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Cover Design: Swami Brahmananda temple, Belur Math. The temple has a marble image of Swami Brahmananda. Sri Ramakrishna once declared him to be a boyhood companion of Sri Krishna in his earlier birth. As if to remind that fact, there is a little image of child Krishna below Swami Brahmananda's image. It is worshipped on special occasions like Sri Krishna Janmashtami. On the top of the temple dome there is a Chakra (Disc), symbolising Maha Vishnu's weapon.

May

10 Akshaya Tritiya
12 Sri Shankara Jayanti

23 Buddha Purnima
01, 16 & 31 Ashtami

04 & 19 Ekadashi



THE VEDANTA KESARI

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
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॥ Tanme Manaḥ Śivasamkalpam Astu ॥

May My Mind Dwell On That Which Is Auspicious

(Continued from the previous issue ...)

सुषारथिश्चानिव यन्मनुष्यान् नेनीयतेऽभीशुभिर्वाजिन इव ।
हृत्प्रतिष्ठं यदजिरं जविष्ठं तन्मे मनः शिवसङ्कल्पमस्तु ॥

- Vājasanēyī Saṃhita, 34-6

Introduction

The mantras 1-5 were explained in the previous issues. The 6th and the last mantra in the Siva-Sankalpa-Suktam are discussed here.

Mantra Word Meaning

यत् — by whom, by the (grace) of the all-knowing and all-powerful Lord; मनुष्यान् — humans; सु-षारथिः — a skillful charioteer; अश्वान्-इव — like horses; वाजिनः — the horses go as fast as they can; अभीशुभिः-इव — as with reins; नेनीयते — taking forward very skilfully; यत् — in what, in the Ishvara; अजिरं — agile, quick, rapid like wind; जविष्ठं — always young; हृत् — in the heart; प्रतिष्ठं — dwells; मनः — Omniscience of Ishvara; तत् — such as; मे — to self (to me); शिव-संकल्पं — mind with good intentions and auspiciousness; अस्तु — may God answer our prayers.

Mantra Meaning

The mind that takes a person here and there, like an expert charioteer, controls and takes the powerful horses here and there; the mind that is devoid of old age, fast-moving, and dwells in the heart; may that mind evoke auspicious thoughts in me.

Explanation

This mantra explains a common obstacle that aspirants generally face during the course of spiritual sadhana. It also clearly informs what measures human beings need to take to prevent that obstacle from slowing us down in gaining the supreme state of mind.

This is explained through an analogy of a chariot, the charioteer and the horses. The human body is a chariot, the mind is the charioteer and it holds the reins and controls the horses—the *Pañca jñānēndriyās* (five sense organs). If the horses are wild and not controlled by the charioteer, they will lead the body-mind to disaster. But if the charioteer (mind) does not submit to the whims of the horses (senses), and instead restrains them by exercising control on the reins, one can lead them towards the desired goal.



Raghava S. Boddupalli, is a Ph.D., Institute of Sanskrit and Vedic Studies (ISVS), Sanjayanagar, Bengaluru. ॐ

It is a common experience that when a spiritual aspirant employs the inner meditational Yajñas, he immediately encounters resistance from his sense-organs, which are constantly seeking the mind's attention. The mind too, being naturally restless, begins to wander towards the sense-objects. Temptations are there always and can prove to be very distracting. At that time, the intellect will intervene and caution the aspirant to keep up his or her Yajñas (spiritual goals), attain the supreme state of mind, and abide in the Self. To contain the wandering mind and continue the sadhana, the aspirant should be blessed and have the grace of God.

But this is not easy! The moment the aspirant tries to direct the mind and restrict its movement from a path undesirable for spiritual growth, the five senses will begin to offer more food for the imagination and wandering of the mind. The mind and the senses are natural allies, and they will try their best to disrupt all your attempts to control them and direct them towards spiritual practices. Thus, it becomes extremely important to ask your mind to ignore the attractions of senses and keep them calm.

Therefore, it is better to lose the temporary sensual pleasure than compromise the freedom gained through higher knowledge of Vedic texts and mantras. If one wishes to know the heart of the matter of this world and beyond, one must first know one's own inner heart. One must clean and purify the mind by performing continuous daily spiritual practice and Yajñas, and make correct choices through proper use of one's intellect.

May my mind, untouched by the influence of the senses, dwell on auspicious thoughts of ever-increasing abidance in the Self, and attain supremacy in all aspects.

Summary of Sankalpa Suktam

Following is a recapitulation of the six mantras of *Sankalpa Suktam* for the benefit of the readers: **Mantra 1** – May my mind—that mind which runs far in the waking state and returns to the deep sleep, that wanderer, who is the light of all lights—have auspicious thoughts (good intentions); **Mantra 2** – May my mind—that mind by which the wise men, well established in *Karma Kanda*, remain engaged in various *Yajñas* (spiritual rituals) and also that which is unique and lives in all beings—have auspicious thoughts; **Mantra 3** – May my mind—that mind which is endowed with intelligence (*Buddhi*), consciousness, fortitude, and immortality and the light within all beings, and that without which no action is possible—have auspicious thoughts; **Mantra 4** – May my mind—that mind which is immortal, because of which the past, present and future are known, that through which the fire ritual with seven priests is performed—have auspicious thoughts; **Mantra 5** – May my mind—that mind in which the *Rg*, *Sama*, and *Yajur Veda* mantras are established like the spokes in the hub of a chariot wheel and by which the minds of all beings are pervaded—have auspicious thoughts; **Mantra 6** – May my mind—that mind which guides men like a good charioteer who controls the horses, and which dwells within and is ageless and fast—have auspicious thoughts.

The human mind is the cause of peace and happiness when purified and the source of sorrow when impure; and if conquered, it grants accomplishment and perfection (*siddhi*); but when unconquered, it generates failure. It well behooves human beings to bring and keep this mind under their control.

Tanme manaḥ śivasamkalpam astu! May my mind have auspicious thoughts! 🙏

(Concluded.)



What Do I Really Want in Life?

The question, ‘what do I really want?’ may be unsettling to many, especially the young, because a young person has all those requisite resources to achieve anything in life. And a youth who is at a crossroads in life is definitely puzzled by his or her state of affairs. He may most likely wonder at the fact that how can he want anything? A slave has no wants. A slave has no wishes. And almost all of us are mere slaves.

Are we Masters to want anything? If you ask a slave about his ambitions in life, most probably he will laugh at you and say that he cannot think of anything apart from his Master’s commands. Such is our case. We are the slaves who are always looking up to a Master. We are in search of leaders whom we can follow, and who can guide us. We are like those blind men who are just walking in the direction of least resistance.

All the great people of the past have ended up in photo frames. Where can we see a great one? Where can we get that enlightenment? Then the answer comes: We have to take charge of ourselves. We have to become the light unto ourselves. We have to conquer this slavery.

Throughout our history, we have held the belief that we are in a state of servitude. There is a well-known anecdote about an English traveller who encountered a pitiable individual toiling in the fields under the authority of a master. Compelled by a sense of compassion, the traveller sought to liberate this individual from his bondage and approached the master, offering to pay the full sum demanded for his release. However, upon informing the slave and his family of their newfound freedom and the opportunity to chart their own course, they exhibited an inability to comprehend and accept this reality. The

concept of liberation had never entered their consciousness, and they were utterly unprepared to confront such a scenario should it materialise. They lacked the necessary preparation to assume the role of being their own master. Consequently, they expressed a desire to remain in their current state of servitude.

When Swami Vivekananda asserts that individuals are the architects of their own destiny, it is often met with scepticism. His proclamations that individuals are infinite and immortal souls with divine potential can seem paradoxical and even humorous. However, upon deeper reflection, it becomes evident that embracing this freedom and self-mastery is essential. The challenge lies in breaking free from ingrained habits and overcoming the limitations imposed by past conditioning. These obstacles hinder progress towards achieving personal liberation and realising one's full potential.

It has come to our attention that we have developed a mindset that limits our capabilities and potential. We find ourselves in a state of complacency, akin to a worm or an ant blindly following its predecessor. This phenomenon can be likened to the proverbial 'blind leading the blind'. When confronted with enticing opportunities, we succumb to their allure, neglecting our inherent power to overcome challenges and achieve success.

The question 'What is my true desire?' is only relevant to those who have achieved mastery. Swamiji encourages all aspiring masters to seek his guidance. He exemplifies leadership through personal conduct. Consequently, we would no longer require external support for survival.

We are familiar with the historical account of Alexander's encounter with King Puru,

the ruler of an ancient kingdom in northwestern India. Following Alexander's victory over Puru, he engaged in a conversation with the captured king, inquiring about his preferred treatment. 'O Puru, how would you like to be treated by me?', asked Alexander. Puru replied, 'As a king treats another king.' Puru's response demonstrated remarkable composure and self-respect, requesting to be treated with the dignity befitting a king, even in the face of defeat and captivity.

We have a lesson to learn. We must behold our inner kingdom. The slavish mindset must be given up. Only a king can be asked this question, 'What do you really want?' and only a king can answer this question befittingly. Sister Nivedita used to address her guru Swami Vivekananda as a king in many of her letters written to Ms. MacLeod etc.

Here is another anecdote about Alexander. His guru instructed him to bring a holy man from India, a land renowned for its abundance of enlightened souls. One of Alexander's military commanders approached a revered holy man in an Indian village and extended an invitation to join their entourage and travel to their country. Upon the holy man's reluctance to leave, the commander resorted to threatening him with death by the sword. In response, the holy man, firmly established in his immortal nature and unfazed by the prospect of physical demise, responded with a hearty laugh.

The most crucial life lesson is the realisation of the oneness of the individual soul with the universal consciousness, often referred to as 'Thou art That'. This profound understanding liberates us from the limitations imposed by our physical and mental constructs, leading to a state of fulfilment and reverence, even in the highest realms of existence. 🙏



THE VEDANTA KESARI

One hundred and eleven years and going strong....

His famous address at The World's Parliament of Religions, Chicago, in 1893 had catapulted Swami Vivekananda to the status of a super star. But Swamiji was not one to bask in chaffy glory. He wrote in a letter dated 12 Jan 1895, 'I want to preach my ideas for the good of the world. ... What work have you done in the way of advancing the ideas and organising in India? ... My life is more precious than spending it in getting the admiration of the world. I have no time for such foolery.'

Swamiji loved and revered his motherland as his own mother. Every breath of his aspired for her well-being and every cell in his body yearned that she regains her lost glory. Swamiji's panacea for this lay in India's very own practical and ennobling Vedantic wisdom. Vedanta recognises no weakness. It proclaims that in every individual lies a mine of strength. All that is needed is an effort to draw from it.

For the propagation of the powerful message of Vedanta, Swamiji opted for the print medium and decided to bring out a journal, giving it the name *Brahmavadin*. In February 1895, in a letter to his trusted disciple Alasinga Perumal, he wrote: 'Now I am bent upon starting the journal. Herewith I send a hundred dollars ... Hope this will go just a little in starting your paper.'

Brahmavadin became the selfless and devoted Alasinga's calling and the first issue rolled out from a press in Broadway, Chennai on 14 September 1895. The birth of the magazine was certainly an occasion for celebration but the struggles were far from over. But Alasinga braved on, surmounting many an impediment. Sadly, Swamiji passed away in

1902, at the age of thirty-nine. Alasinga's intense anguish morphed into heightened devotion towards the magazine. But the next hurdle came in 1909, in the form of Alasinga's own demise. In May 1914, the magazine, tottering as it was, floundered and grounded to a halt.

It was at this crucial juncture, that the Ramakrishna Mission stepped in to revive it. Had not our beloved Swamiji said, '*The Brahmavadin is a jewel – it must not perish!*' And so, the very next month when *Brahmavadin* closed down, it was resuscitated with the new name *The Vedanta Kesari*.

The history of *The Vedanta Kesari* is much more than just a tale of sweat, toil, and a dream realised. It is the roaring *Lion of Vedanta* that forces the foxes of human weaknesses to run to their holes.

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Mahasamadhi of Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj

16th President of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission

With deep sorrow we announce the passing away of Swami Smarananandaji, President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, on Tuesday, 26 March 2024 at 8:14 pm at Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan hospital, Kolkata. He was 94. The news was soon posted on the Belur Math website and published in several newspapers the following morning.

Revered Maharaj went on a visit to Kamarpukur and Jayrambati in September last year. While in Jayrambati, his health deteriorated on account of a chest infection and he was admitted to Peerless Hospital in Kolkata on 27 September. After



two months, he was discharged from the hospital and taken to Narendrapur Ashrama. His health gradually improved over the next few weeks. However, on 18 January, he developed a fever and there was a fall in blood pressure. He was immediately admitted to the Peerless Hospital again. From there he was moved to Seva Pratishthan

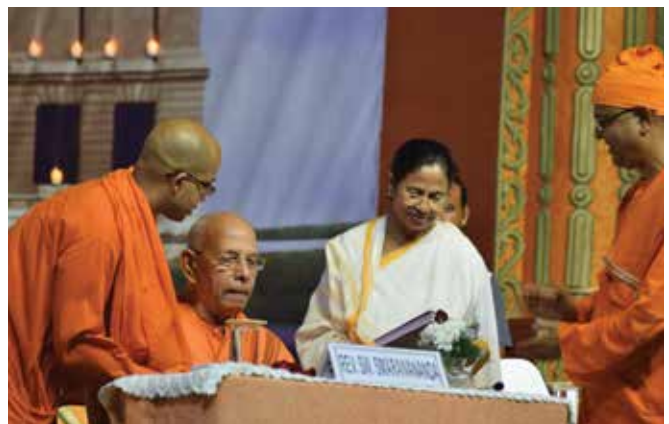
on 29 January. A month later, he developed septicaemia and suffered respiratory failure, for which he was put on ventilator support on 3 March. A tracheostomy was done on 13 March. As he subse-

quently developed acute kidney injury, haemodialysis was started. His condition gradually became critical. Despite the best available medical treatment, he finally passed away owing to septic shock and multi-organ dysfunction on 26 March at 8.14 pm.

