the *mahasamadhi* of Sri Ramakrishna the Holy Mother herself prayed for a Math for her sons. When Swamiji brought the Holy Mother to Belur Math, the Math became consecrated. The Holy Mother stayed at Jayrambati with Golap Ma and Yogin Ma, *brahmacharis* and sadhus from the Math as well as householder-devotees who came in large numbers to see, hear and worship the Holy Mother. Jayrambati, and later on, Udbodhan, the two places of the Holy Mother's *lila*, were really the nurseries and training centres of what became the Sri Sarada Math. One of the spiritual cradle-children of the Holy Mother became the first President of Sri Sarada Math. Mark the mystic vision of Swamiji! He said, 'With the Holy Mother as the centre of inspiration, a Math is to be established on the eastern bank of the Ganga. As *brahmacharis* and sadhus will be trained in the Math here, so in the other Math also, *brahmacharinis* and *sadhvis* will be trained.'

This hope of Swamiji was based on two significant observations which he made. The first was women's right to study the Vedas. Swamiji denounced the priest-caste's denial to women of the right to the knowledge of the Vedas. He cited Maitreyi and Gargi of the Upanishadic times as seers and said that women of our times are entitled to the same privilege. What a stupendous statement of respect for Indian women! The second observation was that women have a right to spiritual knowledge and he said that if even one woman became a knower of Brahman, thousands would be inspired and awakened to

truth by her personality. By her inspiration a good and highly advanced society would come into existence. Let us constantly remember Swamiji's saying that that society is the highest which pays homage to women.

The sixth President of the Ramakrishna Math, Swami Virajananda, said that dedicated women-workers should be given opportunities to lead monastic lives because Swamiji wanted to establish a Math for women. Swamiji's vision at the turn of the century was fulfilled during the centenary celebrations of the Holy Mother in 1954. Sri Sarada Math was established that year when the seventh President of the Ramakrishna Math, Swami Shankarananda, initiated a group of dedicated women-workers into *brahmacharya*. On the *tithi puja*, birthday, of the Holy Mother, 1 January 1959, Swami Shankarananda invested the same members of Sri Sarada Math with *sannyasa*. Swami Madhavananda, who became the ninth President of the Ramakrishna Math, read the *mantras* at the time of the *sannyasa* ceremony of these senior members of Sri Sarada Math.

Sri Sarada Math received inspiring impetus from Swami Vireswarananda, the tenth President of the Ramakrishna Math. He laid the foundation-stone of the temple at Sri Sarada Math on 1 March 1976 and dedicated the temple on the Jagaddhatri Puja day, 6 November 1981. Many may recall how he insisted that the dedication ceremony should not be delayed. The authorities administering Sri Sarada Math showed commendable enthusiasm as well as vision in completing the arrangements for the temple-dedication ceremony as he suggested. At the time of the temple dedication, he said, 'May this temple be a perennial source of inspiration to one and all who come here.'

At the time of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission Convention in 1980 Swami Vireswarananda restated two great ideas of Swamiji as the motto for the next century. One was that the Math rests on the support of the monastic members on the one hand and the householder-devotees on the other. He stretched his hands in benediction and everyone felt a touch of his grace. One naturally recalls the illustration that Swami Vivekananda gave : Just as a bird cannot fly on one wing, the growth of the nation and the individual—material, moral and spiritual—rests on men as well as women. The Ramakrishna Math and the Sarada Math represent the two wings which enable aspirants to soar in quest of the Supreme. The second idea of Swamiji's was that we have to

atone for our sin of neglecting the poor by working for the welfare of the people. Rural welfare and educational institutions are two important activities which promote the welfare of the people.

Swamiji said that if one word could describe Sri Ramakrishna, it is love—because he is love personified. It is his love which sustains the whole universe. Again, Holy Mother's love is the basis of the Ramakrishna Math and the Sarada Math which radiate spiritual strength to humanity for its well-being. These Maths enable thousands to mould their lives in the living and loving faith of Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother. Love, in the highest sense, leads to spiritual illumination. The ideal of universal love removes dissension, and the narrow limits of dogmas and doctrines. The ideal of service to humanity as divinity is the nearest approach to Self-knowledge.

Sri Sarada Math fulfils Swamiji's prophetic vision. For the first time in the history of the world it stands as a completely independent monastic order for women.

Sri Sarada Math is based on the motto which Swamiji gave—spirituality, sacrifice and self-control. Sri Sarada Math represents and reflects what Swami Vireswarananda said—that women should be perfect women and not imperfect men. This Math is an application of this ideal in its amplitude as the beacon light for educating, elevating and ennobling women for the good of society and for the good of the world.

I shall consider myself absolved from a debt of obligation when I succeed in purchasing some land for Mother. I don't care for anything after that.

