

# **PRABUDDHA BHARATA** *or AWAKENED INDIA*

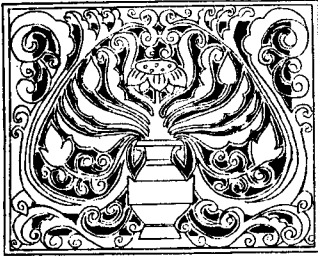


**MAY  
2003**



A Monthly Journal of the Ramakrishna Order  
Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

**VOL. 108**  
ISSN 0032-6178



Monthly Journal of Ramakrishna Order  
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

MAY 2003

## CONTENTS

Traditional Wisdom	241	The Srivaishnava Commentatorial Tradition	268
This Month	242	<i>Dr. Prema Nandakumar</i>	
<i>Editorial:</i> Befriending the Mind	243	Self-images	272
<i>Prabuddha Bharata</i> —100 Years Ago	248	<i>Swami Satyamayananda</i>	
Half a Decade in the Enchanting Environs of Along	250	Glimpses of Holy Lives	279
<i>Swami Kirtidananda</i>		Kaṭha Rudra Upaniṣad	281
Religion and Culture	256	<i>Swami Atmapriyananda</i>	
<i>S Srinivasachar</i>		Reviews	284
In South America: Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay	260	Reports	288
<i>Swami Smaranananda</i>			



Visit us at: [www.advaitaonline.com](http://www.advaitaonline.com) for a free internet edition

**Editorial Office:**  
Prabuddha Bharata  
Advaita Ashrama  
P.O. Mayavati, Via. Lohaghat  
Dt. Champawat 262 524, Uttaranchal  
E-mail: [awakened@rediffmail.com](mailto:awakened@rediffmail.com)

**Publication Office:**  
Advaita Ashrama  
5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014  
Ph: 91•33•22440898/22452383/22164000  
Fax: 22450050  
E-mail: [pb@advaitaonline.com](mailto:pb@advaitaonline.com)

Cover: Temples in Dakshineswar seen from the Ganga. The divine site of the first 'awakening'.

उत्तिष्ठत  
जाग्रत  
प्राप्य  
वरान्निबोधत ।

# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

Vol. 108

MAY 2003

No. 5

## Traditional Wisdom

### DISCRIMINATION

श्रेयश्च प्रेयश्च मनुष्यमेतस्तौ सम्परीत्य विविनक्ति धीरः ।  
श्रेयो हि धीरोऽभि प्रेयसो वृणीते प्रेयो मन्दो योगक्षेमाद्वृणीते ॥

Both the good and the pleasant present themselves before man. The wise (intelligent) one examines them well and discriminates between them. He prefers the good to the pleasant. The dull one chooses the pleasant out of greed (to acquire more) and desire (to protect what he has). (*Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 1.2.2)

To respect Sri Ramakrishna means to work in accordance with the example he set. No one can become spiritually great by just offering a few flowers to the Lord and showing a little emotion. Have intense devotion and be immersed in the thought of Sri Ramakrishna. Be discriminative. Exercise and cultivate your intellect. To this end Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'Be a devotee; but don't be a fool.' Ponder the sayings of Sri Ramakrishna and make them your own. Then and then alone the inner meaning of his teachings will become clear to you. (Swami Premananda)

You will have to discriminate between the real and the unreal. To keep one's discrimination alert is a great austerity. He who has learned to discriminate can successfully overcome lust and greed. So, cultivate your discrimination and conscience. How can you struggle against evil tendencies if your intellect is not trained to differentiate between good and evil? First clear out the rubbish that has entered the mind through the gates of the sense organs, and then put a 'No Admittance' sign in front of each gate. Those bad thoughts which ignore the notice and still come in, you will have to hand over to the police, which is your conscience. With the help of the police you must evict the impure tendencies from the mind and then install the Lord there. That is the way to conquer lust and desire. (Swami Adbhutananda)

---

---

## ∞ This Month ∞

**Befriending the Mind**, this month's editorial, discusses the nature of the mind and the means to discipline it.

**Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago** features excerpts from an article 'Religion As the Highest Art'.

In the fifth part of **Half a Decade in the Enchanting Environs of Along**, his absorbing reminiscences of the early days of the Ramakrishna Mission's work in Arunachal Pradesh, Swami Kirtidanandaji describes some more student-related incidents replete with lessons for teachers and teacher educators alike. The author is a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order and former editor of this journal. He lives in Vivekananda Ashrama, Ulsoor, Bangalore.

In his thought-provoking article **Religion and Culture** Sri S Srinivasachar stresses the need to go back to the fundamentals of religions like tolerance, nobility of conduct, harmony and peace. Rightly observing that religions cannot afford to promote violence and hatred, the author observes that 'tolerance and appreciation of the positive elements in other religions is the essence of good living and an investment in our pursuit of happiness'. Besides having a master's degree in history, the author is a trained archaeologist, and has a long track of meritorious service in the Governments of India and Karnataka. Till a few years back he was in the faculty of Ramakrishna Institute of Moral and Spiritual Education, Mysore, giving classes on Indian culture. He is settled in Mysore.

In his two-part travelogue **In South America: Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay**, Swami Smarananandaji describes his visit to

South America, and the Ramakrishna Mission's work there. The author is General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

Maṇipravāla is a mixture of Sanskrit and Tamil, a style adopted by commentators of the Vishishtadvaita school of Vedanta. In her learned article **The Srivaishnava Commentatorial Tradition**, Dr Prema Nandakumar traces the origin of the style and describes some renowned commentators who wrote in Maṇipravāla. The author is an eminent literary critic, translator and independent researcher. With over 25 books to her credit, including *A Study of Savitri*, she also writes fiction in English and Tamil .

The images corresponding to various levels of our personality, the real core of our personality, and the way to transcend the non-core images—in his article **Self-images** Swami Satyamayanandaji analyses all this from a new perspective. The author is a monk of the Ramakrishna Order, presently serving at Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata.

**Glimpses of Holy Lives** features incidents from the lives of (1) King Shikhidhvaja, who understood the kind of renunciation Self-knowledge calls for; (2) the saint Narhari Sonar from Maharashtra, whose fanaticism mysteriously gave way to true understanding.

**Kaṭha Rudra Upaniṣad** is the second instalment of a translation of this important Sannyasa Upanishad by Swami Atmapriyanandaji, Principal, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur. The elaborate notes are based on Upanishad Brahmayogin's commentary.

---

---

# Befriending the Mind

EDITORIAL

People look upon new years as the right time to turn over a new leaf. They have their own humble resolutions—to cultivate some good habits and kick some bad ones from 1 January. And they do go about earnestly implementing their resolutions from day one. This continues with success and failure for a couple of weeks. Their mental resistance to change is so much that many drop out and go back to square one, 31 December. Rightly did someone send a New Year greeting to his friend: ‘May all your troubles in the new year be as short-lived as your resolutions!’

Even during other times we resolve to do something, but our mind hardly cooperates with us. In our attempts at meditation, we are unaware most of the time of being dragged by the mind from the object of meditation. We are so much one with the mind that it takes some time to know that we were not on an excursion spree with the mind, but were trying to meditate. Nothing can perhaps more poignantly illustrate the non-cooperation ‘movement’ of the mind than the verse attributed to Duryodhana in the *Mahabharata*: ‘I know what is righteous, but cannot follow it; I know what is unrighteous, but cannot extricate myself from it.’<sup>1</sup> All this underlines one fact: we have our own agenda and the mind, its. The mind is not our friend after all, and making it one is not that easy. The problem is more pronounced during adolescence, when the mind simply runs riot. In the youth camps organized by centres of the Ramakrishna Order a frequently asked question is ‘how to achieve concentration of the mind?’

## The Mind Is Both Our Enemy and Friend

Arjuna is the ace archer in the *Mahabha-*

*rata*. How he won Draupadi’s hand in marriage is a testimony to his power of concentration. He had to shoot an arrow at a revolving target above him, by looking at its reflection in a pool of water below. And he successfully did it. It was the same Arjuna who complained to Sri Krishna in the Kurukshetra battlefield: ‘This mind is restless, turbulent, powerful and obstinate. Controlling it, I feel, is as hard as controlling the wind.’<sup>2</sup> When even an ace archer like Arjuna had problems with his mind, what to speak of lesser beings?

Sri Krishna gives an important instruction in the sixth chapter of the *Bhagavadgīta*: ‘A man should lift himself up by his own self; he should not lower himself; for he himself is his friend and he himself is his enemy.’ (6.5) And He proceeds to explain: ‘To him who has conquered himself, his own self is his friend, but to him who has not conquered himself, his own self is hostile, like an enemy.’ (6.6) In other words, a disciplined and controlled mind acts as one’s friend and an untrained mind behaves as one’s enemy.

## The Cause of Bondage and Freedom

According to the *Aṣṭāvakra Saṁhitā*, it is the mind that is responsible for one’s sense of freedom or bondage: ‘He who considers himself free is free indeed, and he who considers himself bound remains bound. The popular saying “As one thinks, so one becomes” is true indeed.’<sup>3</sup> We have an explanation in Sri Ramakrishna’s words:

The mind is everything. A man has his wife on one side and his daughter on the other. He shows his affection to them in different ways. But his mind is one and the same.

Bondage is of the mind, and freedom is also of the mind. A man is free if he constantly

thinks, 'I am a free soul. How can I be bound, whether I live in the world or in the forest? I am a child of God, the King of Kings. Who can bind me?' ... by repeating with grit and determination, 'I am not bound, I am free', one really becomes so—one really becomes free.<sup>4</sup>

Such is the importance of the need to befriend the mind. Hardly anyone would like the mind to act as his enemy. But, what does befriending the mind mean? Before discussing that it will be useful to analyse the place of mind in the human system.

### **Vedantic View: Self-Mind-Body**

According to Vedanta, man—and for that matter, any animal—is not just a body-mind organism, but is basically the Self—or the Atman, or the Spirit—which is eternal Being, eternal Consciousness and eternal Bliss, which animates the mind and the body. Being eternal, the Self survives the body when it is destroyed, and the mind too when it is destroyed in the state of Self-realization. The common view is that the body has the mind in it, which, in turn, has the Self in it. Those who are deeply identified with their body and mind cannot think otherwise. Vedanta says that Consciousness (Self, or the purified 'I') is the basic reality and the mind and the body appear in It, even as a movie does on a screen. An analysis of the three states of consciousness we pass through daily will help make things clear.

### **Waking, Dream and Deep Sleep**

In our waking state our five sense organs present to us five kinds of perceptions: sound, touch, sight, taste and smell. We are also aware of the functioning of the mind: cognition, emotion, feelings and volition. We pass through states of calmness, confusion, stress, strain, joy and misery. When we have pain in the heart, we know whether we need to visit a cardiologist or a psychiatrist: we are able to distinguish between physical and emotional pain. In short, we identify ourselves with the

body and the mind during the waking state.

In the dream state the body is inactive. Though involuntary activities like circulation of blood and breathing continue, the dreamer is not conscious of them, or of his body. For our analysis, we can say that the body is dead from the dreamer's point of view. He still experiences in dream the five kinds of perception. This proves two things: One, we have subtle sense organs corresponding to the gross organs (ears, skin, eyes, tongue and nose), which are inactive in the dream. Two, in the dream the mind makes its presence felt in two ways: The dreamer experiences pleasure and pain in the dream; and the dream itself is the result of impressions stored in the mind. In our analysis of waking and dream states two important facts emerge: (1) It is the same 'I' that has experiences in both the states; (2) While in the waking state we are identified with the body and mind, in dream we are identified only with the mind, for the body then ceases to exist (for the dreamer).

In deep sleep, both the body and the mind cease to exist. The 'I'—which experienced objects in the previous two states—is also apparently non-existent, since there are no objects of perception in sleep. What happens in deep sleep is known only when the person says on waking up, 'I slept happily; I didn't know anything.'<sup>5</sup> During sleep, the 'I' was free from the bondage of the body and mind, but could not perceive any object. Only the Self exists in sleep as the blissful substratum that links the personality that went to sleep with the one that awoke. That is why we say we slept happily. But the happiness in sleep is of an unconscious variety.

### **Mind Is the Connecting Link between the Spirit and the Body**

According to Vedanta, the mind is not the Self, or Spirit, because it is subject to change, whereas the Spirit is eternal and immutable. Mind is therefore matter, but, being unperceivable on dissecting a body, is of a dif-

ferent kind from the body.

The consciousness of the Self percolates through the mind to the sense organs (and the body). When the sense organs come in contact with their respective sense objects, perception results. Each sense organ is responsible for a particular perception, but the mind is responsible for all the perceptions, since it is common to all the sense organs. According to Sri Krishna, the mind is the most important of all organs.<sup>6</sup> When one becomes absent-minded, one does not see even if the eyes are open, or hear even if the ears are open, since the link between the mind and the eyes/ears has momentarily snapped.

### The Fourfold Function of the Mind

In sum, the Self is the core of human personality and the perception chain is Self-mind-sense organs-sense objects. In the *Bhagavadgīta* we find one more important link in this chain. 'The sense organs (gross and subtle) are said to be superior (to the body). Superior to the senses is the mind (manas); superior to the manas is buddhi, intellect. Superior to buddhi is He (the Self).'<sup>7</sup> Buddhi is not really a new link; it is included in the mind.

There are four important functions of the mind: deliberation, determination (discrimination and decision making), egoism and recollection. The mind is called manas when we deliberate on different choices to solve a problem. When we have determined the course of action and decided to act upon it, the mind is called buddhi. Buddhi is the important faculty in self-culture or character development. It is buddhi, again, that discriminates between good and evil, morality and immorality. The feeling of 'I' ('I know this', 'I shall act this way', and so on) is called the 'I' principle, or egoism (ahaṅkāra). The storehouse of all knowledge and impressions of our good and bad actions (and thoughts) is called chitta, from which we recollect things. These four aspects of the mind are not watertight compartments, but different function-based names given to the

same mind.

### The Significance of Saṁskāras

Our every thought, imagination or action leaves a subtle impression on the chitta. The impression deepens with every repetition of the thought, imagination or action. These impressions have two important properties: (1) *Jñānāśaya*, or cognition residue, resulting from perceptions. Also called *vāsanā*, or subtle desire, it produces recollections of the action (or thought) and impels the individual to repeat it; (2) *Karmāśaya*, or action residue, resulting from virtuous and vicious actions. This results in *karma-phala*, or fruit of action, and determines our birth, lifespan and the enjoyment and suffering in store for us. Thus, eating a sweet, rasagolla, for example, leaves an impression that (i) results from the knowledge of how the sweetness of rasagolla differs from that of, say, a laddoo, and prompts us to eat a rasagolla when we see or think of one; (ii) produces the fruit of action later. We have innumerable such saṁskāras in the chitta, accumulated not only in this life, but also in our earlier lives. The sum total of all these impressions—good and bad—determines what we are now, how we react to circumstances, our present work, and so on. Swami Vivekananda defined this sum total of impressions as a man's character.<sup>8</sup> It is enough to remember one important point about saṁskāras: Since our present life is governed by these past impressions, it logically follows that we can shape our future by taking care of the present—by being careful about our thoughts, imaginations and actions. Vedanta assures us that by augmenting our good impressions, we can determine the direction of our life; nay, we can 'drive' it towards our destiny.

### The Importance of Buddhi in Befriending the Mind

The power of reasoning, or discrimination, does not develop until a person grows in maturity and the mind is purified to some ex-

tent. Till discrimination develops in him, emotions can lead a man astray. He prefers the pleasant to the good. But what is pleasant need not be what is good. In fact, what is pleasant is bad in the long run, when pleasure is the result of the contact of sense organs with the sense objects. It is discrimination that helps us prefer the good to the pleasant. 'Both the good and the pleasant present themselves before man. The wise (intelligent) one examines them well and discriminates between them. He prefers the good to the pleasant. The dull one chooses the pleasant out of greed (to acquire more) and desire (to protect what he has).'<sup>9</sup>

Here lies the importance of a moral life right from one's childhood. Till discrimination develops in man, moral life does not come to him naturally. It becomes spontaneous to him only when he is able to control his emotions with the help of discrimination. Buddhi is the seat of decision making and discrimination. Will is its dynamic counterpart. Self-culture, or self-development, carrying out our resolutions, improving concentration of mind—all this begins with culturing the buddhi.

### Need for an Ideal

The more conscious and aware we are of our immediate goal, the greater are the chances of our disciplining the enemy mind. Every time the mind goes astray, one needs to remember the goal and bring it back to the task in hand. With an ideal in life, one becomes aware of one's mistakes and tries hard not to repeat them. A man without an ideal, however, has nothing with which to compare his thoughts and actions, and keeps committing mistakes. In Swami Vivekananda's powerful words, 'If a man with an ideal makes a thousand mistakes, I am sure that the man without an ideal makes fifty thousand. Therefore, it is better to have an ideal.'<sup>10</sup>

### Vantage Point for Mind Discipline

We saw that the Atman is superior to buddhi. Sri Krishna continues in the *Gita*:

'Therefore know Him who is superior to buddhi, control your self by the Self and destroy the enemy who comes in the guise of desire and is hard to overcome.'<sup>11</sup> The more we identify ourselves with the Self within, the more the buddhi develops and the more equipped we become to discipline the wayward mind. Elsewhere in the *Gita*, Sri Krishna advises Arjuna: 'Withdraw the fickle and unquiet mind from whatever causes it to stray away and restore it to the Self alone.'<sup>12</sup>

Though a beginner may not be able to identify with the Self, he can certainly refuse to identify with the wayward mind that leads him astray. He can think of himself as an entity different from the mind, deriving his strength from the Atman. He can also think that he is a child of God, and tell his mind that being an inheritor of God's strength and purity, how can he stray any more? Swamiji's disciple Sharat Chandra Chakravarty once told him that he was at times overcome by low spirits. Swamiji then told him, 'Then think like this: "Whose child am I? I associate with him and shall I have such weak-mindedness and lowness of spirits?" ... Be fully conscious of your dignity by remembering, "I am the disciple of such and such who is the companion-in-life of Shri Ramakrishna, the conqueror of lust and wealth." This will produce a good effect.'<sup>13</sup>

### Regularity in Daily Life

An important factor in mind discipline is having a fixed daily routine. We cannot afford to let the untrained mind brood over choices. Unable and unwilling to decide on any choice, the mind only ends up wasting so much of our time. Having fixed times for waking up, ablutions, spiritual practices, breakfast and other activities—despite resistance from the mind—can contribute to conservation of a lot of mental energy that can be utilized in creative pursuits. Incidentally, this is an important character-building component in the Ramakrishna Mission's residential educational institutions.



