The Vedanta Kesari
THE LION OF VEDANTA
A Cultural and Spiritual Monthly of the Ramakrishna Order since 1914

Roy Villa, RKM Nivedita
Educational and Cultural Centre,
Darjeeling, West Bengal

September 2015
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‘Doing is very good, but that comes from thinking. . . . Fill the brain, therefore, with high thoughts, highest ideals, place them day and night before you, and out of that will come great work.’

—Swami Vivekananda
**Cover Story**

*Roy Villa, Darjeeling*
*RKM Nivedita Educational and Cultural Centre*

Darjeeling is a well-known hill station, having a partial autonomous status in the state of West Bengal. Situated at an elevation of 7,100 ft, it is noted for its tea industry, scenic beauty, bracing weather and a heritage hill railway. Darjeeling was visited by Swami Vivekananda in 1897, besides some of his other brother disciples including Swami Abhedananda. Charmed by its weather and scenery, Sister Nivedita, the illustrious Irish disciple of Swami Vivekananda, visited Darjeeling on several occasions. Between 1903 and 1911, Sister came to Darjeeling 7 times, spending some 242 days and stayed at Roy Villa and also breathed her last there in October 1911.

In May 2013, thanks to the efforts by devotees and monks, Roy Villa, a four storied building built 115 years ago in the style of European castles (at Lebong Cart Road, near Tenzing Rock) and originally belonging to Dwarkanath Roy, brother-in-law of Abala Bose, the wife of the well-known scientist Jagadish Chandra Bose, was handed over to Ramakrishna Mission by the West Bengal government. Thus came into being Ramakrishna Mission Nivedita Educational and Cultural Centre, a branch centre of Belur Math. Roy Villa has been painstakingly renovated and restored. The room where Sister lived now has her picture, old writing desk, chair, table lamp stand, wall clock, typewriter, the old styled electric wiring, reminding of her presence. The Mission recently carried out relief work, with the help of Belur Math and government, for the people affected by the earthquake in Nepal which borders Darjeeling, besides conducting a number of cultural and educational activities and plans for future expansion (visit www.rkmdarjeeling.org).

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*To be continued . . .
Gita Verse for Reflection
Tr. by Swami Tapasyananda

\[ \text{There (a mere formal) practice of disciplines, a clear intellectual understanding (of the doctrine) is better. Than such understanding, meditation is better. Even better than meditation is the abandonment of the fruits of action. For, such abandonment (of the fruits of works and sense of their agency) is immediately followed by peace.} \]

—Bhagavad Gita, 12-12

Give all to the Lord and go on and think not of it. The whole soul pours in a continuous current to God; there is no time to seek money, or name, or fame, no time to think of anything but God; then will come into our hearts that infinite, wonderful bliss of Love. All desires are but beads of glass. Love of God increases every moment and is ever new, to be known only by feeling it. Love is the easiest of all, it waits for no logic, it is natural. We need no demonstration, no proof. Reasoning is limiting something by our own minds. We throw a net and catch something, and then say that we have demonstrated it; but never, never can we catch God in a net.

—Swami Vivekananda, CW, 7:10
Editorial

Living Honestly

The Fact of Our Inability

We all know what is right and what is wrong. But few of us follow the right, eschewing the path of wrong. We haplessly and helplessly go on reciting the virtues that we wish to follow but fail to internalise them in our lives. Says Swami Vivekananda, referring to this inability to do what we say,

We have all been hearing from childhood of such things as love, peace, charity, equality, and universal brotherhood; but they have become to us mere words without meaning, words which we repeat like parrots, and it has become quite natural for us to do so. We cannot help it. Great souls, who first felt these great ideas in their hearts, manufactured these words; and at that time many understood their meaning. Later on, ignorant people have taken up those words to play with them and made religion a mere play upon words, and not a thing to be carried into practice.¹

So, we become mere habitual repeaters of terms and words. We repeat the words without being sensitive to their meanings or without willing to practice them. The following anecdotes, mostly involving children (possibly due to the fact that children, innocent and fresh as they are, are sharp and fearless in their observations and comments) will further illustrate this:

Ring, ring. Ring, ring. The landline telephone at Muthu’s house rang several times before his father asked him to pick it up. ‘Hello, is Vishwan at home? This is Jayant speaking’, asked the caller on the other side.

‘Papa,’ said young Muthu to Vishwan, his father, ‘someone uncle is asking for you.’

‘Who?’ asked Vishwan.

‘Mr. Jayant.’

‘Tell him I am not at home.’

‘Hello, Jayant uncle, Papa is telling he is not at home.’

Indeed, Papa!

Little Anil had been absent for three days from his nursery school. When his mother brought him on the fourth day, the principal of the school asked for the reason for his absence. Anil’s mother produced a medical certificate from a physician. The principal asked his mother to leave the office for a while and after she went out, he asked little Anil, ‘My dear, what happened, you did not come for three days?’

‘My mom said I had fever and she took me to a marriage,’ revealed Anil with all his innocence.

And she said...!

‘Are you coming? It is already getting late,’ said the caller to ten year-old Shweta’s father. ‘Yes, yes. I will be there soon. I am on the road—will be there soon,’ he said. Shweta looked at her father and with confused eyes told him, ‘But daddy, you are at home, not even ready to drive! You said you are on the road and it takes 30 minutes’ drive to office?’ Her father smiled at her but it did not amuse her in any way.

Her father was teaching her wrong ways and he will encounter them himself one day.

¹
Studying in the second grade, Rangan had returned home and was trying to finish his homework before he could accompany his mother to a family function. His teacher had asked him to write ‘We should respect our parents’ 20 times in his notebook. While he struggled to do the assignment, his mother asked him to hurry up as she was getting late. He tried to hurry but little fingers could not move faster. His mother was losing her patience; she had asked him to finish the homework quickly, ‘Hurry up, do fast. Do you not understand!’ she was about to raise her hand to land on his rosy, innocent cheeks; Rangan covered his face in self-defence. Annoyed but helpless, he continued to write, ‘We should respect our parents’. 20 times, at a stretch!

He kept writing with young, little fingers. How will he learn to respect his parents?

Mr. Lahari spoke to his ‘moral education’ class about the importance of being punctual. He spoke excellently, using a refined language, rich in examples and moving quotes, extolling the importance of being punctual. So lost was he in his speech, so engrossed was he in explaining his point that he lost all sense of time. He overshot his time—by an hour.

Moral: do what needs to be done; lessons are for others. ‘Follow your pleasure’!

Professor Nath has been teaching a course on public health. As part of his teaching, he often has to speak on the issue of smoking and its harmful effects. He has acquired quite a bit of facts and figures to prove his point. He teaches well, often targeting the smokers. The only problem is that after he finishes his schedule of classes, he is dead tired and needs to relax. And smokes, at times half a dozen of cigarettes! He cannot understand that many of those who are given to smoking have similar compulsions.

Rightly did someone say, ‘Giving up smoking?! I have done it so many times.’

And then there are those who have mastered the art of making promises and raise others’ hope. Precisely did someone remark about a young man—‘He is a promising young man. He only promises; he rarely keeps them’.

The Lessons of Daily living

These, and countless others, are everyday occurrences. We face them off and on but rarely stop to examine them. We think them to be ‘normal’ and go our way. But think of the following parable told by Sri Ramakrishna:2

There was a physician in a remote village. The physician examined the boy and diagnosed his disease. But, instead of prescribing medicine for the patient, he asked him to come again on the morrow. When the father went to him the next day with his son, the physician said to the boy, ‘Give up taking molasses and the disease will be cured; there is no need to take medicine.’

Hearing these words, the father said, ‘Sir, you might have very well said this yesterday; in that case, I need not have taken so much trouble to come so far today.’

The physician replied, ‘Don’t you see? I had a few jars full of molasses here yesterday. You perhaps noticed it. Had I forbidden the boy yesterday to take molasses, he would have thought that the physician was a peculiar person indeed; he takes so much of molasses himself and asks me to refrain from it! Thinking so, he would not have any faith in my words, not to speak of regard for them. That is why I did not tell you so before removing the jars of molasses.’
Rightly Swami Vivekananda observed a century ago:

Religions of the world have become lifeless mockeries. What the world wants is character. The world is in need of those whose life is one burning love, selfless. That love will make every word tell like thunderbolt.\(^3\)

To love and be selfless means to be honest and sincere and kind. It is absence of double speak, hypocrisy, showiness and insincerity. It is meaning what one says and does. It is living an authentic life aligning what one says, one believes and one lives. There may be some failures despite our best efforts—but it is a life based on honesty and sincerity of purpose. It is ‘making the mind (our thoughts) and mouth (i.e. all senses and actions) one,’ in the words of Sri Ramakrishna.

Most of our mistakes in life originate from sense of cleverness. Being clever is not same as being wise. Wisdom requires holding one to some values, some higher principles. It is not mere, raw intellect; it is cultivated, refined intellect. Swamiji points out:

Intellect is necessary, for without it we fall into crude errors and make all sorts of mistakes. Intellect checks these; but beyond that, do not try to build anything upon it. It is an inactive, secondary help; the real help is feeling, love. Do you feel for others? If you do, you are growing in oneness. If you do not feel for others, you may be the most intellectual giant ever born, but you will be nothing; you are but dry intellect, and you will remain so. And if you feel, even if you cannot read any book and do not know any language, you are in the right way. The Lord is yours.\(^4\)

Beyond the Emptying Recital

Swami Vivekananda further says,\(^5\)

We attend lectures and read books, argue and reason about God and soul, religion and salvation. These are not spirituality, because spirituality does not exist in books or theories or in philosophies. It is not in learning or reasoning, but in actual inner growth. Even parrots can learn things by heart and repeat them. If you become learned, what of it? Asses can carry whole libraries. So when real light will come, there will be no more of this learning from books—no book-learning. The man who cannot write even his own name can be perfectly religious, and the man with all the libraries of the world in his head may fail to be. Learning is not a condition of spiritual growth; scholarship is not a condition.

He also points out:

Any fool can talk. Even parrots talk. Talking is one thing, and realising is another. Philosophies, and doctrines, and arguments, and books, and theories, and churches, and sects, and all these things are good in their own way; but when that realisation comes, these things drop away. For instance, maps are good, but when you see the country itself, and look again at the maps, what a great difference you find! So those that have realised truth do not require the ratiocinations of logic and all other gymnastics of the intellect to make them understand the truth; it is to them the life of their lives, concretised, made more than tangible.\(^6\)

There is an interesting story about parroting:

The young one of a bird was learning to fly. He often fell down and yet was trying his hard to fly. His mother would often help him out and give some practical tips to improve. And then one day, when he felt confident to fly alone, he decided to make a maiden trip to a nearby forest. As a caution and advice, the mother bird told the young one to be aware of the hunters who spread the grains and cast a net over it. To ensure that he remembers it, the mother told him, ‘Repeat, “I will be aware of hunters, I will be aware of...’
hunters. . .”’ The young one repeated and flew off. In the evening, when he did not return, the mother bird, worried and anxious, went in search of him. After much flying around, she finally heard her young one’s voice. He was repeating, ‘I will be aware of hunters, I will be aware of hunters’ and was lying caught in the net which the hunter had laid!

