

Mind in the Heart

People recall their childhood with nostalgia. The laughter that spilled out without cause, the buoyancy of heart and mind, the aliveness and bliss of the untouched senses, the total lack of body consciousness, the warm bubbling joy that welled up for well... no particular reason, —all conjured up a magical experience of utter innocence and complete joy. Correspondingly the world had transformed itself into a heaven or much more than that. The angelic aura of our childhood abandon puts all the calculated joys of adulthood to ignominy. It is not that we had the magnificence of knowledge or the steadiness of a mature mind, we only had an overflowing heart that was incapable of conceptualizing negativity. And our minds rested in our beautiful hearts.

No wonder it is said that the child is the father of man. We can learn from children how to be our simple, unsophisticated selves. The sheer joy of getting something and going gaga over it and again being able to manufacture the same amount of joy at not getting it, is something that points to a simple logic - that the source of joy is not in the outside object. Mind in the heart is perpetual joy, absolute contentment. It is this phenomenon that has been captured and made a way of life in many faith traditions. Strange as this may sound, it is considered to be the crux of spiritual life. And hence in the life spiritual, we are asked to become children all over again. To shine with un-derived joy and radiate happiness born of awareness is exactly what is implied.

The practice of keeping mind in the heart is a Yogic method to cultivate

awareness. Practically it takes the form of concentrating one's thoughts at the Heart Centre (called *anahata chakra* in Yoga) or visualizing one's chosen deity in the region of the heart. However, simple as this may sound and seem, this is no small action. It is a life-transforming technique that has enormous effect over time. Subjectively, it is a way of committing vital energy coursing through our system. It is a powerful practice that renders the mind sharp and alert. It refreshes the mind and renews the energies of body and mind.

Most people understand very little by the word 'awareness'. It seems to connote a shadowy selfhood and an equally hazy understanding of it. We can only understand its objective implication, as when we say, we are aware of something. In the absence of an objective pole, the experience of awareness is an unstudied phenomenon. However, it is important to note that the ontology of awareness is the basic fact of our existence. It is the recurring decimal of every perception and the common denominator of every experience.

When our thoughts encounter an impasse, what is left over is awareness, a sense of simple being. But our busy minds abhor a vacuum and so we fill it up with thoughts again. However if thought is consciously stalled and suspended for a considerable period, the underlying current of awareness intensifies. For this to happen the 'Heart Centre' needs to be developed. The repeated focus of vital energy at the heart makes it the spontaneous focal point of attention. This actuates the experience of awareness without thoughts.

Our common problems with 'thought'-unnecessary thought, overthinking, wrong thinking and the mental diarrhoea that some of us suffer from, are overcome when this state becomes natural. Too many and mutually exclusive thoughts are the cause of our restlessness and lack of harmony. The usual practice suggested to change this is to bring in counter-positive thoughts. But countering is only to a certain extent helpful. Behind all the flourish of thought lies the deep-seated urge to transcend thought itself, to encounter life without the mediation of thought, to touch awareness in its unalloyed state. That is why meditation holds such a promise for many people. Meditation is in some way altering the normal thought process. However, the purpose of meditation lies in extracting awareness bereft of thought.

But why would one want to do this? Most people are cosy in the cocoon of their thought world. There are so many unexplored currents and avenues of thought and emotion shimmering in the deeper recesses of our sub-conscious. So many are the highways, by-lanes and pathways to travel. The superstructures of the various arts and sciences are the physical condensations of ordered, accomplished thought processes. Ordinarily the mind remains absorbed in these. Life throws up myriad experiences, colourful and enthralling, to keep us busy. And what joy we take in being busybodies! Until we face first-hand, the insufficiency and poverty of even good thoughts.

A mind riveted to the whirlpool of thinking alone, exhausts its energies and tires itself out. The peace of mind that we seek and the gnawing restlessness, angst, ennui and stress that overpower us is, upon analysis — the mind yearning for a

refreshing rest in the lap of the soul. The true 'rest' is the connection of the mind with its source which is pure consciousness. Alienated from its source it has strayed and played too long! Now it seeks to return.

In our symbolic representational culture the place of rest is called the Heart. The Upanishads rave over this frequently and ascribe any number of names for it. The cave, the lotus, the centre — all are trying to point to the fulcrum of existence and axis of experience. The mind is seen to attain quietness and remain docile once it enters the heart. The truth of this has no ambivalence for the yogi.

That is why great souls frequently turn within and find their peace of mind there. Holy Mother's life was like a silent lamp hidden from public gaze. It continuously poured forth light without the slightest glare. Her inner life was a secret she guarded to the utmost. Rarely however, one could get a glimpse about the stature of her inner life, from her words, "Once on a moonlit night I was performing *Japa*, sitting near the steps of the *nahabat*. Everything was quiet. I did not even know when the Master passed that way. On other days I would hear the sound of his slippers, but on this day, I did not. I was totally absorbed in meditation...Ah! The ecstasy of those days! On moonlit nights I would look at the moon and pray with folded hands, 'May my heart be as pure as the rays of yonder moon!' or 'O Lord, there is a stain even in the moon, but let there not be the least trace of stain in my mind!' If one is steady in meditation, one will clearly see the Lord in one's Heart and hear his voice. The moment an idea flashes in the mind of such a one, it will be fulfilled then and there. You will be bathed in peace. Ah! What a mind I had at that time!...In

the fullness of one's spiritual realization, one will find that He who resides in one's Heart, resides in the Hearts of others as well – the oppressed, the persecuted, the untouchable and the outcast. This realization makes one truly humble." Mother points out to a number of effects of maintaining mind in the Heart – The Lord manifests in the Heart; A Heart which is the repository of goodwill will find its wishes fulfilled; The Heart is the womb of peace; And the Heart is the thread that unites all beings. Mother's own deep serene composure and sense of unprejudiced and benign judgement shows the habitual anchoring of the mind in the Heart.