The body of Revered Maharaj was brought to Belur Math late in the night and was kept in the Cultural Hall next to President Maharaj's quarters. A large number of monks from branch centres, and thousands of disciples, devotees, admirers and friends thronged the Math premises throughout the night and the next day to pay their last respects and homage. Sri C V Ananda Bose, Governor of West Bengal, and many other dignitaries also paid visits. On the 27th at 8.20 pm, the body of Revered Maharaj was taken in a procession to the courtyard in front of the Math Office and kept on a high platform in a decorated pandal till 8.45 pm. It was then carried in a procession to Holy Mother's ghat where it was given a ceremonial bath amidst Vedic chanting. The cremation rites which started at 9.35 pm were over by 12.45 am. A large number of monks and devotees stayed till the end of cremation.

Condolences were received from many dignitaries, including the following: Smt. Droupadi Murmu, President of India; Sri Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India; Sri C V Ananda Bose, Governor of West Bengal; Sri Amit Shah, Union Home Minister; Ms Mamata Banerjee, Chief Minister of West Bengal; Sri Pema Khandu, Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh; Smt. Sonia Gandhi, Chairperson of Congress Parliamentary Party; Sri Mohan Bhagwat, Chief of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh; and Sri Suvendu Adhikari, Leader of the Opposition, West Bengal.

Special worship and bhandara in memory of Revered Maharaj was held at Belur Math on Sunday, 7 April. All the branch centres also observed this day suitably with special puja of Sri Ramakrishna.





Swami Smarananandaji was born in village Andami in the district of Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, on 25 December 1929. He came in contact with Mumbai centre when he was 20 years old. Inspired by the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, he joined the order at Mumbai centre in 1952 at the age of 22. Swami Shankaranandaji Maharaj gave him mantra diksha in the same year. He also received from his guru brahmacharya vows in 1956 and sannyasa vows in 1960.

From Mumbai centre, he was transferred in 1958 to the Kolkata branch of Advaita Ashrama. He served at both Mayavati and Kolkata centres of the Advaita Ashrama for 18 long years. For a few years he was the Assistant Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*. He also enthusiastically worked to improve the standard of publications of the Advaita Ashrama.

He was posted to Saradapitha centre as its Secretary in 1976. During his long tenure of more than 15 years there, educational and rural welfare work of Saradapitha saw tremendous development. When West Bengal was struck with devastating floods in 1978, he took up extensive relief operations along with his monastic assistants. From Saradapitha he was posted to Chennai Math as its Head in December 1991.

He was appointed a Trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and Member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1983. In April 1995, he joined the Headquarters as an Assistant Secretary, and after two years, he took charge as the General Secretary of the twin organizations. As the General Secretary, he steered the worldwide Ramakrishna Movement for ten long years until May 2007 when he was elected a Vice-President of the Order. He became the President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission in July 2017.

He travelled extensively in India and different parts of the world, visiting many branches of the Math and Mission and also unaffiliated centres, spreading the message of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda and Vedanta among a vast number of people. He also gave mantra diksha to thousands of spiritual seekers.

Revered Maharaj was a voracious reader and a deep thinker. He contributed a number of articles to various journals of the Ramakrishna Order. Collecting his articles and talks, a few books have been brought out: *Smriti-Smaran-Anudhyan* and *Chintan-Manan-Anushilan* in Bengali, and *Musings of a Monk* in English.

Swami Smarananandaji was loved and respected by all for his wisdom, simplicity, unassuming nature, sense of humour and spiritual fervour. His *mahasamadhi* has left a huge void that is difficult to fill.

Some Incidents in the Life of Swami Smarananandaji

In his pre-monastic days, Maharaj would often go for solitary walks to the Worli beach in Mumbai and quietly sit on the huge rocks on the seashore. He would watch the setting sun. One

day, sitting there, he thought—‘Well, these rocks are so big, the sea is so vast, the sky looks infinite, then what am I—a little speck on the surface of the earth? Why give so much importance to myself?’ Flash came the answer: It is true that you look like a speck on the surface of the earth, but within you a great presence is there which is greater than all these. This thought came forcefully, almost like someone speaking to him, and this idea became imprinted in Jayaram’s mind.

He narrated this to a young sadhu one day saying that this was the ‘First Awakening’ in his life:

I read in Napoleon Hill’s book that (i) one must have an ideal in life, (ii) one should have a great desire to realise that ideal and then (iii) one must put forth enough perseverance to actualise it. So I began thinking— ‘What should be my ideal in life?’ I imagined myself as the richest man in the world, or as the Prime Minister of India. But I found none of these things satisfying. ‘What is the Truth?’—this question was haunting me. One day I was travelling on the upper deck of a bus. I had been thinking for many days—‘What am I to do? What should be my ideal in life?’ An answer seemed to come from within as if someone was speaking—‘I (You) have to become a monk’. I set out to become a monk after this.

There was no looking back after this. Nothing could now distract him from this ideal.

Once a young monk put this question to Swami Smarananandaji, which is very relevant in the context of spiritual life: ‘What is the *sadhana* that you predominantly practise? I don’t see you meditating or doing japa for long hours, nor do I see you going on pilgrimage trips, or going for *tapasya* and the like. What is the *sadhana* then that keeps you going on the spiritual path?’ The senior swami was not annoyed or irritated in the least.

Smilingly he replied: ‘Remember two things: first, try to live the Vedantic truth of *Brahma satyam, jaganmithya* and next, surrender to Sri Ramakrishna like a simple, helpless child’. He continued: ‘From the moment I came into the Ramakrishna Order having been convinced about the ephemeral nature of everything in this world, I have realised two things: one, absolute clarity about the goal of life i.e. God-realisation; and two, absolute clarity about the path that I have to walk to realise this Goal. Although the Goal and the path were both absolutely clear, I knew I could not walk faster than my body and mind would permit. So I walked the spiritual path at my own pace consistent with my inner and outer strength, depending on Sri Ramakrishna. I was never restless that I should attain something quickly nor did I ever lose sight of the steadiness and pace of my walk which depended upon my physical and mental capacity. The secret is: Give yourself up to Sri Ramakrishna, allowing Him to use you, your talents if any, your body and



mind for His cause, as He may think fit, as He may ordain. Always depend upon Him, try to remember Him always and work for Him. He will take care of the rest.'

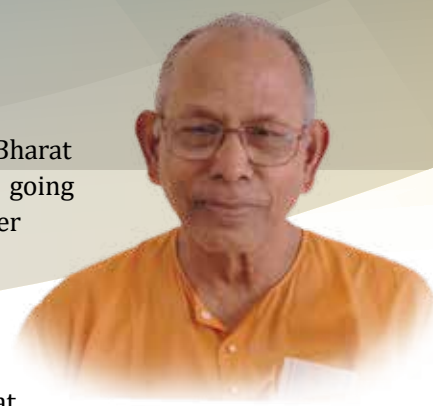
Maharaj was a unique combination of razor-sharp understanding of issues, spiritual and administrative, with a large compassionate heart, forgiving to a fault. Throughout his life, he maintained the same simplicity, un-ostentatiousness, frank, childlike, egoless demeanour. He was easily approachable, open-minded, frank. He would never hesitate to change his own opinion in favour of what was told to him convincingly and logically.

A monk once asked him: 'Maharaj, you have been shouldering so many responsibilities in the Order, of which you yourself once told me that the responsibility of the General Secretary was the toughest and the most difficult. But we have seen you always relaxed, joking and laughing, freely sharing your ideas even with the gardeners, etc.—as if you had no heavy, burdensome responsibility. What was the secret of this behaviour of yours?' Revered Maharaj smiled and replied: 'You see, always remember two things: one, after the world is ultimately unreal, everything is evanescent and ephemeral; and two, it is His (Sri Ramakrishna's) Organisation which He has brought into existence and nurtured (continues to nurture) through Swamiji, Mother and His own direct disciples. We should not and need not be overanxious to do anything except most sincerely and devotedly play our little part. The question we should always ask ourselves is: 'Am I giving my best, very best, to Sri Ramakrishna?' If the answer, hand on heart, is yes, we have nothing to worry. Remember also that He does not need us for His work. But we helplessly need Him for our sustenance and support.' *Gatirbharta prabhussakshi, nivasassharanam suhrid* (Gita 9.18)

Revered Swami Smarananandaji's steadfastness in regard to the study of the scriptures was proverbial. Upanishads with Shankaracharya's commentaries and Bhagavad-Gita with Shanakara's bhashya and Sridhara Swami's tika were his special favourites. He would insist of the brahmacharins getting by heart the whole of Gita and as many Upanishads as possible.



Two of his initiatives are worth mentioning: (i) In 1967 the Akhil Bharat Vivekananda Yuva Mahamandal was founded when West Bengal was going through trying times. Youth particularly bore the brunt of this. To counter this onslaught, the Yuva Mahamandal was started inconspicuously by instilling Swamiji's ideas and ideals in these lost young minds. This institution is thriving today attracting and inspiring thousands of youth. (ii) The Vivekananda Swasthya Seva Sanstha which renders professional medical service in rural and remote parts of West Bengal, was started at his instance.



Sometime in the mid-1980s, the Headquarters entrusted him with the task of recording and bringing out in cassette form, the evening *arati* songs sung in Belur Math and all our centres. With the help of Swami Sarvagananda, Swami Narendrananda, and music experts, the task was done in a very professional manner. Maharaj would normally be present during the rehearsals and recording. But his trademark simplicity was evident here also: his name would never be printed anywhere, but only Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission, Saradapitha, would be printed. Most importantly, these *arati* cassettes along with Ramanama-Sankirtan, songs which were sung by Sri Ramakrishna & Swamiji rendered by established singers, Kali-kirtan, etc., have now reached the houses of numerous devotees and admirers. History will record that this pioneering work was the initiative of Smarananandaji Maharaj.

Swami Tapasyanandaji Maharaj, one of the Vice-Presidents of Sangha and the President of Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, attained Mahasamadhi on 3 October 1991. Smarananandaji Maharaj, who was sent to replace him as President of Chennai Math, assumed charge on 18 December 1991. To accommodate the ever-increasing number of devotees, he planned the construction of a huge Sri Ramakrishna Temple on the Math premises. The foundation stone of the temple was laid by Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, President of the Sangha. Another outstanding contribution during his tenure here was the formation of an All-Tamil Nadu Committee to organise annually an All-Tamil-Nadu-Conference of Devotees of Ramakrishna-Sarada-Vivekananda at different places in the State. Through this initiative, all the non-branch centres in Tamil Nadu were brought under the Ramakrishna Movement umbrella in the State. This made the task of spreading the message of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda easier. During the 3 years and 3 months that he continued here, he endeared himself to both monastics and devotees.

Another significant event of this time is worth narrating. In 1994, there was a proposal to sell the land property in Yelagiri (Tirupattur district, Tamil Nadu) due to maintenance problems. Maharaj decided to stay in that remote place for ten days to personally understand the situation. One brahmacharin accompanied him to look after his personal needs. Those days electricity was available only from 6.00 to 7.00 am and from 7.00 to 8.00 pm. Water was to be fetched from a well that was at a little distance and on a lower level. There was no water pump or overhead tank then. His love for austerity and solitude made him decide that Yelagiri is a beautiful and spiritually vibrant place and that our property there must not be sold. Today, Yelagiri branch is a flourishing centre of the Ramakrishna Math! Indeed Maharaj breathed life into a place that was being written off.

Swami Gautamanandaji says about him: 'Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj was a silent but tireless worker. He was very simple and humble by nature. Though he has struggled and done great works, he never used to mention those to anyone.'



Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj's Beloved Mayavati*

Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj had a great affection for Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, both its external aspect—the Himalaya's grandeur, the stunning nature, the profound silence—and the internal aspect as well, Mayavati's spiritual presence.

In these few lines, we will share a few personal incidents related to Revered Maharaj when he visited Mayavati as Vice President, in May 2011, and as President of the Ramakrishna Sangha, in March 2018. During his 2011 visit, one day he came to the associate editor's office in the old Prabuddha Bharata building. It was a small closed veranda, and as soon as he entered the office, his face lit up. He mentioned that the veranda was closed by Swami Gambhiranandaji Maharaj just for him, as he thought that young Smaranananda, being a South Indian, might feel the cold more. In fact, he was able to work there only in the afternoons, when sunlight entered

through a big window. Revered Maharaj would sit with his back to that window to type the articles for the magazine. 'I was typing in that old big typewriter in such a way that the whole veranda would vibrate,' he expressed with mischievous eyes. He also told us that together with the editor they would play competitions to see who was able to find more mistakes during proofreading. 'This healthy competition kept the quality of the magazine high,' he added. Revered Maharaj also gave us advice on how to maintain a good relationship between the editor and the associate editor, which we implemented and found to be very effective. It was all about sharing some extracurricular activities, exploring nature together, and walking together; in one word, it was about being amazed by Mayavati together.

Though Revered Maharaj served in *Prabuddha Bharata* for about two years, before becoming the manager of Advaita Ashrama in Kolkata, he developed such a connection with the environment of Mayavati that it stayed with him for his entire life. During his visit, he would take walks in the garden and often ask the swa-

* *This section of Mayavati reminiscences is contributed by Swami Madhurananda, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati.*

mi in charge of it about various plants, as he was quite knowledgeable about many of them. There would be also an evening walk, in which many would join him. Everyone was able to notice how free he used to feel in Mayavati, especially while walking. During those walks, he would mention the names of the different points of the road as of old days, which had changed over time; this was important for us to later identify those points while doing research in the Mayavati Diaries. Seeing the monkeys on the road, he once narrated how tigers would hunt monkeys here. In those days there were huge Bengal tigers in this area, which would stand under a tree and roar in such a way that the monkeys, out of fear, would paralyze and fall to the ground. We thought, 'What fear can do!' Revered Maharaj would generally avoid the moral of his narrations, allowing the attentive listener's mind to grasp the moral by itself.