That is our life, too. We repeat and reiterate our freedom but are often caught in the nets of our own passions and ego. We know but that does not help. So, wherein lies the crux of the matter? It lies in seeking, in finding out what we really want, and stop reciting and proclaiming what we seem to want. In Swamiji’s words:

Let us ask ourselves each day, ‘Do we want God?’ When we begin to talk religion, and especially when we take a high position and begin to teach others, we must ask ourselves the same question. I find many times that I don’t want God, I want bread more. I may go mad if I don’t get a piece of bread; many ladies will go mad if they don’t get a diamond pin, but they do not have the same desire for God; they do not know the only Reality that is in the universe.

Among all the spiritual disciplines one takes up, the practice of being aware of oneself is the ‘best’. We must examine our motives, our intentions and our expectations—and the more we can study ourselves, the more we can understand ourselves. We can fool some people sometimes but not all people all times. So, one must be conscious of what one wants. We must convert our ‘information’ into conviction for it is conviction that becomes action. We always follow what we are convinced of and not just what we proclaim. Faith gets transformed into action. ‘A man is as his faith is,’ says the Gita (17.3).

Two cautions in this practice of self-examination: in order to do honest self-appraisal and self-examination, one should keep a sharp eye on the excuses and arguments that the impure mind makes in its own favour—the ‘it is alright attitude.’ When we are caught in such lines of thoughts, we are lenient towards ourselves and strict towards others, while the opposite should be followed: being strict towards oneself and lenient towards others.

And the second caution is about the basic approach that we should adopt: let us never try to prove our moral and spiritual life to others. ‘What do I care if Mohammed was a good man, or Buddha? Does that alter my goodness or evil? Let us be good for our own sake on our own responsibility,’ cautioned Swami Vivekananda.

That would be living honestly. □

References
5. CW, 8.114  6. CW, 2.284  7. CW, 4.20  8. CW, 8.279

India’s Timeless Wisdom

सांच बराबर तप नहीं, झुट बराबर पाप।
जोके हदया सांच है, ताके हदया आप।

—Sant Kabir

There is no austerity like truth, no sin like falsehood. You (O Lord) reside in the heart of him, who has truth in his heart.
IV) How Far Can We Ourselves Solve Our Difficulties

Leaving this development at this point, let us turn to the consideration of a very important question: How far is it possible for us to face and overcome our difficulties without having to run to the professional experts?

There is a trend among the people in modern free societies to be more and more unfree in a variety of ways. If for every little difficulty we have to depend on somebody else, for solution, that necessity itself becomes a major difficulty of life.

It is, however, true that there may be quite a few complicated cases of difficulties in which we require experienced, specialized and professional help. By all means such help should be taken for getting over difficulties. After all we live in a society of complicated interdependence.

Only we are to be sure that we are really going in for a true solution of the problem and not for worse confounding of it.

Such specialized help, however, is so costly by way of payment in time and money that many of us cannot afford to seek such professional help.

Moreover truly dependable and competent advisers are few indeed. Hence it is not also easy to get their help.

And when we take help from half-baked professionals, chances are there that our difficulties will increase. Thus for various reasons we are driven to fall back upon our own resources in our battle against difficulties.

And it is good that the situation is such. It is only by grappling with our difficulties that we grow in strength. Therefore the challenge of any difficulty should rouse in us that sense of honour which does not accept anything lying, least of all defeat at the hand of difficulties.

There are a large number of difficulties of life, which we ourselves should be able to take care of, and often do take care of. When we have overcome our difficulties by our personal efforts, we develop a type of self-confidence, that greater difficulties gradually become easier to face. Therefore it is worthwhile to investigate into the nature of difficulties and find out how we ourselves can overcome them.
Nature of difficulties: To be sure, difficulties will come in every life. But there are difficulties and difficulties. There are difficulties which are real; there are difficulties which are pretty imaginary. And there are real difficulties which we magnify and dignify in order to enjoy the luxury of feeling sad and helpless.

Most of our difficulties are self-created. And there are difficulties, which it would appear, others have created for you.

There are difficulties which can wait. There are difficulties which seem to be in a hurry. There are difficulties with which you will have to live. There are difficulties with which it would appear you cannot live.

Some difficulties are physical, some mental and some spiritual. Sometime they overlap, coalesce, and combine. It is well-known that from emotional turmoil acute physical trouble may develop. It is also not unknown that acute physical troubles may affect one's mind.

About the characteristics of difficulties we need know something more:

In his days of wandering, while in Banaras, Swami Vivekananda was one day hotly pursued by a troop of monkeys. And you know monkeys can be very menacing. The Swami was running away when a monk called to him 'stop, always face the brute'.

He stopped and looked defiantly at the monkeys. And they promptly melted away.

Later on as a preacher, he placed before his audience this as an object lesson for life: always to face the brute, face the dangers and vicissitudes of life and not run away from them.

Some of us are so heroic that whenever we face a difficulty we crane our neck and strain our eyes to find anyone in order to foist the responsibility on.

Many of us are so courageous that we look at our difficulties through coloured glasses of various emotional tints with the corner of our half-open eyes, and are tremendously impressed by their magnitude.

But the moment you face your difficulties in a frontal manner with wide open piercing eyes, you will see like the monkeys, most of them will have disappeared before your doing anything.

Without looking at them courageously and clearly you cannot cut your difficulties to their intrinsic size and shape. It is therefore very important to catch the difficulty by its throat, as it were, and have a good look at its face.

Certain other characteristics of our difficulties and their implications for our lives may also be remembered:

(a) Except perhaps certain congenital difficulties no difficulty is permanent. It will pass away like water under the bridge over a river.

(b) Man is any day mightier than any of his difficulties, if only he knows how to tap the sources of his strength from his real nature.

(c) There is also a way of making difficulties pay cash profit instead of your having to
submit to difficulty.

(d) Difficulties in fact hold the key to our progress and regress.

(e) If you sympathize with others in their difficulties, sharpness of your own difficulties will be felt less and less.

V) Two Ways of Facing Difficulties

There are two ways of facing difficulties of life: (a) the way of facing them before they have arisen; (b) the way of facing them after they have arisen.

Most of the difficulties we have to face are the products of our own thought, actions and weaknesses. The difficulties we are facing today are the products of our past thought, actions and weaknesses. These difficulties have already arisen. They have to be handled in a way which may be called ‘curative’.

But there would be difficulties in future if we think and behave today in a particular way. Such future difficulties have to be handled in another way, which may be called ‘preventive’.

This two-pronged attack has to be undertaken simultaneously. We have to see that we do not sow the seeds of future difficulties. And we have also to deal with the difficulties that are harassing our body and mind right now.

And we have to do this double function without confusing issues. That is to say, great alertness is needed to face difficulties of life creatively.

Preventive Measures: First let us see what preventive measures we can take in order to be sure that right now we are not sowing the seeds of difficulties which we shall have to face in the future.

How can we do this? This can be done by putting into practice a simple and clear summon of the Buddha on ‘Avoiding the Ten Evils’.5 The Buddha says:

‘All acts of living creature become bad by ten things, and by avoiding the ten things they become good.’

Most of our difficulties are the products of these ten things which make our acts bad. Therefore we must know how to avoid them. The Buddha says:

‘There are three evils of the body; four evils of the tongue; and three evils of the mind.’
‘The three evils of the body are: murder, theft and adultery.’
‘The four evils of the tongue are: lying, slander, abuse and idle talk.’
‘The three evils of the mind are: covetousness, hatred and error.’

Now, how do we avoid these evils in order to see that we do not create for us difficulties in future.

The Buddha gives specific instructions in this regard combining both negative and positive precepts.
Three Evils of the Body: For avoiding the three evils of the body the Buddha gives these three precepts: (1) ‘Kill not but have regard for life.’ (2) ‘Steal not, neither do you rob; but help everybody to be the master of the fruits of his labour.’ (3) ‘Abstain from impurity and lead a life of chastity.’

The precepts are small, told in a few words, but in each one of them there is the power of saving wisdom.

If we not only abstain from killing but have also positive reverence for life, the life itself takes a different shape. Many of us have plenty of reverence for our own lives and we would like others to have the same reverence for our lives. Indeed, we want the whole world to reverence our lives. But Buddha here wants us to have reverence for all lives, specially for others’ lives. In that case could we have inter-racial, interfaith and international difficulties? If we had regard for all lives there would be no armament race and the consequent vicious spiral of evils which has kept the world hovering on the brink of destruction.

The precept is not only not to steal or rob, but to help everybody to be the master of the fruits of his labour. Everyone of us is anxious to be master of the fruits of his labour, and often to be the master of the fruits of others’ labour also. But very few of us think the same way in regard to the rights of others, on the fruits of their labour. If we had done so, the great political difficulties created by the power-blocks need not have been there. Communism itself had its origin in this default of man which deprived vast numbers of working people of the fruits of their labour.

Whenever we are genuinely concerned in giving the other person his due, the petty and great conflicts of life at home, office or society are reduced to the minimum and our human relations, which are an abiding source of happiness, improve considerably.

We are advised not only to abstain from impurity but also lead a life of chastity. Those who faithfully observe this precept are showered with many blessings of happy and contended life. And those who do not do so, will have turmoil and difficulties in every sphere of life. They will have physical, emotional, financial and maybe even criminal difficulties to face. And this precept holds good in regard to everybody, whether one is celibate or virgin, a married person or a widow or widower. Whoever transgresses this law will have to pay for it by way of suffering many a pang in life. Sometimes transgression of this law results in insanity or suicide, broken home, alcoholism, and other devastating results, too numerous to be catalogued here.

But a man or a woman who is truly pure and chaste gathers within such a special power that no difficulty can stand in the way of progress.

(To be continued. . .)

References
Swamiji and Sister
Reminiscing Swami Vivekananda and Sister Nivedita

SHAILENDRA NATH BANDOPADHYAY

The following reminiscences written on a folded piece of paper were found among a bundle of books and papers preserved by the family of Mrs. Ruma Mukhopadhyay, the youngest daughter of Shailendra Nath Bandopadhyay, living in Kolkata. The paper was kept in a Webster’s dictionary supposed to have been used by Swamiji and was discovered in April 2014 when she handed over the bundle to Tarit Kumar Bandhopadhyay, former Associate Professor in zoology at Raja Peary Mohan College, Uttarpara, district Hooghly, West Bengal, and a researcher in Swami Vivekananda and a devotee.