## Monitoring the Sensory Input

Another important point in mind discipline is to be careful in not accumulating new bad impressions (saṁskāras), for the existing stock is bad enough in resisting our attempts at discipline. This becomes possible when one monitors the quality of input through the five sense organs. When the nourishment (*āhāra*) is pure, the mind becomes pure, says the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*.<sup>14</sup> *Āhāra* means not only food taken in through the mouth. According to Sri Shankara, *āhāra* is anything that is taken in through the senses: sounds, sights, smells, and so on.

Since thoughts and actions leave mental impressions, we also need to be careful about our thoughts (and imaginations) and actions so that only good impressions result from them. Here are Swamiji's inspiring words:

You must always remember that each word, thought, and deed, lays up a store for you and that as the bad thoughts and bad works are ready to spring upon you like tigers, so also there is the inspiring hope that the good thoughts and good deeds are ready with the power of a hundred thousand angels to defend you always and for ever.<sup>15</sup>

## Self-conscious Activity

Doing one's work with an alert mind and not allowing it to flit during work, but identifying oneself with the higher Self is a great tool for mind discipline. As a by-product, such an attitude will also tone up the quality of work. Says Swamiji, 'When you are doing any work, do not think of anything beyond. Do it as worship, as the highest worship, and devote your whole life to it for the time being.' (1.71) And in his famous lecture 'The Mission of Vedanta' he enumerates the effects of self-conscious activity: 'Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.' (1.193)

\* \* \*

Befriending the mind calls for mind discipline. The task is as difficult as reversing the course of a river.<sup>16</sup> An apparently insurmountable task, it is reserved only for human beings; for only they can think about the higher Self, observe their thoughts and actions as witnesses, discriminate between what is conducive to the realization of the ideal and what is not. There cannot be a greater challenge than mind discipline, for that lends meaning to human life and helps in manifesting the divinity within. \*

## References

1. *Jānāmi dharmam na ca me pravṛttiḥ jānāmyadharmam na ca me nivṛttiḥ ...* —Mahabharata.
2. *Bhagavadgita*, 6.34.
3. *Muktābhimani mukto hi baddho baddhābhimānyapi; Kīrvadantiha satyeyam yā matiḥ sā gatirbhavet.* —Aṣṭāvakra Saṁhitā, 1.11.
4. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1985), 138.
5. *Sukham-aham-asvāpsam, na kiñcid-avediṣam.*
6. *Gīta*, 10.22.
7. *ibid.*, 3.42.
8. See *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 1.54.
9. *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 1.2.2.
10. *CW*, 2.152.
11. *Gīta*, 3.43.
12. *ibid.*, 6.26.
13. *CW*, 7.233.
14. *Āhāra-śuddhau sattva-śuddhiḥ.* —*Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 7.26.2.
15. *CW*, 2.225.
16. Sri Shankara's commentary on the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 2.1.1.



# Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago



May 1903

## Religion As the Highest Art

The lower the animal, the more is its enjoyment in the gross objects of the senses. Its superiority is measured by the development of its perception of the fine. Ignorance sees manifoldness only, but knowledge generalizes the particulars and, at first, posits in theory a unity running through the many and then actually discovers that unity. True civilization consists in the culture of the two faculties, those of the perception of the fine and of discovering a unity behind variety.

What is Art? It is the spiritualization of Nature, the creation of the beautiful as opposed to the useful, called forth by the desire for the fine in man. It is that indefinable *ness* in a thing, which cannot be degraded to the rank of the useful.

When art presents different representations in a group, its success is commensurate with its ability to present a central theme, to show each of the representations severally and, at the same time, arrange them in a manner that each is united with, and contributes its quota to develop and bring into prominence, the central theme. The higher the art, the finer are its representations, the more prominent is its central theme in a group and the greater is its capability of unifying the different parts of the group in its central theme.

Take for instance drama, which is regarded by some as the climax of literary art. Its excellence is determined by the degree in which the characters succeed in reflecting the fine element of human nature—the subtle feelings and thought life of man and by the manner in which the subsidiary characters unite in helping to develop the part assigned to the hero. The hero's character should grow like an organism, without labour, without a break and its consecutive phases should merge into one another in a smooth continuous flow. ...

We do not so much admire the picture as a work of art, in which the artist delineates with his pencil all the ideas meant to be conveyed, as the one in which a few ideas in the brush conspire to suggest the rest. Suggestions satisfy the desire for the fine more than concrete representations. In a group, the several parts ought to combine to develop a common idea, or, if not thus associated, suggested collectively by all the parts.

Besides fineness and unity of theme, another and by far the most essential condition of art is that it must neither be the same as Nature nor contradict her. If it imitates Nature, its utility evidently ceases, for then it does not create a new idea but repeats the ideas already present in Nature. There is certainly great credit in faithful imitation of Nature. But the aim of art ought not to be self-glorification by display of its skill in such imitation but service to humanity by addition of new things to its stock of pleasures supplied by Nature.

Art ought to be an improvement on Nature, but such improvement, to be intelligible to man, must not be contrary to his ordinary experience. In other words, art must not be unnatural. Unnaturalness is a sure sign of degradation of art. Such art, instead of being a source of pleasure to man, becomes an unintelligible monstrosity. True enjoyment being impossible without clear understanding, such art fails to accomplish its main object, namely, the creation of things of joy. Art is like a full-blown lotus, and Nature, the muddy bottom whence the stem of the lotus draws its nourishing sap. To live, art must be always connected with and nourished by Nature. Its death is certain with the cessation of the connection.

Religion is the highest art, because in it the conditions of art are satisfied in the best manner conceivable to man and because it comprises in its fold all other arts, being the genus, as it were, of which the other arts are species.

God is the central theme of religion as an art. He is the finest conception, capable of realization not by the senses but by the most perfected mind. The central theme of religion is, therefore, the finest imaginable representation.

God is the ultimate unity underlying all variety and as the unities of the lower arts comprehend their respective varieties, so He, as the ultimate Unity, comprehends all other unities as well as varieties. The truly religious man sees behind the manifold diversities the divine Unity, not in thought but in a more intense sense than the diversities themselves are seen. Hence the artistic unity of religion is the most general and, therefore, the highest.

God is not only Nature but something more, interpenetrating Nature. 'As the one fire, having entered the world, manifests itself in every form, so the One, the inmost Soul of all beings, manifests Himself in every form and *is yet more besides* (*Katha Upanishad*, V.9). To the man who has not realized God, conceptions of Him may appear unlike his experiences of Nature. But to the man who realizes Him, He is not unnatural or supernatural but immanent in Nature. The whole of Nature assumes a different meaning to that man and he sees Nature in God and God in Nature. The theme of religion is no longer unnatural but a reality ever present in and bathing in celestial beauty and life every part of Nature.

Man's misery and sorrow come from his selfishness and attempts to establish kinship with the transitory incidents of an eternally changeful world. Religion brings him face to face with an Infinity before which his little self melts into insignificance, with a Permanence, the vision of which exposes unmistakably the impermanence of the world and destroys the folly of his endeavours to have abiding relationships with it. With his little 'me' left, he lives in the world, no more a victim of burning desires for self-assertion with its attendant sorrows, and the world does no more weigh upon him with that tremendous seriousness, for he has seen through its transience. Life to him has become a play, a joy, the *beautiful-without-utility* of religion as an art.

Hinduism does not stop here. It is not satisfied with the realization of the Godhead as a universal unity only. The sweetness of divine Unity is, as it were, the substance out of which Hinduism makes many particular preparations, suited to different tastes. They are the Hindu gods and goddesses. They are like so many figures carved out of the rock of Divinity. To the beginner in religion, the deities are means of realization of the Unity. Besides, they have a deeper meaning. Once the Unity is realized, they are not looked upon as means but as various modes of enjoying the Unity. Milk can be enjoyed in shapes such as curd, cream, butter, ghee, cheese, &c; even so, Kali, Durga, Shiva, Vishnu and other deities are the many shapes in which the advanced devotee enjoys the one God. People with no art in them or with whom religion is talk and not reality, fail to grasp this deep import of what they call 'idolatry'. Verily was it said 'He that hath eyes to see, let him see.' Let the shapes and forms of these deities be more *artistic*, and Hinduism will achieve the consummation of religion as an art, which other religions are too young to conceive.

Every attempt at fineness or unity is a step towards the finest and highest Unity, and the goal is reached when that last unity is obtained. Ordinarily, religion signifies this final goal. Taking religion in a broader sense, every one of our attempts at art, in music, painting, writing, speech, dress, food or any of our doings, is an assertion of the desire in man for religion. Knowingly or unknowingly, every artist is more or less religious and every art more or less a religion.

\*

—A Sannyasin

---

---

# Half a Decade in the Enchanting Environs of Along

SWAMI KIRTIDANANDA

## Part 2: The Curtain-raiser (*continued*)

**A**nother lesson I learnt was that the children, even those in kindergarten classes, were keen observers and good judges of human nature. I found this out for myself once to my utter dismay and consternation. Those days I was handling their classes myself. First, it was a delight in itself listening to the innocent tittle-tattle of these tiny tots, just four or five years old. Second, it kept me abreast of the current events of the town. As the children chattered on endlessly about what they had seen or heard in their households, quite innocent of their implication, you gathered a lot of information about the outside world.

Moreover, I was trying a new experiment to see whether these children could not be taught the three Rs—which was all that was needed at that stage—playfully, without the burden of a bundle of books. If at all, they had to carry just three printed copybooks and textbooks. It was not a new idea. Everyone speaks of it these days. But when the time for action comes, everyone prefers to fall in line with the opinions of the majority.

### How Children Sized up Elders

So, while the children chattered they would not be idle. They learnt handwriting or did their exercises in English or arithmetic, which did not require their undivided attention. Even history and geography were taught through music. A Hindi writer had composed a poem listing all the rivers, hills and cities of India as also the great historical personalities, in a rhyme. This was set to music, and by the

time the children had memorized it, they would have got a good picture of India. There was no emphasis on too many do's and don'ts. Suddenly, they would say, 'We shall sing or dance.' 'Yes,' I would say, 'Do that for five or six minutes. Then get set to work again.' Thus it would go on just for three hours a day. Then they were let off to play outside until lunch-time. I appointed a new Bengali teacher to teach them. I was explaining all these things to the new teacher in the classroom. The children were absolutely quiet during the time. I was surprised and said jokingly, 'What! You fellows make a lot of a noise when I am holding classes. But in the presence of the new teacher you are absolutely quiet!' One Usha Chowdhury, a Bengali girl hardly five, who was their leader, said simply in Bengali, '*Amra dekchi*, We are watching', which meant 'We are sizing up the new teacher.' That is, they were assessing the extent of his knowledge of English and Hindi, which were the main languages taught in our school, and his capacity to teach. If he replied only in Bengali to my words in English or Hindi, then, they would conclude automatically that his knowledge of these languages was poor. Also, they could assess his nature: whether he was strict or if they could afford to take liberties with him. All these were implied in that Bengali expression and the way she said it. How we delude ourselves into thinking that they are not observant or do not understand!

### Their Reaction to a Harmless Fib

Apropos of what we are talking about,

two striking incidents come to my mind here. A certain Irim Lingi, hardly three or four years old, was once admitted to the hospital due to fever. But he did not like the stay in the hospital. The swami who had gone to admit him, just to put him off, told him: 'Stay for today in the hospital. Tomorrow I will come and take you back.' The boy completely believed him. When the swami did not turn up for a week he was very angry and upset. So he collected a heap of stones and kept it ready to throw at the swami when he next went to see him. He started doing so with the words: 'You Swamiji, you tell lies!'

### Homework in the Class!

We were then experimenting with the vexing question of homework, which continues to exercise the minds of students everywhere, but from which they shy away for obvious reasons. For one thing, it is acknowledged that it puts unnecessary burden on the young minds. Secondly, the real purpose of it is actually nullified by the fact that more often than not it is the parents or the private tutors who do the homework. Even if that is not so and the children themselves do it, the teachers in the school have hardly any time to go through the homework and correct the mistakes, tied up as they are with the class work and the urgency to cover the syllabus within the stipulated time. Suppose the teachers do take the trouble to correct them in their homes, working extra hours, the children themselves hardly have the patience to go through the often illegible or clumsily done corrections or to follow the instructions of the teachers properly. That is my personal experience. As such, can it not be dispensed with altogether or suitably altered and replaced by some other method of judging the extent of the students' grasp of the class lessons? No harm in giving it a try, we thought.

So, we reduced the number of students in each class to the barest minimum, 25 or 30 at the most; and also reduced the number of lessons to be covered and the number of periods each teacher had to handle. The time thus saved was utilized to get the so-called homework done in the class itself, and the corrections carried out in front of each boy or girl, pinpointing the mistake that he or she had made. This assured, on the one hand, that the homework was done by the students themselves, and, on the other, they were able to understand their mistakes and the corrections effected. That is, when the teacher had finished teaching the first lesson, he would set them to do the homework, and he himself would prepare for the next lesson meanwhile. When the next lesson was over, and the children were

***'No, mummy, I shall feed myself. When you feed, you push everything down my throat in a hurry; I have to gulp it all down at one stroke, willy-nilly! No, I shall pick and choose for myself whatever I want and eat it leisurely.'***

doing the homework relating to that lesson, he would call each boy or girl and correct the homework of the first lesson and so on. To assure me that this procedure had been followed, the teachers would submit to me the notebooks of the children by turns.

### Children Could Not Be Taken for Granted

Once a Hindi teacher, named Mr Bhatt, had asked them to write an essay on 'The Best Teacher in the Class: Why?' And as if to help them in preparing it, he had supplied them with some catchwords and phrases or sentences and subtitles, one of which was: 'Which teacher is the closest to the Secretary Swamiji, the Head of the Institution?' His expectation was that the boy would automatically mention *his* name, preferring him to the rest. But

one boy, Tami Rumi—he had finished his postgraduate degree in medicine when I saw him last in 1993 and was the District Medical Officer in Along, who at the time of this incident was in standard IV or V—had frankly written, ‘Mr Bhatt acts and behaves as if he is the closest to Swamiji. But, *in his heart of hearts*, I think he *dislikes* or *hates* him most!’ Mr Bhatt was startled when I pointed this out to him, and chided him for his presumptuousness in underestimating the precociousness and intelligence of the children.

### A Novel Way to Feed Unwilling Children

We were continuously learning our lessons. I mentioned one Colonel Patwardhan in the first part of this article. Once I had gone on one of my usual visits to his place. The table had been laid for tea and snacks in the open spacious lawn. As we sat down to have them, his second son, Pinto, just two or three years

***‘What happened to me, Swamiji? You had always been telling me that I had a great future, if only I put forth necessary effort. So do all the professors tell me. But I have betrayed the trust of everyone!’ Saying this, he broke down completely.***

old, came now and then to pick up something or other from the table, disturbing our conversation. His mother was annoyed and told him, ‘Pinto! Come here, I shall feed you’. He sharply retorted: ‘No, mummy, I shall feed myself. When *you* feed, you push everything down my throat in a hurry; I have to gulp it all down at one stroke, willy-nilly! No, I shall pick and choose for myself whatever I want and eat it leisurely.’ Wasn’t he correct?

On another occasion, this Colonel Patwardhan’s assistant, Major Parthasarathy, who hailed from Karnataka, and Mrs Parthasarathy, who belonged to Maharashtra, complained to me that they had difficulty in feed-

ing their boy, who was also two or three years old. I just suggested, ‘Instead of forcing him to eat, why don’t you prepare whatever delicacies you can make and simply keep them within his reach? Let him pick up for himself and relish whatever he wants, whenever he wants. Don’t force him to eat!’ The advice worked. Funnily, he would run away from me in the beginning when we first met and hide behind the doors. That was the result of the practice followed by mothers or other elders in South India to frighten their crying children that they would give them away to wandering sadhus! How injurious such methods of keeping the children in control are! Later he was admitted to our school. In the first year, he did not do well in the class. Probably, he even failed in one or two subjects. However, I felt that it would dampen his spirits if we detained him in the same class. So I requested the swami who was in charge of his section to push him up somehow. Again, my suggestion worked. From then on he started progressing well.

### Different Strokes for Different Folks

In the case of another boy, Ujjwal Chowdhury, it worked well in reverse. He was a Bengali boy who had studied only in Bengali medium right from standard I. Ours was an English-medium school, with Hindi as the second language. His knowledge of both the languages was very poor, whereas even in kindergarten classes our boys were very well acquainted with both, as one can very well understand from the following incident. Irim Lingi, whom I just mentioned, was in kindergarten then. I told him once, ‘Lingi, go and tell Pegu Sir that he should meet me at 1 o’clock.’ A long sentence, indeed, for a small boy! I asked him to repeat it. He did so correctly and conveyed the message to the said teacher unerringly. But this boy Chowdhury was al-

ready in standard V. We explained the position to his father, and demoted the boy to a lower class. He was naturally very much upset at the time. But years later, in 1978 or '79, he travelled all the way down to Madras (now Chennai), where I was then in charge of another educational institution of the Mission, only to *thank me*, as he told me, for what we had done. He had stood first that year in the whole state in the matriculation examination conducted by the Central Board of Secondary Education, and ninth in the whole of India. But for our demoting him years back, he said, he would not have earned the present distinction.