Seated in the balcony of President Maharaj's room, he loved to listen to the sound of the cicadas and contemplate the view of the deodars contrasting with the snowy peaks of the Himalayas, when the peaks were open. Once we were thus seated, and only he and I were present. Suddenly, he pointed towards the mountains and asked me, 'Can you see our Thakur there?' 'No Maharaj, I can't,' was my

answer. Then he said, 'I can clearly see his form there,' and he tried to show it to me. Though I was not able to see it, his words made me remember what Sri Sarada Devi said, 'One who is our guru [Sri Ramakrishna], he is Advaita.'

As I was doing the same job that Revered Maharaj did in Mayavati, with a fatherly concern one day he asked me, 'Are you walking daily?' Walking in such an environment is one of the best ways to relax the mind after a whole day of editing and doing intellectual work, especially in a place where there is no emotional outlet. He experienced that first-hand. So I replied, 'Yes Maharaj. Here if one doesn't walk daily, one can go mad.' He looked at me in the eyes and said, 'That's true, that's true.' And as far as I remember, he enquired whether others were walking daily too.

After night reading, Revered Maharaj would tell about the internal life of Mayavati during his days, funny incidents as well as se-



rious ones. He once mentioned that it was tough to reach the ashrama from the plains, as there were no roads or very bad ones. There was no electricity, and the bathing place was to the side of the ashrama, with water getting warm with firewood. They used to cultivate potatoes during summer, to be the main item to consume during winter—potato curry almost every day! By listening to his experiences, narrated in a casual way, he infused us with the strength to somehow cope with our life here without complaint. There were also meaningful talks about Advaita Vedanta, which was one of his favourite subjects.

During his last visit, in 2018, Revered Maharaj gave initiation in the meditation hall of the guesthouse, after several decades during which initiation had not been given in Mayavati. Many of our staff and local people received Revered Maharaj's blessings for two days—it makes a difference in the spiritual ambience of an ashrama when some or many of the staff are also initiated devotees. During that visit, Revered Maharaj was taken to the hospital below by palanquin, which was quite an adventure for him, to inaugurate new eye-surgery equipment. It was a sight to see him balancing in the palanquin, visibly uncomfortable, but focused and in complete silence, conscious that he was doing a service for the good of others.

On another day, he also inaugurated the restoration and conservation work of the main building of the ashrama. A few days prior to that, we had two meetings with him, when the whole project was explained to him in detail. He listened attentively, with a deep personal interest, and even offered some helpful suggestions based on his knowledge of historical records and stories shared by senior sadhus. The day he left Mayavati, I submitted a summary of the whole project to him, with an appendix detail-

ing his suggestions. When I gave him the file, he asked me, with the innocence of a little boy, 'Do you think my suggestions will be implemented?' 'Maharaj, you are our president; your word is final for us.' He looked to one side, puzzled, totally unconcerned about being the president of the Sangha, and I was still more puzzled. As Swami Vivekananda said, 'If you really want to judge of the character of a man, look not at his great performances. ... Watch a man do his most common actions; those are indeed the things which will tell you the real character of a great man.'

The most important of his suggestions to the project was that, in the original plan, an exhibition hall was to be created in the front room below, where Swami Vivekananda stayed for eight nights, and a meditation hall for the public at the back of it, as it was more silent at the back. Revered Maharaj, however, said that if we want to make a meditation hall, it should be where Swamiji stayed and where many other great sadhus have meditated. 'I have seen them meditating there,' were his words. Accordingly, we made some modifications to the blueprint and swapped the meditation and exhibition halls. He also confirmed which was the room above where Swami Vivekananda stayed for six nights, which is now a meditation hall for sadhus.

The departure time was a poignant moment. Many sadhus and devotees stood by the caravan that would take him to Pantnagar airport, which was at least a six-hour journey away. Revered Maharaj smiled and waved his hands as the vehicle started moving slowly. Someone nearby noticed a tear falling towards his smile, which showed the depth of his emotions despite his usual composed demeanour. It was his last darshan of Mayavati, and for many of our staff, the last darshan of Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj. 🙏

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The Saga of 'Vivekananda and Brahmananda Samadhi Temples' at Belur Math

SWAMI VIDEHATMANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue ...)

**In *Mahratta Paper's*,
14th January 1912 issue:**

The *Mahratta* of Pune, while introducing this Semi-centennial Appeal for Swamiji's Memorial Temple, in its illustrated supplement of 14 Jan [1912], observes as follows:

Full fifty years will have today rolled by since the birth of Swami Vivekananda on 12th January 1863, yet his memory is as fresh and green among the people as ever. Swami Vivekananda's achievements were in a sense meteoric, so suddenly and brilliantly did they shine. Within a life of 39 years the Swami did the grand work of re-establishing Hinduism on its pedestal of supremacy against the onsets of scientific materialism. The freedom of

spirit and thought which he imbibed from his mother Shreemati Bhuvaneshwari Dutta, who passed away in last July in spiritual meditation, was set aglow by the magic touch of his Master, Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Ramakrishna found in Narendra—that was Vivekananda's home name—the best material for spiritualisation and converted the skepticism, bigotry and the atheism of Narendra into the intrepid freedom of thought and the sublimity of conception of the future Vivekananda. *Swami Vivekananda is the real father of Indian Nationalism.* He wanted to develop a modern India — not the India 'strutting about in the finery of the alien, ephemeral, materialistic ideals and civilisation, but she who stands in glory as Mother, the Mother of Religion.' He breathed about himself an atmosphere of the old Vedic days and upheld the national ideals of renunciation and service. He wanted the Indian to become 'an occidental of occidentals in his spirit of



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Marble Bas-Relief image in the Vivekananda Temple at Belur Math

equality, freedom, work, and energy, and at the same time a Hindu to the very backbone in religious culture and instincts.' *Every Indian is proud of this father of Modern India*, yet how is his memory perpetuated? The following appeal will, therefore, speak for itself, and, we trust, will meet with cordial response from the people. ...¹⁵

1913: Letter of Mrs. Leggett

Mrs. Betty Leggett visited India, during the last quarter of 1912, with Alberta and her husband, George Montagu. On her way back home, she wrote a letter to Miss MacLeod on 20th January 1913, from her ship as she was nearing Rangoon: 'Then I sat a little while with Saradananda, ill with gout & he showed me the small bas-relief of Swamiji, for you, which I like much better than the original – too narrow in

face to be a likeness or give the power of his intellect. There is no room in such a masque for our Vivekananda's brain or power. ... They are to put it in the library to be built eventually over his tomb, apparently not over the tomb itself.'¹⁶

Probably she was carrying this replica of the Bas-relief with her and after arriving in England, when she purchased a new house, it was set in the living room of Joe [Miss MacLeod], as is described in her biography.

Betty bought this house, called 'Hall's Croft', in 1913. Joe's small room there she made known as the 'Prophet's Chamber'. In this room on the second floor, she had an alabaster relief of Vivekananda, seated in meditation, set into the wall. The daylight passing through the white marble made the figure of the Swami luminous. ... The alabaster relief of Vivekananda was a small copy of the bas-relief which Betty had arranged to be set into the wall of Vivekananda's temple at the monastery at Belur.¹⁷

One of her friends, after visiting her during the late 1930s wrote in her notebook,

Tantine invited me to her house called Hall's Croft at Stratford-on-Avon which her sister, Mrs. Leggett had left to her. It was Shakespeare's daughter's house, and she was very proud of it. She certainly could be as it was really very lovely, and a big house. She had kept for herself a very tiny room on the second floor, and at the head of her small bed was enshrined in the wall the replica of Swamiji's marble in small size. It was lovely to see the daylight passing through the white marble and she was happy to have it over her head.¹⁸

February 1913 — 'Bas-relief of Swamiji'

It appears that by January 1913, the Bas-relief was fixed on the wall of a one storey structure, which was ready by this time. The

Bengali organ of the Math, Udbodhan, reports thus, 'Swamiji's birthday celebration was held at Belur Math on Sunday 2nd February [1913]. The newly carved stone-idol [Bas-relief] at Jaipur, which is preserved in Swamiji's incomplete temple, located towards the south of the Math, ... was also decorated very well.'¹⁹

It was also reported in the February-March issue of 'Prabuddha Bharata' thus: 'On Sunday, the second of February, the birthday anniversary of Srimat Swami Vivekananda was publicly commemorated by thousands of persons, of all ages and description, at the Belur Math. From early morning until late at night vast crowds came and went joining in triumphant shouts of praise in the great Swami's honour, worshipping his picture, visiting his room with great reverence, and *sojourning in meditation before the image in marble, recently placed in the Memorial Chapel erected in his honour*. The very atmosphere was surcharged

with the spirit of devotion, and one felt that the Swami himself was amongst the immense gathering. The Math, the chapel of Sri Ramakrishna, *the Swami's memorial shrine*, all were festively decorated, giving a bright and jubilant effect to the scene and to the day itself.'²⁰

In December of 1915, it was refixed as is evident from the following letter of Miss MacLeod dated 16th, 'I have been to the Math and arranged that Swamiji's marble bas-relief should be put against the wall flush, which has to be done by building the plaster out about four inches – the depth of the marble, so that the marble frames shall be its only separation from the wall. They could not put it into the wall, as the wall is to be the crypt foundation of the new library [The plan of building a library on the upper floor of Swamiji's temple was abandoned, and the Om temple was built there instead.] which they hope eventually to raise over it.'²¹

1919: Embodying the Dream of Swami Vijnanananda

Sometime in 1920 the Belur Math authorities resolved to complete the temple work, along with its first floor and the dome. Swami Brahmananda asked Vijnanananda to come to Belur Math from Prayagraj Math to supervise the construction of the Temple. He came, but even before coming to Belur, while in Prayagraj itself, Swami Vijnanananda was contemplating on Swamiji about the final shape of the temple yet to come up. Swami Sadashivananda writes in his memoirs,

About a year after this (around 1921), Vijnananandaji stayed at Belur Math for some time to look after the construction of Swamiji's Samadhi Mandir on the invitation of Reverend Swami Brahmananda. We have seen in Allahabad, in those days Vijnananandaji was deeply engrossed in Swamiji's meditation, and used to talk more about Swamiji



Swami Vijnanananda



*Saptarshi-Mandal painting by Jaipur Painter made by Swami Vijnanananda
Photo courtesy: Ramakrishna Math, Prayagraj*

than Sri Ramakrishna. Almost every day he used to discuss Swamiji's teachings and wonderful stories of his great life. Often he used to go to Bharadwaj Ashram and visit the statue of Saptarshi there with admiration. Then he used to tell us that in every Kalpa [era] there exists a Saptarshi-Mandal, and those [seven] seers execute the welfare of the whole universe. During this time, he got an oil painting of the Saptarshi-Mandal done by a veteran painter from Jaipur, and kept it in his bedroom. Maharaj used to say, 'Swamiji is everywhere in the world; but his place is in Saptarshi-Mandal. He controls everything of this world from there'.²²

After coming to Belur Math, every day after breakfast he (Swami Vijnanananda) would go to the construction site to guide the workers until 1:00 p.m. and return in the afternoon. He always maintained his calmness during intense activity; he was truly a karma yogi. He remind-

ed the labourers: 'Look, work carefully. You are building the temple of Lord Shiva.'²³

1921: In the Memoirs of Swami Jnanatmananda

From the memoirs of Swami Jnanatmananda, we know, when the final work of construction began. While reminiscing about Swami Vijnanananda, he writes,

It was in 1921, that I met him for the first time. At that time he had come to the Math for the construction of Swamiji's new temple. A little earlier to his arrival, I had been given the task of conducting the Puja in Swamiji's Shrine. At that time, the Shrine had only the ground floor where Swamiji's statue is installed. It had also an open verandah around. There was no other structure near it. Beyond the Math building, the campus extending to the south, had no embankment on the river side, even where Swamiji's Shrine

stood. At the time of flood-tide, the water of the Ganga would come almost up to the Swamiji's Shrine. It was a solitary place and hardly anybody would approach it.

Round about the building there lay strewn some bricks and other stray materials. One day a foreign gentleman (a Saheb), seeing us there, suddenly asked us, 'Why do you keep Swami Vivekananda's Shrine in such a neglected condition? Do you know what a great respect we in the West have for him?' We could not give him a satisfactory reply then. Later, when we told Mahapurush Maharaj about it, he said, 'Why did you not tell him that improvements are being planned?' ...

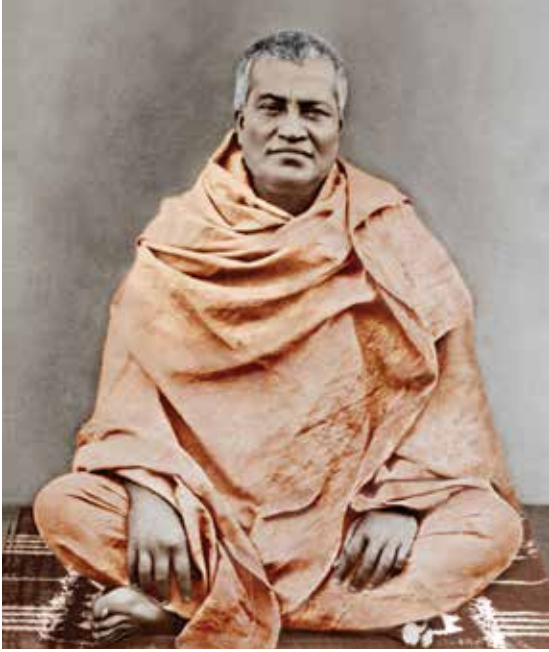
I think it was in the month of Phalgun or Chaitra (February, March or April) that my first meeting with him [Swami Vijnanananda] took place. We saw a hackney carriage suddenly come to a halt on the meadow in front of the Math, and the Swami got down from it. ... Getting down from the carriage, he went straight to Swamiji's Shrine, and whomever he met near about (most probably Swami Shankarananda was one of them), he started asking what materials had been collected for the construction of Swamiji's Shrine. After hearing the details, he proceeded towards the Math building. They had got ready for him the small room by the side of Swamiji's room, which was known to him as 'Khoka Maharaj's room'. He went into it. Brahmachari Buddha Chaitanya, the late Swami Bhaswarananda was deputed to serve him. After food and rest, he again started talking with Swami Shankarananda and others about Swamiji's Shrine.