As a young boy Shailendra Nath Bandopadhyay of Darjeeling had met Swami Vivekananda and Sister Nivedita. His parents—Mohendra Nath Bandopadhyay and Kashiswari Devi—were initiated by Swami Vivekananda and he greatly loved them for their pious and devout disposition. Swamiji stayed with the family (in their house named Bolem Villa) when he came to Darjeeling. They had five sons and the third among them was Shailendra Nath who along with his other brothers had received Mantra Diksha from Swami Vivekananda. At Swamiji’s suggestion, Shailendra Nath later did his schooling (in Bally Tomson School) and college studies (in Presidency College)—all while staying at Belur Math as a student resident. He became a well-known lawyer in Calcutta High Court and often travelled to England to argue cases there. It is not known when Shailendra Nath Bandopadhyay penned these reminiscences but they are of much archival value.

The Bengali translation of these reminiscences was done by Tarit Kumar Bandopadhyay and it was published in Nibodhata, Bengali bi-monthly published from Sarada Math, in its July-August 2014 issue.

Today at a mature age, I can only think of my meeting with Swamiji [Vivekananda] and Sister [Nivedita]. Till day, [many of my] friends and relatives have requested me to [record my] meeting [with them], but I really don’t know why I never had the urge to pen down the experience earlier. Now as an ailing man waiting for death, I feel the need to write about those memories that are forever etched in my mind.

Swamiji

When Swamiji first came to our Darjeeling home (in Bolem Villa), then my age was either eleven or twelve. I did not pay attention to studies too much then; I only used to while away my time by playing with my friends.

Swamiji used to like us a lot. Brothers next to me were quite small (Dijendranath was 6 years younger while Rabindranath was only 4 years). Other brothers (elder brother Bolendranath and middle brother Bhupendranath) were involved in their
I was the only one going to school. Thus I became Swamiji’s constant companion during his morning and afternoon walks.

I used to call some of my friends as well. Swamiji used to walk dressed in hat-coat-boot with stick. He used to tell amusing tales which I still cherish. One such day, while on a stroll, we suddenly chanced upon an old woman porter who stumbled under the burden of the weight she was carrying. It was really painful. She was struggling to get up. Suddenly Swamiji sat down uttering ‘ugh’. We thought that he was not feeling well. I asked, ‘Are you feeling some pain? Then let’s go back home’. Swamiji, after a moment, said to us, ‘Cannot you see the plight of the old porter?’ Today I can understand the significance of his condition. He was so sensitive to the suffering of others that he used to feel every sensation within his own body. Afterwards, people helped her [the porter] to reach home. My mother took responsibility of the porter when she heard of her plight.

When Swamiji came to our house for the second or third time, my mother asked, ‘Nothing is happening to Shaila [referring to me]; what can be done about him?’ Keeping quiet for some time, he said, ‘Send him to Belur Math.’ He further added, ‘He will study there for some days, which will make him self-sufficient. It will help him in his life.’ That day those words didn’t mean much to me. However, his suggestion proved vital for me in future. From 1899 to 1902, I stayed at Belur Math, studying at Bally school and later at Presidency College.

While staying at our house, once Swamiji fell ill—with virulent diarrhea. His clothes were getting soaked regularly. My mother got very agitated. Swamiji became so frail that he could barely walk. I was then entrusted with the duty of changing his clothes, and cleaning his body. I used to provide him medication according to the instructions of the doctor. Under the guidance of doctor Davis, he recovered to health after six-seven days.
I used to meet Swamiji now and then at Belur Math—mostly in the afternoon. Then five- six boys used to reside at Belur Math. It was mandatory to play football and do extensive running in the afternoon. Sometimes, Swamiji used to inspect whether all the boys were present. If someone was absent deliberately, then he would scold him. We also learnt swimming from Swamiji. Swimming was a Sunday fixture.

Another detail that I remember is Swamiji’s instruction to us regarding the preparation of watermelon ‘sherbet’. One summer afternoon Swamiji called me. He enquired whether I knew how to make watermelon sherbet. When I replied in the negative, he wanted me to fetch a sieve. He also instructed me to bring a metal pitcher. When I brought them before him, he gave me the order to cut watermelon pieces. After scaling off the exterior, I kept the watermelon pieces in the metal pitcher. Then using a churning stick, the solid pieces of watermelon became liquid. After filtering it with the sieve, we added a pinch of salt. He ordered me to call others so that they can share the sherbet as well. Drinking the watermelon sherbet, he certified it was excellent.

When Swamiji came to Darjeeling for the last time my mother said to him that my brothers had already taken ‘Mahamantra’, and requested Swamiji to give ‘mantra’ to me as well. Swamiji then said, ‘Shaila, I will instruct you today only; come to my room.’ Once inside Swamiji’s room, he requested me to close the door. On the floor, he sat before me. Then he imparted the ‘Mahamantra’ into my ears by uttering it three times. I stuttered the first time and he corrected me. Then he assiduously taught me the way to take the Mahamantra. Afterwards, he gave me some money from the pocket and keeping it on the table said, ‘Give me a paisa.’ After doing so, I bowed down to take his blessing. He kept his hand on my head. At that very moment, a unique sensation went through my body—a sensation that I cannot describe in words.

During the demise of Swamiji, I was not at Belur Math as I was engaged in some work at Darjeeling. However, I cried a lot that day. In fact, he came in [my] dreams afterwards—the image of Swamiji that lingered in my mind, that of him wearing hat-coat and boots. He seemed to say that I am with you only—ever present here, as long as you will live.

Regarding Sister

I saw Sister or Sister Nivedita when I was at Belur Math. When my parents were in Kolkata, they used to visit me at Belur Math. Swamiji
himself acquainted them with Sister when they came to visit me. Then I was also present there. That was the first day of my meeting with Sister.

The second meeting with her is a curious incident. During that time, a lot of Swamiji’s foreign disciples used to stay at Belur Math. One day Sister came to pay a visit to Belur Math from Bagbazar in a boat travelling across Hoogly river. It was raining slightly in the afternoon. The grass ground became a bit muddy. Sister was brisk walker. That day, somehow her slippers got stuck in the mire. She grew mildly agitated. She then tried to explain her situation to the companion Sadhu. On seeing the situation Swamiji was laughing from the verandah of his room. I was standing close. He instructed me, ‘Shaila, run fast to clear Sister’s slippers’. I followed his orders. I asked her to hand over her slippers. Sister initially refused and she herself stood aside from the mire to pick up the slippers. As the companion Sadhu looked on, I ran with the slippers taking them from her hand. They began to wait for me. Once I cleaned her slippers, I handed them over to her. She blessed me by keeping her hands on my head, ‘Oh sweet naughty boy!’ She was having difficulty in uttering my name, ‘Shaila’ and instead called me as ‘Salen’.

Since Sister was acquainted with my parents, she used to stay with us whenever she visited Darjeeling. However I met her at Darjeeling only two times—in 1909 and 1911. In 1909, when I returned from abroad after becoming a barrister, I was staying at Calcutta during that time. I went to Darjeeling to meet everybody. There I met Sister. She was overjoyed to see me. She requested me whether I can take her to a visit to different villages in the hills. Once I agreed, she was very happy.
I worked as a translator. Sister walked around one such Buddhist Stupa to sit in meditation. She even enquired whether some of the village girls are interested in study of any sort. How are they married? What are their customs? I translated those queries for her. Sister was so happy that day! Then I realized how much Sister loved this country!

In 1911, I went to revisit Darjeeling with my family. There I got the information that Sister was at Darjeeling staying with Bose’s at ‘Roy Villa’. She was quite ill. However even in that situation she enquired about everybody. Acharya [Jagdish Chandra] Basu wanted to call doctor Nilratan Sarkar for the better treatment of Sister. I knew where Dr. Sarkar [was] put up at Darjeeling. I took him to ‘Roy Villa’ so that he can properly diagnose the ailment of Sister. He tried his best. Acharya Basu’s wife attended to Sister like a mother. During that time, I was a regular visitor to ‘Roy Villa’. However all our efforts failed; Sister left us all to take refuge under the feet of Sri Ramakrishna.

When Sister was severely ill, my Mother went to visit her. In fact, my mother has a circle of friends who were foreign ladies who in turn got acquainted with Sister and provided companionship during her illness. At the Chalk Bazaar area of Darjeeling, a lot of people from Kolkata used to live. During the summer and puja holidays, Darjeeling was a nerve centre of activity. Most of these visitors used to congregate at Chandmari hall. This hall was formed by my father, Mahendranath Bandopadhyay. At this hall, Swamiji even delivered a lecture. Sister also used to address audiences at this hall. Swadeshi leaders like Rashbehari Ghosh, P.Mitra, Anandamohan Basu, Ramananda Chattopadhyay, Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, Aswini Kumar Dutta, Jyotindra Mukherjee and even Gokhale used to visit the hall when they came to Darjeeling.

Sister used to love Darjeeling just like Swamiji. I took part in the procession that accompanied the remains of Sister after her demise at Darjeeling. Her last rites were performed according to Hindu rituals. Gangajal and new clothes which were used to purify the dead was dispatched by my mother. I remember the way my eyes got filled with tears—sleep Sister, sleep peacefully in the land of cold comfort. Accept my earnest Pranam which you never accepted physically! Long live Sister! Long live Swamiji! Long live Sri Ramakrishna!!

The room dedicated to Sister Nivedita in the renovated Roy Villa—July 2015
Beyond Opposites

The mystics emphasize not pitting the opposites against each other, but transcending them. Not one versus the other, but entering a center of awareness that rises above both, or, put in another way, discovering a ground that encompasses both. The end result in either case is unitive consciousness. Ultimate reality is a union of opposites. And since it is expressly the boundaries which we superimpose on reality that slice it up into innumerable pairs of opposites, the mystics’ experience that reality is free from the pairs of opposites is a way of saying that truth is free from all boundaries.

According to the Gospel of St. Thomas:
They said to Him: ‘Shall we then, being children, enter the Kingdom?’ Jesus said to them:

When you make the two one, and when you make the inner as the outer, and the outer as the inner, and the above as the below, and when you make the male and female into a single one, then you shall enter the Kingdom.

The Kingdom is the territory of no-boundary awareness.

When we remove our illusory boundaries, we will see, here and now, the universe as an organic, holistic unity, a complete harmony of all opposites. It’s our natural state. As, Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, said when one realizes God nothing unusual happens. You don’t grow two horns, but your power to discriminate becomes sharp as the edge of a razor. You become aware of what you already are. And this brings us to the most important point, how to dissolve the boundaries?

