

Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi

—PRAVRAJIKA JNANADAPRANA

Jayadeva in his *Dashavatara stotam*, does not count Sri Krishna (Keshava) as an *avatara*. He declares Keshava descended as the ten *avatars*. It is said, *Krishnastu Bhagavan Svayam* although he was born as a son of Vasudeva and Devaki, which means, Krishna is Himself God, even though he is known to be born to mortal parents.

This prompts us to look at the life of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother. Saradamani was born as the daughter of Shyamasundari Devi and Ramachandra Mukhopadhyay. Before her daughter's birth, Shyamasundari was on her way to have *darshan* of a local deity, in Sihore. She felt physically uneasy and sat down under a bilwa tree. Soon she heard the jingling of anklets. She saw a small beautiful girl descending from the bilwa tree. The child approached her and embraced her from the back and said in a sweet voice, "I have come to you, *ma*." Some days later, Ramachandra Mukhopadhyay saw a beautiful little girl approaching in a dream, and saying, I have come to your house. The child did not say, I shall be born as your daughter.

Some years earlier, Kshudiram Chattopadhyay (Sri Ramakrishna's father), saw in a dream when he was in Gaya, Lord Vishnu telling him that he wished to be born as his son. Usually, Vishnu, the protector and sustainer of creation descends as an *avatara* taking the help of Mahamaya, to guide human beings. Without Maya he cannot assume a human body. But if Mahamaya Herself comes down, she does not need anyone's help to assume a human

body or to act her play in this world. Sri Sarada Devi is *bhagavati svayam*, the Divine Mother Herself.

While she was in Kamarpukur as a young bride, she used to hesitate on how to go alone, in the very early hours of the morning, to bathe in Haldarpukur. But whenever she stepped out on the street, she would see eight girls of her own age accompanying her — four in front and four at the back. Holy Mother used to say that they never spoke to her, nor did she ask them who they were. Actually, she hinted that they were her *ashtasakhis* — the eternal companions of *Bhagavati*. They used to come out of her and merge into her.

The Personification of Divinity

When the Holy Mother went to Dakshineswar and stayed with her mother-in-law and Sri Ramakrishna (Thakur), she asked him one day how he looked upon her. Thakur said, the Mother *Bhavatarini* worshipped in the temple, his own mother Chandramani Devi, and Sarada Devi were all the same. He truly saw Holy Mother as *Ma Anandamayi*. He used to tell some of the devotees that she was his Shakti. She was *Saraswati*, *Jnanadayini*, highly intelligent and had come to bestow knowledge. Sri Ramakrishna worshipped her as *Shodashi* or *Tripurasundari* and offered all the fruits of his *sadhana* at her feet. He invoked the *Brahmakundalini* in her so that she may bestow Jnana to human beings. Many people interpret this as empowerment of

Holy Mother by Sri Ramakrishna; the power that he gained through *sadhana*, he transmitted to her. But Holy Mother herself, was *Shakti Swarupini*. She needed no external power; she needed no *sadhana* for spiritual realization. In fact, she was the one to be attained through *sadhana* by *sadhakas*.

One day Hriday, Sri Ramakrishna's nephew spoke rudely to Holy Mother. Thakur warned him, "Hridu, if you speak harsh words to 'this' (pointing to himself), and the one inside 'this' gets angry, you may be saved, but if the one inside her is hurt, even *Brahma*, *Vishnu* or *Maheswara* cannot save you!" Thus Thakur himself regarded her highly as the power over *Srishti*, *Stithi*, and *Pralaya* — the controller of creation, preservation and destruction or dissolution.

Before leaving his body, Sri Ramakrishna gave her the responsibility of looking after the 'people of Kolkata wriggling like worms'. That is how he referred to the ordinary worldly people bound in Maya. When Swami Vijnanananda started giving *mantra diksha*, he used to give only the name of Sri Ramakrishna. One night, Thakur appeared in his dream and pointing to Holy Mother, said, "Don't you tell them (disciples) about her? You must tell. After all, the key to liberation is in her hands." Then onwards Vijnanananda started giving Mother's *mantra* also. Thus, *Mother is the giver of liberation, mokshadayini*.

Once when she was staying in Varanasi, some ladies came to have her *darshan*. At that time, Mother was busy with some household chores, like mending torn clothes. Seeing this, the ladies commented, "Mother, you seem to be entangled in Maya," to which mother

calmly replied, "What to do, I myself am Maya!" Surely, those ladies could not catch the significance of those words.