Very soon the materials were all collected and he began the construction work. He was then aged above fifty, and his body was very stout. Even then he put in very hard and tireless work in connection with the construc-

tion. In the morning after taking his tea and a little snack he would present himself at eight o'clock at the place of construction as the labourers arrived, and would be on the work spot till one in the afternoon, i.e., till the masons and other workers had their noon-day break. He would be standing or sitting on the bench under the nearby deodar tree, and would be inspecting minutely every piece of work that was being executed. At 1 o'clock when there was a respite in the work, he would come, wash his hands and face (he would seldom take a bath then), take his noon-day meal and have a little rest. Then, when the work started again at 2 o'clock he would get up from his rest and be there with the labourers. Seeing him do so much hard work at such an advanced age our heads would bend down in shame on thinking about ourselves.

From our friend Swami Bhaswarananda I heard that at that time his diet was very simple. In the morning he would have a number of cups of tea with very little milk in it and a Sandesh or two (Thakur's Prasada) and then start his work. At noon, after returning from his supervision of the construction work he would just have a wash, and take the ordinary Prasada of Sri Thakur. In the evening he had only a few cups of tea, and at night the regular Prasada of Sri Thakur. ...

Sri Maharaj-ji (Swami Brahmanandaji) would daily ask him about the progress of the construction work of Swamiji's Shrine, and if he suspected any defects in the construction, he would let Vijnan Maharaj know about them. Vijnan Maharaj, too, on his part, would accept these with great reverence, and sometimes would ask Sri Maharaj-ji even in our presence, 'Maharaj-ji, how did you come to know about these?' Maharaj-ji too, with a smile on his face, would answer, 'Peshan,



Swami Shivananda

through the grace of the Guru! everything comes of its own accord.' Vijnan Maharaj, though he had been a highly placed Government Engineer before, would accept the corrections without a murmur.²⁴

The work of construction was not always smooth sailing, sometimes it would get stalled due to a shortage of materials. During one of his conversations, Vijnan Maharaj himself narrates one such incident. In 1937-38 while talking to the inmates of Belur Math, he said,

Rakhal Maharaj was gifted with a strange prophetic power. Once, while the construction of Swamiji's temple was going on, we were in difficulty for want of bricks, when he casually asked me how the work was proceeding. I said we were held up for lack of bricks, which had been ordered for but had not arrived in time. He said: 'Your boat-load of bricks will be coming tonight, don't worry.'

I was so much in despair that I could not believe him. Even then, throughout the night, I got up from time to time to see if the boat had arrived. My idea was to tell the boatman, if he came at all, not to anchor the boat

on the shore until morning. Seeing that the boat had not come till 4 o'clock in the morning, I thought it would not come at night and went to sleep. After a while, I heard Rakhal Maharaj calling me and asking: 'Well, Peshan, has your boat come?' I replied: 'Where is the boat, sir? Rest assured, it is not coming.'

Almost immediately, he pointed out the boat, which had by then already arrived, and told me: 'See, there is your boat!'²⁵

1924: Temple Dedicated to Swami Vivekananda by Swami Shivananda

But, despite herculean efforts by Swamiji's followers and admirers, they could not materialise it in bricks and mortar soon enough. It was only after 22 years, that the dedication of 'Sri Vivekananda Omkar Mandir' at Belur Math, could take place on the 62nd birth anniversary of Swamiji, i.e. on Monday, 28th January 1924, by the then president of the Order Swami Shivananda. The following week, on the 7th of February 1924, he also consecrated 'Brahmananda Temple.'²⁶

It was reported in *Prabuddha Bharata* as follows –

The Sixty-Second Birthday Celebration of Swami Vivekananda.

BELUR MATH.

The sixty-second birthday anniversary of Swami Vivekananda was celebrated in a very grand and impressive manner on Monday, the 28th January, 1924. From morning till evening hundreds and thousands of men, women and children arrived at the monastery to participate in the celebration. A few Western lady disciples and devotees of the great Swami also heartily joined in the festivities.

Long before the break of day the Sannyasins, Brahmacharins and devotees of the Math went round the premises singing devotional songs, and imparted to the place a

highly spiritual atmosphere which was continued throughout the day by many Sankirtan parties pouring into the Math from various localities. The special feature of this year's celebration was the opening of the Swami's Memorial Temple in which only the non-sectarian symbol 'Om' was installed on a marble pedestal. Poems composed by the Swami were recited by a number of little boys and girls, and prizes and medals were awarded to them by Swami Bodhananda.²⁷

13th February 1924

Although the consecration of the temple had taken place, it was very close to the Ganges, and the embankment needed to be reinforced properly. It was done later with the financial support of Mrs. Leggett, as is evident from a letter of Miss MacLeod on 13th February 1924:

Mother [Alberta's mother Mrs. Francis Leggett] gave five thousand rupees towards the sea-wall of the Swamiji Temple, the day of its dedication on January 28th. It seems the present wall must be strengthened by an outer one, in line with the [Holy] Mother and Brahmanandaji ones. It was so fitting and so fundamental, and made one feel the security and permanence of this place, as the Great University, which Swamiji predicted, the day before his death, it would be, 'lasting 1,500 years and extending for two miles in extent.'²⁸

Steps leading to the Temple

However, many were not impressed by the flight of stairs leading to the Om temple.



Swami Brahmananda Temple

Known for her refined taste, Miss MacLeod wrote that the steps were 'steep, high and narrow and not at all fitting to Swamiji and his thinking'. She did not stop with mere criticism but made efforts to better the stairs. In 1935 she got a design from the Villa d'Este in Italy, which was famous for its sweeping and curly stairs, and altered the stairs accordingly.²⁹

In the letter of 26th December 1935, Miss MacLeod says, 'Mrs. B- has made a sketch of the steps at the Villa d'Este in Italy, sufficiently clear, so we hope to get them made for the Swamiji Temple—instead of the stiff, straight, high narrow steps, so unlike Swamiji and his teachings!'³⁰

24th January 1939

Even after several years, the work was not over. On 24th January 1939 Miss MacLeod wrote, 'Now they are putting a deeper embank-

ment in front of Swamiji's temple; Mother [Mrs. Leggett] gave 5,000 rupees towards the present one, still not enough to protect Swamiji's temple, the engineers say.³¹

Brahmananda Memorial Temple

As we have mentioned earlier, within 8-10 days of the dedication of Swamiji's temple, Brahmanandaji's Memorial Temple was also consecrated, a report of which is published in *Prabuddha Bharata* thus:

SWAMI BRAHMANANDA MEMORIAL TEMPLE.

The opening of the memorial temple and the birthday of Srimat Swami Brahmananda were celebrated on a grand scale at the Belur Math on the 7th February last. There were special Puja, Bhajan, and music by experts. About 3,000 devotees joined in the celebration. The festival came to a close with a beautiful display of fireworks.³²

Swami Amareshananda writes the story behind this other temple in his article thus:

Swami Brahmananda visited the pious household of Navagopal [Ghosh] many a time. Shyamsundar and Nirod [Swami Ambikananda], two of the sons of Navagopal were his disciples. Both of them were greatly devoted to him, like their parents had been to Sri Ramakrishna.

On the passing away of Swami Brahmananda, Shayamsundar, by this time grown up, donated Rupees forty thousand towards the construction of the Brahmananda temple at the Math. Swami Abhayananda [Bharat Maharaj], used to reminisce that 'Shyam Babu, son of Navagopal, bore almost the entire expense of the construction of the temple, even for the statue of Swami Brahmananda inside.' He recounted that every day Shyam Babu used to come to the Math on a white horse and watch the progress of the construction till it was completed and dedicated by Swami Shivananda in 1924.³³

Swami Shankarananda supervised the construction of this second Temple. ❀

(Concluded.)

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Reminiscences of Senior Monks

SWAMI BRAHMESHANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue ...)

Swami Bhuteshanandaji

Once Swami Bhuteshanandaji, the twelfth President of the Ramakrishna Order, came to Raipur for the inauguration of a statue of Swami Vivekananda at Bilaspur. He was then the Assistant General Secretary of the Order. From Bilaspur, he went with a party of monks and devotees of the Ashram to Amarkantak by car. I was accompanying the party and served him sherbet on the way which was made by putting effervescent tablets in water, which were very popular then. He enjoyed them and whenever there used to be a halt, he asked me to give one such drink to him.

At Amarkantak, we went to the various tourist spots, one of them being a waterfall called Kapil-dhara. One had to climb down a hilly track. Others of the party had already gone down. He being the oldest was walking slowly. I was with him. I enquired whether he was finding it difficult to climb down that hilly track. He replied, 'No, not at all! I have done enough trekking in the mountains. This is nothing compared to that. I do not want to show off.' When I asked him where he went in the Himalayas, he said that he had gone and lived at Uttarkashi. I asked whether he had gone to Badri-Kedar. He said, 'No.' He had lived at Uttarkashi and had done tapasya there, but did not go to the other holy places!



The recorder of these reminiscences is a senior monk and a former editor of *The Vedanta Kesari* and lives in Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service, Varanasi. ॐ

He described once to me in detail how he had taken permission from Swami Shivanandaji (Mahapurush Maharaj) to go for tapasya, how he prepared for it, went to Kashi, lived at the Advaita Ashrama on *bhiksha*; how he later shifted to a place called 'Tila', thence to Uttarkashi. Thus, he gradually intensified his tapasya, becoming more and more dependent on God. Finally, when he left his mind free to roam about, he noticed that his mind did not do anything except *Ishta-chintan* or *tatva-chintan*.

He said that it is now painful to see places where he had done tapasya. They are all almost destroyed by modernisation.

Whenever Swami Bhuteshanandaji came to Varanasi, he used to sit with the monastic brothers after dinner and discuss spiritual matters, and answer questions. He liked my questions very much and acknowledged them openly. Once a senior swami from the local Advaita Ashrama asked Maharaj to speak about his recent trip to Japan. He said, 'Wait, Ashok is here, he will ask questions. Then we shall see.' After the questions and answers, he did describe his impressions of Japan.

Once I had gone to Belur Math, when Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj was the President. All the monks were offering pranams as usual from outside the barrier. He happened to notice me and asked, 'Aren't you Ashok?' I said, 'Yes, Maharaj'. 'When did you come?' 'Yesterday.' Then Maharaj said: 'Yamaraj had said to Nachiketa: त्वादृक् नो भूयात् नचिकेतः प्रष्ट' (O, Nachiketa, may we have questioners like you!) When I used to go to Varanasi, you used to ask

such nice questions. Now those days will not come (Due to age and ill health his going to other towns was restricted.)

Next time, during such an occasion of pranams, he again spotted me and commented, 'Earlier you used to ask such nice questions. Now you don't ask.' I answered: 'The ambience here is not suitable for asking questions.' (Revered Maharaj used to be in a lighter mood and used to cut jokes. There were no serious discussions.) He immediately agreed and said, 'That is true'.

Once some of his close devotees had come from Kolkata in a car to be with him. One day, in the above-mentioned night class, some of these male devotees also joined. As soon as Swami Bhuteshanandaji noticed them, he was annoyed and asked, 'Why are they here?' The idea was that it was a gathering of monastics. Hence the devotees left.

Once I was sitting in the office of Swami Bhuteshanandaji at Belur Math when he was the Assistant General Secretary. Just then the Swami in charge of the library came to take the daily newspaper to the library. Swami Bhuteshanandaji jokingly said to him, 'Oh, I have not been able to read it. Well, Sri Ramakrishna could not touch the newspaper. We cannot live without touching it. Let me at least touch it.' Saying this, Swami Bhuteshanandaji touched the newspaper and gave it to the Swami.

Once while he was describing his spiritual practices in the Himalayas (I don't remember the context), he said that once he was climbing down from the mountains alone with very few possessions and free from any attachment. As he sat under the tree, he had a complete feeling, a sense of freedom. I then asked, 'Was it the highest, most desired state?' He replied, 'No, Bhakti is superior.'

Once I asked him: 'Sri Ramakrishna has advised that we must work with one hand and



Swami Bhuteshanandaji

catch hold of God with the other hand and when work is over, we must hold God with both hands. But Swami Vivekananda says, whatever you do you must put your whole mind into it. So what should we do?' Revered Maharaj laughed and said in Hindi '*kako bandau kako nindau, dono parda bhari*—whom to accept and whom to deny? Both sides are weighing heavy', which means, both views are true.

Q: In Vedantic texts like *Vivekachudamani* etc., *twam pada shodhan* is mostly described in detail and not *Tat pada shodhan*. Why so?

A: Because that is more important and difficult. *Tat pada shodhan* is already there.

Q: How do you compare your generation with the present generation of monks?

A: There cannot be any question of comparison.

He had advised me to read *Upadesh Sahasri* which I later read.

Once I told him that I often go for tapasya for a few months when I live on Bhiksha. Re-

vered Maharaj said in response that living on Bhiksha had become *abhyasa* (natural) for him.

Once I asked him: 'In the Brahmacharis' Training Centre we are taught Acharya Shankara's commentary on the Bhagavad Gita and Upanishads. Since in our tradition, we accept all the Acharyas and the relevance of their philosophies, why are the commentaries of other Acharyas not taught?' Maharaj said: 'Once you read Shankara's commentary, you will find that the others are not so deep.'

Once I told Swami Bhuteshanandaji that Swami Vivekananda has asked us to see God in the patient, but despite serving the patients in the hospital for so many years I am not able to see God in them. In reply, Maharaj sharply said: 'Do you see God in the image?' The idea was that had I really seen God in the image, my life would change and I would become a saint.

Swami Vishwarupananda (Ramgati Maharaj)

Ramgati Maharaj was a great scholar and he translated Shankara's commentary on Brahmasutras into Bengali with his comments. Yet, according to the early tradition of the Order, he too was posted at Varanasi Sevashrama to serve the patients in the spirit of worship of God. He narrated to me the following incident.

It was his duty to dress the wounds of patients. One of the patients probably had gangrene with an extremely foul smell, emanating from the wound, so much so that it was difficult to approach the patient. Just then, Swami Saradanandaji had come to Varanasi, and Ramgati Maharaj placed his problem before him. Saradanandaji gravely listened and then

said, 'What can you do? Pray to Sri Rama-krishna. I too shall pray.'