Swami Vivekananda

Vivek Chetana, Awareness of Vivekananda's Ideals

BENU DATTA

THE UNITED Nations and the Government of India declared 1985 to be the International Year of the Youth. In India a declaration was also made to inaugurate International Youth Year on the day on which Swami Vivekananda was born, 12 January; and that henceforth 12 January would be designated as National Youth Day, to be celebrated every year by a week-long programme beginning on that day.

The Indian Government is to be congratulated as it has at last felt the need of holding up a strong and glorious ideal before the youth of today, many of whom have lost their sense of values. Now the question arises: Why has Swamiji's birthday been chosen as Youth Day? The answer lies in the fact that it is difficult to find a second great man who could match Swamiji in his self-sacrifice and love for mankind and his motherland.

To explain the significance of Youth Day, President Giani Zail Singh remarked that Swami Vivekananda 'had infused into a stagnant society a youthful spirit: a spirit of sacrifice, service, adventure and patriotism. Swamiji wanted the youth, with muscles of iron and nerves of steel, to be at the forefront of all nation-building activities. It is very fitting that his birthday has been chosen for the observance of National Youth Day.'

The history of the freedom struggle in India clearly shows that the images by which Swamiji appealed to and aroused the youth of his time were unique. In 1897, talking about the 'Future of India' Swamiji said, 'For the next fifty years this alone shall be our key-note—this, our Great Mother India. Let all other vain gods disappear for that time from our minds.' Swamiji's prophetic vision came true just fifty years later, in 1947, when India became independent. Swami Vivekananda might well be called the father of modern Indian nationalism. Under Swamiji's inspiration a large number of men and women took an active part in nationalistic activities. Sri Aurobindo remarked that in spite of being a *sannyasi*, Vivekananda thought constantly of the country's independence. The great personality of Vivekananda also influenced

Benu Datta is a Joint-Secretary of the Managing Committee of Vivek Chetana, an organization of women devotees working under the inspiration of the *sannyasinis* of Sri Sarada Math.

Netaji Subhas Bose who said, more than once, that if he could have met Swamiji he would surely have accepted him as his master. The nation-making work that Swamiji began was left to his active disciple, Sister Nivedita, who was the glowing embodiment of Swamiji's ideals.

Swamiji wrote, '... the fate of a nation (depends) upon the *condition of the masses*. Can you raise them? Can you give them back their lost individuality without making them lose their innate spiritual nature? Can you become an occidental of occidentals in your spirit of equality, freedom, work and energy, and at the same time a Hindu to the very backbone in religious culture and instincts? This is to be done, and *we will do it*. You are all *born to do it*. Have faith in yourselves, great convictions are the mothers of great deeds. Onward forever! Sympathy for the poor, the downtrodden even unto death—this is our motto.'

Swamiji preached in his lectures on 'Practical Vedanta': 'The only God to worship is the human soul in the human body.' To the youth of India he said, 'Arise, awake, for your country needs this tremendous sacrifice. It is the young men that will do it. "The young, the energetic, the strong, the well-bulit, the intellectual"—for them is the task.' And today, of course, we can add, for the young women also. In 1893, Swamiji wrote to his disciple, 'India wants the sacrifice of at least a thousand of her young men—men, mind, and not brutes.'

Swamiji's concept of renunciation and service has attracted the youth of India since the dawn of the twentieth century. But standing on the threshold of the twenty-first century, we observe that self-sacrifice, a sense of duty, discipline and warmth of heart are practically disappearing from our present-day-life. One section of our population is struggling for existence, unable to make both ends meet, whereas another section indulges in luxury. In such a background modern youths are frustrated. To them, Swamiji has left an immense task. He appeals to them: 'I bequeath to you, young men, this sympathy, this struggle for the poor, the ignorant and oppressed.'

The Work of Vivek Chetana

On 27 November 1983, in an annual meeting of the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Association held at Sri Sarada Math, Dakshineswar, Calcutta, the General Secretary, Pravrajika Muktiprana invited suggestions from one of its members, Krishna Dutta, (present Secretary of Vivek Chetana), for the spread of the awareness of Swamiji's ideals

among the youth. After a detailed discussion with Revered Pravrajikas Muktiprana, Shraddhaprana, Bhaktiprana and others, all the women devotees were invited to a meeting on 15 January 1984 at the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Matri Bhavan. There it was decided that a convention would be held on 18 March 1984 for the benefit of young and enthusiastic students. The organization formed to conduct the convention was named 'Vivek Chetana'.

The first Convention was held on 18 March 1984 at the Kamala Girls' School. If the opinion of the audience is accepted, then we must admit that it was a success. The topic for the morning session was 'Swamiji's Views of India' (*Bharatbodh*). Pravrajika Muktiprana presided over this session. The chief guest was Pravrajika Nirbhayaprana, President of Sri Sarada Math, Madras. Pravrajika Vishuddhaprana was the main speaker. The other speakers were Professor Ruby Das Gupta and Bharati Datta. Among the student delegates, five young girls delivered speeches and five others recited from various writings of Swamiji. To inaugurate the convention, Vedic hymns were chanted by the students of the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Vivekananda Vidya Bhavan.