### Double Double Promotions!

The case of another Duggam Ete was pathetic. As I said, the first three months after my arrival at Along, I was doing practically nothing. I did not pay any attention to the school work either. The teachers themselves attended to everything. Somehow this boy failed in standard I. Next year, when I took things into my hands, I saw that this boy was very studious. He stood first in the monthly tests we were conducting regularly, then in the quarterly, half-yearly and final examinations, and always in every subject. Maybe, we thought, this was because he had already studied the subjects the previous year. Still, we did not want him to suffer unnecessarily for any fault of ours. So, we gave him a double promotion. Now, he was in standard III, the same standard he would have been in had he passed standard I in the first attempt. But he repeated the performance here too in every test and in every subject. Mind you, he had not studied the standard II books at all. So, we gave him another double promotion. He had gone ahead of the standard he would have been in in the normal course, that is, to standard V. Again, he repeated the performance in every test and in every subject. We wanted to give him another double promotion, but restrained ourselves. We thought enough was

enough; we should not tempt the devil too much. Unfortunately, he could not later on put up with the ragging at the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, and returned home, I heard. A tragic end to a brilliant career, indeed!

### An Exceptional Student Going Astray

This was one of the most painful and frustrating experiences: boys showing great promise in the early period falling by the way-side later on for some inexplicable reason, either because of the lack of required effort on their part or forced by some extraneous circumstances. It created great anguish in our hearts. The case of Tujo Angu, mentioned earlier, is the most typical in this respect. Right from the beginning, he was most brilliant in the class as well as in the playground. Added to that, he was talented in music. Gifted with a melodious voice, his *Gita* chanting was really the pick of the piece. The sonorous vibrations of his rich baritone voice are still ringing in my ears. We even purchased a tanpura for him and were toying with the idea of sending him to the Lucknow School of Music for higher training. Once he had been to Belur Math. It was an ekadashi day. The usual singing of *Ramanama Sankirtana* was in progress. The swamis could not believe their eyes and ears when they saw him singing without the help of the book. It was all in his memory—these verses as well as those from five chapters of the *Gita*, besides many songs in Bengali, Sanskrit and Hindi. Tidy to a fault, he was orderly and meticulous in whatever he did, whether it was keeping his clothes clean or the books and other things always well arranged on the shelf provided for him. Unlike others he had not to be goaded into doing these things constantly. He did everything of his own accord. We used to wonder how he managed to retain the blue colour of his cotton shorts and the sheen on his shirts fresh throughout the year. Even children from well-to-do families of the plains could not do so for more than a few days, as

their shorts would be dotted with patches in no time with one or two washes. And we gazed in wonder at his inborn religious instinct. The photos of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda ever adorned his table. With great care and devotion he would punctiliously decorate them with flowers and other ingredients both morning and evening, and burn incense sticks before them without fail. Surprisingly, nobody asked him to do it. But later, when he was studying in a college in Delhi, he fell into evil ways, taking to drugs and the like. I was then in Chandigarh, and he came there specially to meet me, and unburdened himself of the unbearable misery he was experiencing because he had belied our hopes. Weeping bit-

***We eagerly waited for your lecture to end.***

***Now, there is a spiritual vacuum in my heart, and how I long for the return of those days, of which I cherish the most valuable memories!***

***How I wish now to participate in such programmes as your invitation speaks of, which I detested earlier.***

terly, he made a clean breast of his woes and regretfully said, bemoaning his fate, 'What happened to me, Swamiji? You had always been telling me that I had a great future, if only I put forth necessary effort. So do all the professors tell me. But I have betrayed the trust of everyone!' Saying this, he broke down completely. Still it was not too late to mend matters, I told him. He did improve somewhat, I heard later on, but could not come up to our expectations.

### **Some Did Not Measure up to the Mark**

Then, there was the instance of Ginya Bomjen, who was the favourite of all. He used to knock away the prizes in competitions, even in those conducted by the local Bengali

Association, besides being very studious and methodical in his work. He got his degree in medicine all right. But we were expecting him to top the grade in IAS or some other competitive examination. In the case of the girls, I poignantly recall one Edi Gyama, among others, who was quick-witted and sprightly, but had to discontinue her studies because of the social strictures passed in her society. These were a great hindrance to the progress of girls in general.

### **The Servant Boy Whom People Took for a Teacher!**

However, there were some encouraging signs too. Worth mentioning here is the singular achievement of Bingom, who braved all odds to complete successfully her matriculation course in our institution. Or take, for example, the case of the servant boy Tage Ngomdir. He was very ingenious in playing truant and avoiding performing his duties properly; more so in giving explanations for his frequent escapades and peccadilloes. He would go away on leave for two or three days, but would invariably be late in joining duty again. I would send for him to explain, but he would not appear immediately. He would wait for my temper to cool down. In the meantime he would have thought out the answers for my queries. He would go off in the evenings with his young wife for a walk, so well dressed up that everyone in the town except his own folk would think that he was a teacher in the school! In the mornings one of his duties was to collect the newspaper, *The Times of India*, at the checkpoint of the BRTF, through whom it used to be routed to us because we would receive it more speedily than if it had come by post. When he would present himself there on his bicycle, he would not go inside, but wait outside. The peons of the BRTF would



come running outside to hand him the newspaper. He had given them the impression that he was on the teaching staff of our school, in which their officers' children were also studying. In fact, he could neither read nor write.

Yet, seeing that he was clever, though in a negative way, I thought of sending him, along with a batch of other students, to Ranchi, where our centre was giving training in modern methods of farming under the name Divyayan Krishi Vigyan Kendra. The minimum qualification for admission there was standard VIII. Thus he was not qualified for the training. However, the swami-in-charge readily agreed when I apprised him of the facts and told him that I wanted to give this boy a chance to improve his prospects. He did well, and got a certificate that enabled him to find a remunerative job in the newly started Kambang Farm near Along. Then, when I last heard about him, he had slowly drifted to politics and had become the President of the local Congress (S).

### Life Awakens Spiritual Sensibilities

Quite comforting, too, was the exemplary behaviour of some children, though academically lagging behind, like Reke Bagra, Reli Loyi, Mardo Padu and several others, who were all very polite and dutiful. And their words of gratitude to us for what little we did for them were of great consolation in times of distress and when we were disheartened.

Here I specially remember Tagong Ketan. Along with another boy, Gumser Angu, we sent him to join the military school in Imphal. Years later, sometime during 1981–89, while I was in Chandigarh he came to know about it and wrote a friendly letter. I wrote a loving letter in reply and enclosed with it a printed copy of the programmes at Chandigarh ashrama. His reply in response was electrifying, indeed. He had completed his engineering degree course by then, but was not happy for some unknown reason. He wrote among other things: 'Swamiji, you remember you used to take us to various functions in Along like Sri Krishna Janmashtami and Guru Nanak Jayanti observed at the Army headquarters or elsewhere in the town, where *we* were to sing and *you* to lecture? The singing part was all right, but when you started lecturing, how boring it used to be! Much of what you said, if not all, went above our head. We could not make head or tail of it, and your mannerisms and mode of delivery did not make things easier for us either. We eagerly waited for your lecture to end. Now, *there is a spiritual vacuum in my heart*, and how I long for the return of those days, of which I cherish the most valuable memories! How I wish now to participate in such programmes as your invitation speaks of, which I detested earlier. But will it ever be?'

*(to be continued)*

### Yardstick

A man said to his parish priest, 'My dog died yesterday, Father. Could you offer a Mass for the repose of his soul?' The priest was outraged. 'We don't offer Masses for animals here,' he said sharply. 'You might try the new denomination down the road. They'll probably pray for your dog.'

'I really loved that little fellow,' said the man, 'and I'd like to give him a decent send-off. I don't know what it is customary to offer on such occasions, but do you think five hundred thousand dollars would do?'

'Now wait a minute,' said the priest. 'You never told me your dog was a Catholic!'

—*Anthony de Mello, The Prayer of the Frog, 2.129*

---

---

# Religion and Culture

S SRINIVASACHAR

**T**he second idea that I learnt from my Master and which is perhaps the most vital, is the wonderful truth that the religions of the world are not contradictory or antagonistic. They are but various phases of one eternal religion. ... this religion is expressing itself in various countries in various ways. Therefore we must respect all religions and we must try to accept them all as far as we can.<sup>1</sup>

It is the misfortune of our present generation that these words of knowledge and wisdom spoken over a century ago should still be ringing in our ears with even greater relevance than when they were uttered. In this age of science and reason in which we are supposed to be living, one would expect the values generated by religion to unite rather than divide mankind under pernicious pressures of political expediency. The disease of disaffection is infecting millions of ordinary people in many parts of the world. That India wedded to democracy and tolerance should be a victim of hatred and crimes bringing disgrace to religion is a major tragedy of our times. Probably at no time in recent history has it become so imperative as it is now to look at the religions of the world as messengers of tolerance and good will.

## Tolerance

Tolerance in matters of faith is a civilizational value. It secures an attitude of mind that makes for expanded knowledge at individual levels and ensures at social and national levels peaceful pursuit of material advancement. Tolerance has been a singular feature of India's cultural tradition. What Swami Vivekananda said a century ago is but an echo of what his remote ancestors had said as an article of religious faith and a policy of gover-

nance. This article seeks to bring together as a tribute to Swamiji unassailable evidence not only from the cultural tradition of India but also from every other great religion. '*Ekam sat viprā bahudhā vadanti*, The truth is one, but learned people call it by different names' is an oft-quoted *Rigvedic* statement. There is another statement, '*Devānām dānavānām ca sāmānyam adhidaivatam*', which means that devas and danavas (sworn traditional enemies) worship the same God.

An exact Sanskrit equivalent to the word 'religion' is not available. The word is derived from the Latin *religio* which is a combination of two ideas, *re* meaning 'again' and *ligare* meaning 'to bind'. Together they mean 're-bind' or restore man's relationship with something from which he remains separated. The idea of renewal or rebuilding which is inherent in the term 'religion' would also suggest that by the strength of faith and personal effort our relationship with something else that has been allowed to lapse can be restored. In early Christianity, which gave currency to this word, we learn that it meant 'the binding of monks to monastic vows'.

## Basic Agreement among Religions

Notwithstanding the fact that the religions of the world differ from one another in several recognizable ways, we feel consoled by the fact that so far as human values are concerned, they are in basic agreement. It is the aim of every religion to reconcile one's mundane life with spiritual craving, common to every person. The Holy Koran makes a remarkable statement which, in essence, confirms the *Rigvedic* mantras cited above, and it is in the following words:

This that I am now uttering unto you,

Within the ancient seers' writing too;  
 For teachers have been sent to every race  
 Of human beings; no community is left  
 Without a Warner and a guide.  
 And ought of difference we do not make  
 For disagreement; there is none twixt them,  
 Between these prophets. All that have  
 Been sent have been so sent  
 But one truth to proclaim:  
 ... ..  
 There is no other God than I.<sup>2</sup>

Sri Krishna tells Arjuna in the *Bhagavad-gita*, 'To but one goal are marching everywhere all human beings, though they may seem to walk on divergent paths. That goal am I'.<sup>3</sup>

To be dispassionate would mean not merely to be tolerant of other religions, but to show genuine respect for them. Over twenty-five centuries ago, Emperor Ashoka had these

***If in the name of religion mindless cruelties have been committed, as indeed they have been, the reason is that in such cases it is not that religion has failed mankind, but man has failed religion.***

immortal words carved in stone:

Man can keep self-control best when he controls his tongue ... let them not extol themselves and disparage others on any account. For this is conceit; and it is better to try to extol other sects than to disparage them in any manner. By doing this, they become greater and gain the good will of others. ... It is advisable to respect each other and, for everyone, to accept the lessons of others. By doing this they will increase their knowledge by transmitting to each other what every one of them knows.

Nearly a thousand years later, Prophet Mohammed said in one of the remarkable statements made in the Koran:

To every people have we given a law  
 And a way whereby they may reach to God.  
 If God had wished it so, He would have  
 Made you all one people.  
 He has not done so,  
 Wherefore let every people on the way  
 Prescribed for it, press forward to  
 Good deed, and let none laugh

At any other man; perchance they  
 May be better than themselves.

### **The Need to Go to the Fundamentals**

The real problem with us is that we treat other religions in terms of their outward symbols: how they dress, to whom they pray, what language they speak, the social customs they follow, their religious architecture, and so on. If religious fundamentalism means going to the fundamentals of religion and not a mindless hatred of other religions, we should welcome it. Over a period of time many religions have accommodated changes in their practices and even in some of their doctrinal beliefs, but none of them has preached that there are different Gods for different peoples. If in the name of religion mindless cruelties have been committed, as indeed they have been, the reason is that in such cases it is not that religion

has failed mankind, but man has failed religion. History is replete with gory tales of jihads, crusades and dharma-yuddhas. They remain implanted in the ethnic memories of mankind. Any attempt to resurrect ancient animosities that made these conflicts possible in the name of religion would invite disaster. There is a verse in the *Vishnu Dharmottara Purana* which says, 'He who listens to all the words of dharma, he who reveres all the gods without intolerance, and he who has conquered prejudice and hatred, obtains the favour of Vishnu.'<sup>4</sup>

### **Nobility of Conduct, the Keynote of All Religions**

The fundamental value of dharma, or righteous living, preached by all the religions of the world is astonishingly similar. It will not be out of place to draw attention to such similarities. There is a well-known admonition in the *Mahabharata*: 'A person is considered su-

perior only by virtue of his noble qualities. No one becomes superior merely by birth. Do we consider the great poison *kālakūṭa* non-poisonous because it was born in the Milky Ocean?<sup>5</sup>

The point that there is one God and many ways to worship Him is made out by every religion. Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavadgita*: 'Those who worship other gods with faith, they too adore but Me behind those forms, unknowing yet of the one direct way.'

There is an almost parallel statement of Prophet Mohammed: '*At-turqu il-Allahi kan nufusu bani Adama*, There are as many ways to God as souls, as many indeed, as the breaths of Adam's sons.'

When Prophet Mohammed was asked by a follower to name the one basic thing or principle which supports all virtues, the Prophet touched his tongue and said: 'Control the reign of this sense organ over yourself ... men are hurled headlong into fires of hell by loads of evils that their tongues have heaped.'<sup>6</sup>

Zoroaster says: '... who knows the self is

### ***Tolerance and appreciation of the positive elements in other religions is the essence of good living and an investment in our pursuit of happiness.***

wise, controls his tongue, and tells the truth in soft, convincing words.'<sup>7</sup>

The *Manu Smriti* echoes the same admonition to everyone in the following words:

Since all thoughts and feelings are enrapt  
In words, and are conveyed by them to  
others,

He who misuses words empisons all;  
Let the wise man then guard well all his  
speech.

If ye have to instruct, direct command,  
Use speech that may be smooth and soft and  
sweet.

Whose mind and speech are pure and well  
controlled,

Only he finds the fruit of final truth.  
Touch not another to the quick, though you  
Yourself are hurt; let malice sway you not;  
And carefully eschew the speech of pride,

Unsocial, which perturbs and repels.

There is a sublime Sufi saying that distinguishes man from animals:

Separatism, difference, exclusiveness,  
Characterize at once the animal mind;  
The soul of oneness is the soul of man,  
The soul of all-inclusive sympathy,  
Of unity and non-separateness.

Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi, the famous Sufi saint, says in his *Masnawi*: 'By loving wisdom doth the soul know life. What has it got to do with senseless strife of Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Arab or Turk?'

### **The Inner Truth behind Outward Differences**

The distinction between outward differences and the sameness of the inner Truth has been emphasized by every great religion. In Sanskrit we have the word *pradhāna*, or mandatory, and *gauna*, or optional, in religious matters. In Islam we have the words *asl* and *furu* of religion. In his *Masnawi*, the king of

Sufis says, 'The marrow from the Koran have I drawn, and the dry bones unto the dogs have I cast.'

Sri Krishna ridicules in plain language those who harp on outer rituals and neglect what is the essence of wisdom in the following words: 'They who are always praising Vedic rites and ceremonies, saying there is nothing else worth thinking of, are very foolish men.'<sup>8</sup>

### **The Way Out of Strife**

When we mistake the superficial for the real in matters of religion, we move on the short road to conflict, war and disaster. The immediate casualty is tolerance, a value which India has cherished through centuries to produce a highly pluralistic society. Probably many Muslims do not know that the word *Is-*

lam has a beautiful connotation. The word is derived from *salm* which means 'peace'—peaceful surrender of the ego-self to the Almighty God. Any effort by individuals or groups to convert religion into an instrument of power will end up in a denial of religion and calamitous conflict among people. This reminds us of the *Rigvedic* admonition 'Your heart, mind, object—may all these be one. So shall you all prosper.' A fitting end to this article is provided by another *Rigvedic* mantra: '*Nānyah panthā ayanāya vidyate*, No alternate way to this can be conceived.' Swami Vivekananda observed in one of his famous speeches, 'My Plan of Campaign': 'In India, religious life forms the centre, the keynote of the whole music of national life; ... you must make all and everything work through that vitality of your religion.'

### Indian Culture: The Central Message

Every place dedicated to the worship of God, be it a temple, a gurdwara, a chaitya, a mosque, a church or a synagogue is a *devasthāna*, a house of God. People visit these holy places to pray with closed eyes, or prostrate in utter humility and surrender their mind and body to Him, though for the majority the exercise might end up as a mere ritual. We have places of worship of every description in this country, no matter who built them or how. India, more than any other country, and Hindus, more than any other people, have acknowledged since time immemorial that God cannot be different for different people, no matter how we call Him or how we worship Him.

Tolerance and appreciation of the positive elements in other religions is the essence of good living and an investment in our pursuit of happiness. Real history is what we do to build our future upon and not what we resurrect from the muck and stink of yesteryears. Prayer is the quintessence of every religion. God's grace will not descend on mankind if religion comes to be misused to promote hatred and violence. The mystic experience of Sri Ramakrishna was a demonstration of the truth that all religions lead to the same spiritual goal. *Śāntisamṛddham amṛtam*<sup>9</sup> is a Vedic mantra meaning 'Immortal bliss lies where peace is in plenty.' This is the central message of Indian culture. \*

### References

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 4.180.
2. Koran, 2.62.
3. *Bhagavadgīta*, 4.11.
4. *Śṛṅute sarvadharmāmśca sarvān devān namasyati; Anasūyūr-jitakrodhas-tasya tuṣyati keśavaḥ.*
5. *Guṇair-uttuṅgatām yāti na tu jāti prabhāvataḥ; Kśīro dadhi-samutpannaḥ kālakūṭaḥ kimuttamaḥ.* —*Mahabharata*.
6. *Hadis*.
7. *Gāthā*, 31-19.
8. *Gīta*, 2.42.
9. *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 1.6.2.