The next morning, a miracle occurred. As Ramgati Maharaj approached the said patient, he did not get the stink at all and was easily able to do the dressing. After that, he never had any difficulty due to bad smell, even with other patients.

Ramgati Maharaj passed away suddenly. His dead body was found lying on his bed. It seems he passed away while doing Japa.

Manik Maharaj

I don't remember his Sannyasa name. He had a big thickened pleura on one side of his chest. It was a sort of chronic disease, a permanent defect by which the respiratory capacity of half of his lung was destroyed.

Once I received an emergency call to see him. He had developed Pneumonia and was almost unconscious with great respiratory distress. He was immediately shifted to the hospital and provided emergency treatment. I was in my room when I was called with the message that the Swami was shouting and asking for me. When I reached, I found that he was fully conscious and out of danger. But as soon as I reached, he started scolding me, asking why I had saved him? Why did I not allow him to die? After all, he was leading a retired life in the Mission Senior Citizens Home and was awaiting death in the holy Kashi [for attaining liberation]. What could I say, except that as a doctor it was my first duty to save his life? The next day, when he had cooled down, he embraced me since he loved me very much, and then several times repeated the same thing.

(To be continued ...)



Education – A Deeper View

SWAMI ARUNACHALANANDA

‘Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man.

Religion is the manifestation of the Divinity already in man.’¹

The above two comprehensive definitions of ‘Education’ and ‘Religion’ given by Swami Vivekananda cover immense ground. We can trace from them the entire process of evolution of human species on planet Earth. To understand the role of education and religion in the march of civilisations, it would be helpful for us to understand the Vedantic view of a human being. Vedanta views human beings as Brahman (Infinite Pure Consciousness-Bliss)

‘appearing’ limited by thought patterns and thought, which is the ‘power-manifestation’ of Brahman. External universe, too, is considered by Vedanta, as Brahman ‘appearing’ as limited objects; and external objects too are discovered ultimately as nothing but thought patterns. Thus, according to Vedanta, the gross sense-perceived vision of human beings and the universe is in fact concretised thought patterns. Swami Vivekananda explains this as:

If you can get to that subtle vibration, you will see and feel that the whole universe is composed of subtle vibrations. Sometimes certain drugs have the power to take us, while as yet in the senses, to that condition. Many of you may remember the celebrated experiment of Sir Humphrey Davy, when the laughing gas overpowered him – how, during



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the lecture, he remained motionless, stupefied and, after that, he said that the whole universe was made up of ideas. For the time being, as it were, the gross vibrations had ceased, and only the subtle vibrations which he called ideas, were present to him. He could only see the subtle vibrations round him; everything had become thought; the whole universe was an ocean of thought, he and everyone else had become little thought whirlpools.²

Infinite Pure-Consciousness-Bliss Reality (Brahman or Atman) is thought-projected as *Akasha* and *Prana*—the universal substance and universal power—and everything in the universe is a manifestation of these two: '*Akasha* is like the water, and everything else in the universe is like blocks of ice, made out of that water, and floating in the water, and *Prana* is the power that changes this *Akasha* into all these various forms.'³

We fail to realise this truth about ourselves and the world due to the 'dullness' and 'distractedness' of our intellect or in other words due to the 'impurity' of our hearts; this 'dullness' or 'impurity' is in the form of attachment to the sense-perceived phenomenon and desires for objects and relationships. Vedanta terms this as *avidya* (ignorance) and the way to regain true knowledge, is through education.

Education in Perspective

Education begins with secular knowledge and ends with spiritual knowledge. In India during the Vedic period and in later developments, all knowledge was considered sacred. The knowledge of 'inner man' was Religion while the knowledge of 'outer world' was Science, e.g. science of physics of things is called '*भौतिक शास्त्र (bhautika shastra)*' while the science of spirituality is called '*अध्यात्म शास्त्र (adhyatma shastra)*' or '*ब्रह्मविद्या (brahmavidya)*'.

The Mundaka Upanishad says:

द्वे विद्ये वेदितव्ये इति ह स्म यद् ब्रह्मविदो वदन्ति |
परा चैवापरा च ॥ तत्रापरा ऋग्वेदो यजुर्वेदः सामवेदः
अथर्ववेदः शिक्षा कल्पो व्याकरणं निरुक्तं छन्दो
ज्योतिषमिति | अथ परा यया तदक्षरमधिगम्यते ॥—The knowers of the Brahman declare that there are two kinds of knowledge worthy to be known, namely, the higher (Para) and the lower (Apara). Of these the lower (knowledge) consists of the Rig-Veda, the Yajur-Veda, the Sama-Veda, the Atharva-Veda, the Shiksha (or the science dealing with pronunciation and accent), the Kalpa (or the sacrificial liturgy), grammar, the Nirukta (or the science dealing with etymology and the meaning of words), prosody, and astronomy; and the higher (knowledge) is that by which that Unchangeable is known.⁴

Also, Swami Vivekananda further explains:

... all knowledge is divided into two classes, the Apara, secular, and the Para, spiritual. One pertains to perishable things, and the other to the realm of the spirit ...

It is not that secular and spiritual knowledge are two opposite and contradictory things; but they are the same thing – the same infinite knowledge which is everywhere fully present from the lowest atom to the highest Brahman – they are the same knowledge in its different stages of gradual development. This one infinite knowledge we call secular when it is in its lower process of manifestation, and spiritual when it reaches the corresponding higher phase.⁵

In India, all phenomena, the domain which science observes and deduces its conclusions from, were always understood to be manifestations of Noumenon – the Infinite Pure Consciousness-Bliss Reality. All nature, as well as all beings, regarded as manifestations of the Infinite substance – Infinite

Reality expressing as manifold names and forms, as time and space, is phenomenon. This Reality (Truth or God) was the domain of religion and its expression was science. Swami Vivekananda's definition of science can be understood from this highest and broadest perspective: 'In reality, the meta-physical and the physical universe are one, and the name of this One is Brahman ... the variations that the One has undergone, the different sorts of species and individuality It is assuming – that can be understood, and the enquiry into this is called Science'.⁶ He also says: 'Science and religion are both attempts to help us out of the bondage; only religion is the more ancient, and we have the superstition that it is the more holy. In a way it is, because it makes morality a vital point, and science does not'.⁷

Similarly the following observations on Education by Swami Ranganathanandaji are very pertinent:

Education is the process by which man, submerged in the collectivity, is raised to the dignity and status of, first, an individual, then, a person, with the capacity to integrate oneself freely with other persons.⁸

All true religion is education and all true education is growth. Education and religion, accordingly, form the earlier and later stages of man's growth in this trans-organic or trans-physical dimension.

Secular education continued to our deeper dimensions is spiritual education, says Vedanta. That is how Vivekananda defines the roles of the physical sciences, politics, and economics, on the one side, and of art, ethics, and religion on the other.

The training of the senses and the mind into effective instruments in the search for truth and character-excellence is education, and religion is only continued education.

Thus, not only is religious study rational and scientific but also necessary for moral, ethical development of an individual and society. This broadest possible outlook towards knowledge or education enables us to trace all human activities and the march of civilisations on the face of earth to its proper roots.

Education and Human Evolution

As seen above, education helps in the process of gradual removal of the 'veil' or 'ignorance' which covers the reality; it is the increasing manifestation of the inner perfection through gradual diminishing of 'veiling-imperfection' of thought patterns. Education has thus helped human beings evolve from 'forest-wandering-beasts' to 'cultured-society-based-personalities', and in some cases further to 'saints, seers, yogis, and incarnations'. Homo-sapiens started with hunting and making basic tools which later progressed into cultivation of land and cattle grazing. Basic structure of human society began to take shape; soon tribes formation, development of social institutions like marriage, formation of symbolic noises into words, development of syntax, sentences, and language, etc. followed. Culture in the real sense started taking shape now; the ability to express thoughts in developed languages along with various discoveries regarding laws of nature, i.e., development of external sciences further quickened the process. Science seeks answers from within the system, i.e., not searching for extra-cosmic cause; this is a sure sign of maturing of human psyche. Swami Vivekananda says, '... in one word, what is meant by science is that the explanations of things are in their own nature, and that no external beings or existences are required to explain what is going on in the universe. ... And this is one of the features of science which I mean to apply to religion.'⁹

As with the modern scientists, ancient Indian sages too, at first searched for answers to the perennial questions about meaning of existence in the external world and then turned within. The search for inner, super-sensuous truths is religion. Thus, the entire gamut of science and religion comes under 'Education' and the method of acquiring it is concentration; Swami Vivekananda explains:

All knowledge we have, either of the external or internal world, is obtained through only one method—by the concentration of the mind. No knowledge can be had of any science unless we can concentrate our minds upon the subject.¹⁰

We can roughly plot a chart showing the gradual evolution of psyche from a crude state to a highly refined state as:



Adharma Pradhaan Sakaam Karma
(Human Body but immoral means for *Bhoga*)



Pashu Vritti (*Tamasik Avastha*)
(Either Animal Body or Human Body, crude state)

As seen from the above flow-diagram, the mind evolves initially from 'beastly nature' to first 'selfish human nature' and later 'unselfish/sacrificing human nature'; if the process of refinement is continued, through detachment and spiritual discernment, then we come to Self-Knowledge (God-Realisation). The animal finally becomes a saint. Education is the driving force behind this evolution. Even in the last step of the evolution when the Guru imparts the knowledge of the Self to a mature spiritual aspirant, it is through the 'educational tip' – *tat tvam asi* (You Are That)! The difference between various souls and steps of evolution is not of kind but only of degree of manifestation of Pure Consciousness, says Swami Vivekananda:

Let us take our stand on the one central truth in our religion – the common heritage of the Hindus, the Buddhists, and Jains alike – the spirit of man, the Atman of man, the immortal, birthless, all-pervading, eternal soul of man whose glories the Vedas cannot themselves express, before whose majesty the universe with its galaxy upon galaxy of suns and stars and nebulae is as a drop. Every man or woman, nay, from the highest Devas to the worm that crawls under our feet, is such a spirit evolved or involuted. The difference is not in kind, but in degree.

This infinite power of the spirit, brought to bear upon matter evolves material development, made to act upon thought evolves intellectuality, and made to act upon itself makes of man a God.¹¹

I have said before that our [Indian] education, intelligence, and thought are all

spiritual, all find expression in religion. In the West, their manifestation is in the external – in the physical and social planes. Thinkers in ancient India gradually came to understand that that idea of separateness was erroneous, that there was a connection among all those distinct objects – there was a unity which pervaded the whole universe – trees, shrubs, animals, men, Devas, even God Himself; the Advaitin reaching the climax in this line of thought declared all to be but the manifestations of the One. In reality, the metaphysical and the physical universe are one, and the name of this One is Brahman; and the perception of separateness is an error – they called it Maya, Avidya, or nescience. This is the end of knowledge.¹²

Thus, the development of human species is the result of 'Education'. Let us now see some of Swami Vivekananda's valuable words on Education.

Swami Vivekananda and Education

Swami Vivekananda wanted 'Education' to cover a vast ground and not be limited to being mere 'book-learning'; he says, 'The education ... which does not bring out strength of character, a spirit of philanthropy, and the courage of a lion -- is it worth the name?'¹³ And also, 'By education, I do not mean the present system, but something in the line of positive teaching. Mere book-learning won't do. We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's own feet.'¹⁴ He wanted education to help an individual to get hold of his/her will-power and channel it to fruitful purposes. The panacea for India's woes, he traced to education. He wanted poor and oppressed millions of Indians to gain self-confidence, practical efficiency, and a sense of human dignity through education. The edu-

cation in schools and universities that did not achieve this and rather produced merely 'foreign-ideas-stuffed-brains' that were practically inefficient and devoid of all self-respect, he considered useless.

Hence, Swamiji was of the view that in India education should be based on the ancient gurukula system, where the students lived with the teacher's family and imbibed not only the syllabus but also all the positive qualifications required to make them grow spiritually and be beneficial components of social and national fabric. He says, 'My idea of education is personal contact with the teacher – *gurugriha-vasa*. Without the personal life of a teacher, there would be no education. Take your Universities. What have they done during the fifty years of their existence? They have not produced one original man. They are merely an examining body. The idea of the sacrifice for the common weal is not yet developed in our nation.'¹⁵ In modern times these gurukulas also need to include, in their syllabus, the English language and modern technology, to make the future citizens equipped to handle the rapidly interconnected global stage. In the words of Swamiji, 'What we want are Western science coupled with Vedanta, Brahmacharya as the guiding motto, and also Shradha and faith in one's own self.'¹⁶

Considering the education scenario in India, we still need a lot of work to be done in the direction pointed out by Swami Vivekananda. Even seven decades after Independence, the Indian education system is not fully free from its colonial hangover. This needs to change urgently.

Conclusion

Education should help an individual to find the hidden source of inspiration within himself/herself. Swami Ranganathananda puts it as:

In the sentiment contained in that famous short sentence [*naitat tvayyupapadyate*, 'ill doth it become thee' (Gita 2.3)], we have the appeal, through psychology, to every individual to rise higher and higher, and to find new sources of strength within oneself. The educational value of this appeal is supreme. How to help another person, how to make him or her stand on one's own feet, is a great educational problem. How to undertake the task of making that person rise higher and find ways and means to develop one's own life and power? In this larger context, this consideration becomes relevant because Sri Krishna's appeal is a general appeal; it has a positive content.¹⁷

And education should

Enable all students to achieve at least a fraction of the synthesis of East and West, spirituality and science, contemplation and action. It is the science of spirituality, the *para vidya*, the supreme science, that fosters in the human being ethical, aesthetic, and spiritual values, including the moral values associated with pure science. The harmony of all these

values, and the intrinsic harmony between science and religion, always upheld in Vedanta, became revealed in our time in the deep spiritual kinship between Narendra (the later Swami Vivekananda), the representative of *aparā vidyā*, and Sri Ramakrishna, the full embodiment of *parā vidyā*. ...