In the afternoon session, Pravrajika Shraddhaprana, Assistant Secretary of the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, presided and conducted the most interesting part of the Convention: the question-answer session. The topic of this session was 'Swamiji's Ideals In Modern India and Their Application'. The main speaker was Pravrajika Amalaprana, Principal, Vivekananda Vidya Bhavan. Three students spoke on the topic and one student read out Swamiji's poem, 'To a Friend' (*Sakhar Prati*). Six young women read out their reports of the social welfare activities in which their organizations are engaged. Two hundred students from about forty educational institutions took part in this convention. The *sannyasinis* present numbered about fifty and there were ninety women present in the audience.

The second Convention took place a year later, on 17 March 1985, amidst great enthusiasm, also at the Kamala Girls' School. Since 1985 was the International Year of the Youth, the topic for the morning session was 'Swamiji and the Youth'. Pravrajika Muktiprana presided over the session. Pravrajika Vivekaprana, Assistant Secretary of the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, New Delhi, delivered the main speech. Professor Ruby Das Gupta and six student-delegates spoke on this

topic. Six others read out passages from Swamiji's works.

The afternoon session was devoted to a panel discussion. The topic was 'Are Swamiji's Ideals Limited to His Own Age?' The participants were all post-graduate students, researchers or lecturers : Sudakshina Sarkar, Brinda Sen, Eeshita Chatterjee, Brinda Majumdar and Sudeshna Sarkar. The moderator for the discussion was Pravrajika Bhaswaraprana of Vivekananda Vidya Bhavan. The discussion was appreciated by all. Pravrajika Shraddaprana conducted the question-answer hour, which was as interesting as that of the previous occasion. This year, three hundred students from about forty institutions took part in the convention. Forty *sannyasinis* and ninety-five women were in the audience.

After the first convention, Vivek Chetana was transformed into a full-fledged, service-oriented organization. Its aim is to inspire the younger generation with Swamiji's ideals of selfless service and to involve them in constructive work. The workers of Vivek Chetana strive to improve conditions in the regions where there is poverty, disease and illiteracy.

At present, Vivek Chetana is functioning through three of its centres situated at Gol Park, Golf Green and Lake Avenue in Calcutta. The Head Office is at 2/3A Keyatala Road (Gol Park), Calcutta-700029. The general programme of Vivek Chetana's activities is as follows :

- a) Weekly/fortnightly study circles where Swamiji's ideas are studied and discussed.
- b) Coaching Centres for underprivileged children who are also served tiffin.
- c) Sponsorships are granted to two or more very poor children of each centre.
- d) Company is given to the old and infirm.
- e) A Sunday class is held where children are taught various co-curricular activities like drawing, singing and reciting. Stories are told to them from the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, the lives of Swami Vivekananda and other great men.
- f) Medical Units—Homoeopathic clinics are run at Golf Green and Lake Avenue for the needy, where medicines are distributed free of charge.
- g) It runs a small children's library.

- h) Sewing is taught to needy girls so they can earn money by selling their needlecrafts. The marketing is done by the workers of Vivek Chetana.

The task that lies before the workers of Vivek Chetana today is certainly great and varied. But our funds, our abilities and our woman-power are limited. As a natural consequence, many of our dreams and aspirations have not seen the light of fulfilment as yet. For this we appeal specially to the youths to come and join us in our endeavour. Youths alone can translate their zeal, energy, vigour and enthusiasm into action, thereby bringing help to many neglected people. We must not forget the amount of confidence Swamiji had in the youth and we must constantly bear in mind his words:

'A hundred thousand men and women, fired with the zeal of holiness, fortified with eternal faith in the Lord, and nerved to lion's courage by their sympathy for the poor and the fallen and the downtrodden, will go over the length and breadth of the land, preaching the gospel of salvation, the gospel of help, the gospel of social raising-up—the gospel of equality.'

SRI SARADA MATH & RAMAKRISHNA SARADA MISSION

SRI SARADA MATH, PUNE

1975-1986

SRI SARADA Math at Pune is situated on a three-acre site on the slope of a hill a little distance from the city. All round can be seen foothills with the high Sahyadri ranges in the distance. On the western side is the historical 'Sinhagad' conquered by Tanaji in 1674 from the Moghuls for Shivaji, and on the eastern side are the famous temples of Parvati-Maheshwara and Ganapati which were daily visited by the successive Peshava rulers. Behind the Sarada Math flows the Mutha River to complete this picturesque setting.

Management: The earnest request of a group of devotees was fulfilled by the Trustees of Sri Sarada Math, Calcutta, when they opened a Math in Pune in February 1975.