**Y**ou may say, 'I cannot see Him with these eyes of mine. I cannot hear Him with these ears. How then am I to perceive Him?' You can never perceive Him in this way. To go to the Creator you must throw aside these instruments which take you directly to the created. You must go beyond your mind and senses; then meditation will come of itself. This is the only way to get the inner vision. These senses are made for the creation, not for the Creator.

—Swami Ramakrishnananda

---

---

# In South America: Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay

SWAMI SMARANANANDA

I checked in at Johannesburg airport at 8 am on 16 May 2002 and went through immigration and customs formalities. The South African Airways flight to São Paulo (Brazil) took off on schedule at 10:20 am. It was a ten-hour non-stop flight. In international air travel, this is the most tedious part. I took the 'no jet-lag' tablets every two hours, as instructed. On the flight, they gave me some sort of 'Asian vegetarian' food, enough to keep me going for 3-4 hours! The plane landed at São Paulo 45 minutes before schedule! The registered baggage took some time to arrive, but I passed through immigration and customs without a hitch. Swami Nirmalatmananda, head of our São Paulo centre, Swami Pareshananda, head of the Buenos Aires (Argentina) centre, and nearly 20 devotees met me at the airport.

Before we resume the narrative, we shall have a quick look at some general information on Brazil and the spread of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda message there.

## Brazil

The country derives its name from a tree of valuable red dyewood that is widely found in its forests. Its name is *pau-brasil*. A country with an area of 8.5 million sq km—2.5 times that of India—and a population of 170 million is indeed a power to reckon with. Its resources of fresh water and minerals (iron, gold, and so on) are vast. Brazil is the biggest coffee producer of the world. Soya beans and cane sugar are the main agricultural products that are exported.

Brazil is the biggest country in Latin America, both in area and population. From the tropical and sub-tropical north encompassing the vast Amazon basin, Brazil extends

to the temperate south, thus qualifying to be called a subcontinent.

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to settle in Brazil in 1500 AD. The native population at that time was estimated at two million. There was fierce competition between the Portuguese, the Spanish, the Dutch and the British to occupy as much territory as possible. By the nineteenth century, Brazil had become an independent nation free from the colonial rule of Portugal.

After passing through various political vicissitudes, Brazil became a democracy in 1964. Now it is one of the most industrialized nations in the third world. In the post-war period, the urban population increased greatly, now constituting 70% of the total population. Though exports dominate the economy, poverty and illiteracy still loom large, affecting the majority of the people.

The official language of Brazil is Portuguese, while in the rest of Latin America the language is Spanish (Espanola). A small minority speaks English. Quite a number of city dwellers study in English schools, for the knowledge of this international language would help them on the economic front.

## Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement in Brazil

The message of Sri Ramakrishna slowly percolated into Brazil since the time of Swami Vijayanandaji (Pashupati Maharaj, a disciple of Swami Brahmanandaji), who started the Buenos Aires centre in Argentina. He visited Brazil regularly, and a small group became seriously interested in the lives and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. After Swami Vijayanandaji passed away, some other swamis from the USA and else-

where kept visiting Brazil. Among them was Swami Ritajanandaji, the then head of our Gretz (France) centre. He visited Brazil more than once, and many devotees were deeply influenced by him.

Thus came into existence some private centres in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Curitiba, managed by devotees. Another influence was from one Swami Tilak, a sadhu from Ayodhya, who preached Sri Ramakrishna to his devotees and disciples. He advised them to worship Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother and practise the teachings of Swami Vivekananda. Though he passed away nearly two decades ago, his influence still lingers.

After persistent requests three years back from devotees in Brazil, the Ramakrishna Mission headquarters sent Swami Nirmalatmananda to São Paulo to manage its affairs. The swami has been working actively since then and has won the love and esteem of the devotees. Thanks to his efforts, the centres at Rio de Janeiro, Curitiba and Belo Horizonte have been activated and his periodic visits to these places keep the devotees enthusiastic about the Movement.

### My Visit

Now, to continue with our narrative. As I said earlier, we arrived at the São Paulo Guarulhos International Airport 45 minutes before schedule. With a population of 18 million, São Paulo is one of the biggest cities in the world and the biggest in South America. It is the industrial hub of the nation. Brazil is 5 hours behind South Africa and 8 hours behind India.

Our ashrama is located in the heart of the city; it is about an hour's drive from the airport. During rush hours it takes even more time. We reached the ashrama at 4:15 pm. I slept from 6:45 pm to 2 am with a brief break

for a cup of milk at 8:30 pm. This was the effect of jet lag; the 'no jet-lag' tablets seemed to have done their job only partially!

Next day, 17 May, after breakfast at 7:30 am, Nirmalatmananda took me for a walk in the big park, named Ibirapuera, not far from the ashrama. It occupies a vast area and there is a covered stretch nearly a third of a kilometre long, which helps you take an unhindered walk even when it rains. Swami Pareshananda and some devotees too accompanied us, and it became a small procession! In the afternoon we went to a museum called Pinacotec Do Estado. Besides some sculptures, the museum contains some interesting and valuable paintings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The big museum building has a garden adjacent to it, called Jardim Da Luz. After evening arati in the shrine and meditation, I met the assembled devotees.

On 18 May, at 7 am, we received the news of the passing away of Mr Samir, an old Brazilian devotee loved by all. But already a reception meeting had been organized for the visiting swami. It was to be held at Cinemateca, an old cinema hall (now not in use), in front of our centre. At 10 am the function began. About 200 people had assembled there. Besides me, the meeting had the following



*With devotees at Embu retreat centre*

speakers: Mr Ernani Buffolo, Vice President, Ramakrishna Vedanta Ashrama, São Paulo; Mr Jandir C Waftner, President, Centro Ramakrishna Vedanta, Curitiba; Mr Luis Antonio S Monteiro, Secretary, Centro Ramakrishna Vedanta, Rio de Janeiro; Mr Elson de Barros Gomes, Junior Vice President, Centro Ramakrishna Vedanta, Belo Horizonte; Mrs Maria R M Acquino (Radha) of Sao Bento do Sapucaí; and Mr Deepak Bhojwani, Consul General of India. The function was over by 12:30 pm, after which, accompanied by Swamis Pareshananda and Nirmalatmananda, I went to Samir's house. His apartment was only 7-8 minutes away. In the afternoon, I gave a long interview to the *Vedanta Bulletin* with the help of an interpreter. (Of course, I had no way of knowing what finally appeared in print!)

The next morning we left for Embu, a retreat centre some 45 minutes away. We passed through the outskirts of São Paulo city and through a village. The poor condition of these areas reminded me of the environs of Kolkata and other similar Indian cities. There was heavy rain in the morning, preventing people from attending the retreat. In spite of that, nearly 90 devotees were present. This retreat centre is on a three-acre undulating plot with two nice houses. The shrine is in the upper storey of one of these buildings. Both these

houses had been recently renovated thoroughly. I inaugurated the renovated shrine. Some lady devotees had come over to Embu the previous day to cook and make arrangements for the retreat. There was devotional singing led by Radha and Govinda (Maria Regina Janario Acquino and Julio Cesar Vanario Acquino). All devotees joined in the singing, clapping their hands. This too reminded me of India. Swami Nirmalatmananda performed puja in the shrine. Reading from the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* followed this, after which Pareshananda spoke. Then I spoke for 25 minutes with sentence-by-sentence translation by an English-knowing devotee. After that I had to field questions in a long-drawn question-answer session. The retreat was over by 4:30 pm, and all but some 8 devotees left the place. We stayed back and enjoyed the silent atmosphere of the wooded place.

Next morning, by 9:30 we left for São Paulo and reached there by 11:00. At 5:30 pm an inter-religious meeting was arranged at the centre. Every month one such meeting of religious leaders of various faiths is arranged to promote religious harmony. But, thanks to rains, very few people attended the meeting, and they too came very late. So the meeting began after arati. Among others, the meeting had a Sufi, a Christian, a representative from the Brahmakumaris and a scientist.

The topic for discussion was how to create awareness about the need of religious harmony.

On 21 May, at 9 am, we left for the city airport for a helicopter ride over the city of São Paulo. Dr Boris Barone, a leading surgeon and Swami Vijayanandaji's disciple, had arranged the ride. For nearly an hour, it was an interesting experience. We could see the huge lakes to the north of the city, which were the source of water for the big city. The pilot pointed out how multi-storeyed



*On the way to Iguassú Falls*



high-rise apartments existed alongside the slums and hovels of poor people. Indeed, this is the curse of all big cities of this modern age. We saw the two narrow rivers that passed through the city highly polluted. We returned at 10:30 am. At lunch I met Dr Ernani Buffolo and his wife Marsiana. Dr Ernani is also a disciple of Swami Vijayanandaji. Nagging rains continued. But we went for a walk in the covered portion of the big park. There were many devotees at dinner.



*Iguassú Falls*

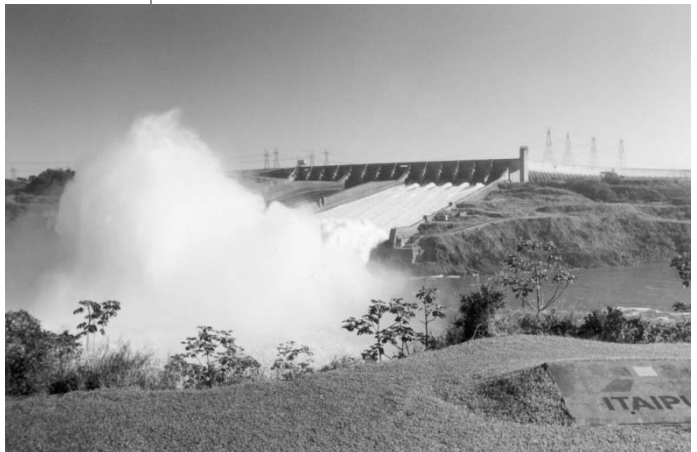
### **Foz-do-Iguassú**

On 22 May we left for Guarulhos International Airport to board the flight to Foz-do-Iguassú, a city very near the famous Iguassú waterfalls. It was a one-hour flight. Ricardo had gone there the previous day to make all the arrangements. He was worried about the bad weather the day before. But we reached there to find the weather very pleasant with bright sunshine. We were lodged at Hotel Continental, but had our lunch at a devotee's (Mrs Beatrice) house. At 3 pm we left for the waterfalls, *cataratas* in Portuguese. A national park with virgin forests has been developed around this area. Since private cars are not allowed inside, we had to leave ours outside and take the bus provided for this purpose.

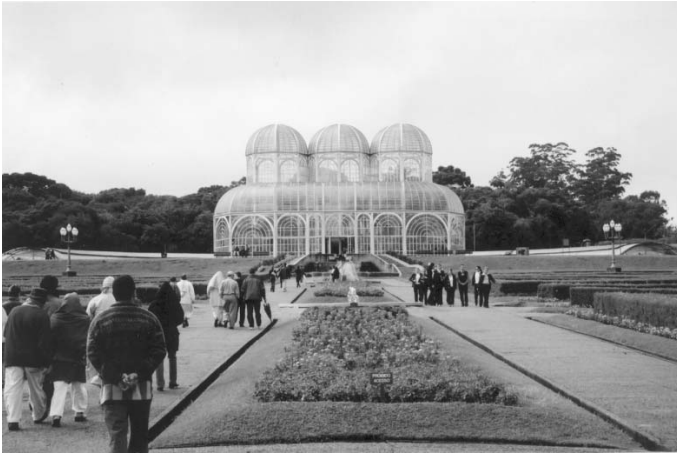
The Iguassú waterfalls are really fantastic. These falls are formed by 275 waterfalls (we could easily count 30) along the border between Brazil and Argentina. Surrounding these is the national park with an area of 185,000 hectares. With the forest, mountains and waterfalls, big and small in all directions, it is

indeed a fairyland. The Niagara seems insignificant in comparison. Had we had the time, we could have spent the whole day admiring these waterfalls! But none is allowed to remain in the national park area after dusk, so we had to return.

Next day, after breakfast we three swamis and the many devotees who had accompanied us from São Paulo left for Itaipu, a binational, Brazil and Paraguay, hydroelectric project. The Itaipu dam is 196 m high and 7,760 m long. This is the biggest hydroelectric project in the world. It generates 25% of the electricity consumed in Brazil. We motored



*Itaipu Dam*



*Botanical garden, Curitiba*

from the Paraguay side of the dam to the Brazilian side. The lake was full and the overflow itself was like a huge waterfall, rising to a great height, crowned by a rainbow! In the afternoon we visited the Argentinean side of the waterfalls. In Spanish it is called *Iguazu*. A toy train takes us to the bridge that spans the 1-km broad river. This bridge takes us very near the falls. Without a raincoat one could easily get drenched by the spray from the waterfalls. The river Iguassú falls from many directions. It is difficult to say which side of the falls—Brazil's or Argentina's—is more beautiful. Both claim their side to be the better!



*Curitiba devotees*

## Curitiba

On 24th early morning we left for Curitiba, a modern city and capital of Parana state of Brazil. The flight took an hour. Many devotees met us at the Curitiba airport. Among them was Mr Jandir, an old devotee and disciple of Swami Vijayanandaji. A new ashrama has come up here on a land measuring 1000 sq m. The shrine is beautiful, big enough to accommodate just 50 persons. They are planning to have a bigger hall.

After breakfast, we went for a stroll in a nearby park along with

the devotees. In the afternoon we went to the city on a sightseeing spree. From a tower 109 m high we had a bird's-eye view of Curitiba. After evening arati the devotees sang some songs in chorus. Then we three swamis spoke for a short while. Pareshananda needs no interpreter, for he speaks Spanish fluently and most people in Brazil understand Spanish.

Next morning, it was drizzling all along. Still we went to a botanical garden. In the afternoon, I spoke to the devotees. About 65 of them were present, trying to squeeze themselves in the inadequate space! The subject was 'Meditation: Why and How?'

Many Brazilian devotees sing the arati song, while playing the tape. They sing some Portuguese songs also on Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swamiji.

Next morning we left for the retreat centre, 45 minutes away. On the way, I was shown a big auditorium built of steel and glass. This retreat belongs to Mr Jandir. He has willed it to the Curitiba centre. It is a 15-acre plot with fruit trees and pines. Mr Jandir lives alone here. There is a

beautiful shrine and a few rooms where swamis can stay. There is a place for devotees also. At 4 pm there was a meeting, which began with a few songs. I spoke on 'Spiritual Practices: Obstacles and Solutions', to an audience of about 60 people. This was followed by a long question-answer session. Elvis was my interpreter. He had once spent some time in India as a brahmacharin. He manages the Curitiba centre with other devotees.

Next day, on our way to airport we saw Mr Jandir's incense-stick factory. His father was a florist and grew flowers. Mr Jandir switched over to manufacturing incense sticks. We took the flight to Brasilia, Brazil's capital and reached there at 11:45 am. Mrs Carmelita and some other devotees met us at the airport. We were taken to her suburban garden house. It is a beautiful five-acre plot, with mango trees and various flower plants. Mrs Carmelita lost her husband two years ago. Now most of the time she lives in the city with her son.

Earlier, I referred to a Swami Tilak from India. He belonged to the Ramayat tradition and was working in these parts and Spain. He was highly respected. He advised people to worship Sri Ramakrishna, the *yugavatara*, and gave Indian names to some of his disciples. He built in the city an institution named Jnana Mandiram. We were pleasantly surprised to see Sri Ramakrishna's and Holy Mother's pictures in the shrine, below that of Sri Rama and Sri Krishna. Swami Tilak's and his guru's pictures were placed still below. The swami died in a car accident in Spain some years ago. I spoke to about 50 devotees in the evening on 'The Relevance of Vedanta and Yoga in the Modern Age'.

Next morning the weather was fine, cool and pleasant. After breakfast, we went for sightseeing in the city along with Mrs Carme-

lita, Radha and Sadhan (a Brazilian devotee). A guide named Fernando accompanied us. Brasilia is a newly planned city with interesting modern architecture. There are some architectural landmarks like the Don Bosco Church and the TV tower. A huge memorial has come up for President Juscellino Kubitschek de Oliveira. He built this city 580 miles north-west of Rio de Janeiro, the old capital. Brasilia became the new capital in April 1960. The Metropolitan Cathedral is a huge dome. The whole design is unorthodox. Though there is a lot of explanation about the symbolism of the cathedral, it does not inspire a spiritual feeling we experience in a traditional cathedral with its Gothic pillars and vaulted



At Swami Tilak's Jnana Mandiram

roofs. There is a museum, a sort of memorial for the indigenous people, who have almost disappeared. There are only 250,000 natives—so-called Indians—today in Brazil.