It is thus obvious that if the current secular school and university education is high and higher education, the spiritual education that Swami Vivekananda received from Sri Ramakrishna in our time, bearing wonderful fruits of character strength and compassion, deep as the ocean and broad as the skies, and harmonising East and West, religion and science, the sacred and the secular, is the highest education into which the other two, to fulfil themselves, must lead a child. Sri Ramakrishna's experience and example also make it clear that the human being can enter into, and benefit from, this spiritual education from any stage or level of his school or college education.¹⁸

Let us hope that every human child gets this total education and he/she becomes capable of realising the Immortal. 🙏



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Features of a Holy Man

SWAMI JAPASIDDHANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue ...)

Lead: The list of dos and don'ts in the foregoing verses *are* long and taxing; there should be a simpler 'pragmatic' way out; *preferably* a primrose path! A caricature of such a 'personage' is portrayed in the next verse.

12. Spurious Version of a Sādhu

स्वोदर्या यो वीतरागादिवृत्तिं
श्रित्वात्मानं नाशयेच्च छद्मसाधुः।
दीक्षां प्रेक्षां विद्वदाचाररीतिं
साधुमन्यो वेषधारी न साधुः ॥१२॥



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Translation: A fake 'Sādhu' who adopts renunciation, puts up pretence of vows and philosophy, and copies men of realisation to fill his stomach, ultimately degrades himself. He is a fraud, not a Sādhu, though he may fancy himself to be one.

Notes:

1. *Ātmānaṃ nāśayec chadmasādhuḥ* 'a fake 'Sādhu' degrades himself': The Lord, in the *Gītā*, denounced pretence: *karmendriyāṇi saṃyamya ya āste manasā smaran indriyārthān vimūdhātmā mithyācāraḥ sa ucyate* 'He who, withdraws the organs of actions, but mentally keeps chewing the cud of sense-objects, is of a hopelessly deluded mind, and is called a hypocrite'.⁵²

Lead: Ways of god-men are *inscrutable*; and countless are the ways by which men reach

God. Copious are the details therefore, in the scriptures about *Sādhu*. Stupefied at the exuberant content, aspirants wonder and ask - what, indeed, is *Sādhuhood* in short? That is answered in the next verse.

13. Sādhuhood in a Nutshell

स्वार्थं हित्वा यः पराणां विधत्ते
योगक्षेमं वाञ्छितं च श्रमेण ।
तेनैवेशः प्रीयते सूनृतेन
पारार्थ्यं वै साधुता सङ्ग्रहेण ॥ १३ ॥

Translation: He who gives up self-interest, and endeavours to fulfil others' wishes, works for their gain and security, thereby pleases God by that very labour coupled with pleasant words of truth. Life for the sake of others is, indeed, *Sādhuhood*, in short.

Notes:

1. *Svārtham hitvā* 'giving up selfishness': Selfishness contaminates spiritual endeavours, and can turn any sacred thing into profane. Swamiji said: 'It is selfishness that we must seek to eliminate. I find that whenever I have made a mistake in my life, it has always been because *self* entered into the calculation. Where self has not been involved, my judgement has gone straight to the mark.'⁵³
2. *Pārārthyam vai sādhutā saṅgrahaṇa* 'life for the sake of others is, indeed, *Sādhuhood*, in short': Swamiji wrote to Pramada Das Mitra from Almora on 30th May, 1897: 'Another truth I have realised is that altruistic service only is religion, the rest, such as ceremonial observances, are madness--even it is wrong to hanker after one's own salvation. Liberation is only for him who gives up everything for others, whereas others who tax their brains day and night harping on 'my salvation', 'my salvation', wander about with their true well-being ruined, both present and prospective; and this I have seen many a time with my own eyes.'⁵⁴

Lead: Daily practices for one who aspires to become a *Sādhu* is given in the following two verses.

14. Daily practices of a Sādhu - 1

प्राणायामं देहचर्चा विधाय
स्वान्तर्बाह्यं शौचमास्थाय सौम्यः ।
शान्तिं दान्तिं युक्तवृत्तीरुपास्य
साधुर् भूमावात्मनो न च्युतो यः ॥ १४ ॥

Translation: He is a *Sādhu*, who, in this world, practices breath-regulation, physical exercises, cleanliness within and without, restraint of mind, control of sensory and motor organs, moderation in activities, and has not fallen from the Self, *Ātman*-consciousness.

Notes:

1. *Dehacarcām vidhāya* 'by practising physical exercise': *Sādhuhood* has no connection with weakness. In earlier days, *Sādhus* were quite strong; they could undergo enormous austerities, and yet, keep their health. The present age, however, necessitates a special mention of physical exercise for *Sādhus*. What service can you expect from a person who cannot keep his own health? Swamiji was very particular about the health of *Sādhus*; his letters written to his brother monks on their illness shows his concern and views.⁵⁵ *Kālidāsa* too, rightly observed in the *Kumārasaṃbhavam*: *śarīramādyaṃ khalu dharma-sādhanam* 'Body, indeed, is the prime instrument for attaining merit.'⁵⁶
2. *Svāntarbāhyaṃ śaucamāsthāya* 'by being clean within and without': Cleanliness is essential to every civilised being, and it is superfluous to say that a god-man should be clean. Here the phrase is added to highlight a message of Swamiji. In the lecture on Bhakti, delivered in Sialkot, Punjab, Swamiji exhorted: 'All religion is to be based upon morality, and personal purity is to be counted superior to Dharma. In this connection it ought to be

known that Achara means purity inside and outside. External purity can be attained by cleansing the body with water and other things which are recommended in the Shastras. The internal man is to be purified by not speaking falsehood, by not drinking, by not doing immoral acts, and by doing good to others.⁵⁷

3. *Saumyaḥ* 'affable': A god-man is blissful always. Having long faces on the pretext of austerities and purity is morbidity according to Swamiji. In one of the lessons given on Raja-Yoga in England, Swamiji said: 'Always keep your mind joyful; if melancholy thoughts come, kick them out'.⁵⁸ Pleasant disposition is a prerequisite for spiritual unfoldment. One may fail to become a god-man, but should not, at any rate, turn devilish. Swamiji drove this point home when he said: 'The first step is the joy of living. Asceticism is fiendish. To laugh is better than to pray. Sing. Get rid of misery. Do not for heaven's sake infect others with it. Surround yourself with flowers and pictures and incense. The saints went to the mountain tops to enjoy nature'.⁵⁹ And again, he said elsewhere: 'Every peal of laughter is a prayer sent to God'.⁶⁰

4. *Śāntiṃ dāntiṃ yuktavṛttīrupāsyā* 'by practising restraint of mind, control of organs - sensory and motor, moderation in activities': Here *śāntiṃ* stands for mind-control, and *dāntiṃ* for sense-control. *Yuktavṛttī* (*yuktavṛttīḥ* when split) collectively gives the entire set of golden rules of moderation stipulated in the sixth chapter of the *Gītā*.⁶¹
5. *Sādhuḥ bhūmāvātmano na cyuto yaḥ* 'He is a *Sādhu*, who, in this world, has not fallen from the Self – *Ātman*-consciousness': When consciousness drops off from the Self, it takes no time to come down to the level of the body, and body is a boundless package of problems. A *Sādhu* should always be up and doing in being conscious always of his Self, *Ātman*. It is virtual death to a *Sādhu*, to drift away from his awareness of the *Ātman*. *Ātman*-consciousness is a very essential stage in spiritual life. Realisation of the *Ātman* is a prerequisite for attaining the knowledge of *Brahman*. Only he who knows himself to be the *Ātman* can meaningfully yearn to attain *Brahman*; or else his efforts will be out of gear. This verse, consequently, comes in right order, and prepares the ground for the message of *Brahmadhyāna* in the succeeding verse.

(To be continued ...)



References

- 52) *Gita*. Vol.1, p.163, Ch.3, V.6.
 53) *CW*: 8.265.
 54) *CW*: 6.395.
 55) *CW*: 6.276; 8.416.
 56) Malaviya. p.132, Ca.5, V.33.

- 57) *CW*: 3.360.
 58) *CW*: 6.130.
 59) *CW*: 8.227.
 60) *CW*: 9.479.
 61) *Gita*. Vol.1, 331, Ch.6, V.16.

Reminiscences of Sargachhi: Varanasi Series

SWAMI SUHITANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue ...)

92

23.08.63

In the course of the conversation, the topic of *vāra-velā* (inauspicious period) of Thursday came up. Then Maharaj said:

Maharaj: Is it possible to follow everything? Observe whatever is sanctified by the scriptures. The ship Titanic sank—did all the passengers start their journey during the ascendancy of the stars *Aśleṣā* and *Maghā*?

I used to be on the lookout for men. The purpose was not to make monks but to see if someone could be found, who would be the repository of Sri Ramakrishna's ideal—in whom all the four Yogas have flourished and who would be able to stay, whenever desired, relinquishing everything. We don't put much emphasis on spiritual practice at all. That's because there are many obstacles on the way—honour and fame, occult powers, and the bondage of *sāttvic* happiness. That's why we say—it would be good to have attraction for God.

The second chapter of the *Gītā* and the *Samādhipāda* of *Rāja-Yoga*—these are like the

goal and the means. If one listens to the recital of the second chapter, it seems what else there is to learn in the world. It will be enough if one reads it.

It won't do if one is asked to read. The time and opportunity for reading have to be created. Srish used to come daily to the upper floor above the Math dispensary with news about Nirmal Maharaj (Swami Madhavananda)—I used to teach him one verse of the *Gītā* every day. Sourin of Kanpur used to prepare my diet at Kankhal Sevashrama—I used to give him a verse written on a piece of paper; he used to keep it with him and read it during breaks of work. Tell me who cares to take so much trouble?

24.08.63

Maharaj: One doesn't become a Monk merely by doing japa and meditation. A monk must have his head, heart, and hands well-developed! Those who do only japa and meditation are of one type. Taking such a big responsibility, responsibility of so many people, should one pass one's days thus? That's wrong!

25.08.63

Maharaj: One must stick to the repetition of the holy name like a hereditary farmer—whether or not the mind gets involved in it. One has to grab the opportunity for spiritual prac-



The author, one of the Vice-Presidents of the Ramakrishna Order, presents here his conversations with Swami Premeshananda (1884–1967), a disciple of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. ॐ

tices by shoving or pushing, or by hook or crook. Go to bed at 10 at night and get up at 3 a.m. Read the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, the Gita, and the Raja-Yoga aphorisms in the morning and Sat-Prasanga, the Gita, and the Raja-Yoga in the afternoon. You may become unpopular because of that, but what does that matter? This is a subjective life.

Attendant: If one is ordered to deliver lectures?

Maharaj: No gain accrues if lectures are not delivered systematically. However, it may give name and fame. Spiritual practice makes one's words effective—and also benefits oneself.

29.08.63

Maharaj: The *Gospel* is as if the provisions have been arranged in the store room ready for cooking and eating food. One just has to bring those and eat after cooking.

31.08.63

For the sake of Maharaj's recovery, it was proposed that worship be offered to Kala-Bhairava and Mother Sankata. At this Maharaj said:

Maharaj: What should I do? I have offered everything of my own at the feet of one Person. Sri Ramakrishna is my Vishwanatha, Holy Mother is my Annapurna, and Swamiji is my Kala-Bhairava.

What excellent boys come to us! They remain in the Order for two years, but they cannot feel it as their own and it's because of our fault. You people look after all these things; I am on my way out. If a monk remains excessively engaged in japa and meditation only, we don't trust him; a monk should have a sharp sense of discrimination. Those who remain occupied round the clock with meditation, japa, and rosary may be exalted, but they won't be people representing the ideal of Sri Ramakrishna.

Akhandananda Maharaj used to arouse a person from meditation and make him water plants. At first, I became annoyed, but afterwards seeing Baba's life I realised that he did the right thing. He, who is *sattvika* by nature, would be quiet, but those people cannot sit quietly even for a minute. Even if their body remains seated, the mind jumps around. Spiritual practice and all that goes to naught.

Question: Maharaj, I've been staying with you for so many years like a shadow, yet have not found you displeased even for a day. What's the reason for this?

Maharaj: Don't you see what name [Premeshananda] I have been given by my Guru! It is not possible for me to be displeased with anybody.

* * *

While staying at Kashi, Maharaj developed an inclination to suck lozenges; which may be due to diabetes. Occasionally, Maharaj was given some lozenges after checking his sugar and other parameters as advised by the doctor. One day he started demanding obstinately that he must be given another lozenge. He was being dissuaded in various ways and various other topics were being brought in. He was responding to all those rightly but didn't let go of the demand for a lozenge. At long last towards the afternoon I gave him a lozenge. At that time the Pujari Maharaj at Advaita Ashrama came. Every day he used to come and give a part of the rice pudding offering out of his quota to Maharaj and the attendant.

As soon as Maharaj got the lozenge in his hand, he put it in his mouth along with its paper covering as if someone would snatch it away; and started sucking it—a glow of the delight of being victorious shining in his eyes and face.

(To be continued ...)



POTENTIAL UNLIMITED

Ethics, principles and values for ordinary people to become extraordinary

Yuva
Kesari

What is Inclusive Growth?

RAMASUBRAMANIAN O.B.

Sometimes strangers we meet in our daily lives share with us stories that we do not otherwise get to hear. Returning home from a government department meeting, discussing 'inclusion', it was surprising when the autorickshaw driver started to talk about a category of people whom we normally do not acknowledge. In the meeting on inclusion, we talked about the differently abled, physically and mentally, abandoned elders and many other categories who need to be catered to through government schemes. One of the participants shared that recently they found that a growing population (more than 25%) of women were primary earners for their families, having to take care of their children and elders in the family in a village. He said that the vulnerability of these women was very high due to several factors. The meeting discussed all categories of people who may be included in a scheme for the same to be an 'inclusive' programme. So, the autorickshaw driver in this big city started by telling me, 'You know once I used to own 10 autorickshaws and employ drivers, and I gifted the vehicle to them!!'