The simple answer is to erase the primary boundary between our true Self and our apparent self, by breaking down the fundamental boundary. Remove this brick of ego and the edifice collapses. Collapsing the edifice is the neti, neti (not this, not this) side of our spiritual practice. The practices are described in negative language to eliminate, to break our infatuation with, all the associations that we normally have. Initially, we separated our small self from everything considered outside our self, saying this is me in here. And everything out there is not me. But a spiritual seeker separates the true Self from everything outside, including the ego.

In Shankaracharya’s Nirvanashtakam, ‘Eight Stanzas on Nirvana,’ the process is beautifully stated:

I am neither the mind, intelligence, ego, neither ears, nor the tongue, nor the sense of smell and...
sight. Neither ether, nor air, nor fire, nor water, nor earth; I am eternal bliss and awareness. I am Shiva; I am Shiva.

Step by step all qualifiers are eliminated. And what remains is pure bliss.

Spiritual sadhana is directed toward the attenuation of the ego, and the ultimate recognition that the ego is an imposter. The ego boundary, like all other boundaries, doesn’t really exist. So in one sense we can’t destroy or nullify it, because in order to destroy something, we have to first of all accept it as real.

It isn’t real; it only seems to exist. Sri Ramakrishna compared the ego to an onion. In the Gospel he says:

If one analyses oneself, one doesn’t find any such thing as ‘I.’ Take an onion, for instance. First of all you peel off the red outer skin; then you find thick white skins. Peel these off one after the other, and you won’t find anything inside.

This practice of negating the boundary line is technically called in Vedanta apavada, desuperimposition; that is, the process that removes the illusion and reveals the truth.

Shankaracharya emphasizes in his teachings that the Self-existent reality is the basis of our consciousness of ego. That reality is the witness of the three states of consciousness, waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, as well as being the knower in all states of consciousness. Our true divine Self is an ever-present, no-boundary awareness, wherein the subject and the object, the seer and the seen, and the experiencer and the experienced, form a single continuum.

The asti, asti (it is, it is) part of our sadhana is the positive affirmation that we are this divine being right now. Nothing can ever obstruct our real nature. It is our feeling and experience of existing as an isolated being that is an obstacle to higher consciousness. As Sri Ramakrishna said, ‘When will I be free, when I cease to be.’ The Buddhist sage Padma Sambhava put it this way, ‘If the seeker himself, when sought, cannot be found, thereupon is attained the goal of seeking and also the end of the search itself.’

Conclusion

The essence of the mystical message is simple and straightforward: there is only nondual consciousness; the truth is there are no boundaries. The sense of self expands including everything once thought to be not self. One’s sense of identity shifts to the entire universe, enveloping all; then there is no longer anything outside of oneself, and so nowhere to draw any sort of boundary.

In that experience of oneness all artificial boundaries are removed. There is the perception of the underlying unity pervading the apparent diversity. As the Isa Upanishad proclaims about one who has broken all boundaries:

The wise man beholds all beings in the Self, and the Self in all beings. To the seer, all things have verily become the Self. What delusion, what sorrow can there be for him who beholds that oneness?

(Concluded.)

If you do not have holy association outside, then engage your mind with the association of the Lord who is within you. If you can make the inner companion your very own, then you don’t need much association with outsiders. He who is within you is Satchidananda [Existence-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute]. If you think of him, you will not be inert matter. Wholeheartedly take refuge in that all-loving Lord. He will make you understand everything. He is omniscient and he does everything knowing our inner thoughts. —Swami Turiyananda
Kabir and His Mystic Wisdom

Kabir the Mystic

From the foothills of the Himalayas to the shores of Kanyakumari, from Somnath on the western shores to the Bay of Bengal, Kabir had long been regarded by Hindus and Muslims as a great mystic poet and a religious reformer. His name has travelled far and wide in the subcontinent. In the Indian religious history, Kabir is unique. To the Hindus, he is a Vaishnava Bhakta, to the Muslims, a peer, to the Sikhs a Bhagat, to the Kabirpanthis, an Avatar, and to the modern patriots Kabir is a champion of Hindus-Muslim unity. He is seen as a promoter of universal religion, who opposed superstitious beliefs and empty rituals. In modern progressive circles today, Kabir is held in high esteem as a social reformer and a revolutionary. Kabir is a symbol of all that is free, noble and challenging in the Indian tradition. His message of an omnipresent spirituality, divine love and equality of all beings make him the modern messiah who promotes the best of Hindu, Islamic and Sufi wisdom.

Life of Kabir

It is now a well accepted fact that Kabir was an abandoned child whom his foster parents, the weaver named Neeru and his wife Neema, found near a lake at a place called Laheratara in Varanasi and took him home. There he was raised in a secular community open to both Hindu and Muslim practices. Kabir grew up in poverty but with values of inner richness and honesty. The naming ceremony of the child was done according to the tradition by the Kazi, a Muslim priest, who, opened the holy book Quran and named him ‘Kabir’ as found therein. This Arabic word represents the Great Lord. As is generally the case with the life of most of the saints, Kabir’s life too is full of miracles. Since Kabir’s foster mother was not lactating, he was reared up on goat’s or cow’s milk from his very infancy. At times, the child would remain hungry causing worry to the parents. When, however, he would gaze eagerly at a cow, milk would flow from the udders and fill the cup kept underneath. Although from the childhood itself, Kabir got into the family trade of weaving, he hardly ever paid much attention to it. From his very young age, he was so engrossed in the contemplation of God that his negligence did cause his parents’ anxiety as to how will he survive without livelihood. In one of his songs, Kabir refers to his mother’s anxiety and his faith that God is the sustainer of his devotees.

Kabir was a genuine spiritual aspirant who found the charismatic guru Ramananda. Since it was not possible for a Muslim to be
initiated by a Hindu sage, Kabir laid himself down on the steps of Ganga from where Swami Ramananda generally passed. In the dark early hours of the day, the Swami did not notice Kabir and as his foot touched his body, he uttered “Rama, Rama”. Kabir thus was initiated. Kabir took this as his mantra and according to some, later met Ramananda who willingly initiated him in infinite spirituality. Kabir grew with the direct experience of the Divine. According to another view, Kabir was the disciple and successor of Sheikh Taki, a renowned Sufi ascetic saint.

Like other facts of Kabir’s life, his married life is also shrouded in doubt and confusion. Some believe that Kabir was married and his wife was called Loi. His son’s name was Kamal, and some believed that there was a daughter too. And since there is no authentic proof of the above beliefs, some opine that although a householder (not a monk), Kabir never married. Kabir never advocates giving up of the world; only its obsession is the bondage. He believes that any place or time is good enough to experience the Divine. He advocates spiritual enlightenment within the world, not by renouncing it.

There are a number of miracles described in Kabir’s life. As Kabir’s reputation grew as a holy man, he also became famous for his healing powers. Stories of healing of incurable diseases of emperor Sikandar Lodhi and his master Sheikh Taki’s daughter are very well known. But more than miracles, Kabir’s sole aim was to inform people that it was their birthright to experience God without discrimination of caste, creed, religion or status — the privilege of human existence. He is supposed to have met the mythological personalities like Hanuman, Sage Vasistha and other past historical luminaries like Gorakhnath, Makhdoom Jaharia and to have had discussions with them. While these may be true or false, he did suffer persecution at the hands of the fanatic Muslims for his uprightness and uncompromising denunciation of the prevalent evils in the name of religion. According to records, in Barabanki, several attempts were made to harm Kabir. In Guru Granth Saheb, Kabir mentions to dramatic attempts on his life. But Kabir survived to gain greater glory and was held as a true man of God.

While multitudes flock to Banares to breathe their last, Kabir showed his contempt for unfounded tradition and orthodox practices, and decided to head for Magahar, thus challenging the belief that death in Kashi grants salvation. He arrived in Magahar around 1518. Knowing that the end was near, the saint demanded to be left alone inside a hut where he lay covered by a single cloth. Outside, his Hindu and Muslim disciples contested the right to dispose of his body according to the rites of their respective religions. A little while later a spark of light emanated from the hut and his disciples rushed in. But when the cloth was lifted, nothing was found but a bed of flowers. Half of the flowers went to the Rajah of Banaras, Veer Singh, who had them cremated according to Hindu rites. The remainder went to the Pathan Noble Bijli Khan, head of the Mohammedan group, who buried them and erected over them a funeral monument on a spot in Magahar near Gorakhpur. This is generally acknowledged as Kabir’s place of Samadhi. The Kabir Chaura Math at Banaras encloses the Kabir Samadhi, according to the legend, built over the flowers secured by Veer Singh.

Researchers think that Kabir was born in 1455 AD and passed away in 1518.

(To be continued . . .)
And when much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, [Jesus] spake by a parable: A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bore fruit an hundredfold.1

Swami Vivekananda and four of his brother monks planted the seeds of the Vedanta movement in America. As early as the Chicago Parliament of World Religions in 1893, Swami Vivekananda seeded American minds with the idea of a universal religion.2 This was to become a recurring theme throughout his years of public work.

The first-generation swamis, including Swami Saradananda, encountered a diverse group of Americans whom we may compare to an uncultivated meadow. Some parts of the meadow had rich well-watered soil and other parts were rocky. As in Jesus’ parable, and as is true today, the seeds of a universal religion in the form of the Vedanta movement sprouted and grew according to the minds of the recipients.

Swami Vivekananda conducted a cyclonic seeding tour from Chicago to Boston to London and many places in between in the years 1893-1896. Preceding his return to India, he called on his brother monks for help in giving a more concrete shape to the garden of Vedanta growing in the West.

Swami Saradananda was the first to answer the call. He spent one and a half years in America, from 2 July 1896 until 12 January 1898. He worked mainly in the northeastern states of Maine, Massachusetts, New York and New Jersey. The study of the letters that he wrote during this period, as well as after his return to India, not only offers a unique lens through which we can view the early history of the Vedanta movement in America, but also helps us draw inspiration for our own personal practice. Careful reading of Swami Saradananda’s letters helps us reflect on the ways in which our predecessors, the early American students of Vedanta, were both participants and contributors in implementing the ideal of a universal religion.

Reading Letters in Context

A common problem in the study of correspondence occurs when we limit ourselves to the letters written by one individual. This may produce a narrow view of...
the author’s network of social connections. The author of interest writes to many people who in turn write to many people, and so on. Here we hope to gain additional insight by reading letters authored by other members of Swami Saradananda’s American network.

Letters not only give us a hint of the relationship between author and recipient but also show how that relationship evolved over time. An effort is made to analyze letters as a function of time in context of the network of which they are a part. The figure shows a small subset of Swami Saradananda’s western network.