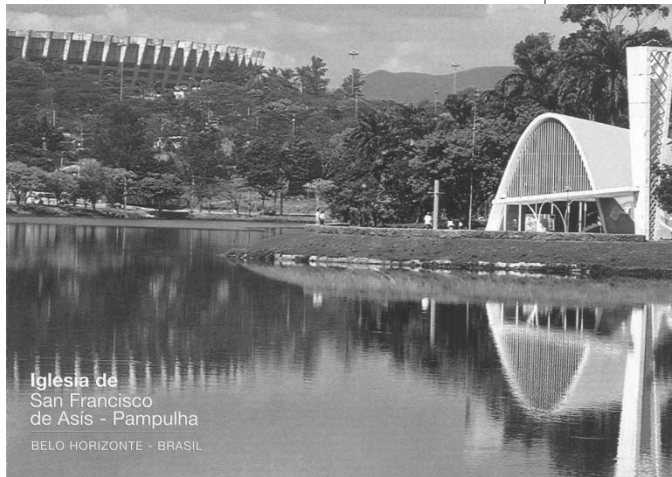
On 29th morning we flew to Belo Horizonte, the capital of Minas state, reaching there at 11:45 am. In the afternoon we went to Betim, a village an hour's drive from the city. Here some years ago one Prof Arlindo had a vision of Raja Maharaj (Swami Brahmanandaji), who asked him to start an orphanage. At that time he did not know anything about Raja Maharaj, but nevertheless started an orphanage for poor children in that area. Interest-

ingly, this area has many blacks, descendants of Africans who were brought as slaves some two centuries earlier to work in the mines. Prof Arlindo is no more. The orphanage had to be wound up as the Brazilian government banned all residential schools. However, it has been converted into a day school with 400 children, all educated free. Now the institution is named Missão Ramacrisna (Ramakrishna Mission)! Besides the school curriculum, the grown-up boys are taught macaroni manufacture as well as various trades like weaving and wire-fence manufacture. All these bring some income to the young men, while the surplus is used for running the school. Sale of merchandise fetches a good sum. Really good work,

At the ashrama shrine at 4 pm, I addressed an audience of about 65 on 'The Ramakrishna Mission: Its Ideals and Activities'.

On the 31st morning, there was a proposal to visit a historical place, some two hours away, but I declined to go. Instead, we visited a park on the mountainside and another in the heart of the city. At the former, there is a road called Peanuts where you witness a strange phenomenon: Coming down the slope the car stops at the crossing, but even with the engine switched off, the car slowly moves backwards, climbing the slope! There has been no scientific explanation to this so far.

In the afternoon, I gave an interview to a journal published by Missão Ramacrisna. They print and distribute some 2,000 copies. In the evening, after arati, I spoke to some 35 devotees on 'Divine Grace and Self-effort' and answered questions. Susan was my interpreter.



Iglesia de  
San Francisco  
de Assis - Pampulha  
BELO HORIZONTE - BRASIL

*Belo Horizonte*

right on our lines! I spoke for 15 minutes with the help of an interpreter.

The city of Belo Horizonte is situated amid hills. The state of Minas is known for its gold and diamond mines. In the morning we visited the house of an initiated devotee by name Mr Elson Gomes. He is a self-made man and has built a beautiful house on the hillside, where he, his wife and their four children live. Mr Gomes loves India and has visited it many times. Since his house is full of Indian books, pictures and artifacts, some consider his house an 'Indian Museum'.

## Rio de Janeiro

On 1 June, a holiday, we arrived at Rio de Janeiro at 9 am. This city was the capital of Brazil till 1960 and is the second biggest city with a population of 6 million. It is one of the most beautiful cities in the world, with sea all round and rocky hills rising to a sheer height of 2,000 ft or more from the sea. Its beaches—particularly Capacabana—are world famous and attract thousands of tourists all round the year. When the Portuguese sailed into the bay on 1 January 1502, they thought they had discovered the delta of a huge river and so named it Rio de Janeiro, that is, 'River January'!

Our stay had been arranged at Vandana's luxury apartment facing the lake. A disciple of Swami Tilak, Vandana is greatly devoted to Sri Ramakrishna. Mr Gilbert, a young employee of United Airlines of USA, drove us to

her house. Gilbert, his wife Patricia and two sons are all devotees. We went to see the house bought recently for the new ashrama. It was being renovated and the rooms for monks were yet to be ready. We returned to Vandana's house for lunch, and visited the ashrama building again in the afternoon. I did the ceremonial opening of the new shrine. Nirmalatmananda performed puja. The devotees sang *namavali* bhajans. They can sing well the arati song, *Khandana bhava-bandhana*. I spoke to an audience of 200 on 'Sri Ramakrishna's Message for Modern Man'. Nirmalatmananda has managed to buy houses for the ashrama at Rio, Belo Horizonte and Curitiba at a cost of 500,000 rials (1 rial = 26 rupees). At Rio, Cordelia, an 86-year-old lady, is quite enthusiastic about the new centre that is taking shape. She is a disciple of Swami Vijayanandaji.

On the 2nd morning, we went to Corcovado, the rock more than 2,000 ft high, where a statue of Christ the Redeemer, is built. The statue stands 99 feet high from the pedestal. It is as if Jesus is inviting all with outstretched arms! With sea all around and the mountains as backdrop, the city provided a breathtaking view. We saw the Sugar Loaf mountain from a distance and also visited a beautiful cathedral. We went again in the afternoon to see the Capacabana and Ipinoma beaches. Returning to the ashrama, I spoke on Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, and answered some questions. Chandra did a good transla-

tion job. Dinner had been arranged at the ashrama. The lady devotees had brought all the food articles. After dinner we returned to Vandana's apartment.

Next day early morning, we went to the beach for a morning walk. Returning to our residence, after breakfast I answered some questions of devotees. We went to the Botanical Gardens and to a beach where coconut milk was available. At 5:30 pm we left Vandana's apartment for the ashrama. The lady devotees sang some Portuguese songs on Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother. This was followed by short speeches by Nirmalatmananda, Pareshananda and me. I answered a few



*Christ the Redeemer*

questions also. Arati and dinner followed, after which we drove straight to the airport. After a 40-minute flight, we reached São Paulo at 10:30 pm.

4 June was a day of rest. Of course, we went for a walk in the big park nearby. I met devotees and discussed many religious topics, always with someone's help as interpreter.

*(to be concluded)*

First impressions last.

---

---

# The Srivaishnava Commentatorial Tradition

DR PREMA NANDAKUMAR

One of the reasons for the survival of ancient Tamil texts (of the Sangam Age, second century BC to fourth century AD) is the commentatorial tradition that began with the *Iraiyānār Ahapporul Urai* of Nakkirar. Among the great commentators whose exegetical works helped preserve the intelligibility of the Tamil works are Nachinarkkiniyar, Parimelazhagar, Satiyarkku Nallar and Ilampooranar. These commentators wrote in pure Tamil.

## How the Maṇipravāla Style Originated

When Jainism came to Tamil Nadu, it was felt by theologians that religion could be better disseminated by using the local language to explain the Prakrit or Sanskrit texts. Thus was born the Maṇipravāla style, which is said to resemble a chain made of pearls and coral. Sanskrit is used liberally, but the grammar follows the Tamil tradition. Since ancient Tamil did not have letters for certain Sanskrit sounds, *ja, sha, sa, ha* and *ksha* were created and they came to be known as the *grantha* characters. Among the Maṇipravāla creations of Jains in Tamil are *Sri Puranam* and *Gadya Chintamani*.

When Nathamuni (ninth century) anthologized the hymns of the Azhvārs in the *Nālāyira Divya Prabandham* and popularized it through music and explanatory lectures that related the Tamil hymns to the Vedas, the epics and the Puranas, this twin-language approach came in handy. The acharyas who followed Nathamuni took the cue, and since the mellifluous hymns of the Azhvārs spoke of mystic experiences, their approach also was an experiential one. They conveyed their personal reactions and relationships with the Divine. When the commentaries were written

down, this closeness with the audience remained. Reading the commentaries is like taking part in a beautiful *rasalīla* with the conscious presence of the Divine.

## The First Maṇipravāla Commentary

Chronologically, Tirukurugai Piran Pillan is the first teacher to have recorded his commentary. Born in 1062, he became an earnest disciple of Sri Ramanuja. As advised by his master, Pillan wrote a commentary on Nammazhvar's *Tiruvāimozhi*, titled *Ārāyirappaḍi* (The Six Thousand). It was commended by Sri Ramanuja, who said that Srivaishnavites should study the work along with his own commentary on the *Brahma Sutras*, titled *Sri Bhashya*. By suggesting the linkage of the verses in *Tiruvāimozhi*, *Ārāyirappaḍi* became the basic ground plan for all exegetical works written on the subject later by the spokesmen of Srivaishnavism.

## Other Commentators

Nanjeeyar's (1182-1287) *Onbadhināyirappaḍi* (The Nine Thousand) grew out of his lectures based upon Pillan's work. The lectures were taken down by his disciple Nampillai. It is said that Nampillai lost the palm-leaf manuscript in the Kaveri floods. However, placing his faith in his own enormous memory, he wrote down the entire work again. When Nanjeeyar read it, he was astonished at some novel and appropriate explanations that were not part of his original lectures. When he came to know of what had transpired, he blessed his disciple. Nanjeeyar has also written commentaries on *Tiruppāvai* and *Kanninun Chiruthampu*. Later on there were other Maṇipravāla commentators like Koneri Dasyai and Vedanta Deshika. The literature is voluminous and is

a rich space of experienced delight for the followers of Srivaishnavism.

### Nampillai's Work

The work of Nampillai needs a special mention. His lectures were recorded by his student Vadakku Thiruveethi Pillai and this is hailed as *Nampillai Eedu*. The latter-day exegetists often refer to the *Eedu* to underline their approach to the work of the Azhvars. It is a fine socio-political document. While Sanskrit is used liberally, the work has also recorded ancient Tamil sayings and proverbs. Parasara Bhattar (1192-1220), son of Kuraththazhvan (Srivatsanka Mishra) was also a renowned teacher, but all his Manipravāla commentaries have been lost, except for a portion of what he said about Tirumangai Azhvar's *Tiruneduntandakam*. The lady Tirukkoneri Dasyai (1217-1312) also wrote a commentary on Nammazhvar's work, titled *Tiruvāimozhi Vācagamālai*.

### Periavachan Pillai's Significant Contribution

With Periavachan Pillai (born 1227) we come face to face with an image of amazing scholarship, intense devotion and breathtaking prolificacy, marking the noonday brilliance of the commentatorial tradition. He was named Krishna at birth as he was born under the Rohini asterism in the Tamil month of Āvaṇi. His devotion to Krishna was immense. A series of visions drew him to make Srirangam his place of residence, where he became an earnest disciple of Nampillai. Commanded by his master, Periavachan Pillai launched upon a commentary for the entire hymnal output of the twelve Azhvars. He also wrote exegetical works on Sanskrit scriptures like the *Stotra Ratna* of Yamunacharya and the *Gadya Traya* of Sri Ramanuja. His explanations of select verses from the twin epics as well as the *Parandha Rahasya Vivaraṇam* on mantras are considered important for understanding Srivaishnavism. Other works of secret doctrine like *Mānikka Mālai* and *Sakala Pramāṇa*

*Tātparyam* explain certain aspects of Srivaishnavite theology. The hagiological work, *Pazha Nadai Vilakkam* speaks highly of Periavachan Pillai's services to Srivaishnavism:

For the Srivaishnavas who belong to the Vishishtadvaita Siddhanta, there is no refuge but *Tirupallāṇḍu* and the other poems in the *Dīvyā Prabandham*. To understand the significance of the *Dīvyā Prabandham* there is no way but the commentaries of Periavachan Pillai. Hence all Srivaishnavas would draw close to Periavachan Pillai and be his disciples.

Periavachan Pillai's genius lay in performing a very fine balancing act between an immense scholarship in Sanskrit and Tamil literature and philosophy on one hand and a hail-fellow-well-met style on the other. Thanks to his using familiar proverbs, terms of endearment, colloquial speech and anecdotes of great people, there is an utter contemporaneity in the flow. Since his works have recorded many received traditions, the commentaries are a treasure trove for the social historian as well.

Dealing with the verse clusters in the *Dīvyā Prabandham* one could get lost easily. Aren't they but a constant worship of the Divine? It is the commentators who reveal the progression of thought in these individual verses and show that not a word in these verses has been used for mere decoration, which is why we regard this work as the 'Drāviḍa Veda'. Again the similes that the commentators use to get their idea home are simply marvellous. Periavachan Pillai thus comments on a verse of Tirumangai Azhvar:

Material pleasures: this is like coming upon a snake with its spreading hood, and not knowing that it is there to wrap up the victim, one goes in search for a place in its shade for taking rest. (It is like the) joy gained by a man about to be guillotined who feels thirsty and is given water which he quaffs and feels happy. That is, man chooses one of the sorrows (material pleasures) as a happy state.

### His *Ramayana* Experience

Periavachan Pillai's *Ramayana* experience is another glorious world for the lover of Sanatana Dharma. Just as he embellished his commentaries on Tamil scriptures with profuse quotations from Sanskrit, he uses the soulful hymns of the Azhvars at appropriate places in his exegesis. Master of dramatic aesthetics, he recreates the scenes of distant past with imaginative accuracy. There is the fourteenth verse of the nineteenth chapter (*sarga*) in the 'Bala Kanda', where we have Vishvamitra assuring Dasharatha with a masterful challenge, '*Aham vedmi, I know!*'<sup>1</sup> Periavachan Pillai's recreation of the scene with the addition of 'You do not know' to run parallel with 'I know' is marvellous. Vishvamitra speaks in the commentary:

I understand from my inner sight purified by yoga that 'the image that can never be seen by the physical eyes is seen and recognized by the inner vision', but you, who see through physical eyes, cannot understand. Whereas I can understand because I have saluted several acharyas and gathered understanding, how can you, who is saluted by ordinary mortals, know? I who carry the *darbhā* grass know and not you who carry around a bow. I, who have matted locks, can understand, and not you, who have put on the crown. A sattvic person like me can understand and not a rajasic person like you. I have remained below the seat, following the dictum 'the disciple should have a lower seat and bed than his teacher', and not you who are seated upon a throne. I know the steps of yoga and so I can understand, but not you, who only know the steps of material pleasures. Can a person like you who performed a sacrifice to gain children know more than me who have done a sacrifice to gain realization? I know as one who follows dharma and moksha; how can you know as much when you are sunk in material enjoyment?

The thought content and the dramatic monologue are further embellished by a marvellous word play. The commentator's net catches even minor characters like Shatrughna with facile ease for a detailed study. If

Periavachan Pillai chooses a verse to comment upon, that verse must be deemed lucky! We are rendered breathless for a moment when we hear the challenge of Sita in her statement, 'Did my father, the King of Mithila, get for his son-in-law a woman in the guise of man?' However, the commentator hurries forward to assure us that between a loving couple, the usual rules of speech become topsy-turvy (*pranayābhimānangal vyuthkramamāgāiyināle*). The oratorical brilliance of the commentator touches great heights when he takes up the term son-in-law: 'For those who have got a daughter there are ten planets as it is said that the son-in-law is the tenth planet (*Jāmāto daśa-magrahaḥ enru peṇṇillaipetrukkoduththārkkugraham pathāyire iruppadhu*)'. Spoken so casually, the immediate audience must have enjoyed the hit very much indeed.

### His Comments on Self-surrender

Periavachan Pillai's choice verses from the 'Yuddha Kanda' and his remarkable commentary have earned him the sobriquet 'Abhayapradāna Rājar'. Srivaishnavism is based firmly on the concept of a total, integral surrender to the Divine. Vibhishana's surrender to Rama is considered to be such a *śaraṇā-gati*. Rama consults his friends. Sugriva is not happy with the idea of accepting Vibhishana as the latter was from the enemy camp. Hanuman's words full of humility are addressed to Sugriva. Periavachan Pillai says that this speech of Hanuman signifies the sixfold decisive markings of one who seeks refuge in the Lord as found in the *Ahirbuta Samhita*. They are a determination to be friendly towards everyone (*ānukūlya sankalpam*), enmity towards none (*prātikūlya varjanam*), a shoreless faith (*mahāviśvāsam*), praying to the Lord for refuge (*goptrtva varaṇam*), placing oneself in the control of the Lord (*ātma nikṣepam*) and keeping nothing for oneself (*kārpaṇyam*).

Comparing two verses attributed to the Supreme in different incarnations, Periavachan Pillai speaks of the '*mītrabhāvena*'



*shloka*<sup>2</sup> in the 'Yuddha Kanda' as Rama's *charama shloka* just as *Sarva dharmān parityajya*<sup>3</sup> from the *Gīta* is known as Krishna's *charama shloka*. The manner in which Perivachan Pillai marshals his points for comparison as well as for contrast is breathtaking. Both the utterances are the final pathway, after going through other pathways and arguments. The transformative power of the verses transform the hapless and homeless heroes into royalty. Spoken in the midst of an army, the verses uttered by two Gopals (Krishna, the guardian of cows, and Rama, the guardian of earth) chase away devotees' sorrows and induct them into a prosperous future.

All the same, Perivachan Pillai votes for the Rama *charama shloka*. Krishna spoke from the chariot but Rama spoke standing on the earth, so his words are firm. Krishna calls for surrender, but Vibhishana has already surrendered. Krishna calls for the giving up of all dharmas, but Vibhishana has already turned away from all that is his. Krishna has several consorts and is famous for his falsehoods whereas Rama never spoke words with two meanings: *Ramo dvirnābhībhaṣate*. With Krishna the words come from a charioteer (*sārathi*) holding the whip but Rama's words are from the son of an emperor (Dāsārathi) holding a bow and an arrow. Krishna says 'I shall save you' while Rama says 'I won't give you up.' Krishna speaks of releasing a sinner from sins while Rama's words assure us that even if one is a sinner, Rama will not abandon him. Krishna speaks of a moksha which is beyond us, while Rama deals with what is to happen here on earth.

### Later Commentators and the Fading away of the Maṇipravāla Style

The Maṇipravāla style came to an end with Manavala Mamunigal and Vedanta Deshika (1269-1369). The former has dealt with the *Ramānuja Nūtrandhādhī* and has also written a commentary for the first seventy-three

verses of the *Nālāyira Divya Prabandham* since Perivachan Pillai's commentary for this portion was lost. Vedanta Deshika wielded Sanskrit and Tamil with equal ease and sometimes wrote in the mixed style as well. As with almost all the Srivaishnavite acharyas of those days, Vedanta Deshika also deliberately chose a life of poverty. He lived for his God and to convey the tenets of Srivaishnavism to his disciples. Towards this end he wrote several tracts and commentaries. Unlike Perivachan Pillai, Deshika was also a creative writer and has written stotras, narrative poetry, a drama and an epic. Of Deshika's Maṇipravāla works, the crowning jewel is his *Rahasyatraya Sāra*, which deals with the esoteric doctrine of Srivaishnavism that is based on complete surrender, prapatti. The scholarship imbedded in the argument has made it a classic of Indian Vedantic literature.