Once during Durga Puja in Belur Math, Holy Mother stayed in Nilambar Babu's house and attended the puja daily from *Shasti* (the sixth day) to *Vijaya Dashami* (the tenth day). The devotees would offer *pushpanjali* to Holy Mother just as they did to Durga. They felt Mother Durga was present in the form of Holy Mother. Infact, Swami Vivekananda declared that she was the living Durga. While in Kamarpukur, after Thakur's *mahasamadhi* when Harish being temporarily insane created trouble, Mother assumed the form of *Bagala*, another powerful aspect of the Divine Mother, to overpower him.

Whenever Mother was in Kolkata, she used to stay in Baghbazar. One day, a sadhu from Belur Math was going to Kalighat temple to have *darshan* of Mother Kali there. Swami Premananda advised him to first have the *darshan* of the living Kali in Baghbazar, before going to Kalighat. That sadhu, when he came to Holy Mother, told her Premananda's advice. She simply smiled, thereby acknowledging the truth of Premananda's words.

Bharatiprana Mataji, the first President of Sri Sarada Math, and a direct disciple of the Holy Mother, related two interesting incidents:

- While Holy Mother was in Baghbazar Udbodhan house, a group of devotees came bringing offerings meant for Devi Jagaddhatri. One among the group had a dream in which he saw Holy Mother as Jagaddhatri. They wanted to offer the puja items to Holy Mother. She did not object and calmly accepted

- their offerings proving her identity with Devi Jagaddhatri.
- At Jayrambati a group of devotees suddenly came at noon without any prior information. It was meal time, and there was not enough food. Holy Mother went into the kitchen, added little salt to some dishes and stirred the food items with a ladle; then asked her companions to serve them. Wonder of wonders! There was no shortage of food for all of them. Everybody felt that Holy Mother was really Annapurna, the goddess of plenty.

One disciple seeing the way Mother was regarded and worshipped commented, “Mother, hereafter nobody will worship goddesses like *Shitala* and *Manasa*.” Mother promptly replied “Why? They are also parts of me.” This meant that if she was worshipped, automatically all those goddesses would be worshipped because she is *Sarva Deva Devi Swarupini* (the manifestation of all gods and goddesses).

The True Advaitin

When Swami Vivekananda visited the Advaita Ashrama in Mayavati in January 1901, he saw in one room a picture of Sri Ramakrishna installed and

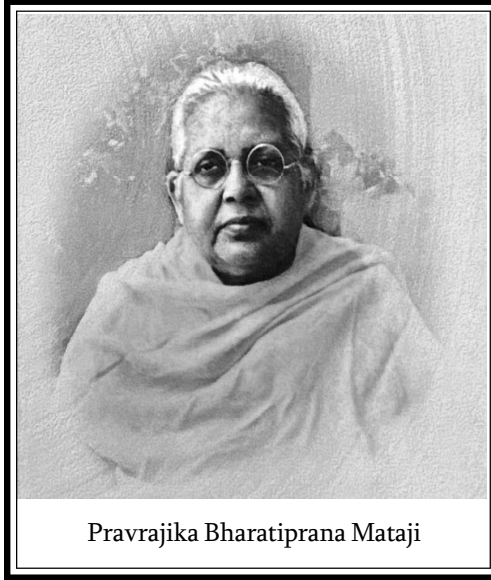
flowers and incense were offered to him. Swamiji was very upset, because he wanted that centre in the Himalaya to be

exclusively focused on Advaita *sadhana*, and no dualistic or ritualistic worship would be allowed there. He ordered the inmates of the Ashrama to immediately remove the picture and stop worshipping it. Much later after Swamiji's *mahasamadhi*, one member of the Mayavati Ashram wrote a letter to the Holy Mother wanting to know her opinion about this. In reply

she wrote, “Sri Ramakrishna was an Advaitin and you are his followers. So you are also Advaitins.” She thus endorsed Swamiji's action. She herself was a true Advaitin. She once told a devotee, “If you do *sadhana* you will realize that the ‘One’ in me is in you and the same is in the others like *dule*, *bagdi*.” And again, “On gaining Jnana you will see all forms of gods and goddesses disappear. They come and go within the time frame.” Beyond time and space there is no form or name — that is what she meant. And that is *Advaita anubhuti* (non-dual perception).