The letters of Swami Saradananda written up to July 1902 are addressed to fifteen different recipients in India, England and America. Of the sixteen known letters that Swami Saradananda wrote while he was in America, five were addressed to Lala Badri Shah of Almora. These letters deal mainly with famine in India and Swami Vivekananda’s visit to Almora. We get a glimpse of Swami Saradananda’s caretaking nature in these letters. He was concerned about the citizens of India even from half a world away. On a more personal note, we also see him requesting Badri to send basmati rice to his dearest American correspondent—the recipient of ten of the remaining eleven letters, Mrs. Sara Bull (1850-1911) of Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Granny

Mrs. Bull’s role in the American Vedanta meadow was somewhat similar to that of a ‘Chief Operations Officer’ (COO) of a business enterprise. She was skilled at managing events and finding the right people to carry the movement forward. As was true of Swami Vivekananda, Swami Saradananda often wrote to her regarding business matters. However she also had a motherly relationship with Swamis Vivekananda and Saradananda. So sometimes we see him writing to her just as a son would write to his mother.

Sister Nivedita considered herself to be Swami Vivekananda’s spiritual daughter. In this model, Mrs. Bull would have been her grandmother. Thus she affectionately referred to Mrs. Bull as ‘Granny.’ Others who were close to Mrs. Bull adopted this sobriquet, Swami Saradananda among them, so we often find his letters to her beginning with ‘Dear Granny’.

Like any COO, Mrs. Bull had a cadre of helpers and Swami Saradananda knew many of them. In six of his ten letters written to Mrs. Bull from America, Swami Saradananda referred to western women with Sanskrit names: Santi, Agni and Kali.

To give a flavour of Swami Saradananda’s correspondence with Mrs. Bull, a few extracts from his letters follow:
Oct 12th, 1897
Montclair NJ

My dear Mrs. Bull,
Many thanks for your kind letter. . . . I had the opportunity of meeting Dr. Bradford here. . . . He was very much interested too & said how many points of agreements Christianity & Vedanta have. He spoke from his pulpit last Sunday that the Christian ought to learn & study any system of philosophy which is broad & especially the Indian. . . .
I am now looking to all sorts of schools & improved methods of training, so that when I go over to India I might a little help in that direction. . . .
My love & best prayers for yourself again & Santi.5

Oct 18th, 1897
Montclair NJ

My dear Mrs. Bull,
Many thanks for your interesting letter. I am to start today for Nashville, as you already know. Yesterday afternoon I gave the last talk here. The work here has been satisfactory. Sufficient interest has been roused by this series of eight lectures, for the work to go on in a respectable basis. I invited Abhedananda,. . . . . . . .With best love & prayers for yourself, Santi & Agni & hoping to return by the end of the month.6

Oct 27th, 1897
Worcester MA

My dear Granny,
I arrived here this morning; and just think of it I am only at a distance of an hour’s journey from you all. I am very sorry I could not write you nor Agni nor Santi for a long time. But you will excuse me when you learn that I have been spending the last week in sleeping cars at night & the day in sight seeing in new places or in lecturing. On the whole the lectures went on well everywhere by the blessings & good wishes of you all. I am hoping to return to you on Friday sometime. My best love & prayers for yourself, Agni & Santi & kindest regards to all friends there.

Ever your
Saradananda

P.S. My trunk might reach Cambridge before I do!7

Swami Saradananda kept up his active correspondence with Mrs. Bull after his return to India. Between April 1898 and July 1902 we know of 82 letters written by the Swami. Of these, 49 were addressed to Mrs. Bull, and of those, 33 contained references to Agni, Santi, or both. Extracts from some of these letters follow.

August 18th, 1898

My dear Granny,
. . . I am so glad Santi & you presented me the picture of the Madonna, last Christmas. It is
hanging just before my working table and is dear symbol to me of the motherly relation. Agni too likes the picture so much. I shall ever cherish it & the ideal. . . .

Sept. 13th, 1898

My dear Granny,

. . . A very kind letter from Miss Schroeder of Montclair to say my friends at Montclair are collecting little sums to help our work here. It is really so considerate for them. I am thinking of dividing the sum of 120 dollars, which they have already collected & will send me as soon as I write—equally between the orphanage & Nivedita’s school. Do you approve of this? You need not tell it to any one at present—or do what you think best. No letters this mail from A. or S. . . .

Sept. 20th, 1899

My dear Mrs. Bull,

. . . I am glad Agni could come & Santi at Riddley. The latter, it seems had been very ill. Kindly read & forward the enclosed to her. I will continue to send her a line now & then, enclosing it with yours, but never to write to her at her Somerville address, until she expressly wishes it. . . .

With very kind regards to you always,

Ever yours faithfully,

Saradananda

From Swami Saradananda’s letters it is evident that he had a close relationship with Mrs. Bull. They corresponded on business as well as personal matters. Swami Saradananda also took a continuing interest in Mrs. Bull’s friends who were students of Vedanta. In hindsight, it is not difficult to see tremendous significance in the role that Granny played—sometimes a student, sometimes a disciple, and at other times a tireless worker for the cause—in helping the seeds of Vedanta take root in this new country. (To be continued . . .)

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References

8. ibid., vol. 97, no. 1, January 2010, 28.

The Master used to say that the mind is like a mad horse, which is prone to running hither and thither, and just as a coachman controls the horse with the girdles, so must a man direct the mind with the power of discrimination, which is already in him. If men are guided by this discrimination, they never come to grief.

—Swami Saradananda
The Gita: What Can It Teach Us?

DAN A. CHEKKI

Gita: ‘The Most Beautiful Song’

The Song of God, Bhagavad Gita, is one of the oldest sacred scriptures of the world. It is described as one of the finest philosophical works, a literary masterpiece. It transcends time and place. The Gita has been translated into every major language of the world and has the distinction of having numerous commentaries by distinguished scholars. Wilhelm von Humboldt pronounced Gita as ‘the most beautiful, perhaps the only true, philosophical song existing in any known tongue.’ Aldous Huxley thought that ‘the Gita is perhaps the most systematic spiritual statement of the Perennial (Vedanta) Philosophy.’

The Gita has profoundly influenced the spiritual, cultural, intellectual, and political life of India through the centuries. The essential message of Gita has been an inspiration for many thinkers around the world. It is a precious guide for daily life and spiritual journey. Here we shall make an attempt to present the cosmic, material, and spiritual dimensions of the Gita. It is aimed at providing a brief sketch of the quintessence of the Gita.

Gita’s Teachings

The concepts of God (Brahman) and Soul (Atman) form an integral part of the Gita; Brahman, the Godhead and Atman, the divine core (soul) of individual personality (self). The self in each person is not different from the Godhead. The image of God is found essentially in all humanity. God is the creator, protector, destroyer, and re-creator of this entire universe, and pervades the entire cosmos.

God manifests in the form of taste in water, the light in the moon, the brilliance in fire, and the sacred syllable Om. God (Brahman) dwells in the core of the human heart. God is knowledge, wisdom, action, truth, food, life breath, sound, source and energy of all life including stars, planets and galaxies, and is smaller than the smallest, greater than the greatest, and controls the cosmic process. Whenever righteousness declines, God appears, in every age, on earth to protect the good, to destroy the evil, and to re-establish righteousness (dharma).

The Gita depicts God as: ‘If a thousand suns were to rise, and stand in the noon sky, blazing, such radiance would resemble the fierce brilliance of that mighty Supreme Spirit.’ The American nuclear scientist Robert Oppenheimer remembered this passage of Gita when he saw the first atomic explosion.

Stephen Mitchell observed that the Gita’s passages about God ‘are sublime, crystalline, electric, stunning in their passion, their nimbleness, their density, the hugeness of their imagination, their metaphysical grace, and their readiness to cut free from rational limits.’

The Gita states that the human body is mortal. Death is inevitable; but the soul (self)
is immortal. It does not die when the body
dies. It is everlasting and eternal. Every human
being, every creature, takes birth, dies, and
is born again. Therefore, Gita tells us not to
grieve for the dead or the living. Perform work
without selfish attachments, alike in success
and failure. Action is better than inaction.
Strive to serve and help others; perform work
dedicated to God and guided by compassion.

The Gita lays down the different paths to
Self-realization, enlightenment, and liberation
or eventual union of one’s soul with the
universal soul (God). These are: the path of
action (karma yoga), the path of knowledge/
wisdom (jnana yoga), the path of devotion
(bhakti yoga), and the path of meditation
(raja yoga). We begin our spiritual journey by
confronting the selfishness of mind, ignorance,
anger, cruelty, pride, greed, hatred, jealousy,
arrogance, and so forth. The Gita teaches
that humans should cultivate self-discipline,
self-control, tranquility, patience, humility,
austerity, generosity, compassion, honesty,
and dedicate their lives and work to God and
humanity.

Mahatma Gandhi pointed out that
renunciation of the fruits of action is the
centre around which the Gita is woven. The
Gita teaches that it is not in giving up of the
world, but rather in disciplined action without
attachment to results; and emphasizes the
changing nature of this material world.

Our contemporary society is dominated
by a culture of excessive materialism, 
consumerism, sexuality, and violence. It is in this
context that the message of Gita is more
relevant today than ever before. The Gita
emphasizes the need for detachment from
sense objects and materialism. It encourages
simplicity of life, and stresses the necessity of
achieving a balance between our material and
ascetic life. The Gita advocates the golden path
toward an integrated and enlightened life that
includes both material and spiritual aspects
by following the methods of yoga of action,
knowledge, and devotion.

Gita’s Time Relevance Message
The timeless message of the Gita refers
to the cosmic conflict between good and
evil: life as a series of battles between matter
and spirit, body and soul, life and death,
ignorance and knowledge, health and disease,
temptations and self-control, and, ephemeral
and eternal. Swami Vivekananda held self-
less service to humanity and renunciation of
selfishness and desire for the fruits of action as
paramount means to personality development
and national progress. He said, ‘Unselfishness
is more paying, only people do have the
patience to practice it.’ His numerous writings
elaborate on universal ethics and moral
conduct based on the different yogas
explicated in the Gita.

The Gita highlights
the need to link with
God through meditation
(yoga) and complementing
this endeavor with
practical active
engagement in the
material world.

The well-known
American philosopher-historian Will Durant noted that ‘the Gita is the loftiest philosophical poem in the world’s literature . . . a poem rich in metaphysical and ethical contradictions that reflect the contrariness and complexity of life.’

More than a hundred and fifty years ago, Henry David Thoreau wrote: ‘In the morning, I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita . . . in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial.’ Paramahansa Yogananda, the author of The Autobiography of a Yogi declared: ‘Among the world’s sacred writings, there is perhaps none more universal in its appeal than the Bhagavad Gita. It shows how we can create a life of spiritual integrity, serenity, simplicity and joy. It is the soul’s journey to enlightenment; a comprehensive guide to the spiritual life.’