The Maṇipravāla language was born because the times called for it, when the acharyas sought to set the hymns of the Azhvans in the great tradition of Indian religious and spiritual discipline. Once the mission was complete and the Ubhaya Vedanta of Vishishtadvaita was established on firm foundations (drawing upon Sanskrit and Tamil scriptures with equal felicity), this style faded away. But the Maṇipravāla commentaries continue to be studied eagerly even today and remain inspirational springs for aspirants pursuing the spiritual path in the light of Vaishnavism. \*

### References

1. *Aham vedmi mahātmānaṁ  
rāmaṁ satyaparākramam;  
Vasiṣṭho'pi mahātejā  
ye ceme tapasi sthitāḥ.*
2. *Mītrabhāvena samprāptam  
na tyajeyam kathaṅcana;  
Doshō yadyapi tasya syāt  
satāmetad-agarhitam.  
—Ramayana, 'Yuddha Kāṇḍa', 18.3.*
3. *Bhagavadgīta*, 18.66.

---

---

# Self-images

SWAMI SATYAMAYANANDA

In Greek mythology we come across the story of Narcissus, a beautiful youth who falls in love with his own reflection. Separated from his friends while hunting and wearied, he lay down beside a clear pool in order to slake his thirst. He looked at his reflection in it and kept admiring it, forgetting about his fatigue and thirst. He wanted to possess the beautiful image, yet knew he could not do it. He lay grief-stricken, but rejoiced in this torment. Unwilling to give up his self-love, he took his dagger and plunged it into his breast.

The word *narcissism*—an inordinate love and admiration of oneself—stems from this story. Thanks to this youth, we know that narcissism is a great defect of human personality leading to self-destruction. Another word that owes its origin to him is *narcotic*; this is due to the properties of narcissus oil, derived from a white-red flower, identified with Narcissus and on which his blood spilt. A narcotic is an addictive substance taken to escape reality.<sup>1</sup> So self-love is like a narcotic that takes us away from reality and finally destroys us.

## The Other Side of Narcissism

Once Swami Vivekananda was with his disciple Ellen Waldo in the drawing room of a house in New York. The room had a mirror that reached from floor to ceiling. The mirror seemed to fascinate Swamiji. He stood before it again and again, gazing at himself intently. In between he walked up and down the room, lost in thought. Miss Waldo's eyes followed him anxiously. "Now the bubble is going to burst," she thought. "He is full of personal vanity." Suddenly he turned to her and said: "Ellen, it is the strangest thing. I cannot remember how I look. I look and look at myself in the glass but the moment I turn away I for-

get completely what I look like."<sup>2</sup>

## Different Images

You wake up early and head for the bathroom with a feeling of mild tension. Today is a big day. For the much-awaited promotion you will have to clear one last hurdle in the form of an interview with your superiors. At the sink you automatically look in the mirror above, wincing at the sight. Whatever happened to that person who could make heads turn? Squeezing the eyes shut, you turn away, going through the rest of the motions like an automaton. The mild tension has worsened after seeing the mirror. After breakfast you take your time dressing up for office in your best clothes, in front of a full-length mirror. Your confidence is coming back to you slowly with the appearance and by mulling over your various mental and moral qualities, personality aspects, and so on. You keep telling yourself that you have what it takes. The sleep-induced puffiness of facial tissues has now subsided, and you are looking and feeling better.

Before getting into a taxi, you glance at its side-view mirror and feel satisfied. You get in, lean back and begin to pep yourself up by again silently reciting a litany of all your positive qualities. On reaching the office you perfunctorily perform the routine work while waiting for minutes to tick by. A visit to the washroom to tidy up in front of the mirror has sent your already soaring confidence to newer heights.

You enter the director's office, and the dour atmosphere there freezes your smile. Three pairs of eyes seem to rip your insides. The old tension is back, the face loses colour and the body feels frozen. You almost jump at the voice that tells you to sit down, which you

do uncomfortably. The questions seem to shoot holes in your personality; you struggle to marshal your thoughts, but your squeaky replies make you cut a sorry figure. This was what you had been dreading. The bosses with their overbearing personalities make yours want to cringe. In five minutes you are dismissed.

It took just this long to break everything you had built with so much effort for so many years. Feeling like you could die right away, you do not remember lurching up and leaving the office. Stumbling into your own, you flop down in the chair drained, with vacant eyes and mind. After what seems an hour, you begin to seethe in fury, raving and ranting. The door opens and only then you realize you were shouting. Embarrassed, you keep quiet but your mind is churning. You ask yourself what went wrong and where. Feeling feverish, suffocated and trapped, you want to dash out of the building to some place, maybe the park. You sink lower in your chair and stare blankly out of the window. Slowly your features relax and a languorous feeling takes over the limbs. Your breathing becomes shallow; you have stepped into your own private world. Here you are the grand boss, and all things are subject to your will. Here this stupid world cannot hurt you any more. Your eyes are half closed now and a smile spreads across your face (maybe you are imagining pummelling the three bosses).

### The First Image

Let me briefly examine this phenomenon and leave the reader to cogitate on the rest. There is in the mind a natural image of our

physical configuration. This image is partly the general feeling of the body and partly the mental impressions connected with it. This is because the lower mind is intimately connected with the body. This image is responsible for making everybody think the mind is the body and the body is the mind. Part of a dialogue in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* between Yajnavalkya and Shakalya will help clarify the issue:

Shakalya: 'What deity are you identified with in the fixed direction (above)?'

Yajnavalkya: 'With the deity Agni, fire.'

Shakalya: 'On what does fire rest?'

Yajnavalkya: 'On speech.'

Shakalya: 'On what does speech rest?'

Yajnavalkya: 'On the heart (mind).'

Shakalya: 'On what does the heart rest?'

Yajnavalkya: 'You ghost! When you think the heart is elsewhere than in us (then the body is dead). Should it be elsewhere than in us, dogs would eat this body, or birds tear it to pieces.'<sup>3</sup>

So it becomes clear that the mind rests on the body. This is the first self-image. 'Here I stand and if I shut my eyes and try to conceive my existence— "I", "I", "I"—what is the idea before me? The idea of a body.'<sup>4</sup> For all practical

***The body is the result of prarabdha karma, the fructified part of a vast store of accumulated (sanchita) karma. So Hindus and Buddhists say the mind creates the body; it is natural that the mind then foolishly identifies with its creation.***

purposes this image ought to have included the insides too—the musculo-skeletal, circulatory and other systems, but it does not. Try imagining you are standing a few metres away and looking at yourself, like Buddhists do in one of their meditations. The image is not vivid, nor does the size gel with the actual. Besides, every time one sees oneself, that image is etched in consciousness and filed away in an already bulging folder of previous images. This image can also be called a psychosomatic image. We know thoughts affect the body and vice versa. Psychosomatic diseases—physical

illnesses or other conditions caused or aggravated by a mental factor—were well known in the past and are getting added recognition nowadays. The use of placebos—pills given more for psychological benefit than for any physiological effect—too has a long history. The belief that it is medicine can at times cure the illness.

According to traditional Hindu teachings, the body is the result of *prarabdha* karma, the fructified part of a vast store of accumulated (*sanchita*) karma. So Hindus and Buddhists say the mind creates the body; it is natural that the mind then foolishly identifies with its creation. 'Those fools who are tied to these sense objects (like the body) by the stout cord of attachment, so very difficult to snap, come and go (are born and die), up and down (in the various worlds), carried helplessly by the powerful emissary of their karma.'<sup>5</sup>

### The Second Image

The second image is composed of what is called personality or character. This is individuality, the real you. For instance, even a most beautiful person ceases to be attractive if he exhibits bad behaviour, uncouth speech and uncultured morals. This second self-image is abstract, unlike the first. That is because of the things that go to make it up: values, morals, knowledge, intelligence, aesthetics; emotions like love, hatred; culture, language and religion—all of which are abstract. Though not concrete, this image is tangibly felt all the same. Suppose you are asked to imagine a circle, you simultaneously imagine the space around it. If you in-

crease the circumference of the circle, that will also expand the space around it. No one can get away from this, for that is how the mind is structured. This is how the second self-image is apprehended. When we caught you mulling over your mental and moral qualities and efficiency, while dressing and in the taxi, you were preoccupied with this self-image.

### The Third Image

This is an ideal image of the self: what we are and want to be. Like the second one this too is abstract. Everyone has in him an innate ideal: of truth, goodness and beauty, *satyam*, *shivam* and *sundaram*.

***Our images invariably dictate what we experience. The more limited the images, the more limited the world view. There is a whole world out there waiting to be discovered, yet we choose to limit ourselves only to what we are comfortable with. And what a pandemonium we create within this limitedness! The common saying 'We make our own world' cannot be truer.***

We will not go into how or why this ideal image exists, because it is a different subject matter. Here we only need to know that this image subconsciously impels one to bring out the best in oneself and imparts the idea of perfection and excellence in one's endeavour. Without this ideal image, we will hardly have any inspiration for action; we will merely live at the brute level: eating, drinking and sleeping. This self-

image also makes us want to see, read about and study people who are beautiful, successful, wealthy, talented, and so on, for they seem to embody what we are striving for. This is the reason why film stars and sports stars, heroes and powerful people are mobbed. This third self-image conforming to your ambitions and drives also needs to be replenished; like the first one that prompts one to look in a mirror. This model image in us is what is really adored by us. Unable to actualize it internally, most people project this image outside on those they adore, and try to imitate them. This

image goads the first and second images.

### The Fourth Image

This image is a very private one, a fantasy image, generally not shared with others. This illusory image lives in an illusory world. In this fantasy world the image is exceedingly beautiful, the most intelligent, the bravest of the brave, wealthy, grand. The human mind is such that if it is not occupied with anything, it will occupy itself with this image; like the tendency to daydream and build castles in the air anywhere and at any time. You had fondly nurtured this image of yours and hence had become blind about its capabilities in the real world. When faced with hard facts, this image panicked. This panic rebounded on the third, second and first images, dropping them down like three pins. That is the reason why you felt all withered up, broken and empty; your images were temporarily demolished. The demolition of the four images then worked on the outer body and it felt sick and drained. Generally, this fourth self-image always imagines itself endowed with success. But the worst comes when this illusory image secretly indulges in things that are sick, indecent and prohibited in society. In some people this image becomes so prominent that it brings endless trouble by cutting off the three other images from the external world of reality. This results in mental illnesses. After raving and shouting, you stepped into this world and closed yourself in.

### Images Limit Our Views

Our images decide what we are, what we

see and want to see in the external world. On the way to office you never noticed many things around. Your preoccupation with your images had cut them off from you as of no consequence. The images can be compared to a peephole through which we experience the external world. To put it crudely, a pickpocket will have his attention only on people's purses and wallets; a barber will only notice people's hair; a drunkard will only notice bars and liquor shops. Our images invariably dictate what we experience. The more limited the images, the more limited the world view. There is a whole world out there waiting to be discovered, yet we choose to limit ourselves only to what we are comfortable with. And what a pandemonium we create within this limitedness! The common saying 'We make our own world' cannot be truer.

***The human tendency to look in any reflecting surface, unless occupied with the other self-images, is thoroughly exploited by restaurants and such establishments. They know how to cater to human vanity by placing mirrors, soft lights and music in order to sell their products.***

### Mutual Interaction of Images

These self-images do not stand in isolation but interact with one another. And when we interact with the world of non-selves, it is our respective self-images that actually interact. These non-self images hang, as it were, on our self-images. There is one more important thing: Every form is associated with a name, and so all our non-self images have their corresponding names. Moreover, one self-image speaks to another. You kept speaking to yourself in the taxi, and while shouting in the office. It is comical to see people talking to themselves sometimes, even making gestures, unaware of doing all that. Another fact is, the non-self images that surround us tend to influence our personality. Hence people with somewhat similar images tend to group together.

## We Are Occupied with Our Images

What we really know is only our own self-images. Swami Vivekananda put it beautifully:

You know how pearls are made. A parasite gets inside the shell and causes irritation, and the oyster throws a sort of enamelling round it, and this makes the pearl. The universe of experience is our own enamel, so to say, and the real universe is the parasite serving as nucleus. The ordinary man will never understand it, because when he tries to do so, he throws out an enamel, and sees only his own enamel.<sup>6</sup>

The human tendency to look in any reflecting surface, unless occupied with the other self-images, is thoroughly exploited by restaurants, shops and such establishments. They know how to cater to human vanity by placing mirrors, soft lights and music in order to sell their products. They know how to enamour us with the 'narcotic' effect. In public we are a bit restrained and we avoid looking at ourselves in mirrors, as it is considered bad manners. Besides, it is a belief—and not a wrong one at that—that such people are nuts. But in private we know how we behave in front of a mirror: preening, smiling and acting uninhibitedly.

### Mental Narcissism

Narcissus kept staring into a pool of water, but, according to Swami Vivekananda's explanation above, the real mirror would be the mind in which these images are reflected. The four images can be compared to four mir-

rors placed like four walls of a hall. Then each mirror/image reflects on the rest, giving rise to multiple images. Anyone who has entered such a hall of mirrors will know how bewildering the images appear. As you look into a mirror the images look at you; you move and the images follow you. Our internal mind-mirrors are also like that: the mental images keep constantly changing; they are subject to internal influences like joy and sorrow and external influences brought in by the sense organs. The mind itself is restless; this makes the images appear mobile and difficult to catch. Over and above this are the memories of endless old images. Are we condemned to live and die in this world like Narcissus?

### Giving Up Our Images

***Now instead of looking in the mind mirror, let us look at our images reflected in others' faces, their eyes. Let every animate thing in the world be our mirror, and let us see how we appear in them. When we exhibit concern, warmth, helpfulness, love and compassion, the external mirrors will react in the same way. ... This world of images will then become a heaven.***

When our self-images are temporarily shattered, we feel terrible, dreadful and inadequate. Apart from this, we somehow intuitively feel that these images are not what we really are. At times we feel so oppressed by them that we leave them aside. For the images are not really we, just as the reflection in a mirror is not we: it is we plus the mirror. When we play with babies and children, we behave just like them. Babies and children do

not have self-images (or perhaps have rudimentary ones) and since we interact only with our images—most of the time miserably—we renounce them for the moment and feel good. This is evident when we are alone with nature; that leaves a wonderful effect on our psyche. When we visit a holy person without any self-images, we feel so happy in his presence because our images are temporarily held in

abeyance. We experience indescribable joy during deep sleep. That is again because all the self-images then cease to exist. Sleep is, in a way, nature's way of preventing us from going crazy.

### External Mirrors and Karma Yoga

When one looks in a mirror and smiles, the reflection smiles back, and if one frowns the image does that too. To get out of this trap of self-images we need to switch our choice of mirrors. Now instead of looking in the mind mirror, let us look at our images reflected in others' faces, their eyes. Let every animate thing in the world be our mirror, and let us see how we appear in them. When we exhibit concern, warmth, helpfulness, love and compassion, the external mirrors will react in the same way. We will then see ourselves in a beggar's smile, in a lonely old woman's gratitude, in children with loving faces, in the hopes of an invalid, in the joys of our friends, in the light of our family, in the forgiveness of one wronged, in the strength of the downtrodden. This world of images will then become a heaven; even animals and birds will not shy away from us. The whole of nature will reflect us. What a wonderful state that would be, compared to the sorry state we are in now. This is the path of karma yoga.

### Realizing the Goal through Bhakti Yoga

Spiritual aspirants are advised to avoid looking at their image in a reflecting medium. The reason is this: There is enough damage already done to consciousness by the existing self-images and they are not to be re-etched any further, since that would only strengthen the bondage. Our self-images are to be attenu-

ated so that the image of the Ishta (an aspect of God chosen for us by the guru) and the vibrations of the mantra can saturate our consciousness. As the aspirant keeps on contemplating on God, repeating the mantra, singing His glories, doing His work, his attenuated self-images are inexorably replaced with that of God's. The stronger and more complex the self-images, the more bitter will be the struggle for this replacement. As God's image becomes clearer and more powerful, more of the divinity associated with It saturates the mind mirror. Slowly God is the only thing in the mind, wiping off everything else. That is the state of God-realization. And in Sri Rama-

krishna's words, God-realization is the goal of human life. This is the path of bhakti yoga.

### Transcending Images through Raja Yoga

The yogi initially drops the baggage of non-self images by withdrawing the senses from their objects. The mind's tendency to

imagine the future or dwell in the past is then gradually curbed through will power and detachment. The first to go is the fourth image followed by the first image coming under control. As the yogi stills the mind by constant practice, the images are correspondingly stilled. The images then come under the yogi's powerful searchlight of insight, which renders the images impotent and brings them under perfect control. Finally, as the yogi realizes the supreme Self, all the images are transcended.

### The Fearlessness of Jnana

There are a few brave souls, the best of humanity, who simply dare to step back and smash all the self-images. These are the jnanis, men of Knowledge. This seems easy, but it takes tremendous courage to see the images

***As God's image becomes clearer and more powerful, more of the divinity associated with It saturates the mind mirror. Slowly God is the only thing in the mind, wiping off everything else. That is the state of God-realization.***

dropping like broken glass all around. The jnani knows that these self-images are wrought by delusion and ignorance, and the quicker they are done away with, the better. What then remains is the real Self, the changeless, all-pervading,<sup>7</sup> unmoving, immovable and eternal Atman.