Just as she revealed that all gods and goddesses are in her, she also declared that she is in all creatures. When a *brahmachari* in Jayrambati beat a cat, Mother warned him not to do so as She was in that cat also! She is the *antaryamini* in all of us. If we can remove our ‘I’ or ego, she will reveal Herself in us.

Holy Mother declared she was the



Pravrajika Bharatiprana Mataji

Mother of all — mother of both the virtuous and the wicked. To her, Sarat and Amjad were equally her sons. Sarat (Swami Saradananda) was a *brahmajñani* and Secretary of Ramakrishna Math and Mission, whereas Amjad was a dacoit. Physically, mentally, intellectually they were totally different. But as the undivided oneness of the *Atman*, they were the same. Mother had the *atma drishti*. So, both were equal in her eyes. She wanted us to cultivate this attitude — have this *Atma drishti*, which alone will free us from finding fault. She said, “Don’t see others’ faults, see your own faults.” If we see the faults of the mind and body of others — not seeing their real nature

as the ever-pure *Atman*, that is our fault. “No one is a stranger, my child. The whole world is yours — learn to make the whole world your own.” Mother wants to give us the *Atma jnana* — the One *Paramatman* appearing as the *Atman* in each being. Thus, she is *the bestower of knowledge, Jnanadayini*.

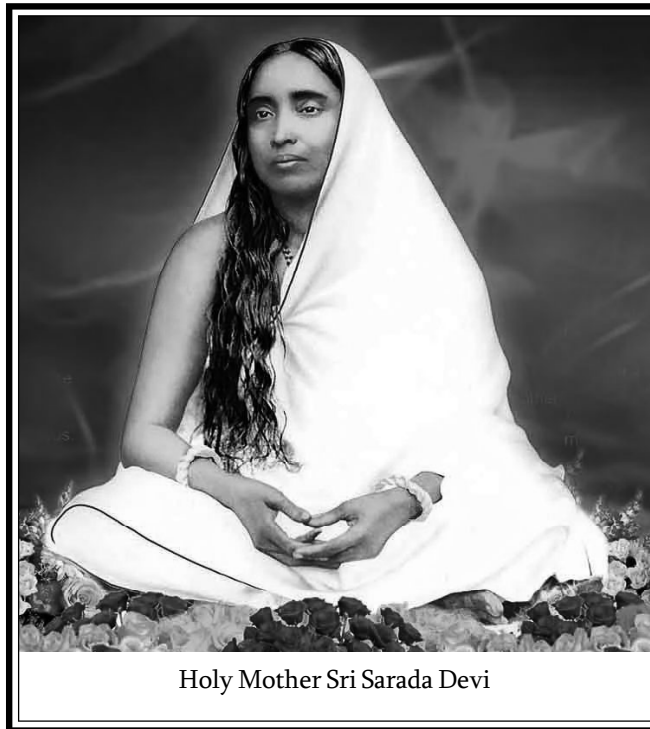
Being the Universal Mother, Sri Sarada Devi told her devotees that Sri Ramakrishna had this attitude of motherhood towards all, and he had left her to

to demonstrate and propagate this ideal of motherhood in the world. As the mother of all, she served the devotees — cooking and feeding them and providing whatever they needed — collecting milk from door to door for preparing tea for them, searching for vegetables for their meals and so on and so forth. Sri Ramakrishna demonstrated how a man

should long for God, how a man should pray and strive to realize God. He says, “God realization is the goal of human life”. Holy mother on the other hand demonstrated how God loves man. In the history of religions this has never been seen before. God’s love for man, for his creation has

never been demonstrated as has been done by Holy Mother. Humanity’s progress from the Stone Age till now has raised it to that state where human beings can understand and appreciate the teachings of the Holy Trio.

Swamiji promised that he would go on inspiring human beings till the whole world comes to know that it is one with God, which means that human beings will realize that they *are* God. Swamiji says, “I worship that God whom the ignorant



Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi

call by mistake man.” How would these “man - gods” be? They would be like the Holy Mother — brimful with selfless and divine love.

For being transformed from human beings to divine beings — to manifest the divinity already within, the first step is to clean our minds. Sri Ramakrishna says, pure mind and pure *Atman* are the same. Pure mind reflects the God within. How should we purify the mind? Holy Mother shows the way.