Human suffering is a result of callous ignorance. Knowing that a large chunk of our pain is of our own making, we must learn to combine objective and subjective solutions. The solutions to the energy crunch on the planet lie as much in the finding of renewable sustainable sources of energy, as in putting a conscious check to our wild and greedy desires to exploit every available resource. So also the solutions to worry and stress should combine creating happy workspaces with healthy mental food and spiritual practice.

To every kind of suffering, Mother prescribes the method of placing the mind in the heart. It seems to be a miracle cure to all negativity. It frees one from the frustrating pain of repeated negative thought patterns and refreshes the mind as no novelty of thought or emotion would. To quote Mother's words again, "Let my sister-in-law, who complains of mental worry....get up from bed at 3 in the morning and sit in the porch adjoining my room for meditation. Let me see whether she can still have any worry of mind. She will not however do that but only talk about

her troubles! What is her suffering? I never knew my child, what mental worry was."

In the *Mandukya Karika, Prajna* or the self in deep sleep (the deep sleeper) is said to reside in the 'space within the heart'. There is no mind in deep sleep but there is no denying one's existence or being in deep sleep. Thus being, awareness and consciousness are said to be located in the Heart. Consciously activating the Heart Centre, one naturally intensifies the subjective pole of experience. Thus it becomes possible to culture awareness. The *Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads, Bible* and *Yoga Vasistha* all prescribe this efficacious method of culturing awareness. The Philokalia is a collection of texts written by spiritual masters of the Eastern Orthodox hesychast mystical tradition between the 4th and 15th centuries. Therein is described the process of "watchfulness" of mind by raising it to the heart. Jon Kabat-Zinn, Professor of Medicine Emeritus at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, has pointed out very interestingly, "In Asian languages, the word for 'mind' and the word for 'heart' are the same... You could think of mindfulness as wise and affectionate attention."

In the Yoga-Vedanta tradition, a heightened awareness, so essential to spiritual success, is harvested using different methods. When attention is fixed at the heart for long and thought stalled, the "feel" of objectless awareness is awakened. With this as the aim, one may follow any method to achieve the state. Some generate it by repetition or hearing the divine name as an echo in the heart. This entails the conscious raising and concentration of one's energies at the Heart Centre. In some others, it is meditation on

a holy image in the heart. In some others, it is quietly watching the long train of our thought process without involvement. All of these call for long practice with dedication in order to bring about the necessary effect. It leaves the mind in charge of the Heart, which means it replaces thoughts with awareness.

The *Yoga Vasistha* ascribes a condition for attaining continuity of objectless awareness. It is called *achala chittam*, unshaking mind. Mother describes it in no uncertain terms, “You may talk of the vision of God or of meditation, but remember, the mind is everything. One gets everything when the mind becomes steady...My child, austerities or worship, practise all these things right now. Will these things be possible later on? Whatever you want to achieve, achieve now; this is the right time.” Again she once told a disciple, “The mind is rendered pure as the result of many austerities. God who is purity itself cannot be attained without spiritual practices. What else does a man obtain by the realization of God? Does he grow two horns? No, his mind becomes pure, and through such a mind one attains knowledge and spiritual awakening.”

The austere mind develops the capacity to sink into the Heart and, most of all, remain there. Untouched by desire, unrelenting in its aspiration, such a mind is the asset of the yogi. And when the mind moves or thinks, the absolute clarity of the thought process is stunning. Every thought and emotion of such a mind rings true for they have become powerful beyond measure. This is the state from which blossomed the fairest flowers of Vedanta. It is important for us to know that there are techniques to touch these heights.

“The clouds do not cover the sun,

the clouds cover your eyesight. So also ignorance does not cover Brahman, it blinds your eyesight”, says Hastamalakacharya. Reality stands ever firm and fixed. All we need to do is work on the instrument of perception, the mind, which flickers, falters, waxes and wanes. The esoteric technique of keeping the mind in the heart is the gateway to unchanging awareness. In fact all Yogic preliminaries are meant for this and ultimately converge into this. Mystical as the phrase may sound, the phenomenon itself is far from being mysterious. It is the natural state of children and the saints. Sri Ramakrishna insisted on it by saying that one should meditate on God in the Heart. That is the special ‘parlour’ where God meets his devotee. While describing the six chakras of Yoga Sri Ramakrishna especially spoke of them as the activated centres of consciousness ‘where the mind dwells’. The limits as well as the boundlessness of mental activity has been extensively researched into through the important Sat-chakra model of Yoga psychology.

Awareness scintillates and pervades the awakened Heart. When the mind enters the Heart, it loses its nature and merges into the awareness. This is the point of unity, completeness, wholeness when one gets in tune with all creation, for one *is* all creation. No difference, no division, everything shines as an extension of oneself! This was the heart throb of the sages of the Upanishads. It is the song every saint sings in his ecstasy. Hence sang an Urdu poet,

Only names differ beloved,
All forsooth are but the same.
Both the ocean and the dewdrop,
But one living liquid frame. ❀



The Taste of Happiness

GITANJALI MURARI

Ajith matched his father's brisk pace, "The champion's boat...it is just what I want papa!" Susheel smiled, "One day yes, you will have it...for now, I'll get you a catamaran that is faster than your old one...what do you say?" "Oh yes papa...then I'll win by an even bigger margin!"

Five years ago Susheel had left his job at a private firm and moved his family back to their picturesque village in Kollam district. He had agonized at first, wondering if he was making the right decision but then his wife had pointed out, "What about our ancestral home and land, Susheel?... Ajith has to take care of them...he is our only child."