### The Real Self

The best way to conclude this article is to leave it open for readers to cogitate on it—not on the four images discussed, but on the Upanishadic teaching: ‘He who inhabits the mind, but is within it, whom the mind does not know, whose body is the mind, and who controls the mind from within, is the Internal Ruler, your own immortal Self, the Atman.’<sup>8</sup> Swami Vivekananda said he could not remember what he looked like when he turned away from the mirror. That was because he had no self-images. Narcissus lives in every one of us as a prototype, and we saw what happened to him. Sooner or later we will have

to make a choice between the Self and the non-selves. To echo the voice of the Upanishad, ‘These two serving divergent purposes bind men; good accrues to him who accepts the Self, and he who selects the delusive selves falls from the true goal.’<sup>9</sup> \*

### References

1. Robert Graves, *Greek Mythology* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1966), 1. 287.
2. His Eastern and Western Admirers, *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1994), 128.
3. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 3.9.24-5.
4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 1.7.
5. *Vivekachudamani*, 75.
6. CW, 1.201-2.
7. *Bhagavadgita*, 2.24.
8. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 3.7.20.
9. Adapted from the *Katha Upanishad*, 1.2.1.

## The Carpenter’s House

An elderly carpenter was ready to retire. He told his employer-contractor of his plans to leave the house building business and live a more leisurely life with his wife enjoying his extended family. He would miss the pay cheque, but he needed to retire.

The contractor was sorry to see his good worker go and asked if he could build just one more house as a personal favour. The carpenter said yes, but in time it was easy to see that his heart was not in his work. He resorted to shoddy workmanship and used inferior materials. It was an unfortunate way to end his career. When the carpenter finished his work and the builder came to inspect the house, the contractor handed the front-door key to the carpenter. ‘This is your house,’ he said, ‘my gift to you.’

What a shock! What a shame! If he had only known he was building his own house, he would have done it all so differently. Now he had to live in the home he had built none too well.

So it is with us. We build our lives in a distracted way, reacting rather than acting, willing to put up less than the best. At important points we do not give the job our best effort. Then with a shock we look at the situation we have created and find that we are now living in the house we have built. If we had realized that we would have done it differently.



---

---

# ↳ Glimpses of Holy Lives ↳

## True Renunciation

**K**ing Shikhidhvaja ruled the kingdom of Malava. Chudala, his queen, was a spiritual person. She regularly practised meditation in the wee hours. In due course she realized the absolute Truth. Her face shone brightly, revealing her incomparable inner beauty. The king wondered about the cause of her new, blissful countenance. The queen said it was the result of her realizing the supreme Truth. The king laughed at her, thinking that realization was possible only through severe austerities practised in a forest retreat. He thought such realization was not possible in the palace. He wanted to retire into the forest and practise austerities to gain Self-realization. The queen tried to dissuade him. She said he could perform austerities in the palace itself, besides ruling the kingdom. The king did not listen to her, but went to the forest and led a life of intense austerities. The queen ruled the kingdom in his absence.

Taking pity on her husband and with a view to saving him from delusion, the queen assumed with her psychic powers the form of one Kumbha Muni and appeared before the king, a few feet above the ground! Thinking that some celestial being from heaven had descended to bless him, the king fell prostrate at the Muni's feet and sought his spiritual guidance.

The Muni taught him thus: 'Karmas bear fruit as ordained by God, but by themselves they cannot grant you salvation. By performing selfless actions one's mind can become pure. With a pure mind one should contemplate the Self. This would destroy the *vasanas* (latent desires). Then one should approach a guru and through his grace learn about Self-enquiry. Liberation is possible only through such enquiry and not by performing any amount of karma. By renouncing everything

one will realize the Truth.'

The king said that he had renounced everything, including his kingdom and family. Kumbha Muni told him that his renunciation was only external, and the seeds of attachment were still in him. The king then took out his walking staff, water pot, necklace of *rudraksha* beads and clothes and consigned them all into fire, and stood bereft of any possession. When the Muni insisted that the king had still not renounced completely, the king was ready to drop his last possession, the body, by jumping from the top of a mountain. The Muni asked him, 'What harm has the body done to deserve this punishment?' He then taught the king, 'You won't realize the Truth by destroying the body, but only by destroying the mind, which is the source of all attachment. The mind identifies itself as "I", leading you to bondage. Complete renunciation is nothing but the snapping of this identity.' The Muni then described to the king the *sadhana* of discrimination.

The king's doubts were dispelled and his mind became pure. He enquired into the source of the Self, soon became one with It and remained in blissful *samadhi*. Kumbha Muni disappeared and returned after some time as Queen Chudala. The king was still in *samadhi*. She roared like a lion to wake him up, but could not. Then, assuming a subtle form, she entered into the king's heart and found it pure and devoid of any latent tendencies. In a melodious voice she then chanted from the *Sama Veda*. Like the blooming of a lotus, the king became aware of the world. He was filled with ineffable joy and was speechless, not knowing how to express his gratitude. On the queen's advice, he returned to the palace. Established in the supreme Self, he endeared himself to all by his noble rule. \*

## Measuring the Immeasurable

Narhari Sonar was a resident of Pandharpur but a staunch devotee of Lord Shiva. His was a fanatic kind of devotion that prevented him from ever entering the temple of Vitthala, the presiding deity of Pandharpur. Neighbours felt it unfortunate that such a devoted person should be so fanatical. Not that Narhari was bigoted, but even so none made so bold as to suggest to him that he ought to visit the famous temple at least once.

Narhari was a fine goldsmith. Once it so happened that a rich landlord desired to offer an ornate waistband for Lord Vitthala and approached Narhari with a request to make one. Narhari agreed—on one condition: the landlord would have to give him the measurements; there was no way Narhari could go to the temple himself.

So the landlord had the measurements given to Narhari and the waistband was delivered on time. Strangely enough, when the temple priests tried to fit it on the image, the ornament was found a couple of inches short. The landlord brought the waistband back to Narhari, who altered it suitably. But this time it was a couple of inches too long. And so it went: all this work of re-measuring and re-making was repeated over and over again until it began to look as if there was nobody in Pandharpur who could just measure the image right!

The perplexed landlord now pleaded with Narhari to take the measurements himself. But Narhari was not easily persuaded; he had never set his eyes on any deity other than Lord Shiva and had no intention of ever doing so.

As he haggled with the goldsmith an idea occurred to the landlord. He proposed a clever compromise which would allow Narhari to take the measurements without actually looking at the image: they would just bandage his eyes! Narhari was rigid in following his religious beliefs, true; but he thought

he would be unreasonable to reject the landlord's solution.

So they brought Narhari to the Vitthala temple, the bandage in place across his eyes. Inside the sanctum, standing in front of the image, Narhari stretched his hands to feel it. The image was wet to the touch, as though drenched by a steady stream of water. Something long, soft and cool slithered over his hands. Wondering, Narhari moved his hands and touched what seemed to be, of all things, strands of *rudraksha* beads! It was all getting somewhat weird. Narhari began to doubt his perception. As he ran his hands higher up, over the face of the image, his doubts vanished. He felt Lord Shiva's matted hair ... and ... yes ... he could make out the third eye too! It was unbelievable!

Narhari ripped the bandage off his eyes—to see the image of Lord Vitthala gazing benignly at him! Chagrined beyond words, Narhari quickly drew the bandage back on and tried to get on with his job. But as he touched the image all over, he simply could not get rid of the impression that it was Shiva's image and not Vitthala's. Three times Narhari removed his bandage, and three times he saw not Shiva but Vitthala.

At last the real blindfold dropped from Narhari's inner eye. How could he have been so blind as to think that Shiva was different from Vishnu! The same God is called Hari by the Vaishnavas and Hara by the Shaivas. 'O Vitthala, accept me as Your own!' cried Narhari in utter humility as he fell at the feet of the smiling Lord. The experience lifted Narhari above the relative feelings of duality and immersed him in the infinite oneness of God.

Narhari Sonar later joined the Varkaris, a Vaishnava sect who saw no difference between one aspect of God from another. \*

# Kaṭha Rudra Upaniṣad

TRANSLATED BY SWAMI ATMAPRIYANANDA

## Procedure for *sannyāsa*

### संन्यासक्रमः

ब्रह्मचारी वेदमधीत्य वेदोक्तचरितब्रह्मचर्यो दारानाहृत्य पुत्रानुत्पाद्य ताननुरूपोपाधिभिर्वितत्य, इष्ट्वा च शक्तितो यज्ञैस्तस्य संन्यासो गुरुभिरनुज्ञातस्य बान्धवैश्च । सोऽरण्यं परेत्य द्वादशरात्रं पयसाग्निहोत्रं जुहुयाद् द्वादशरात्रं पयोभक्षः स्यात् । द्वादशरात्रस्यान्तेऽग्नये वैश्वानराय प्रजापतये च प्राजापत्यं चरुं, वैष्णवं त्रिकपालं अग्निम् । संस्थितानि दारुपात्राण्यग्नौ जुहुयात् । मृन्मयान्यप्सु जुहुयात् । तैजसानि गुरवे दद्यात् । मा त्वं मामपहाय परागा नाहं त्वामपहाय परागामिति गार्हपत्यदक्षिणाग्न्याहवनीयेषु, अरणिदेशाद्भस्ममुष्टिं पिबेदित्येके । सशिखान् केशान्निष्कृष्य विसृज्य यज्ञोपवीतं भूः स्वाहेत्यप्सु जुहुयात् । अत ऊर्ध्वमनशनमपां प्रवेशनमग्निप्रवेशनं वीराध्वानं महाप्रस्थानं वृद्धाश्रमं वा गच्छेत् । पयसायं प्रश्नीयात्सोऽस्य सायंहोमो यत्प्रातः सोऽयं प्रातः, यद्दर्शं तद्दर्शं यत्पौर्णमास्यं तत्पौर्णमास्यं, यद्वसन्ते केशश्मश्रुलोमनखानि वापयेत्सोऽस्याग्निष्टोमः ॥३॥

3. A celibate student (*brahmacārin*), after studying the Vedas and performing his duties as one belonging to the *brahmacarya āsrama*,<sup>1</sup> and [subsequently] marrying and begetting sons and equipping them with appropriate means<sup>2</sup> for getting established in life and having performed [Vedic] sacrifices according to his capacity, shall take to renunciation, on being permitted by his *gurus*<sup>3</sup> and relatives. On reaching the forest he shall perform the *agnihotra* sacrifice for twelve nights, with milk for oblation. He shall subsist on milk for twelve nights. At the end of twelve nights, uttering the *mantra* 'May this oblation be offered] to the *vaiśvānara* fire', he shall offer the wooden vessels<sup>4</sup> present into the fire as oblation, the cooked rice [specially] meant for Prajāpati to Prajāpati, the oblation apportioned in three-pots herds to Viṣṇu and Agni. The clay pots shall be assigned to the waters; the metal vessels shall be given to the teacher, uttering the *mantra*, 'May you not desert me while parting from me, may I not desert you while parting from you.' [He shall prostrate before three fires, namely,] the household fire, the southern fire and the fire in which oblations are offered. Some say that he shall consume a handful of ashes from the place of the fire-kindling sticks. After removing the hair along with the tuft and discarding it, he shall offer as oblation the sacred thread in the waters with the *mantra*, '*Bhūḥ svāhā*'. Thereafter, he shall take to fasting or entering into the waters or fire or heroic path or the great [and final] march till emancipation<sup>5</sup> or he shall go to a hermitage of elders (ascetics). He shall partake of milk (or water)<sup>6</sup> as evening repast; that is his evening oblation. That [milk or water] which he consumes in the morning is his morning oblation; that consumed during new moon in his new-moon-day sacrifice; that consumed during full moon in his full-moon-day sacrifice. The shaving of hair and beard and the paring of nails during the spring season constitutes his *agniṣṭoma*.<sup>7</sup>

## The duties of a *sannyāsin*

### संन्यस्तस्य कर्तव्यानि

संन्यस्याग्निं न पुनरावर्तयेत् । यन्मृत्युर्जायमावहं इत्यध्यात्ममन्त्राञ्जपेत् । स्वस्ति सर्वजीवेभ्य इत्युक्त्वा आत्मानमनन्यं ध्यायन् तदूर्ध्वबाहुर्विमुक्तमार्गो भवेदनिकेतश्चरेत् । भिक्षाशी यत्किञ्चिद् दद्यात् । लवकं नाघावयेत्

जन्तुसंरक्षणार्थं वर्षवर्जम् इति । तदपि श्लोका भवन्ति ॥४॥

4. After renunciation he shall not resume the performance of fire rituals. He shall recite the spiritual *mantra*, 'May I, who have [verily] become Death, enter into that [Knowledge of Brahman] which is being engendered.'<sup>8</sup> Saying 'Wellness be to all beings', contemplating on the Self (Atman) and naught else, and with raised arms, he shall tread the path of [absolute] Freedom; he shall be a homeless wanderer. He shall subsist on alms and not [indulge in] giving of gifts.<sup>9</sup> He shall not wear even the barest [minimum] of clothes for the protection of [the bio-physical aggregate, that is] the body, except during the rainy season. Moreover, there are [the following] verses [in this regard].

(to be continued)

## Notes

1. The well-known division of a person's life into four *āśramas*, or stages, is as follows: (i) *brahmacharya-āśrama*: the stage of a celibate student; (ii) *gārhasthya-āśrama*: the stage of a married person remaining in a household (house-holder); (iii) *vānaprastha-āśrama*: the stage of an ascetic or recluse living away from the household after fulfilling all his commitments to his family; (iv) *sannyāsa-āśrama*: the stage of a monk living a life of absolute dependence on God.
2. That is, by giving them proper education so that acquiring necessary competence and qualifications, they may get established in life.
3. By the word *guru* is meant here wise men and senior well-wishers, including his preceptor and *ācāryas*.
4. Being of no more use to him.
5. The idea seems to be that, seized of the divine fervour of renunciation, he shall make an all out do-or-die attempt at totally abandoning any kind of duality in the world of 'transactions' (*vyavahāra* in *dvaita prapañca*).
6. The word used in the original is *payah*, which could mean either milk or water.
7. The actual sacrifices that he used to perform before *sannyāsa* are now replaced by symbolic performances. Upaniṣad Brahmayogin comments as follows: The consumption of milk and so on is mentioned to indicate that after *sannyāsa*, one should not perform sacrifices like the *agniṣṭoma* or repeat the *mantras* pertaining to them as before.
8. The construction here is rather elliptical. Upaniṣad Brahmayogin gives an elaborate commentary on the same *mantra*, which occurs also in the *Kuṇḍika Upaniṣad*. We briefly summarize his commentary: Upon taking the vows of renunciation, a *sannyāsin* shall not perform any fire ceremony. If it be asserted that even after renunciation one is justified in continuing with fire ceremonies enjoined in the *śruti* (the Vedas) and the *smṛti* (secondary scriptures specifying rules, codes of conduct, and so on) for the sake of liberation or for the attainment of mental purification, the answer is no; there could be no such justification. For, a person who has crossed over to the other side of a river by means of a boat does not carry the boat on his head after reaching the other shore! Rituals and ceremonies, meant for mental purification, lose their purpose when once such purification is attained. Suppose one asks, 'What harm does it entail if one continues to perform the ceremonies despite taking to vows of renunciation?' The answer is contained in the spiritual *mantra* mentioned in the text: 'May I, who have verily become Death . . . .' The 'I' referred to here is the *śruti* texts that enjoin appropriate rituals and ceremonies for the various social orders. These ritualistic portions of the Vedas (usually called the *karmakāṇḍa*, which the *sannyāsin* is supposed to have transcended), tell the *sannyāsin*, as it were, in so many words: 'Look, if you fail to remain absorbed in the contemplation of the supreme Brahman, which is

supposed to be the only activity of a *sannyāsīn*, but rather continue to be engaged in ritualistic ceremonies even after having formally renounced them, then I, having become Death, will enter into the Brahman-Knowledge that is being engendered in you as a *sannyāsīn*.’ Here Death means inattention or forgetfulness, that is, lack of one-pointed application to the high ideal of *sannyāsa*. Scriptures call this inattention (*pramāda*) to be verily the death of spiritual striving and realization, for *pramāda* leads to forgetfulness of the spiritual Goal that is Brahman. On account of this ‘death’ entering the knowledge engendered in the *sannyāsīn* devoted to *karma-kāṇḍa* (ritualism and ceremonialism), his knowledge ceases to be knowledge—it is in fact ignorance or at the most a semblance of knowledge. The import is that a *sannyāsīn* shall not indulge in ritualism or ceremonialism that he has renounced as being needless accretions to his ever-pure, ever-free, ever-awakened, self-effulgent inner Core of personality—the Self or Atman—which must be his only Goal and pursuit. Suppose one asks, ‘What about a person who has taken the *sannyāsa* vows without sufficient mental purification? Does he not need to go through some ritualism in order to attain mental purification, which is the essential prerequisite for getting established in Knowledge (*jnana-niṣṭhā*)?’ The answer is no. A *sannyāsīn* ought not to take up what he has formally renounced (on getting initiated into *sannyāsa* through the great *sannyāsa mantras*), no matter whether he has done so knowingly or unknowingly. But then, the scriptures speak of two classes of *sannyāsa*: (1) *vidvat-sannyāsa*: renunciation by spiritual aspirants of a very high order, those who renounce the world after attaining Knowledge; in their case *sannyāsa* is a mere formality, meant for *loka-saṅgraha*, or universal welfare; (2) *vividīṣā-sannyāsa*: renunciation by those aspirants who have not yet attained the highest Wisdom, but are deeply eager to attain It. While absolute abandonment of all ritualism and *karma-kāṇḍa* is prescribed for the former class, the latter may, without giving up steadfast adherence to the highest Ideal of *sannyāsa*, repeat the *praṇava mantra* (*Om*) and the *mahāvākya* (Great Saying), for these assert the absolute non-difference between the individual Spirit (*jīvātman*) and the supreme Spirit (*paramātman*). The *vividīṣā-sannyāsīns* may, in order to attain mental purification, repeat spiritual *mantras* like the *praṇava*, *mahāvākyas* or the hundred and eight Upaniṣads starting with the *Īśa Upaniṣad*. But in no case should they perform rituals and ceremonies with a view to attaining any of their objects of desire.

9. The import is that a *sannyāsīn* must not enter into the world of ‘transactions’—of giving and taking—however glorified it may be as a ‘gift of love’. Swami Vivekananda called this ‘sanctified shopkeeping’.