'Yes sir, when I finished paying loans for these autos that I had bought through bank loans, I gifted those vehicles to them to drive', he continued. 'Why did you do that?' I asked, 'Don't you need to earn money from running

the autorickshaws for your earnings?' 'I do, but you see these are no ordinary people. All the people I had employed were convicts who had been released from prison. No one employs them, it is very difficult for them to find any jobs. So, I decided to employ them. If it is difficult to find a job, it is even more difficult for them to get a loan from a bank. I could get it and they could not. So, I decided if I can provide them with the vehicle, I can ensure that they manage to have their livelihood taken care of.' That was very generous of him. I felt and got a new category of people that I had not earlier thought about during the discussion on Inclusion!

'But what does that provide you?' I asked him. 'You see, I drove a vehicle from a young age and sponsored the education of two of my elder brothers. Today one of them is a doctor, I know how much one can achieve if one has a vehicle', he said with pride. He continued 'And if anything happens to me these people to whom I have given away old autorickshaws, they are all there to take care of me', he concluded. As we reached my destination and I stepped out of the autorickshaw, I bowed to him for enhancing my understanding of how individuals too can practise 'inclusivity' and that it is not just the government. I recollected what Swami Vivekananda called a privilege—to serve mankind, and how he had called the service of all humans as the worship of God. He would have looked at the autorickshaw driver with approval. 🙏



The author is a social entrepreneur based in Chennai, and is the Managing Director of Samanvaya Social Ventures. 🙏



Vivekananda Way

ISSUE 71



Series 5: Understanding India - through Swami Vivekananda's eyes

In this series we understand India through Swami Vivekananda's eyes, and thereby build a deeper appreciation of the country.

We explore the key messages of the 'Lectures from Colombo to Almora', delivered by Swami Vivekananda on his return from the West.

Focus in this issue:

Vedantism (at Khetri)

At Khetri, on 20th December 1897, Swami Vivekananda delivered a lecture on Vedantism. He spoke for more than an hour and a half, and was at his best. **It was a matter of regret that no shorthand writer was present to report the lecture at length. What we have is a summary from notes taken down at the time.** In this Issue we cover the core ideas that Swami Vivekananda shared:

1 The two pathways of the Aryans and the Greeks

Two nations of yore, namely the Greek and the Aryan had been placed in different environments and circumstances – and these two environments resulted in the development of two peculiar and different ideals of civilisation.

Greeks

- The Greek was surrounded by all that was beautiful, sweet, and tempting in nature, with an invigorating climate.
- The study of the Greeks was the outer infinite – i.e. the macrocosm.

Aryans

- The Aryan on the other hand, was surrounded on every side by all that was sublime, and born and nurtured in a climate which did not allow of much physical exercise.
- The study of the Aryans was the inner infinite – i.e. the microcosm.
- The Aryans were by nature an analytical race. In the sciences of mathematics and grammar wonderful fruits were gained, and by the analysis of mind the full tree was developed.

Swami Vivekananda points out that each had its distinct part to play in the civilisation of the world. And it was not that one required to borrow from the other, but if they compared notes both would be the gainers.



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2 The influence of Indian ideals on Europe through the ages

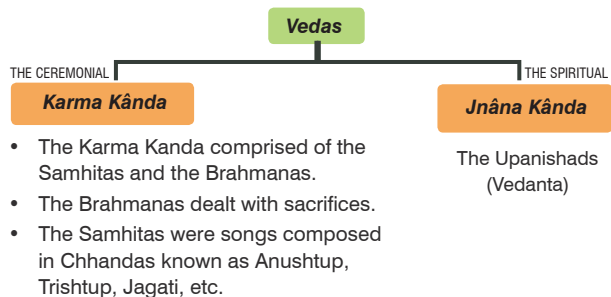
- Swami Vivekananda showed us that as early as 500 BC, traces of Indian thought could be seen in the ideas of the great Greek philosophers such as Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and the Egyptian neo-Platonists.
- Indian thought also permeated further into the countries of Spain, Germany, and other European countries. In the middle ages, the Indian Prince Dara Shuko had translated the Upanishads into Persian, which was subsequently translated into Latin. We see Schopenhauer's philosophy getting deeply moulded by the Upanishads.
- In the Enlightenment Period, we also see traces of the teachings of the Upanishads in the works of the great Western philosopher Immanuel Kant.
- In the 19th century, we see people like Paul Deussen take an active interest in the study of Indian philosophy and Sanskrit.

Swami Vivekananda pointed out that in Europe it is the interest in comparative philology that attracts scholars to the study of Sanskrit.

He hoped that in future much more interest would be taken in the study of Sanskrit.

3 On the nature of the Vedas

- Swami Vivekananda tells us that unlike other religious texts, the Vedas were not spoken by any person. The ideas were evolved slowly over an extended period of time until they were embodied in book form, and then that book became the authority. He said that various religions were embodied in books: the power of books seemed to be infinite.
- He points out that as Hindus, we will have to hold on to the Vedas for thousands of years more, but our ideas about them are to be changed and built anew on a solid foundation of rock.
- The Vedas were a huge literature. Ninety-nine per cent of them were missing. They had been in the keeping of certain families, with whose extinction, the books were lost. However, those that are still left could not be contained even in a large hall.
- The Vedas were written in an archaic and simple language. Their grammar was very crude; so much so that it was said that some parts of the Vedas had no meaning.
- Swami Vivekananda further explained that the Vedas comprised of two portions, and outlined what was contained in the Karma Kanda.



4

On the different ideas of worship in different civilisations

IDEAS OF THE BABYLONIANS

- The soul was only a double, with no individuality of its own, unable to break its connection with the body. This double was believed to suffer hunger, thirst, feelings, emotions like those of the old body.
- Also, if the first body was injured the double would be also be injured; when the first was annihilated, the double also perished.
- This created the tendency to preserve the body. Mummies, tombs, and graves came into existence.
- The Egyptians, the Babylonians, and the Jews never got any farther than this idea of the double; they did not reach to the idea of the Atman beyond.
- In the Semitic type of religion there was tribulation and fear; it was thought that if a man saw God, he would die.

IDEAS OF THE ARYANS

- Not the least trace of ancestral worship could be found in the Rig-Veda (as per Prof. Max Muller).
- There we do not meet with the horrid sight of mummies staring stark and blank at us. There the gods were friendly to man; and the communion between the worshipper and the worshipped was healthy.
- There was no moroseness, no want of simple joy, no lack of smiles or light in the eyes. In fact, Swami Vivekananda tells us that while dwelling on the Vedas he even seemed to hear the laughter of the gods. He recited several Mantras in confirmation of what he had just said: *“Carry him to the place where the Fathers live, where there is no grief or sorrow”* etc.
- Thus the idea arose that the sooner the dead body was cremated the better.
- By degrees the Aryans came to know that there was a finer body that went to a place where there was all joy and no sorrow.
- And finally, according to the Rig-Veda, when a man saw God face-to-face then began his real life.

5

On the Rishis and their gods

- Swami Vivekananda recited the famous *Nasadiya Sukta* which describes the *Pralaya* state and in which occurs the idea of *“Darkness covering darkness”*. He asks us to reflect on the fact that if the persons who described these sublime ideas in such poetic thought were uncivilised and uncultured, then what should we call ourselves.
- Further, he said that it was not for him to criticise or pass any judgment on the Rishis and their gods.
- In fact he said that he saw everything like a panorama, unfolding one scene after another, and behind them all, as a background, stood out the idea एकं सद्भिर्वा बहुधा वदन्ति — *“That which exists is One; sages call It variously.”* The whole thing was most mystical, marvellous, and exquisitely beautiful. It seemed even yet quite unapproachable —the veil was so thin that it would rend, as it were, at the least touch, and vanish like a mirage.

6 Aryan Mind and Greek Mind (contd.)

Greeks

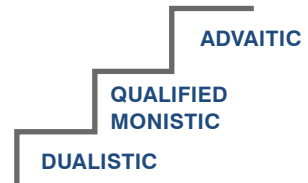
- The Greek thought – man died and went to heaven.
- *What was meant by going to heaven?* It meant going outside of everything; there was nothing inside, everything was outside; all his search was directed outside, nay, he himself was, as it were, outside himself.
- And when he went to a place which was very much like this world minus all its sorrows, he thought he had got everything that was desirable and was satisfied; and there all ideas of religion stopped.

Aryans

- For the Aryan, heavens were all included within the material universe. The Hindus understood that external nature, however great and grand, was limited in space and time.
- Then new sublime thoughts dawned in their minds. That voice said – “*Neti, Neti*”, “Not this, not this.” All the different gods were now reduced into one; the suns, moons, and stars – nay, the whole universe – were one, and upon this new ideal the spiritual basis of religion was built.
- No more is there that limited, crude, personal idea; no more is there that little idea of God sitting in judgment; no more is that search outside, but henceforth it is directed inside.
- Thus, all the schools holding different opinions in India came to be established on the foundation of the Upanishads.

7 An evolutionary vision of Vedanta

- The Swami reconciled the apparent dichotomy between the dualistic, qualified monistic, and Advaitic theories of Vedanta. He said that each one of these was like a step by which one passed before the other was reached; the final evolution to Advaitism was the natural outcome, and the last step was “*Tattvamasi*.”
- He also pointed out that each one of the great commentators Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, and Madhvacharya believed the Upanishads to be the sole authority. However, they twisted and tortured the meaning of particular paragraphs of the Upanishads to support their own theory.

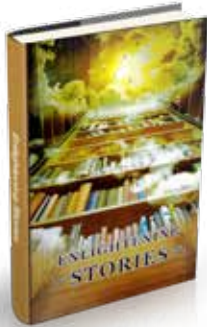


It was perfectly true that the Upanishads had one thing to teach, but that was taught as a going up from one step to another.

8 On Knowledge

Swami Vivekananda explained that knowledge was the finding of unity in diversity, and the highest point in every science was reached when it found the one unity underlying all variety. This was as true in physical science as in the spiritual.

BOOK REVIEW



ENLIGHTENING STORIES

Trans. and ed. **Swami Vimohananda**

Advaita Ashrama, 5, Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata-700 014. 2019; paperback; pp.392; ₹130.

Everybody, regardless of age, loves a good story.

What happens next? Can this be true? These are the questions that arise in our minds and keep us reading. In this book *Enlightening Stories*, the story form has been used to instruct and entertain. The seventy-four selections fall into five categories—Upanishadic, Spiritual Life, Saints, Mythology and finally, Other Stories. They first appeared in various well-known magazines and books like *Prabuddha Bharata*, *Galpa Malika* and *Galpaguchha*.

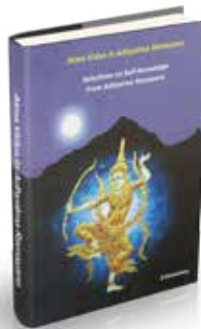
The stories are from different religious and cultural traditions—Sister Marianna is about an Italian saint who devoted her whole life to helping others and who gets divine help when she feels all hope has been lost. Another beautiful story is *Devidas* by Swami Tyagishvarananda. Set in British Bengal, it is about the young *Devidas*, a selfless man, who is a natural leader of his village and is also a great Kali devotee. When his village is overrun by a cholera epidemic, *Devidas* implores his favourite Kali for divine intervention. This takes a turn for the better in the village, but *Devidas* pays for it with his life. The villagers discover his body in a secluded area near the Kali temple. The

poignancy of patriotism and devotion are tellingly brought out.

Other wonderful stories are Tagore's *Hidden Treasure*, written in his inimitable way, a mixture of mystery and philosophical truths, and *Sarvamangala* by Ramachandra Datta.

The translation requires special mention and requires our thanks. It has been so beautifully done by Swami Vimohananda that readers who might not be able to access these stories in the original will now be able to read and enjoy them. Every single story is immensely interesting and moving and takes the reader back to an age when anything was possible. All the stories recall a time when both storytelling and listening were marvellous arts, in which both lesson and entertainment combined to make this oral art form so popular and sought after. This book will give hours of happy and instructional reading to an audience that is now ready for this literary form to make a comeback.

PREMA RAGHUNATH, CHENNAI



ATMA VIDYA IN ADHYATMA RAMAYANA: SELECTIONS ON SELF-KNOWLEDGE FROM ADHYATMA RAMAYANA.

Selection and Translation by **G Kameshwar**

Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning, Post Office Road, Sanjaynagar, Bengaluru - 560094. 2018; paperback; pp.322; ₹300.

The Ramayana has been told several times after Valmiki. The story of Rama is multi-faceted and colourful. That story, at one level, is about Rama, the embodiment of Self-knowledge. Traditional sources attribute the *Adhyatma Ramayana* to be part of the Brahmanda Purana, the author being Vyasa. But some attribute it to the 13th-century devotional poet Ramananda. There is controversy about the authorship and the date, with Karapatri Maharaj asserting that the work predates Sri Shankaracharya and further, that the latter was influenced by the Advaita ideas in it. Whatever be the truth, and Kameshwar discusses these in detail, the work at its core is about Self-knowledge, and Kameshwar does well to focus on this aspect and to cull from the larger work those passages which justify this emphasis. The text reveals all three paths to spirituality—Karma, Bhakti and Jnana.

The impact and influence of the text have been immense. It has inspired renderings in different languages of India, notably Tulasidas' *Ramcharitmanas* and Ezhuthachan in Malayalam. Upanishad Brahmdendra wrote an influential commentary on it. Ramana Maharshi was influenced by it too.