Observing his son's glowing face, he was glad they had left the anonymity of the big city and returned to their roots. The boy was already a star pupil in his school, achieving top grades in all exams. And for the last two years, he had been lifting the trophy in the annual teenager's boat race, a mini version of the grand Kallada Vallamkali. The elders of the Karayogam, the village committee, had proclaimed in awe. "You are fortunate Susheel sir... such a bright lad...he has become the pride of our village!" "And for good reason," another had added, "Sir is so kind, so generous...Goddess Annapurna is showering her choicest blessings on him and his family."

As he walked with Ajith down the narrow path flanked by green paddy fields on one side and the tranquil river on the

other, Susheel reflected that there was much to be thankful for. Voices in the distance made him look up. He could discern two figures, the older dressed in the *lungi* commonly worn by fishermen and the younger in a shirt tucked into cotton pants rolled up till the knees. It was Mukuvva and his son Gopu. Susheel's brow wrinkled into a frown. As they came abreast, Gopu waved at Ajith, trying to catch his attention but Mukuvva slapped his hand down. "Show some respect, you rascal!" Gopu grinned but Ajith shifted awkwardly on his feet, looking at his father instead.

Six months back, Mukuvva had appealed to the Karayogam for his son, "Please help my motherless boy...he is hardworking, an asset to me...but his heart is set on joining Famous school." Everyone knew that Gopu loved to read. He had become the lifeline of the fishing community ever since it had realized that the boy could decipher the official notices sent out by the fisheries' department. Not only did Gopu untangle the meaning of the sentences enmeshed in bewildering legalese, he also helped in negotiating good prices for the catch. He was quick as lightning in calculating profits, coming up with the figure even before the fishermen had tapped out the digits on their calculators.

But Gopu had thirsted for more. He had long outgrown the village primary school and had craved to be a part of the noisy, happy crowd that entered the gates of Famous school each day. But Famous,

the domain of those who could afford its high fees, had no provision for the poor. "Mukuvva," the elders had advised. "What will Gopu do with an education? One day, he will fish just like you and your father before you...education will spoil him...make him useless for you." Mukuvva had returned home to find Gopu swinging from a fishing net with a book in one hand.

The next day the fisherman had set out for Susheel's house. The entire village sang paeans to the landlord's charitable nature and as it had happily turned out, Susheel had spoken to the school authorities and made Gopu's admission to Ajith's class possible. The hoary Karayogam had been vexed. "Sir is too impulsive...he is still a city person...he should understand this is not how things are done here." The elders had summoned Mukuvva and instructed him to impress upon Gopu his extreme good fortune. That he should be careful in how he spoke to Ajith, always deferring to him, his superior in every way.

But Gopu was like any boy his age brimming with youthful optimism. Instead of treating Ajith, his benefactor's son, with reverent courtesy, he had behaved in the casual, friendly manner that came naturally to him. Ajith, the brilliant student and the tallest boy in the class, had been affable and quite often encouraging, especially when Gopu had shown signs of having grasped some tough lessons. Till one day, the quarterly exam results had been announced.

Ajith had ranked first as always and as he had acknowledged the cheers of his friends, the teacher had announced, "There is someone who has beaten you in two subjects Ajith...and that is Gopu!" The class had been stunned. Ajith's smile had slipped,

the word 'beaten' ringing in his ears. And Gopu, unconscious of the reaction around him, had jumped up with joy. The teacher had continued, "He has scored full marks in Mathematics and General Knowledge...not a single incorrect answer!...Well done Gopu!"

Some of Ajith's friends had quickly fostered a friendship with Gopu, eager to take his help for their homework. No longer was he an object of amusement nor spoken of as, "that poor fellow whose papa catches our daily fish." And Gopu, who enjoyed nothing more than revealing the simple beauty of mathematical logic to anyone who cared to listen, had cheerfully assisted his classmates. But Ajith's uncharacteristic grumpiness had created an uncomfortable situation for the boys. "Oh, I wish Ajith would stop sulking...he is still the best," one of them had grouched. "But not for long," had been the sly retort from another. "Gopu is working hard on other subjects." "You mean one day Gopu will stand first? It will *never* be so!" Ajith had overheard the conversation and felt deeply betrayed.

His mother had noticed that for some days her boy hadn't ventured out to play, shutting himself up in his room instead. She had asked Susheel, "Do you know what is the matter with Ajith? I have never seen him so dejected." But Susheel had not been able to coax one word out of his son.

But the Karayogam, the repository of all the local news, had disclosed the details to Susheel. "These things are good only in books sir...now see where this Equality business has landed your boy!...That shameless Gopu has challenged his position...if this is the situation in the classroom, what will happen when they are older, when they step out into the real

world?...Tsk, tsk...as it is these low-caste people get too many benefits from the government...there are no jobs for the upper caste anymore...at least in the village, in our home, we should have our say." Susheel had responded with a forced laugh, "What upper-lower caste? All that is outdated." The Karayogam had sighed. Sir had much to learn. Caste did not come with an expiry date.

The conversation with the elders had left Susheel feeling restless. It was true, he had mused, that he believed in a casteless society, one that did not put any man above another simply by birth. But it was equally true, he had argued with himself, that life in the present age was far more difficult, more complicated than it had been in his grandfather's time. Back then, every person had known his place, not daring to cross the sacrosanct boundaries. No, Susheel had shaken his head, it had been an unjust world and yet, people high or low, had not quite worried about their children's future. "It is so competitive now...will Ajith have to struggle all his life, constantly under threat from a mere fisherman's boy?" The instant this question had crossed his mind, Susheel had felt the pinpricks of shame. He had immediately set about providing a diversion, as much for his despondent son, as for himself, unwilling as he had been to face his troubled conscience. And so, the two of them had gone to watch the popular snake boat race on river Kallada. Ajith had brightened up, cheering for the winning team along with the roaring crowds. Father and son had enjoyed their outing and had been happily discussing Ajith's new boat when they had run into Mukuvva and his ebullient boy.