The Gita, in essence, teaches us to follow the good and simple life composed of both the spiritual-contemplative and the active work and service-oriented patterns of human life; doing good to others, treating others as oneself.

Who is Happy?

A crow lived in the forest and was absolutely satisfied in life.

But one day he saw a swan. ‘This swan is so white’, he thought, ‘and I am so black. This swan must be the happiest bird in the world.’

He expressed his thoughts to the swan. ‘Actually,’ the swan replied, ‘I was feeling that I was the happiest bird around until I saw a parrot, which has two colours. I now think the parrot is the happiest bird in creation.’

The crow then approached the parrot. The parrot explained, ‘I lived a very happy life—until I saw a peacock. I have only two colours, but the peacock has multiple colours.’

The crow then visited a peacock in the zoo and saw that hundreds of people had gathered to see him.

After the people had left, the crow approached the peacock. ‘Dear peacock,’ the crow said, ‘you are so beautiful. Every day thousands of people come to see you. When people see me, they immediately shoo me away. I think you are the happiest bird on the planet.’

The peacock replied, ‘I always thought that I was the most beautiful and happy bird on the planet. But because of my beauty, I am entrapped in this zoo. I have examined the zoo very carefully, and I have realized that the crow is the only bird not kept in a cage. So for past few days I have been thinking that if I were a crow, I could happily roam everywhere.’

That’s the problem.

We make comparison with others and become sad.

We don’t value what we have. This is what leads to the vicious cycle of unhappiness.

—From Cyberspace
My very dear Granny,

Your kind letter has reached me duly by the last mail & I need not tell you how welcome it was! I thank you very much for the same. It is a great joy to hear that Santi was with you while my last reached you. My loving regards to her & to Agnes when you write her.

Mrs. Sevier has started from Mayabati on April 10th. She stopped with us at the Math for a few days and was delighted with her visit. She told me a very good piece of [news] (gathered perhaps from Nivedita) that you are contemplating to come to India & will stop with us for some time when you come! It was such a joy to hear it. I hope it is true.

My mother is still at Baidyanath & my brother has written today that the stay there has done her good. She will come back to Calcutta by the end of April. As she is very anxious to visit Brindaban & Haridwar once, I have promised to take her to those places in July or August next. So you see, I have already planned for a rest. Mr. P. Ramanathan has not written me yet. I will consider that too after hearing from him. It is so kind of you to write to him for me! Dearest granny you are doing so much & always for your boy! May Sri R. [Ramakrishna] give the boy power & strength to serve you a little, besides praying for your peace & welfare as he always does night & day! May he himself find the peace, all understanding & bring that to you as his grateful present. In the meantime accept our heartfelt love and gratitude & the same of my mother & Jogin Maa who always inquires of you.

You have heard perhaps that Bodhananda has started independently. . . perhaps it will be a source of great good in the end. Swami Bodh. has written to inform that he will work directly under the Belur Math. I am glad you are inviting him & am sure the visit will do him good. Give my love & blessings to him when he comes.

The memorial temple & library of Swamiji has been begun & will prove most [edifying] & useful when completed. Kindly see if there are more sale proceeds of Swamiji’s books with Mr. Leggett. It will help us a great deal in building the memorial if you can send them now. The principle of the divinity of the Soul & its power to uplift man, will be what will be preached from this temple—for nothing personal will be kept in the altar within for worship except the memorable words of the Vedas ‘Thou art That’ in marble. I hope you approve of it.
With my loving regards & blessings to you as ever & writing to be remembered kindly to Mrs.Vaughan & other friends there

Yours Affectly
Saradananda

Jan 17, 07.
Math Belur Howrah.
India.

My dear Mrs.Brown

I cannot thank you enough for your kind letter of Dec 7. 06. I am so sorry I could not acknowledge it earlier, for I have been kept very busy attending to my mother, who is seriously ill.

I thank you for your kindly minting the Bill of the Roycrofters for us.

I did not hear for a long time from any of my Montclair friends. So your last has become doubly welcome. I am sure they have not forgotten their old friend and neither will it be possible to forget their kindness and precious friendship, for me, at any time; but just as you say, individual problems keep us so busy everywhere that at times we cannot but keep ourselves quiet, regarding things which do not concern immediately those problems & I believe that is right to do. Remember me kindly to them all please if or when opportunity offers itself. I am so glad to hear Mrs Wheeler is strong enough now to visit her friends again & that Miss Schroeder is well. I am so glad to hear sweet Mrs.Willmer is still with us.

So your boy has become engaged and perhaps your daughter will be so very soon, whom I saw so young! Strange, how things & persons change around us and how we have run the race of life before we know it & before we have known the Unchangeable around whom & within whom the race is run! May He reveal Himself to you & us before many other changes have come & bring to eternal peace & enlightenment!

Most sincerely yours
Saradananda

[On the envelope:]
Mrs.Barnetta Brown
137 Upper Mountain Ave.
Montclair, N.J.
U.S.America.

References
1. A direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna
2. Mrs. Sara Bull, an American disciple of Swami Vivekananda

Courtesy: Ramakrishna Museum, Belur Math

The Vedanta Kesari ~351~ September 2015
Swami Vivekananda, the India Personified

TAPASH SANKAR DUTTA

His Love of India

Swami Vivekananda loved India from the core of his heart. He wrote to Haridas Viharidas Desai, the Dewan of Junagad (Gujarat), ‘My greatest fault is that I love my country only too, too well.’ Having identified himself completely with India, India’s history, culture and aspirations, he was aptly called as ‘condensed India’. He thoroughly knew the ins and outs of the idea called India. Years later, when Romain Rolland, the illustrious French writer, wanted to know about India from Rabindranath Tagore, Tagore replied, ‘If you want to know India, study Vivekananda. In him, everything is positive and nothing negative.’ Sister Nivedita, his Irish disciple, after travelling and interaction with Swamiji, remarked, ‘Vivekananda is India encircling a body.’

While travelling on foot from one part of India to another, Swamiji discovered that foremost cause of India’s downfall is poverty. The nineteenth century of India that he travelled through was a land of hunger and squalor. The common mass of people that he met did not have one good meal a day. They were half-fed, half-clad, illiterate, deprived of treatment when they are victim of diseases and lacked proper housing for their living. Swamiji was deeply distressed by what he saw. Rightly did he say, ‘Food first and then religion. It is a sin to preach religion to a starving man.’

The day he delivered his historic speech in the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, he was invited by a wealthy person to his house. His Life describes:

On the very day of his triumph, he was invited by a man of great wealth and distinction to his home in one of the most fashionable parts of the city. Here he was entertained royally; a princely room fitted with a luxury beyond anything he could have conceived was assigned to him.

The author, from Silchar in Assam, holds a PhD in ‘A Study of the Philosophy of Vivekananda with reference to Advaita Vedanta of Sankara and Great Universal Heart of Buddha’ from Guwahati University and is a member of several academic and cultural organizations. Now in his late 70s, he has contributed thoughtful articles to various journals.
But instead of feeling happy in this splendid environment, he was miserable. Name and fame and the approval of thousands had in no way affected him; though sumptuously cared for, he was the same sannyasi as of old, thinking of India’s poor. As he retired the first night and lay upon his bed, the terrible contrast between poverty-stricken India and opulent America oppressed him. He could not sleep for pondering over India’s plight. The bed of down seemed to be a bed of thorns. The pillow was wet with his tears. He went to the window and gazed out into the darkness until he was well-nigh faint with sorrow.

At length, overcome with emotion, he fell to the floor, crying out, ‘O Mother, what do I care for name and fame when my motherland remains sunk in utmost poverty! To what a sad pass have we poor Indians come when millions of us die for want of a handful of rice, and here they spend millions of rupees upon their personal comforts! Who will raise the masses in India! Who will give them bread? Show me, O Mother, how I can help them.’

This is only a sample of his intense sympathy and love for the Indian people.

Solving the Problems India Faces

Swami Vivekananda was born and died in British India. He passed away on 4 July 1902 at the age of 39 yrs 5 months and 24 days. Much has happened after that. India attained independence on 15 August 1947. And yet, after 68 years of independence, India has still not been able to solve problems of poverty, hunger and illiteracy.

Swamiji wanted India to take advantage of modern science and technology to solve her problems. He advised Jamshedji Tata to establish a strong industrial base in India and as a first step towards that, set up an Institute of Science and Technology. Responding to his advice Tata worked for bringing industrial activity in India. Later, Jamshedji Tata wrote a letter to Swamiji presenting his ideas about starting a research institute in science and the result was Indian Institute of Sciences in Bangalore which of course could take its shape after both of them had passed away.

Swamiji insisted on saying that the real strength of India lay in the masses. In his words,

Our aristocratic ancestors went on treading the common masses of our country under-foot, till they become helpless, till under this torment the poor, poor people nearly forgot that they were human beings. They have been compelled to be merely hewers of woods and drawers of water for centuries, so much so, that they are made to believe that they are born as slaves, born as hewers of wood and drawers of water.

His warning in this connection is,

I consider that the greatest national sin is the neglect of the masses, and that is one of the
castes for establishing superiority generated hatred among men which Swamiji condemned vehemently. Hatred can be overcome by raising lower castes to the level of upper class. He wanted the Brahmins to work to that end so that transition might be peaceful. To prevent cultural decline, he wanted to deluge India with spiritual thought. He wanted to create a new social order by combining the best of spiritual tradition with the latest advancement in science and technology.

Swami Vivekananda had profound understanding of education—it’s ideal and the means. He observed that the system of education prevalent in British India—the time when he lived—was job-oriented education. He condemned this type of education which does not help the common mass of people to equip themselves for the struggles of life, which does not bring out strength of character, a spirit of philanthropy and the courage of a lion.

So what should be the ideal of education? Swamiji said,

We must have life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas. If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any man who has got by heart a whole library.

He said,

Education is the manifestation of perfection already in man.

Sadly, the system of education as one finds in free India today falls short of man-making education as advocated by Swamiji. He boldly declared,

We must have the whole education of our country, spiritual and secular, in our own hands, and it must be on national lines, through national methods as far as possible.

As a man of foresight, far-sight and insight, Swamiji gave us a comprehensive
view of education which if followed in practice would solve all fundamental problems of human beings everywhere. In fact his message regarding education is a challenge to humanity. If we accept it, we shall survive—materially and spiritually, if we discard it we will die physically and spiritually. Will humanity care to listen to the warning voice? Let those who have ears, let them hear and heed it, for themselves and the entire humanity.