The *Adhyatma Ramayana* has innumerable characters experiencing and expressing Self-knowledge. Among them are Rama Himself, Shiva, Rishis like Narada and Valmiki, women like Ahalya, devotees like Hanuman, and even Rakshasas like Kabandha and Vibhisana. Kameshwar guides us through this complex work by suggesting that it might be worthwhile to read the text by first focusing on the chapters 'Rama Hrudayam' and then the 'Rama Gita', in both of which Shiva and Parvati converse about the ultimate and Rama as embodying it. Reading it sequentially, of course, is also an option. The text, sequentially speaking, starts with Balakandam, followed by

Ayodhyakandam, Aranyakandam, Kishkindhakandam, Sundarakandam, Yuddhakandam and ends with Uttarakandam. 'Rama Hrudayam' occurs in Balakandam and 'Rama Gita' in Uttarakandam. From each of these Kandams, Kameshwar has deftly selected passages appropriate to his purpose of emphasizing Self-knowledge. A random list would include the deliverance of Ahalya, the encounter between Rama and Parashurama, Vasishtha counselling Bharata, the liberation of Jatayu and Kabandha, Sugriva's hymn to Rama, Hanuman's exposition to Ravana, the death and deliverance of Ravana, and Agasthya's hymn to Rama. One can see that every part of the Rama story lends itself to emphasize the Self-knowledge aspect. Two instances may be cited. Parvati requests Shiva to impart to her, his disciple, the most secret knowledge which leads to devotion and dispassion and then refers to Rama as the 'essence' who enables us to cross *Samsara*. Shiva obliges and in limpid verses Kameshwar gets Shiva to enumerate the true nature of Rama. Rama is the supreme Being, the one who transcends Prakriti, the self of all, and so forth, and we are left in no doubt that this is a text about Self-knowledge. In the chapter 'Liberation of Shabari', Rama teaches her the way of Bhakti to gain Self-knowledge. Shuka teaches Ravana that Rama is no mortal, that Sita is in actuality 'the cause of the universe', and exhorts him to follow Rama.

Kameshwar has taken great pains to produce a readable book. The translations are wonderful and in elegant English and he has provided the narrative links between selections and Kandams. This is a book that will inspire devotion and reverence and as it is aimed at the general reader, it will be a very fine addition to the spiritual literature coming out of the Ramana Maharishi Centre for Learning.

_____. PROF. MOHAN RAMANAN, HYDERABAD



The Order on the March

News & Notes from Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission

❖ The birthday (*janma-tithi*) of **Sri Ramakrishna Dev** was celebrated at Belur Math on Tuesday, 12 March, with spiritual fervour and delight. Khichuri prasada was served to 30,000 devotees. The General Secretary presided over the public meeting held in the afternoon. ❖ The centenary of **Swami Brahmananda Temple** at Belur Math was celebrated on 13 and 14 March with special worship, musical programmes and two public meetings. Swami Suhitanandaji and Swami Bhajananandaji, Vice Presidents of the Ramakrishna Order, chaired the meetings respectively on the first and second day of the celebration. ❖ The centenary of **Swami Vivekananda Temple** at Belur Math was celebrated on 15 March with special worship, Vedic chanting and cultural events. Swami Girishanandaji, Vice President of the Ramakrishna Order, presided over the public meeting held in the afternoon. ❖ The erstwhile Headquarters building at Belur Math, situated opposite Sri Ramakrishna Temple, has been named **Swami Subodhananda Memorial**. Swami Gautamanandaji, Vice President of the Ramakrishna Order, unveiled

two plaques on 16 March with the new name and a brief history of the building inscribed on them. ❖ The annual **Public Celebration** in connection with Sri Ramakrishna's birthday was held at Belur Math on Sunday, 17 March, with religious discourses, cultural events and *mela* (fair). Lakhs of people visited Belur Math on that day. Khichuri prasada was served to 45,000 devotees and visitors.

News of Branch Centres

❖ Swami Suviranandaji, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the new monks' quarters at **Shyamsayer** centre on 24 March and laid the foundation stone for a school building for the higher secondary section at **Asansol** centre on 25 March. ❖ **Hollywood** centre, USA, installed a plaque at a nearby intersection on 22 February. The plaque reads 'Vedanta Square - Commemorating the message of peace, harmony, and oneness brought to Los Angeles by Swami Vivekananda in 1899.' ❖ To commemorate the 125th anniversary of Swami Vivekananda and Vedanta's arrival in Los Angeles, the centre held two meetings on 24 February—one in Hollywood and another in

South Pasadena. ❖ The 75th anniversary of the Ramakrishna Monastery in Trabuco Canyon was celebrated on 25 February with a symposium on monasticism.

Eye Camps and other Healthcare Services

India: Bankura, Chennai Math, Coimbatore Mission, Cuttack, Goa, Gourhati, Gurap, Hatamuniguda, Jammu, Jamshedpur, Kalyani, Kanpur, Lucknow, Madurai, Manasadwip, Mumbai, Nagpur, Naora, Nattarampalli, Ponnampet, Porbandar, Rajamahendravaram, Rajkot, Salem, Silchar and Thanjavur. **Outside India:** Batticaloa and Durban.

Values Education and Youth Programmes

The following centres held programmes mentioned against their names: **Gurugram:** A session on values education at the National Progressive Schools' Conference, Delhi, on 21 February, attended by 250 principals; **Porbandar:** Several values education programmes from August to February which were attended by a total of 492 students and 20 teachers from 10 schools and colleges; **Raipur:** Three personality development camps in Raipur and Durg districts on 4, 11 and 19 March attended by 421 students and

63 teachers in all; **Rajkot:** (i) Two values education programmes at the ashrama and 5 programmes in schools and colleges from 29 January to 20 February in which altogether 3,740 students took part. (ii) A state-level written quiz competition in which 42,096 students from 516 schools in 33 districts of Gujarat took part; the top-pers were awarded prizes on 3 March; **Ranchi Morabadi:** Youth awakening programmes in two remote areas in Jharkhand on 5 and 7 March which were attended by 565 youths in all; **Thanjavur:** Two values education programmes on 13 and 20 March in Amara-vathiputtur and Thanjavur in which a total of 575 students took part.

RELIEF WORK

In the wake of recent disasters, centres carried out relief operations by distributing various essential items

Cyclone Relief

Tamil Nadu: In continuation of its relief operations among the people affected by Cyclone Michaung in December, **Chennai Students' Home** distributed 1,100 kg rice, 240 kg wheat flour, 60 kg pulses, 40 litres cooking oil, 20 kg assorted spices, 20 kg tamarind, 40 kg salt and 40 kg sugar among 215 families in Chengalpattu and Kanchipuram districts from 21 December to 5 January.

Distress Relief

The following centres distributed essential items to needy people: **India:** Aalo, Belgharia, Kolkata, Chennai Students' Home, Cooch Behar, Digboi, Indore, Kalyani, Kamarpukur, Koyilandy, Muzaffarpur, Nagpur, Naora, Prayagraj, Puri Math, Rahara, Rajamahendravaram, Salem, Sikra Kulingram, Thanjavur, **Bangladesh:** Bagerhat. **South Africa:** Durban, Phoenix

Winter Relief

The headquarters and the following centres distributed blankets and winter garments, from November 2023 to March 2024: **India:** Aalo, Bankura, Belgharia, Chandigarh, Davanagere, Dehradun, Digboi, Halasuru, Jamshedpur, Kalyani, Naora, Ponnampet, Puri Math, Rahara, Sargachhi, Sarisha.

Distress Rehabilitation

Gujarat: **Vadodara** centre renovated the prayer hall roof of a school in Ahmedabad. The renovated prayer hall was inaugurated on 20 January.

Economic Rehabilitation

Assam: **Guwahati** centre handed over 11 sewing machines and 10 handloom machines (*tantsals*) to needy women on 17 March.

Infrastructural Support

Madhya Pradesh: **Indore** centre distributed 25 sets of tables and benches, 305 desks, 2 noticeboards, 6 almirahs, and 31 sets of kitchen utensils (each



Distribution of Blankets: Digboi



Distress Relief: Kamarpukur



Blood Donation Camp: Burdwan



Values-Oriented Programme: Thanjavur

set containing 25 plates, 1 *ka-dai*, 1 pot, 2 pans and 2 serving spoons) among 16 schools in Khargone district from 8 July to 5 December. 🙏

AN APPEAL

Advaita Ashrama is a branch of Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math. It was founded by Swami Vivekananda in 1899 at Mayavati in the Himalayas. It is the premier publication house of the Ramakrishna Order. For more than a century Advaita Ashrama has been spreading the message of Vedanta all over the world through publication of books on Vedanta, spirituality and Indian culture.



In 1920, the publication work of the Ashrama was shifted from Mayavati in the Himalayas to Kolkata, where it changed places four times before it settled down in 1960 in a small building at 5 Dehi Entally Road. In recent decades, the Ashrama has been facing difficulties in conducting its activities efficiently due to an acute shortage of space. Hence arose the dire need to construct a new building on our adjacent plot of land at 36 Ananda Palit Road.

This new building is going to be a ground-plus-six-storied structure. It will have sufficient space for stocking printed books and publication-related activities. All departments will be provided with sufficient office space. There will be a 400-seat auditorium to hold regular classes for the benefit of all, a meditation hall for devotees and visitors, a spacious sales section, rooms to conduct educational and character development activities for the local youth, a monks' quarter, a staff quarter, and rooms for guests.

The estimated cost of this project is rupees 42 crores. With the help of donations coming from large-hearted devotees, we have been able to collect till now around rupees 20.38 crores. To complete the work, we need additional funds of approximately rupees 21.6 crores.

We therefore appeal to all the devotees and admirers of Swami Vivekananda to come forward and help us complete this project by making donations to whatever extent possible. The foundation stone for this project was laid on 30 March 2022 and we expect the work to be completed within three years. Every rupee or dollar donated by you will be furthering the cause of Hindu Dharma and Swami Vivekananda.

Donations to Advaita Ashrama are eligible for Income Tax exemption u/s 80G (5) (vi) of IT Act, 1961. Indian citizens can donate online through our website: <https://advaitaashrama.org/donate>.

Our bank details for donations by Indian citizens only (strictly) towards New Building Construction : Bandhan Bank, CIT Road Branch P-8, CIT Road, Kolkata 700014

A/c Name: Advaita Ashrama; A/c No: 50190020938949; IFSC: BDBL0001843

Please send us an email to mail@advaitaashrama.org in case of online transfer / NEFT providing your full address, phone number, and PAN.



Foreign citizens may write to us at mail@advaitaashrama.org to know Wire Transfer details.

Yours in OM,

Swami Shuddhidananda
(Adhyaksha)



Advaita Ashrama

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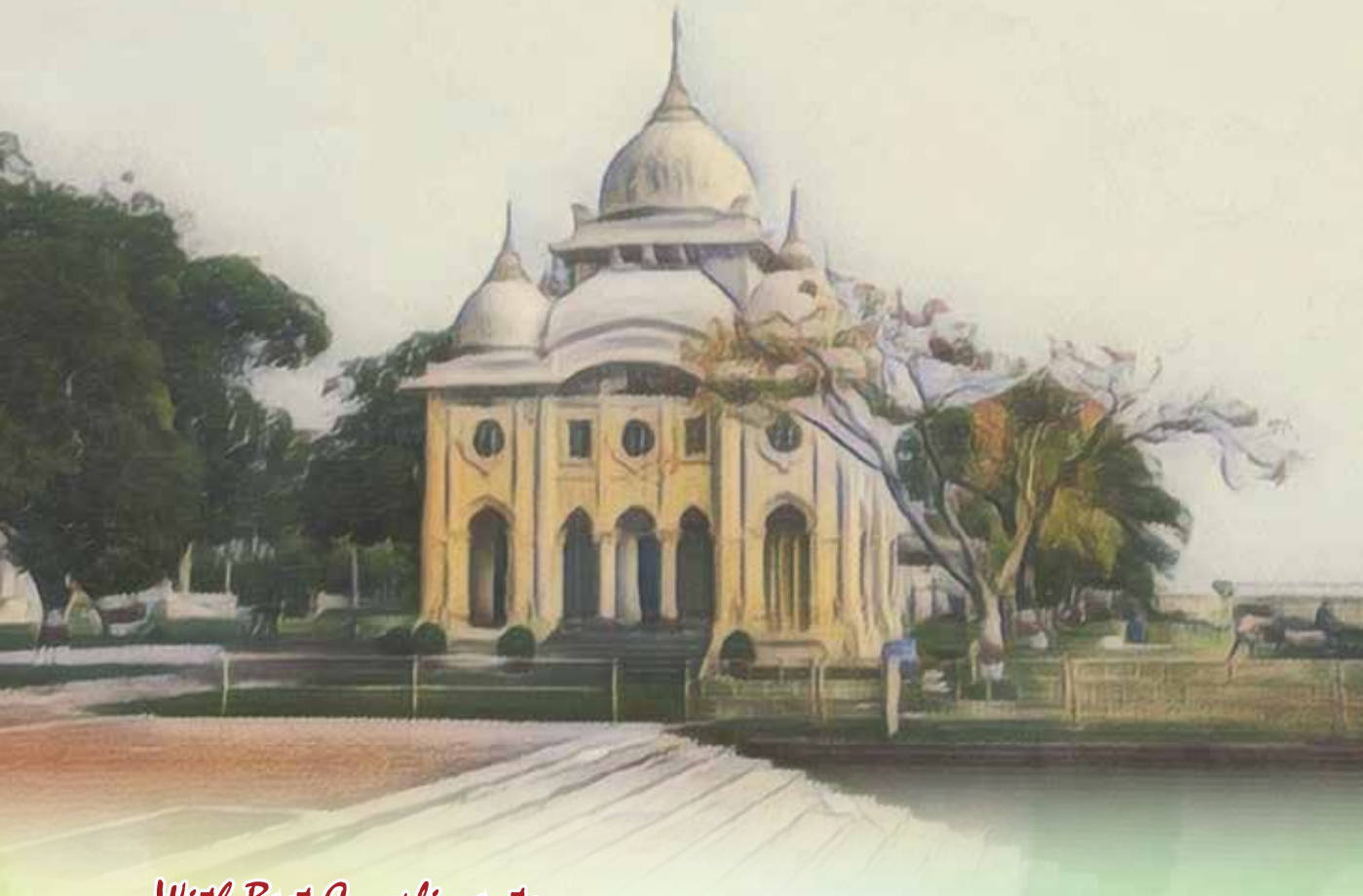
**“If the poor cannot come to education,
education must go to them.”**

- SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

We at the Merino Group are committed to this direction and make it our mission to fulfill our social responsibility. With the **SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ARUNODAY VIDYALAYA**, at Hapur, we strive to ensure the all-round development of the children belonging to the weakest section of the society.



Swami Brahmananda Temple, Belur Math



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