"How are you Mukuvva?" Susheel

felt a flare of resentment at the sight of a smiling Gopu. "Getting ready for the season sir...hopefully the river will bless us with a big haul of fish this year..." "Good, good." Susheel was about to walk on when the fisherman stepped hesitantly forward. "Sir," he began in a pleading voice, "If I could buy a new boat...a small one with a motor...then I could fish further down the river, near the sea...the variety of the catch there would fetch me a good price in the city market...I'll pay off the loan quickly." Susheel stiffened, "Er...it is quite late Mukuvva...we need to be on our way." And he hurried off with Ajith, muttering under his breath, "Always asking for favours...he should take the loan from the bank...I have other commitments too...not just him and his brat!"

Ajith's new catamaran arrived and it was welcomed with great ceremony. His mother broke coconuts, sprinkling the sweet water over it. Ajith and his friends solemnly offered flowers as directed by the priest. Then shouting gleefully, they pushed the boat into the river and took it for its maiden run on the sun-dappled waters. Gopu watched from the bank, his thin face mirroring Ajith's joy.

He ran home to a small thatched cottage that Mukuvva had built a long time ago, at the time of his wedding. "Acha, acha," he screamed romping through the one room into the backyard. Mukuvva was painting his only boat, a weathered catamaran, with all the love that a mother has for her newborn. "Ah, Gopu! Look what you have made me do!" He pointed to the untidy streak of red paint that had crossed its border into the white band. "Acha," continued an unrepentant Gopu. "I want to participate in the boat race!" After a moment's pause in which Mukuvva

observed that his son was in earnest, he replied, "So, you have finally lost your mind...you know very well nobody from our community has ever put in their name for it...although no one can wield an oar better than a fisherman!" "That's right *acha*," exclaimed Gopu. "Why haven't any of us ever taken part? I have checked the rules...the race is open to all." "Even so child, how do we make it possible? You need to practice first...a lot of practice...and for that you need a boat...how can I get you one?" Gopu looked at his father, his eyes dancing. "No, no," Mukuvva was horrified. "Don't even think of it!" "But *acha*," Gopu's voice was persuasive. "The fishing season will start only next month...and by that time the race would be over...and I promise I will be careful... *very* careful...please dear *acha*." Gopu's eyes were big with hope. Mukuvva's heart wavered. Deep within him, he sensed the stirring of an ancient call to adventure, a call hard to resist. "Alright...you can have my boat...but," and he wagged his finger in Gopu's shining face. "On one condition...no getting away from homework, eh?"

The Karayogam was outraged. Mukuvva and his son had turned their world upside down. And to add insult to injury, the ecstatic fishing community had raised the sum of one lakh rupees as prize for the winner. "Always crying no money, no money...now where did they find one lakh?" The elder who posed the question spat viciously into a flowerbed. The Karayogam had hurried over to Susheel's house to discuss this pressing matter and sat quivering with indignation in the large patio overlooking the garden. "The women sold their gold! They think Gopu will win...*hah!*" The men sniggered. But Susheel

stared at the floor in frowning silence. He knew what was rankling the Karayogam. It was gnawing at him too.

The fishing community believed they had already won the race, a far more significant race. The cash prize was a symbol of triumph, for in entering his name for the competition, Gopu had done the unthinkable. He had broken an unwritten code. Susheel looked up, "I will add to the prize...by another one lakh." The Karayogam was thunderstruck and then all at once they broke out in an excited babble. "Two lakh rupees! This is the *biggest* prize for an event in the district...it will send out a message to Mukuvva and his kin that their celebration means *nothing*...when Ajith wins, they will never dare to raise their heads again! What a master stroke sir!"

"Hey Ajith! Did you know Gopu has entered his name for the race?...I just saw him towing his father's boat up and down the river." It was Ajith's best friend imparting this vital titbit in a shocked voice. Ajith's face burned red in anger. "Why is he always trying to compete with me? Even here he won't leave me alone." "But he'll never win against you...you needn't worry." Ajith glared at his friend, "Why should I worry? I am going to race ahead of everyone in my new boat and that rat, Gopu, will never dream of participating again."

Mukuvva took out his old catamaran everyday on the emerald river, assessing its strengths and flaws. As soon as Gopu finished his homework, he dived into the river and swam to the boat. He watched his father's patient demonstrations with a keen eye absorbing the instructions like dry mud soaking up water. "She is old and heavy for you no doubt...but she can take

a hard knock unlike some of the other boats...so this is how you must oar...use the weight of the hull to push ahead.”

Soon the placid waters churned as the other boys took to practicing alongside Gopu, eager to show off their skills. Meanwhile, well before daybreak, Ajith and Susheel skimmed the river in their new boat, testing it against every curl and wave. And by the crack of dawn, satisfied with their drill, they returned home.

As the day of the race drew close, Ajith went quiet, the strain evident in his sombre eyes. “Forget the cash prize...I shouldn’t have mentioned it,” Susheel said. “You are easily the best...you must believe it.” Ajith tried to smile but his facial muscles felt stiff. Gopu’s participation and the two lakh rupees had electrified the village. It was different this time, he thought. It was no longer fun.

The sun shone bright in a clear, blue sky proclaiming it was the day of the race. Everybody made their way to the river carrying baskets of food and colourful banners to cheer for their favourite contestant. The fishing folk occupied the bank on the opposite side, at the finish line, waving constantly to Gopu and shouting advice across the river that couldn’t be heard. The Karayogam smirked, “Now they understand...simply sending their boy to participate does not change anything.” A senior government official, invited to flag off the race, climbed the makeshift podium. Instantly a hush descended on the spectators. The official greeted the elders and Susheel before holding up the trophy and the bag of cash for all to see. “This year, one boy will not only make his family very proud but also rich!” The crowd burst into a deafening applause. Finding the enthusiasm infectious, the official decided

to forgo his long speech and dropped a red handkerchief, a signal that the Boat Race should begin.