While she was in Jayarambati with her relatives, her niece Nalini, who was always fastidious about bathing, washing, and so on, once she happened to step on something dirty in the street. It was late evening in winter. She insisted that she would bathe in the pond. Everyone asked her not to do so for fear that she would catch a chill or even something more serious like pneumonia. They suggested that she merely wash her feet and change her clothes. But she would not listen. Holy

Mother also discouraged her. So she did not bathe, but would not enter her room nor would eat. Moaning with self-pity, she sat outside her room, on the verandah, in the cold. The others were fed-up with her; they took their meal and went to bed. But Mother could not go to sleep. She cajoled Nalini to change her clothes and sprinkle Ganga water on her body. But Nalini would not listen. Finally, Mother said to her, ‘touch me!’ By touching Mother’s body her body was purified.

Now Mother is no more in her physical body and for cleaning our bodies we have other means. But to purify our minds let us touch her, the *pavitrataswarupini* ma by our minds- think of her, talk of her, meditate on her, read about her. We will become pure in mind, and reflect or manifest the divinity within us thus fulfilling the aim of human life.

ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय
ममैव तेन हृदि यन्मया विदितम्

Bhagavad Gita. 10. 9 ❀



Who has understood the Holy Mother? You have heard about Sita, Savitri, Vishnupriya and Radharani. The Holy Mother occupies a far higher place. Not even the slightest trace of divine powers was noticeable in her...the exalted Empress has of her own accord appeared as the indigent woman. ...Infinite patience, unbounded mercy and above all the negation of even the slightest trace of egoism.

—Swami Premananda on Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi

Swami Vivekananda's Thoughts and Modern Management

SAROJ UPADHYAY AND SUDESHNA GUPTA

Swami Vivekananda, the great philosopher of modern India, championed many excellent modern ideas, which are highly relevant today. He was ahead of his time in thinking and action. He was a social reformer, a nationalist, a prolific writer and an orator par excellence, a great organizer, and planner. The Ramakrishna Order established under his stewardship, is a great spiritual, non-governmental organization, which has established its mettle beyond doubt over the past 125 years. The Ramakrishna Mission has come forward to help people in socio-economic crises both in India and abroad. Despite his philosophical mind, Swami Vivekananda was never indifferent to worldly reality. He was always led by his concern to elevate mankind and he acted accordingly. He believed that the evolution of human beings is a social rather than a biological process. It has not proceeded from any hereditary variation in the species but mostly by social, environmental, intellectual, and moral innovations as transmitted to individuals by imitation, customs, social practices, or education. His ideas, way of thinking, leadership style and action have much relevance in the context of modern management.

The Ideal and Inspirational Leader

An ideal leader is one who motivates his followers, in thought, word, and action. An example of Swami Vivekananda's style of motivational leadership is demonstrated by an incident in London in 1895. He was

supposed to deliver a lecture and was accompanied by Swami Saradananda, his brother disciple. But when Swamiji's turn came he announced Swami Saradananda's name. While, Swami Saradananda was taken aback and very surprised, getting inspiration from Swami Vivekananda, he gave a great speech. Similarly Swami Abhedananda, another brother disciple, was equally inspired and motivated by Swami Vivekananda and he gave a talk in London, while Swami Saradananda was sent to America for taking classes and delivering lectures on Vedanta. Swamiji emphasized the principle of empowerment and facilitation instead of the command and control approach, over a century before modern management realized this perspective. Management needs to have a democratic spirit of implementation. Swami Vivekananda introduced the decentralization of management, which empowers the lower rung of management and therefore, the process of work becomes a positive endeavour towards the decentralization of power. Swamiji's leadership style is closely reflected in the eminent management expert, Peter Drucker's basic principle, "Management by Objective".

Swamiji's style of leadership can be referred to as "servant leadership" in contemporary parlance. The term "servant leadership" was first coined in 1970 by Robert Greenleaf with an objective to stimulate thought and action for building a better and more caring society. A servant leader, as the name implies, is one who is

a servant first, meaning one who wants to serve first. He or she is endowed with unique attributes:

- A good listener.
- Empathizes with others.
- Heals the emotional and broken spirits.
- While generally aware, is also particularly self-aware.
- Convinces others rather than coerce.
- Has conceptual thinking, which leads to foresee the likely outcome of a situation consciously.
- Stewardship, which assumes the commitment to serve the need of others.
- Deeply committed to the growth of each and every individual within his or her institution.
- Builds a community among those who work within a given institution.

Swami Vivekananda had all the qualities, of an ideal and inspirational leader, at the highest and most exemplary level. He always extended a helping hand towards all his followers, with proper empathy in his mind. He could get the work done by ultimately setting an example with his direct participation.