The Spiritual Foundation of India

To Swamiji, religion is the backbone, the foundation, of Indian culture and life. In his words,

I see that each nation, like each individual, has one theme in this life, which is its centre, the principal note round which every other note comes to form the harmony. In one nation political power is its vitality, as in England, artistic life in another, and so on. In India, religious life forms the centre, the keynote of the whole music of national life; and if any nation attempts to throw off its national vitality—the direction which has become its own through the transmission of centuries—that nation dies if it succeeds in the attempt. And, therefore, if you succeed in the attempt to throw off your religion and take up either politics, or society, or any other things as your centre, as the vitality of your national life, the result will be that you will become extinct. To prevent this you must make all and everything work through that vitality of your religion.

Let all your nerves vibrate through the backbone of your religion. I have seen that I cannot preach even religion to Americans without showing them its practical effect on social life. I could not preach religion in England without showing the wonderful political changes the Vedanta would bring. So, in India, social reform has to be preached by showing how much more spiritual a life the new system will bring; and politics has to be preached by showing how much it will improve the one thing that the nation wants—its spirituality. Every man has to make his own choice; so has every nation. We made our choice ages ago, and we must abide by it.

The life-blood of religion is spirituality. The neglect of this life-blood will virtually lead annihilation of the nation. To Swamiji, ‘Religion is the manifestation of divinity already in man.’ Religion turns animal-man to God-man. It is not a cloth to be put on and put off at one’s sweet will. In his words,

He is an atheist who does not believe in himself. The old religion said that he was an atheist who did not believe in God. The new religion says that he is the atheist who does not believe in himself.

If India is still grappling with numerous social, economic and other challenges even after 68 years of Independence it is because she has neglected her life-blood—spirituality. People have managed to forget his cautious warning: ‘Religion and religion alone is the life of India.’

He said,

Do you want that the Ganga should go back to its icy bed and begin a new course? Even if that were possible, it would be impossible for this country to give up her characteristic course
Vivekananda was, as I said, profoundly moved by the realization of India’s poverty and the state of her oppression under the British colonial rule. And he proposed a revolution. The spirit of this revolution enormously influenced Gandhi and influences Indian political thought to this day. Vivekananda in this sense is a great figure in Indian history, one of the very greatest historical figures that India has ever produced. But it must always be noted that Vivekananda’s revolution, Vivekananda’s nationalism, were not like the kind of revolution, the kind of nationalism, which we associate with other great leaders, admirable and noble as they may be. Vivekananda was far greater than that. In fact, when one sees the full range of his mind, one is astounded. Vivekananda looked toward the West, not simply as a mass of tyrants exploiting various parts of Asia, and other undeveloped areas, but as future partners, people who had very, very much to offer. At the same time, without any false humility, he faced the West and said, ‘we have fully as much and more to offer you. We offer you this great tradition of spirituality, which can produce, even now, today, a supremely great figure such as Ramakrishna. You can offer us medical services, trains that run on time, hygiene, irrigation, electric light. These are very important, we want them, and we admire some of your qualities immensely.’ . . .

Vivekananda’s revolution was a revolution for everybody, a revolution which would in the long run be of just as much use to the British as to India. Vivekananda’s nationalism, the call to India to recognize herself—this again was not nationalism in the smaller sense, it was a kind of super-nationalism, a kind of internationalism sublimated.

—Christopher Isherwood

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3. CW, 3:192
4. CW, 5,222-25
5. CW, 7.147
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10. CW, 4.358
11. CW, 2.301
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Man being the best product of creation, God may be fully manifested in human beings. Nara is Narayana. To quote Swamiji, ‘I worship that God whom ignorant people call human beings.’

Swamiji was indeed so deeply one with the Indian Mind that his whole thinking process was centred round India. India and Swami Vivekananda are eternally one. He is the very soul of India. □
The Order on the March

News and Notes from Ramakrishna Math and Mission

All India Youth Leadership Conference at Vadodara

Over 700 students from 15 states in India took part in All India Youth Leadership Conference organised by Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Memorial, Vadodara, Gujarat, from 28 to 30 June, 2015. Shri Sarbananda Sonowal, Minister of State (IC), Youth affairs and Sports, Govt. of India, while formally inaugurating the event called upon youth to become achievers in life and serve the society and become ideal leaders—following the teachings of Swami Vivekananda who was an ideal leader himself. Many youth achievers such as Padmashree Arunima Sinha (the first female amputee of the world to climb Mount Everest), Tenzin Norgay Awardee, Bhakti Sharma, National Balshree Awardee Priya Agrawal, National Bravery Awardee Zeal Marathe and eminent monks and speakers like internationally acclaimed Management Trainer Shri G Narayana, Chairman of BVG group Shri H. Gaikwad, popular writer Jyotiben Thanki, Youth counselor Dr. Jayesh Shah addressed the participants. The conference also included interactive sessions, audio visual and cultural programmes including tribal dance by the group from Chhatisgarh, and an educational tour for the delegates.

Vivekananda University

Vivekananda University celebrated the tenth anniversary of its foundation as well as held its annual convocation ceremony at its Belur campus on 4 July. The General Secretary presided over the meeting and awarded the certificates, degrees and diplomas to 84 students who successfully graduated from the Belur, Narendrapur and Ranchi faculties of the University. Dr A S Kiran Kumar, Chairman of Indian Space Research Organization and Secretary of the Department of Space, Govt of India, delivered the convocation address and awarded medals and prizes to the toppers.

The following three buildings at Coimbatore Mission centre were inaugurated on 28 July: (1) research centre building of the faculty of General and Adapted Physical Education and Yoga (GAPEY) of Vivekananda University, (2) multipurpose hall of the faculty of GAPEY of Vivekananda University, and (3) extension block of the College of Arts and Science. Besides, the newly set-up bookstall of the centre at Coimbatore railway station was declared open on 29 July.
**Annual Day Celebrated**

The fifty third Sports Day and Annual Day of Sri Ramakrishna Math Vivekananda Centenary Girls’ Higher Secondary School was celebrated on 17 July, 2015 at its premises at Saravana Street, Mint, Chennai. Prayer, drill and Yogasana display and cultural presentations by students marked the event. Monks and eminent citizens of Chennai addressed the students many of whom were presented trophies and prizes for their success in various fields of excellence.

**News from other Centres**

Swami Vagishanandaji inaugurated the newly started computer training centre at Gadadhar Ashrama, Kolkata, on 11 July.

The newly constructed dispensary building at Gourhati Math was inaugurated on 12 July.

On the holy occasion of Godavari Pushkaram, a festival of the River Godavari which occurs once in 12 years, Rajahmundry centre distributed the following items daily from 14 to 25 July: food to 6000 pilgrims, buttermilk to 15,000 pilgrims, and milk to 2000 children. The centre also conducted spiritual discourses and cultural programmes on this occasion.

Agartala centre organized a blood donation camp on 18 July which was inaugurated by Sri Manik Sarkar, Chief Minister of Tripura. A total of 42 persons donated blood in the camp.

On the sacred occasion of Ratha Yatra, Puri Math conducted a medical camp from 18 to 26 July in which 1120 patients were treated. The Ashrama also served sharbat to 30,000 pilgrims.

Puri Mission Ashrama served lemonade to about 30,000 pilgrims and distributed 50,000 pouches of drinking water during the Ratha Yatra festival. In the medical camp organized on this occasion 447 patients were treated. The centre also served lemonade to pedestrians throughout the summer.

The newly constructed multipurpose building at Koyilandy centre was inaugurated on 31 July, the sacred Guru Purnima day.

**News of Relief Work by Ramakrishna Math and Mission**

1. **Landslide Relief: West Bengal:** Owing to heavy rains, a series of devastating landslides took place in some parts of Darjeeling district on 1 July, causing severe loss to life and property. Darjeeling centre distributed 202 packets of Horlicks, 400 packets of biscuits, 184 packets of baby food, 1000 shawls, 200 bars of soap, 400 mattresses, 400 mosquito-nets, 200 solar lanterns, 200 umbrellas, 4 sets of agricultural sprayers, 140 notebooks, 70 pens, 70 pencils, 70 erasers, 70 pencil sharpeners, etc among 200 affected families who had taken shelter in 4 relief camps set up by the district administration in Mirik, a hill station located 50 km from Siliguri.

2. **Flood Relief: Gujarat:** The recent flash floods in Amreli district caused severe waterlogging in many areas. Rajkot centre distributed 2087 educational kits (each kit containing a school bag, a slate, a pencil box, a geometry box, a few notebooks, etc) among 2087 affected students of 13 schools in 12 villages of the district.
Srimad Bhagavata — The Book of Divine Love
By Swami Gitananda
Published by Advaita Ashrama, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014. mail@advaitaashrama.org 2014, hardbound, pp.624, Rs. 300.

The Bhagavata is Krishna. That is what we learn from Padma Purana.
When Uddhava asked Krishna how the devotees would sustain themselves once the Lord gets back to his formless presence, Krishna simply descended and vanished in the sea of the Bhagavata! So the Purana is Krishna, a faith that has sustained us in this trouble-filled Kaliyuga.

While Krishna cannot be seen separately from the Bhagavata, there are spaces where he is seen very much in the forefront. For the Yoga of Divine Love, these passages form a royal passageway to meet him. Swami Gitanandaji, who was a Vice President of Ramakrishna Math and Mission, chose a few of them and prepared yet another Vaijayanti in mellifluous Bengali, with detailed commentary on the verses. The present version in English has been prepared by Swami Sunirmalananda and flows like a gentle stream, in tune with the original Sanskrit verses printed in Devanagari and English transliteration. A set of paintings on Bhagavata themes (like the Dasavatara, Dhruva, Krishna playing blind man's buff with his companions) make the volume an enchanting work to handle as well.

Swami Gitananda commends the Bhagavata Purana as an excellent antidote to loneliness. Yes, we do feel lonely when the thought strikes us regarding the unreality of earthly life. As we grow older, this feeling of loneliness becomes stronger.

"Then the soul longs to get someone, longs to be lost in the thought of someone who is completely one’s own? In the Bhagavata, which is the essence of Indian spiritual lore, it is stated that the thought of God removes the sorrows and sufferings of this world, and that listening and thinking about God makes us feel good. This is the hopeful message of the Bhagavata which needs to be verified in each one’s life." (pp.6-7)

Now begins the commentary with a special thrust on the significant statement: satyam param dhimahi, ‘we meditate on that Truth Supreme’, in the first verse. But how to meditate upon the formless Supreme? Obviously by learning about Truth and Swami Gitananda draws our attention to the scriptures which define Truth: ‘That which was there before, is there now, and will be there in the future is the Truth; that is, that which is there for all times to come and does not become corrupt is the Truth.’ This too is not enough, says Rishi Narada. It is experiencing Truth, and not mere knowledge that is needed. That can be attained by listening to the legends of Krishna, the Formless that had taken the Form of the All-Beautiful. So we open the casements to listen to Shuka Maharishi speaking to Parikshit and ourselves become part of the flow.