There was a minor commotion as the contestants scrambled into their boats but soon it became apparent that Ajith had wasted no time in taking the lead. Susheel relaxed, a small smile curving his mouth. His eyes searched for Gopu and he was astonished to see the slight frame plying the oar with confidence, his movements precise and economical. Mukuvva paced the bank on the other side gesturing wildly. But Gopu remained intent on cleaving a path for himself, edging his boat past one frantic competitor after another. Susheel felt a sneaking admiration for the boy.

It wasn’t till Ajith had crossed the half mark that he noticed the feverish excitement of the crowd at the finish line. He shot a quick glance behind and the reason for the uproar became clear. Gopu was inching close to him. Panic gripped Ajith and he began to oar vigorously. Looking over his shoulder constantly, he was relieved to see the gap widen between the two boats. “I won’t rest till I reach the finish line,” he vowed. Mukuvva stood quietly watching his son struggle behind Ajith. A friend reassured him, “Gopu has given the reigning champion a big scare! Take heart...our boy is coming second...that is good enough for us.”

The race was almost at an end. Susheel crossed to the other side and glanced at Mukuvva. The fisherman began to clap, slow deliberate claps. Soon others joined him, the sound echoing across the water. Ajith puffed out his cheeks and exhaled. He was nearly there. He turned to cast a triumphant glance at his rival. Gopu’s gaze was fixed on his father as he strained every nerve, every muscle to

catch up with Ajith. Sweat poured down his face, his chin jutting out resolutely. He seemed tireless, unable to give up even when he didn't stand a chance to finish first. Ajith recognized the yearning. It was an intense desire to push oneself beyond all limits of mental and physical capacity, to expand and become limitless. He felt alump rise up in his throat. Gopu's face resembled his own. And in that instant he made up his mind.

As his oar struck the water, Ajith let it slip from his hands into the splashing waves. The crowd gasped in horror. Mukuvva and his kin fell silent, their heart beats erratic. Only when Gopu pulled ahead of Ajith, did they erupt in incredulous shouts of joy. The new champion leapt out of the boat into his father's open arms. "We did it acha! We did it!"

The fishing community broke into a cacophony of bugles, drums and conches while the Karayogam tried hard to mask its consternation. Susheel watched his son make his way slowly through the crowd, acknowledging the commiserations with a quick nod. When he reached his father, Ajith's gazes kittered to the ground. Susheel patted his shoulder, "We all make mistakes...even the best of us."

Quite soon Ajith came to regret his impulsive act of kindness. He desperately wished to forget the race but wherever he went people reconstructed the moment of his defeat. "If only you had kept a firm hold on the oar! Just one strong move and the trophy would have been yours like always!" "Well you *almost* came first! They should have given you a cash prize too," his best friend declared stoutly.

Ajith went late to class and was the first to leave so that he could avoid Gopu's friendly overtures. At home, his mother

was too solicitous, eager to soothe her son's chafed feelings while his father was more preoccupied than usual, his countenance marred by discontent.

The swiftness with which Susheel had discarded his principles, which had defined his life so far, had deeply shaken him. He wondered about the stranger who walked in his skin, the one who had alienated him from his true self. His son's loss in the race, he felt certain, was divine retribution. It was his failure, not Ajith's.

Ajith sat by the river tossing pebbles in it listlessly. He must have been mad to do what he did, he thought for the umpteenth time. He sighed, if only he could make his father happy again. His hand stopped in midair. He knew what he must do. He jumped to his feet, "I will tell Mukuvva the truth...then he will return papa's money...that will make everything alright again."

It was twilight when Ajith found the fisherman's cottage. He could hear voices in the backyard. All of a sudden he was overcome by nervousness and hung back in the shadows to listen. "Acha, with the new boat you will catch plenty more fish...I did a rough calculation of the profit...I think it should be one and a half times more." "One and half times more profit?" Mukuvva's voice rose in disbelief. "Yes dear acha!" "What are you saying Gopu?...with that kind of money we can repair this old house, maybe add another room, get you to college..."

Ajith slipped away. He turned once to look back at the fisherman's cottage. A light burned in a window. The faint sound of the banter between father and son reached his ears. A laugh bubbled up inside him and with a whoop of joy he ran all the way home. ❀

Sister Nivedita's Project of 'Nationality'

VINAYAK LOHANI

This article attempts to capture the multifarious ways in which Swami Vivekananda's ideas of 'Man-Making' were translated into 'Nation-Building' by Sister Nivedita. All her efforts in diverse domains were to bring about a certain conception of Nationality (that was the term she used) to India, in the hearts and minds of the people. What she meant by Nationality was having a country /nation to identify with, which identification becomes an essential part of the individual's self-concept. That to Nivedita was the starting point for any national consciousness.

Initial Training : The Master and the Mother

After arriving in India in January 1898 and getting extensive training from her Master, the magical maze of India unfolded before Nivedita. She also got initiated into a life of spirituality and service and the ideal set before her by the Swami was that of the *Bodhisattva* – giving up one's life fully to ameliorate the hardships of others. He also charged her to completely refashion her life in the mould of a Hindu *Brahmcharini*, even destroying the memories of her past. Towards achieving this stupendously difficult task she was benefited most by her close association with the Holy Mother, with whom she also stayed for nearly a fortnight, being witness to the daily austerities and orthodox spiritual life of all the denizens of Mother's household. This was an education in sacraments, something which, in her own

words, changed 'her centre of gravity', which Nivedita later deemed to be of incalculable value in her development.