He frequently wrote inspiring letters to Sister Nivedita and many others to help them to fight against spiritual and emotional crises. Sister Nivedita was inspired to sacrifice her entire life for the welfare of India. Swami Akhandananda was motivated and inspired to fight against famine and hunger in Murshidabad and send money to serve famine-stricken people there. The modern functions of management such as planning, organizing,

staffing, and directing are consistently present in the functioning of the Ramakrishna Mission.

Growth and Development of Human Beings

Swami Vivekananda had an excellent vision of the growth and holistic development of human beings and 'All that is needed to raise the consciousness of man to the highest possible level'. His human excellence can be classified as social excellence and spiritual excellence. Social excellence require three qualities:

1. Knowledge to uplift mankind
2. Capacity to put the knowledge into practice.
3. Strength of conviction, that is, *Shraddha*.

This is the essence of all good actions. According to Swami Vivekananda every individual is a perfect blend of social and spiritual excellence; every individual is unique and the character is his or her identity. He emphasized building up character through the process of education. He said, "We want the education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's own feet." Education is not simply the process of acquiring knowledge. It combines the strength of self-conviction and the depth of thought, which enables a person to reach character excellence. The character energy that comes out of human development, particularly through education, the faith in oneself enables one to overcome any difficulty or obstacle that comes in the way to reach the goal. Only those people with a high degree of character excellence nourish this world.

Thus character energy/excellence is an essential element for human excellence.

According to Peter Drucker, each person has inherent strengths and weaknesses. One cannot identify the strength of self, and identification of areas of inner strength can be made possible only through feedback analysis. A person's efficiency can be improved only in his areas of strength, and indiscriminate attempt to improve the weakness will lead to mediocrity.

Swami Vivekananda believed that efficacy of knowledge, strong faith in the Self, and personal conviction can raise the level of excellence. The Upanishads assert that all human beings can attain human excellence. Modern management discusses the concepts of vision, leadership, motivation, excellence in work, decision making, and planning. These elements are also discussed in the *Bhagavad Gita*. While Western concepts of management consider these things at the peripheral level, the *Bhagavad Gita* considers these issues from the grass-root level of human thinking. Once the basic thinking of a human being is improved, it automatically enhances the quality of actions and their results. In Swami Vivekananda's vision of

development, there had to be a combination of both material and spiritual



Swami Vivekananda

development of a human being. He considered knowledge as the manifestation of what is the innate character of the person. In this sense, Swami Vivekananda wanted the qualitative growth of human beings, which is quite similar to the modern management concept of TQM (Total Quality Management), which considers everyone in the organization engaged in a

continuous process of self-improvement in quality and to achieve satisfaction for all stakeholders in the system.

Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata, the noted industrialist, was so inspired by Swami Vivekananda that he wanted to establish a science institution in India, making Vivekananda as its key mentor. He wanted a new beginning in the life of the Indian people by invoking and developing the ascetic spirit combined with a scientific outlook.

Motivation towards Excellence

Swami Vivekananda always motivated everyone to attain a higher level of performance. In a letter that he wrote to Swami Saradananda in 1897, “Lastly you must remember I expect more from my children than from my brethren (that is, his brother disciples). I want each one of my children to be a hundred times greater than I could ever be. Everyone of you must be a giant — must, that is my word. Obedience, readiness, and love for the cause — and if you have these three, nothing can hold you back.” This method of motivating people is in consonance with Abraham Maslow’s “Hierarchy of needs”, a theory of psychological health; and Douglas McGregor’s Theory X and Theory Y, suggesting two aspects of people at work. Modern management is valueless unless it contributes to the upliftment of the society. This was understood by Swami Vivekananda in the last decade of the nineteenth century, when he advised John D. Rockefeller, one of the richest men in the USA at that time, to distribute his wealth among the poor. He told Rockefeller that although he had earned

this money, he was in reality a mere custodian; that God had given him all the wealth so that he might have the opportunity to help and do good to people. Redistribution of wealth by rich people and corporate entities is similar to the concept of improvement in social life through the execution of corporate social responsibility, which modern management lays great emphasis on.

Conclusion

Swami Vivekananda was well ahead of his times. His various ideas and actions hold great relevance with the modern management principles. His ideas led to the upliftment of the nation and the people. Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, and innumerable freedom fighters were inspired by Swami Vivekananda. Even today, we can see how relevant these ideas are in the context of nation building. He actually practised what we refer to as ‘management techniques’, for the effective development of the nation. ❀

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