### Work As a Spiritual Discipline

Troubles arise only when there is any slackness in spiritual practices. You have to do His work without any attachment. Know it for certain that if one goes on performing one’s duties under the sincere belief that one is doing God’s work, one can never suffer spiritually. God protects such a one for ever. But the fall comes as soon as egotism and attachment creep in. The Master used to say that there should be no self-deception in the matter of sticking to the ideal. One need have no fear so long as one clings to the idea ‘I am thankful that I am able to do His work, to serve Him through this.’ One should keep strict vigilance over one’s mind, analysing it at every turn. Whenever you notice that the course of the mind is altering even slightly, you should at once start praying to Him with all humility, and you should apply yourself more intensely to your spiritual practices.

—Mahapurush Swami Shivananda



## Reviews



*For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA  
publishers need to send two copies of their latest publications.*

### **Conquest of the Four Quarters: Traditional Accounts of the Life of Sankara.**

*Jonathan Bader.* Aditya Prakashan, F-14/65 Model Town, Phase II, New Delhi 110 009. 2000. xv + 392 pp. Rs 550.

In India Shankaracharya is a name to conjure with. This great saintly sage forged a golden spiritual link that united the divided country of India. We have no authentic information about the time in which he flourished. Scholars are divided and the suggested dates start from the sixth century BC. This particular date, however, seems to be absurd. The tendency is to accept the years 788-820. Be that as it may, Shankara is a unique personality who gave India her identity and for this we can never be grateful enough to him. This fact was freely acknowledged at the time of the national celebration of the 1200th anniversary of his birth in April 1988.

Shankaracharya is great not because he is an apostle of either jnana or bhakti but because he is an apostle of both. The man who wrote the stupendous commentaries on the *Brahma Sutras*, the Upanishads and the *Bhagavadgita* also wrote majestic hymns like *Dakshinamurti Stotra*, *Saundaryalahari* and *Anandalahari*.

There is a greater miracle the great acharya achieved in his short lifespan of thirty-two years. He wandered from one end of India to another—from Kashmir to Kanya Kumari, from Puri to Dwarka—in those days of extremely difficult and hazardous travelling. And it was always a victorious journey. Shankara came, he saw, he conquered.

It is no wonder that the book under review, which is a chronicle of the traditional accounts of the life of Shankara, is entitled *Conquest of the Four Quarters*. The author takes his cue from the most famous of such accounts entitled *Shankara-digvijaya*. It is one of those biographies that began to emerge after some seven hundred years or more after the demise of Shankara. These works are mainly instrumental in securing for him a lasting place in Indian culture. They could create a vital and versatile

image of the great master, who became an object of adoration and veneration in all parts of the Indian subcontinent.

The present study discusses eight works on Shankaracharya: Madhava's *Shankara-digvijaya* and the seven lives prior to it. Excerpts from seven previously untranslated texts are presented here for the first time: Anantanandagiri's *Shankara-vijaya*, Chidvilasa's *Shankara-vijaya-vilasa*, Vyasa-chala's *Shankara-vijaya*, Rajachudamani Dikshita's *Shankara-abhyudaya*, Govindanatha's *Shankaracharya-charita*, Tirumala Dikshita's *Shankara-abhyudaya* and Lakshmana Shastri's *Guruvamsha-kavya*.

Initially Dr Bader gives an account of these eight biographical works. Then he attempts to construct the life story of Shankara from them under the following principal heads: circumstances of his birth and early years; Vyasa, who approves his work and extends his life; meeting with Kumarila Bhatta; debate with Mandana-Vishwarupa (adjudicated by Sarasvati); debate with Sarasvati; and entering into the body of the dying king to learn the erotic arts. The author, however, notes that 'the elaborate life story of Sankara found in the Sanskrit hagiographies stands in strong contrast to the paucity of verifiable biographical data.' (71) The author is not sure about the influences behind the composition of the hagiographies. It is possible that the emergence of the texts coincides with the development of major Shankarite institutions at Shringeri and elsewhere. There are also political factors.

The third chapter of the book examines the Shaiva mythological setting. The next chapter is concerned with Shankaracharya's all-India tour to which the hagiographers devote considerable attention. The author believes that whatever the nature and extent of this tour, it is based on a historical event. However, any attempt to read the hagiographies as history is bound to be futile. The fifth chapter is concerned with the great debates: the Shankara-Mandana debate; refutation of the Buddhist doctrines; refutation of Buddhists and Jains; and refutation of other Shaiva doctrines.

The penultimate chapter of the book is devoted to Shankaracharya's legacy: the Advaita tradition, the *mathas* and the establishment of the sects. It has to be admitted though that it is hardly possible to ascertain whether Shankaracharya himself was ever interested in the foundation of monastic centres. Still the fact remains that the Shankara *mathas* maintain a high profile in contemporary Hindu society. The conclusion is sensitive as well as sensible: 'Because of their very real integration in the social fabric of India, the Sankara *mathas* are not exempt from the conflicts which are prevalent on the local, regional and national levels. Indeed the disputes testify to the vitality of the Sankara tradition today.' (307)

The author has shown how the modern period has seen continual reworkings of Shankaracharya's figure. This is only natural as 'For political and religious leaders as well as the educated public, the Sankara story strikes a chord deep within which resonates with the sound "self-sacrifice". So long as this message is heard, Sankara remains a dynamic symbol of the ascetic values which are at the very heart of Indian culture.' (329)

*Conquest of the Four Quarters* is scholarly and comprehensive and Dr Jonathan Bader writes with ease and clarity. His knowledge of Sanskrit is adequate for his purpose. He is well read and has done his homework thoroughly. He has a good knowledge of contemporary Indian political affairs and can strike the right balance between his personal love of the Indian tradition and the true researcher's objectivity.

*Dr Visvanath Chatterjee*  
Former Professor of English  
Jadavpur University, Kolkata

**Mahabharata.** *Trans. and retold by William Buck.* Motilal Banarsidass, 41-UA Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, New Delhi 110 007. 2000. xxviii + 417 pp. Rs 195.

**S**wami Vivekananda says, '... if there is one word in the English language to express the effect which the literature of India produces upon mankind, it is this one word, "fascination". It is the opposite of anything that takes you suddenly; it throws on you, as it were, a charm imperceptibly.' This is what the study of Sanskrit and the reading of

Indian classics and epics have done to William Buck. There is no escape from it. The world has never produced and will never produce, even in the future with all its modern technology, anything even closely resembling the *Mahabharata*. It is massive, it is comprehensive, it is astounding, it is one of the finest writings of religious literature ever to be produced by the human brain. Great people have tried in vain to describe it. It is sufficient to say that the *Mahabharata* includes everything human and divine and all that exists in between, and that it reaches out and affects different layers of one's psyche all at once. The impress made is invariably a lasting one.

The *Mahabharata* is a long struggle between two branches of a royal family, culminating in a horrible war at Kurukshetra. Ancillary stories have gone into embellishing the epic and there are stories within stories. But this is the mere framework, which is filled in with history, mythology, religion, philosophy, mysticism, rituals, magic, mantras, dharma or ethics, social and individual duties, the various sciences of war, diplomacy, culture, heroism—the list is staggering and endless. And this has made what the *Mahabharata* is today—the manual, the essence, of Indian heritage. To rewrite this epic in a simple and however shortened form is next to inconceivable; it will be like throwing away the bathtub along with the water and the baby.

By chance when the author came across an old copy of the *Bhagavadgita*, which forms a very small fraction of the *Mahabharata*, his interest in Indian epics culminated in translating and retelling in simple poetic style the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. This book is not a technically or a fully translated book, both of which would be impossible within 400 pages. What the author has done is, keeping the original story in view, retell it in a popular, modern idiom for contemporary readers. One can very easily see how deeply William Buck was committed to the *Mahabharata*, which in turn has made his book a very interesting read.

Those who don't have the time or the patience to go through huge literal translations, will be immensely helped by this book. Once this spell of William Buck's retelling of the *Mahabharata* is cast on readers, they will surely get encouraged to go through other less abridged versions. The book comes in soft cover with good quality paper and printing. B A Van Nooten's Introduction is brief but clear. Black-and-white sketches by Shirley Triest

are very good. A delightful book indeed.

*Swami Satyamayananda*  
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata

**The Gītā and the Tulsī-Rāmāyaṇa: Their Common Call for the Good of all.** *Satyā P Agarwal*. Motilal Banarsidass. 2000. xv + 246. Rs 295.

It is the greatest good to the greatest number which is the measure of right and wrong, wrote Jeremy Bentham, and these words seem to have inspired Satya P Agarwal when he undertook a comparative study of two immortal religious classics of India from a particular viewpoint: their common call for the good of all. This idea, it is obvious, goes even further than that of Bentham. We are reminded of the ancient Sanskrit prayer: May *all* be happy. May *all* be healthy.

In his Preface, Dr Agarwal explains the significance of the year of publication: 2000. Now that the challenges of the twenty-first century have to be met, as an admirer of the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Rām-caritmānas*, the Rāmāyaṇa of Tulsidās (hereafter *Mānas*), he strongly feels that the promoters of the universal message of these two great books need to be alert in making their views known now, so as not to let a great cause suffer from lack of appropriate and timely action.

This is exactly what the learned author does. He, however, specifies as to what particular aspects of the *Gītā* and the *Mānas* need, in his opinion, to be promoted at the beginning of the new century. He summarizes the necessary specification in three steps. First, that the message of the *Gītā* is to encourage all the people to put an end to discrimination, injustice and conflicts, through programmes based on social harmony, justice and social service. Second, that the *Mānas* too contains practically the same message as the *Gītā*. Third, that both these books are in favour of adjusting religious practices to changing social needs. So the dharma that they envisage for the conflict-ridden society of today needs to emphasize a broad ideal like *avibhaktam vibhakteṣu*, that is, to bring about unity in the midst of diversity.

Not that the author is the first writer to emphasize the universal message of the *Gītā* and the *Mānas*. This noble task has already been accomplished by great leaders like Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Sadhu Vaswani and Acharya

Vinoba Bhave. Yet there is the urgent need for spelling out the message once again from the present-day point of view, and the book under review admirably fulfils the need. The book is the culmination of the author's scholarly work for years. He has already written five earlier books on the subject, the first being *The Social Role of the Gītā: How and Why* (1993).

The author believes that the good of all is the single most important criterion of excellence of any socio-political approach to the problems of today's conflict-ridden life. This criterion is comprehensively discussed in the course of the book. This presentation, with its three life-sustaining streams of thought, can indeed be compared to the three sacred rivers Ganga, Yamuna and Sarasvati. The first stream is the *lokasaṅgraha*-message of the *Gītā*, which has evolved in that holy book from ten different but interconnected angles. The second stream refers to the *jaḡmangal*-message of the *Mānas*, which is quite simple and can be easily related to the same ten angles as can be applied to the *Gītā*. The third stream, the theme of the opening chapter of the book, refers to the frequently used expressions of concern for the good of all, which started with the Vedas and which continued as an integral part of the Indian spiritual and cultural tradition up to the times of the *Gītā*, the *Mānas* and later.

The book is divided into thirteen well-written chapters, in the last of which there is a section which discusses the important contribution of Swami Vivekananda, especially vis-à-vis his foundation of the Ramakrishna Mission, with its motto of *ātmano mokṣārtham jaḡaddhitāya ca* (for one's own liberation and for the good of the world).

The author deserves our congratulations on an excellent research work that is scholarly as well as readable. It preaches the practical philosophy of service to humanity. And jiva and Shiva being identical, service to humanity is synonymous with service to God.

*Dr Visvanath Chatterjee*

**Ramayana.** *Trans. and retold by William Buck*. Motilal Banarsidass. 2000. xxvii + 432 pp. Rs 195.

The *Ramayana*, or the Way of Rama, the first epic poem of mankind, has irresistibly moved people down the ages. There will never be another



story like the *Ramayana* that has moulded people's thoughts, imaginations, lives, morality, arts, paintings and sculptures, not only in India but all over the world. In the original *Ramayana* of Sage Valmiki, one comes across a rich and beautiful tapestry of religion, history, metaphysics, mysticism, morality and heroism, which has helped transform the religious psyche of the Hindus.

The *Ramayana* abounds with heroes, the principal one being Sri Rama, the prince of Ayodhya. And the main theme is dharma, the triumph of good over evil. Apart from this is the impressive portrayal of characters. In his translation, William Buck has succeeded to a great extent in depicting them acceptably and, more importantly, in bringing out the religious tone which pervades the entire *Ramayana*.

This cannot be called a literal translation of the epic, but a retelling of it in the form of a story. And what a retelling! The language is simple and poetic and will delight both the grown up and the young alike. There are a few places where there is a slight deviation from the original, but it is to make it more readable and in no way mars the story. All credit should go to William Buck for translating and retelling in about 400 pages an epic like the *Ramayana*. The sketches by Shirley Triest bring additional life to the pages, although the orthodox Hindu will frown at some of them. The book is soft bound and excellently composed in clear type.

*Swami Satyamayananda*

**Conquering the Brain—Towards the Essence of the Multiversity and the Akhanda Paradigm.** *Dr A K Mukhopadhyay.* Conscious Publishers, 22-B, DDA Flats, New Friends Colony, Tamoornagar, New Delhi 110 065. 1995. 281 pp. Rs 350.

**D**r Mukhopadhyay, a professional doctor on the faculty of AIIMS, has made a mark by his previous works entitled *A Dynamic Web of Supracortical Consciousness* (1987) and *Frontiers of Research for Human Biologists* (1985). According to information available in the present volume, both of these received appreciative comments from well-known writers like Larry Dosse. In fact, Prof Gopinath of AIIMS says that 'the author's work is phenomenal.'

With this background, we have the present study with a thoroughly researched but sometimes despairingly technical study of the nature of con-

sciousness in the context of modern science and cognitive theories. The book consists of seven parts covering areas such as 'Death Experience', 'New Paradigms', 'The Responsivity of the Brain' and 'Revisiting Nature'. The final part entitled 'Towards a New Formation' seems to be the culmination of many of the arguments advanced in the course of the book. One helpful feature is the glossary for technical words provided by the author. Curiously, the glossary, at least a part of it, is in the form of questions we get quite often in a study of this nature.

The author says that he derived his paradigms from his guru Swami Swarupananda Paramahansa Dev, who declared that he came 'to create a new history on this planet. To follow the beaten track is not my way.' This sets the tone for the models and metaphors the author advances with obviously some interior awareness. He says that 'the multiverse is born out of Interuniversal Essence of the Transcendental Essence/Transformative Essence/Essence of the Multiversity. This Essence is Consciousness—Mother Nature, who imparts an absolute transparency in the system, makes it an ever-open process, generates infinite pluralism.' To put it in perhaps non-technical language, as the author himself does, this is 'the ground of everything. It is everywhere, everytime, in everything—the Immanent.' This is marked by capacity for infinite creations and variations. Perhaps this is indivisible awareness that goes beyond the purely physical, neurological models of the brain.

As far as I could follow, the tenor of the arguments of the Akhanda Paradigm have at their core what the mystics emphasize—Love. Dr Mukhopadhyay coins a term, supracortical awareness, 'which is exemplified in sacrifice and love'. As he rightly says, 'Whatever sacrifice and love one observes day by day is, in fact, the result of the successful expedition of SCC through numerous obscurities of the infrastructure of the nervous system.'

In short, this is an important contribution to an area where few venture. Highly technical, it is yet an honest attempt to work out an alternate model of the universe and consciousness, as a corrective to the Western paradigms.

*Dr M Sivaramkrishna*  
Former Professor and Head  
Department of English  
Osmania University, Hyderabad

---

---

## ॐ Reports ॐ

**Organized.** Its 21st free eye-operation camp; by Ramakrishna Mission, Kamarpukur; between 16 and 18 November 2002. Swami Smarananandaji, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, distributed spectacles to 131 poor patients who underwent cataract operations.

**Visited.** Ramakrishna Mission, Bhubaneswar; by Sri Surendra Nath Nayak, Minister for Schools and Mass Education, Government of Orissa; on 29 January 2003. He participated in the annual function of the school run by the centre.

**Dedicated.** A new marble image of Sri Ramakrishna at Ramakrishna Math, Thrisur; by Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission; on 3 February (Swami Brahmananda's birthday).

**Celebrated.** Centenary of Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Varanasi; from 3 to 6 February. Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, released the book *Shatavarsher Duti Phul* brought out on the occasion. Swami Smarananandaji presided over the public meeting and released the book *Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama—100 Years (1902-2002)*.

**Visited.** Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi; by Sri T N Chaturvedi, Governor of Karnataka; on 6 February.

**Organized.** A medical camp and an exhibition on Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda at the Triveni Sangam on the occasion of Magh Mela; by Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Allahabad; from 16 January to

16 February. About 16,000 patients were treated at the medical camp and nearly 100,000 people visited the exhibition.

**Unveiled.** A marble statue of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and a bronze statue of Swami Vivekananda at Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service; by Swami Atmasthanandaji; on 7 February.

**Visited.** Ramakrishna Mission, Narottam Nagar; by Sri Arvind Dave, Governor of Arunachal Pradesh; on 10 February. He participated in a value-education camp organized by the centre.

**Visited.** Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Lucknow; by Sri Vishnukant Shastri, Governor of Uttar Pradesh; on 18 February. He participated in the Vivekananda Polyclinic's 33rd dedication day ceremony.

**Inaugurated.** A colony of 50 new earthquake-resistant houses built by Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Memorial, Porbandar; by Swami Atmasthanandaji; at Tumbda (Bokhira-Porbandar); on 23 February. The houses were handed over to the beneficiaries at a public meeting in the presence of government officials, prominent citizens and a large number of the local population.

**Distributed.** 18 kg of rice per family to 1360 drought-affected families of Tanjavur, Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam districts by Ramakrishna Math, Chennai; 271 warm garments by Ramakrishna Mission, Indore; 309 blankets by Ramakrishna Mission Seva Samiti, Karimganj; 367 warm garments by Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Kishanpur; to poor people; in February. \*