Now that her perspective had got sufficiently recalibrated, Swamiji found her ready for an advanced round of training, as it were. In June 1899, Nivedita travelled to America in the Swami's company. She again got ample opportunity to hear Swami's deepest thoughts on issues ranging on an astonishingly large canvas during the sea voyage. She later wrote:

"To this voyage of six weeks, I look back as the greatest occasion of my life....I received one long continuous impression of his mind and personality, for which I can never be sufficiently thankful. ... From the beginning of the voyage to the end, the flow of thought and story went on. One never knew what moment would see the flash of intuition, and hear the ringing utterance of some fresh truth."

Introspection in the West (1899-1901)

Upon reaching America, Nivedita followed her independent lecture tour while the Swami did his own work. Along with a few other friends and admirers of the Swami, they were briefly together in Paris and also attended the Paris Exposition. It was in Brittany in France just before Swami was on his way back to India that he gave a unique blessing to Nivedita saying, "Go forth into the world and there, if I made you, be destroyed! If Mother made you, live!" He gave

complete independence to Nivedita to carve out her own direction of work and also presented to her with a benediction written in verse.

While Swamiji had returned to India, Nivedita stayed in England for another year, engaging with many new ideas that were to inform her later nationalist work in India. This was a period of considerable intellectual enrichment for her. She was particularly influenced during this time by Scot polymath Patrick Geddes, with whom she worked for a few weeks in Paris. She also made close friendship with eminent social theorist Peter Kropotkin – whom she hailed as ‘King of modern day Sociologists’. She also spent some weeks in the company of the veteran civil servant and one of the first Indian economists, Romesh Chandra Dutt when both were guests of Mrs Ole Bull in Norway. He motivated Nivedita to write her first major work as an interpreter of India to the West - *Web of Indian Life*.

This entire two year period of travel and stay in the West was a crucial time in Nivedita’s later development. It was during this time that she realized that what India needed most immediately for its overall regeneration was freedom from the oppressive foreign rule. She also realised that her Master’s teachings were so vast and so sweeping that as his devoted disciple and worker she needed a definite reference point in order to put them into action. For her the cause of Nation-building was to be the line of her work. She strongly began to feel that she had something definite to contribute in this sphere. “Just as Sri Ramakrishna, in fact, without knowing any books, had been a living epitome of the Vedanta so was Vivekananda of national life. But of the theory of this, he was unconscious”, wrote

Nivedita. It was the self-aware articulation of this ‘national life’, in all its breadth, that Nivedita decided to make the main thrust of her mission for the rest of her life.

Man-Making to Nation-Building

Nivedita returned from the West in February 1902 - in her own words ‘to be present at the closing scene, to receive the last benediction’. Her diary on 4th July 1902 had just two words “Swami died”. The one, banking on whom, she had left her home, family, future, and her country to live in a culture vastly different from hers, was no more. A lesser person might have considered return to one’s familiar backyard. Only a person made of immense grit could have continued to live under such changed circumstances. She had read somewhere that if one truly loves a person it had to show in actions rather than tears. But she was made of sterner stuff and with steely resolve she stayed put. Re-gathering herself, she began to give shape to the future direction of her work - translating her Master’s ideas of ‘Man-Making’ into ‘Nation-building’.

Throughout the years following 1902 Nivedita was formulating the different bases for Indian nationhood and eloquently expressing them in her writings. She knew this to be her chief task. In 1903 she wrote in a letter to Miss MacLeod:

“The whole task now is to give the word ‘nationality’ to India, in all its breadth and meaning. The rest will do itself. India must be obsessed with this great conception. Hindu and Mohammedan must become one in it, with a passionate admiration of each other. It means new views of history, of customs, and it means the assimilation of the whole Ramakrishna-

Vivekananda idea in religion, the synthesis of all religious ideas. It means a final understanding of the fact that the political process and the economic disaster are only side issues – that the one essential fact is realization of its own nationality by the Nation.”

She wholeheartedly believed that India was a synthesis with great strands of unity. “The Indian people may be defective in the methods of mechanical organization but they have been lacking as a people in none of the essentials of organic synthesis.” She in fact thought that the British were quick to understand the underlying unity of the country, and thus could put it under a common administration.

“The Motherland is indeed one, that North and South are inextricably knit together, and that no story of its analysed fragments, racial, lingual, or political, could ever be the story of India...No Indian province has lived unto itself, pursuing its own development, following its own path, going its way unchallenged and alone. On the contrary, the same tides have swept the land from end to end.”

She relentlessly attacked the idea that it was the British who had united India :

“If India had no unity herself, no unity could have been given to her. The unity which undoubtedly belonged to India was self-born and had its own destiny, its own functions and its own vast powers; it was the gift of no one.”

Nivedita could see that Indians themselves were not self-aware of this unity and this is what she applied herself to. She knew that when this self-awareness of being a nation came then India would march ahead in its destined path with greater vigour and strength. Few

understood as Nivedita did, how much it cost Indians not to know what India really meant – this lack of realization by the nation of its own nationality. In a letter to her sister May in 1905 she writes, “But we shall be on firmer ground when we have a clear thought to associate with the word ‘India’.”

Education for Nation-Building

For Nivedita, what India needed was an education established soundly on the basis of a ‘national consciousness’. To her any effective education had to boost the national self-consciousness, and invoke vigour and responsibility, and that once this was firmly in place, international / universal dimensions would follow, thus raising it to a new level of perfection.

Nivedita believed that training of the mind and development of power of concentration had been the chief thrust of Hindu education for ages. And therefore, it did not have anything substantial to learn from the West towards this. She felt that superiority of the West lay in its realization of the value of united efforts in any given direction. She referred to this Western trait as ‘organizing of the popular mind.’ It was here she felt India could learn from the West.

According to Nivedita, National Education is first and foremost an education in national idealism with emancipation of sympathy and intellect as its chief aim. For achieving this she wanted the ideals presented before the children and students to be in a form informed by their own past. “Our own imagination must be first based on our own heroic literature. Our hope must be woven out of our own history. From the known to the unknown

must be the motto of every teacher, rule of every lesson." A true national education in India would awaken people towards a life of sacrifice towards what she referred to as '*jana-desha-dharma*'.

An education founded on a national basis was to Nivedita the perfect recipe for creating future heroes. She did not think heroes were born; she believed all human beings had an innate longing for self-sacrifice, and that the force of heroic thought impels them in that direction. She thought that the challenge of educating the Indian masses could be best solved by dedicated and inspired educational missionaries coming from within the country. It was her fervent desire to see a band of educational missionaries who would cross the length and breadth of the country, educating the masses. She took the example of many Western countries where young men were required to serve for a few years in the military service and hoped for a similar army of educational missionaries in India. But she believed that best way to do this was by voluntary selflessness of students and youths themselves.

From 'Family Ideal' to 'National Ideal'

On the foundation of 'family ideal', moving towards the larger ideal of 'nationality' is a constant refrain in Nivedita's writings. She wished the countrymen, particularly the youth, have a deep cultivation of this ideal. "The centre of gravity must be for them, outside the family. We must demand from them sacrifices for India, Bhakti for India, learning for India."

She hoped that children from a very

young age would absorb this spirit of identifying with the nation as a whole.

"The best preparation for nation-making that a child can receive is to see his elders always eager to consider the general good, rather than their own.... We are a nation, where every man is an organ of the whole, when every part of the whole is precious to us, when the family weighs nothing in comparison with the People."

She was at her inspired best while giving a call, just like her Master, to her countrymen for pledging their lives for sacrifice for the sake of the nation:

"Why should we limit the social motive to a man's own family, or to his community? Why not alter the focus, till we all stand, aiming each at the good of all-others, and willing, if need be, to sacrifice himself, his family, and even his particular social group, for the good of the whole? The will of the hero is ever an impulse to self-sacrifice.... Shall I leave my family to struggle with poverty, unprovided? Away with the little vision! Shall we not eagerly die, both I and they, to show to the world what the Indian idea of duty may be? May not a single household be glad to starve, in order that a nation's face may shine? The hero's choice is made in a flash. To him, the larger vision is closer than the near." And thus she urged and inspired the countrymen to immerse this little 'self' into the *Virat* of *Bharatvarsha*,

"If the whole of India could agree to give, say, ten minutes every evening, at the oncoming of darkness to thinking a single thought, 'We are one. Nothing can prevail against us to make us think we are divided. For we are one. We are one and all antagonisms amongst us are illusions' – the power that would be generated can

hardly be measured.”

She knew that in the modern times a strong Indian nation needs to have a thoroughly democratized society with careers open to all and that for achieving this, education was the key. Her thoughts on equal opportunities and access to education were spelt unambiguously:

“The motherland must recognize no caste, for that would prevent her availing herself of the best possible service. For this, the presence of a social formation representing democracy is absolutely necessary. So far from recognizing caste, indeed education must be absolutely democratized, in order that all talents may be discovered, and the remaking of the Swadesh may proceed apace.”

On his return to India in 1897, in Madras, Swami Vivekananda had said : “For the next fifty years this alone shall be our keynote – this, our great Mother India. Let all other vain gods disappear for the time from our minds. This is the only god that is awake, our own race – everywhere his hands, everywhere his feet, everywhere his ears, he covers everything.” Echoing that Nivedita said:

“This desire to serve, the longing to better conditions, to advance our fellows, to lift the whole, is the real religion of the present day. Everything else is doctrine, opinion, theory. Here is the fire of faith and action. Each day should begin with some conscious act of reference to it. A moment of silence, a hymn, a prayer, a salutation.”

She hoped minds and hearts would be trained to the service of the *jana-desha-dharma*, and that would act as the motive-spring of all the struggles. She thought of ‘organised unselfishness’ as the foundation of national feeling.

Inspiring Youth and Intellectuals in National Movement

An important area of her work during these years was to inspire the youth in the ‘religion of nation-building’. She embarked on extensive lecture tours in different legs covering Bombay, Poona, Nagpur, Amraoti, Baroda, Madras, Patna, Lucknow and several other places. When in Calcutta she used to visit and lecture to various youth and civil groups like the Dawn Society founded by Satischandra Mukherjee, Vivekananda Societies, Anushilan Samity etc. After the appointment of the Universities Commission (1902) by Lord Curzon (leading to the Universities Act in 1904) several leading men in Bengal’s public life embarked upon the course of a ‘National Education’. The chief vehicle of this was the Dawn Society, which was a meeting and moulding place for young intellectuals. Nivedita was a frequent visitor here and passionately addressed the youth. She engaged in discussions on what ingredients should an ideal National Education have and published extensively on the same – now compiled in her book *Hints on National Education in India*. These efforts and ideas led to the founding of the National College in Calcutta with Aurobindo Ghosh as its Principal. Aurobindo had been in touch with Nivedita ever since their first meeting in Baroda in 1902 when she had urged him to relocate to Calcutta. Nivedita was also very active among the small scattered revolutionary societies and was a member of the committee which Aurobindo Ghosh organised for coordinating and integrating the efforts of all these groups. She inspired a large number of youth who became prominent in

revolutionary activities like Aurobindo's younger brother Barindra Ghosh and Swamiji's younger brother Bhupendranath Dutta. Wherever she went, the youth cheered her. She was a heroic figure to them. She paid for the bail of Bhupendranath, after the latter was released upon serving a one-year rigorous term of imprisonment owing to his key role in the revolutionary journal *Yugantar*. She then arranged for his higher education in America.

She also inspired many young intellectuals to devote their future for serving the country and gave them concrete guidance. Prominent among them were Benoy Sarkar, later an eminent social scientist, and eminent historian Radhakumud Mukherjee, to whom she gave the vision of working in the field of Indian history which he did splendidly. The long note that she wrote to the then young Mukherjee is an intellectual treat and now a part of Complete Works of Sister Nivedita. His future work, particularly his work, *The Fundamental Unity of India*, bore the mark of the seeds which Nivedita sowed in his young mind. She was definitely a sort of public intellectual of that time.

Many important figures of the National Movement were close to Nivedita. Nivedita had a greater proclivity for the stand of those who were called the 'Extremists' in the National Congress then – represented by Tilak, Lajpat Rai, and B.C. Pal. But she had a close friendship with Gokhale who used to stay in Calcutta for long periods due to his membership in the Imperial Council and was a regular visitor to Nivedita's house. Nivedita, often with her characteristic candidness, expressed dissatisfaction towards the concessionary politics practiced by

Gokhale, but praised him generously whenever he made an impact in the Council. For the furtherance of the national cause she presented him with several letters of introduction during his visits to Britain with leading opinion-makers there.

In 1905, the major event of the Partition of Bengal galvanized the national consciousness in an unprecedented manner. Nivedita played a very active role in the Nationalist movement following the Partition. She gave full support to the efforts of the Swadeshi campaign and urged people to go all out in this 'Swadeshi-sadhana'. Her own work with girls and women gave full expression to the practice of 'Swadeshi'. Her writings at that time bear the testimony of how she passionately advocated not just Swadeshi but its logical accompaniment of boycott of foreign goods.

It was during this time that she also felt the need for an Emblem for the whole country. And for that she chose the 'Vajra' (The Thunderbolt). The Vajra had a long history in Indian tradition symbolizing the 'power of selflessness'. The idea first occurred to Nivedita during a trip to Bodh-Gaya when she found that the 'Vajra' was a common Buddhist symbol – used in worship and other rituals. In Tibet and Myanmar the Vajra stood for the Buddha himself. The Lamas did their *Puja* holding a miniature 'Vajra' in their hand.

In Nivedita's design there are two Vajras crossed in order to signify coordinated and selfless actions of multiple individuals (of the nation) acting in effect as one national organism. Nivedita got some designs embroidered by the girls in her Calcutta school and had it displayed in the Exhibition organized by the Congress in 1906 in Calcutta. Quite a few eminent

persons of the time started using this as an emblem. It later came to be used as the Emblem of the Bose Institute founded by Jagadish Chandra Bose. The Paramvir Chakra also has the double-Vajra as a major component of its emblem. It is quite possible that it was Nivedita's inspired idea that was at its root too.

Nivedita was one of the pioneering practitioners of the idea of worship of the nation as mother. Following the Partition of Bengal when the government prohibited the singing or chanting of 'Vande Mataram', Nivedita continued it as a part of her school's prayer.

She passionately communicated the idea of worshipping the nation-mother. "Dedicate some part of every *puja* to this thought of the Mother who is Swadesh. Lay a few flowers before Her, pour out a little water in Her name", she said.

From August 1907 to July 1909 when the Nationalist movement was ebbing and many prominent revolutionaries were being imprisoned, Nivedita along with the Bose couple, went westward. She continued with her journalistic activity, both in the Indian as well as British press, and helped create a favourable opinion on Indian questions among sympathetic Englishmen.

Steeped in the process of reaching Advaita through rejecting dualities, she

urged everyone to imagine India is one - imagining thus she would actually become one. To her India was the great unity all Indian people had to arrive at. In today's times when people question whether India is or can ever be called a 'nation' and point out what they think is her 'fragmentary nature', Nivedita's exhortation to her Indian brethren has an abiding value :

"Let love for the country and countrymen, for the People and Soil, be the mould into which our lives flow hot. If

we reach this, every thought we think, every word of knowledge gained, will aid in making clearer and clearer the picture. With faith in the Mother, and Bhakti for India, the true interpretation of facts will come to us unsought. We shall see the country as united, where we were told that she was fragmentary. Thinking her united she will actually be so. The universe is the creation of the mind, not matter. And can any

force in the world resist a single thought, held with intensity by three hundred millions of people?"

The Motherland – Her Central Note

In the concluding paragraph of her masterly Introduction to the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Nivedita wrote :



“These, then - the Shâstras, the Guru, and the Motherland — are the three notes that mingle themselves to form the music of the works of Vivekananda. These are the treasure which it is his to offer. These furnish him with the ingredients whereof he compounds the world’s heal-all of his spiritual bounty. These are the three lights burning within that single lamp which India by his hand lighted and set up, for the guidance of her own children and of the world.”

It can be said that it was to this third note of her Master – the Motherland, that Nivedita applied herself most. Indeed, a British journalist who knew her well had described her as ‘India-intoxicated’. On her beads she was known to repeat ‘Bharatvarsha’ as the mantra. The central theme of her life was to make the Indian people self-aware of their nationhood and express it in various aspects of national life. That each Indian should live for the country’s sake and hold oneself as an offering to Mother India was her constant thrust.

Swami Vivekananda, when he was

with Nivedita in France in 1900, had blessed Nivedita’s future work by presenting a poem which was also a charge to her of her future mission in the form of the lines :

*Be thou to India’s future son
The mistress, servant, friend in one.*

Nivedita spent her whole life as an attestation, as it were, of this faith her Master had reposed in her. She carefully nurtured this trust and hoped that she did justice to what he might have expected of her. As far as Swami Vivekananda’s love and vision for India is concerned, it can truly be said that it was Nivedita who was his heiress in this line of thought and action. ❀

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India is a vast university, and every child born within her borders owes to her the service of a student. Every life, however simple, helps to build up the inheritance of the future.

Sister Nivedita