Though essentially Krishna-centric, Swami Gitananda also chooses some dear personalities like Dhruva, Prithu and Prahlada for presentation. Taking us to the summits of Self-knowledge are the incidents of Bhishma chasing away Yudhistira’s self-pity by speaking of Krishna; the Nine Sages teaching King Nimi, the nature of Bhagavata Dharma; and the Vidura-Uddhava dialogue. When we study the Bhagavata, we return often to the Mahabharata. Even in the 10th century when the Purana was being written, elders felt that certain searing incidents in the nation’s life should not be forgotten. We must remember so that these unendurable scenarios do not recur. One such is the disrobing of Draupadi. When did Vidura leave the Kuru Court? Swami Gitananda quotes the verse, yadaa sabhaayaam kurudevadevyaah, and says: ‘Vidura knew that the result of such a heinous act would be terrible and the Kaurava clan would be routed.
So he left the house with great mental agony and thought jungle to be better.’ (p.97)

Then there is Krishna’s story. What is special about Swami Gitanandaji’s commentary is that he weaves deftly the Sri Ramakrishna-experience when retelling the Purana. By bringing the Bhagavata experience so close to our times, he insinuates that the devotees in the Purana do not belong just to the past. Such sterling Bhagavatas have appeared even in the twentieth century. Uddhava feels sad that the Yadavas did not realize Krishna was the Supreme. Discoursing on this passage in Varanasi, Swami Turiyananda said with great emotion:

‘Just as the fish play with the reflected moon, we too were once upon a time living with Swamiji. We ate with him, slept with him in the same room. We thought Swami Vivekananda was one of us. But he is no more. Now we understand what or who Swamiji was—the veritable Shiva.’ (p.121)

So the Bhagavata is not an ancient tale. It is a continuous phenomenon. All the paranormal incidents in Krishna’s life are taken in his stride by Swami Gitanandaji. What has poison-spewing Kaliya to do with Sri Ramakrishna? One has to read the relevant passage in this volume. Unexpectedly the intervention comes and enriches our understanding of man, society and the historical moment. The Rasalila in the Bhagavata gets explained with intuitive perception by Swami Gitananda. Should we not pay special attention to the first word of the first verse, bhagavaanapi? ‘This is God’s divine sport filled with divine love, because Lord Krishna is enacting this sport with all his divine power, splendour, and sweetness.’ There is nothing but a spread of Ananda then and now. As Sri Ramakrishna has assured us, that total self-giving of the gopis is unique. ‘Try to create that same yearning in your heart for God. Yearning is all you need in order to realise him.’

Caught in this earthly life, man needs bhakti and vairagya. Both are given in ample measure by Shukadeva in the Bhagavata. Swami Gitanandaji makes the circle whole by concluding with the last phrase of the last verse, satyam param dhimahi which also happens to be the last phrase of the first verse in the first chapter. That is the central theme, says the author. It is for us to begin the meditation with Srimad Bhagavata: The Book of Divine Love in hand. A perfect gift to give, to retain and read daily as well. 

PREMA NANDAKUMAR, TRICHY, TAMILNADU

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**Women Who Lived in God**

*Series -1*

By Pravrajika Ajayaprana

Published by Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, Dakshineswar, Calcutta - 700 076. srismath@gmail.com, paperback, pp.112. Rs.5/-

This book of three stories recounts the life of three women who, as the title says, ‘lived in God’. They are fairly well-known stories which display how a life of quiet renunciation is as effective, and sometimes more effective than, more dramatic ways to realize God.

The first of the three stories is about Kurooramma (who lived in Kerala), a name given to Nangema who first came to Kuroor Illam as a young and innocent bride but was very soon widowed. A life of privation and repression followed—she could not ever again go out of the house. The writer says that the customs prevalent in those days ‘prevented her from giving water to a dying man’.

As a result of this cruel practice, one hot day when a man almost fainting with thirst came to her doorstep, she was unable even to give him a glass of cool, reviving water. In an agony of misery at what she was reduced to, she prayed to Krishna, the only companion in her miserable life.

Krishna came to her rescue as a young boy, called ‘Narayanan’, who then fulfilled her every wish, sometimes making cryptic remarks about true devotion. The highlight of the story is the visit of the great devotee Swami Vilwamangal to her house rather than the palace of the richest family of the village. This comes about because the Swami realizes that the young Narayanan is none other than Sri Krishna.

The second story is about the Sufi saint, Rabia (AD 717). Rabia decided to give up her entire life to God and nothing could change her mind. She managed to avoid marriage by means of dexterous argument and, despite great hardship and privation, kept her vow to remain devoted to God and God alone. Repentance, asceticism and selfless love were the watchwords of her life. She lived a life of self-abnegation and solitude to achieve unity with God and in her last days lived absolutely on her own so that she could meet her Maker alone.
The third story is the very well-known account of Shabari, who as Neeli, the young girl from a hunter tribe and therefore barred from learning, stayed in hiding at the Matanga Ashrama and taught herself to recite Shlokas. On being discovered by the Rishi, she confessed that she had been listening to the others and trying to grasp what she heard. Compassionately the Rishi agreed to let her stay on and become his disciple. The story of Sri Rama, while in exile, liberating her after accepting her worship is quite well known. Her presence is felt even today in the famed Shabarimalai in Kerala where the incident is said to have taken place.

The three stories illustrate the importance of telling and listening to stories as a method of learning—in this case, the value of devotion, truth, discipline, renunciation and acceptance of anything that may come the devotee’s way, whether good or bad. The writer, Pravrajika Ajayaprana, has written the stories with great feeling and tenderness, so that the reader gets the atmosphere of tremendous faith that accompanies the myriad sacrifices that religious life entails. This is even more true of women who have to be doubly brave as they live in the world, as in the case of all three in this book. The noteworthy aspect is that in whatever manner one decides to live, anything worth having requires the same discipline, self-sacrifice and single-minded dedication that the women in the stories demonstrated: these qualities are not reserved only for the lives of the great.

The language of the book is simple and easily accessible and the settings are instantly recognizable. These are the aspects that give the book value; on the debit side, one wishes that proofing had been done in greater detail.

PREMA RAGHUNATH, CHENNAI

MYTHOLOGY AND ICONOGRAPHY OF GANESHA
By Dr. Madhumita Datta
Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Kolkata - 700 029. rmic@vsnl.com, 2012 Hardbound, Pp158, Price Rs.100/-

This book, attractively formatted, is a scholarly monograph on the most popular god of Hinduism, Ganesha. He is worshipped at the commencement of an enterprise by all Hindus, not because he is considered superior to all gods and goddesses, as the writer rightly observes, but because ‘he has a special place in the affection of people’. In the Vedas Ganapati, (another popular name for Ganesha) refers to Brihaspati, who is the guru of the gods and synonymous with wisdom. Later on he came to be identified with the elephant headed God. The author discusses the Ganesha episodes in the Puranas, in chapters I to V. The iconographic depiction of his figure and paraphernalia in sculpture and painting, is illustrated with sketches and colour plates. Chapter VI is devoted to the Ganesha worship in Bengal and neighbouring regions. This includes the Ganesha motif in folklore and modern poetry as well.

There are four appendices which discuss related topics: rituals connected with worship of the god, the vehicle, the female form of the god, viz. Ganeshani, and the totem symbol of the elephant evolving into the god. This is followed by twenty-four colour plates, with merely numbers under them and one has to turn to pages xiii to xv, for explanation which one finds irksome. Notwithstanding these editorial lapses, the book may be read with profit.

M.C.RAMANARAYANAN, THIRUVALLA, KERALA

Vijaya Vivekananda
by Sidhanta Tulasi
Sanatana Publications, No. 142 F, Sabari Sanatana, Greenways Road, Raja Annamalaiperum, Chennai - 600 028 omsanatana@gmail.com pp.133, Rs.80

Study of any hagiography is certainly uplifting. And, when a comparative study of the anecdotes of two mumukshus is made, it offers deep insights into the mechanics of spiritual evolution. The book under review attempts to identify parallels in the sublime lives of two Spiritual Titans—one is Arjuna who had his spiritual education and growth under Bhagavan Krishna and the other is Swami Vivekananda whose spiritual evolution and destiny were guided and shaped by Bhagavan Ramakrishna.
The slim book has five chapters. The First Chapter titled ‘Flee or Face’ highlights the cruel dilemmas that both Arjuna and Swamiji faced. Arjuna’s doubts about the legitimacy of the war which were based on attachment and ignorance were dispelled by Bhagavan Krishna through his classic spiritual discourse of Bhagavad Gita. Naren’s proclivities of agnosticism were dissolved by Sri Ramakrishna’s categorical affirmation of God’s existence. The Chapter describes their transition from doubts and hesitancy to certitude and resolve by the narration of a number of anecdotes in their lives.

The Second Chapter with the caption ‘Do and Withdraw’ envisages the pragmatic Law of Pravritti and Nivritti that should govern any mumukshu’s life. Nara (Arjuna) and Naren (Swamiji) had both their periods of total involvement in and quiet retreat from their whirlpools of action. As both Arjuna and Naren had their spiritual baptism and guidance from the Purnavatara and Avatar Varishta respectively, they had the humility to recognise and submit to the supremacy of Divine Will.

The Third Chapter has the significant title ‘Give up to go up’. Spiritual voyage is a saga of renunciations of sense-delights, of mental cravings, of intellectual pride and above all of the infatuation of egoism. The Chapter describes the crowning victories of Arjuna and Swamiji—the former’s on the battleground of Kurukshetra and the latter’s on American soil and, particularly, in the Parliament of Religions in Chicago.

The Fourth Chapter titled ‘Be Transparent to be Tranquil’ shows how the transparency of Sattva promotes tranquillity. A few episodes in the lives of Arjuna and Swamiji are cited to show how both of them mellowed with the passage of time and how they, who were initially under the grip of tamas and rajas, eventually broke the hold of the twin gunas and came under the benign influence of sattva.

The final Chapter titled ‘Be Free’ relates the episodes in the lives of both Arjuna and Swamiji that are expressions of their spiritual wisdom. The captions of the five chapters chart the path of Spiritual Odyssey of the two exemplary mumukshus from their abject plight of doubt and indecision to the secret of involvement and withdrawal to their attainment of the spiritual precondition of renunciation for ascent to their cultivation of sattvic transparency for peace and to their eventually reaching the terminus of self-transcendence and liberation.

The book is quite readable and the narrative is marked by genuine passion. One glaring defect that would be frowned upon by lovers of King’s English and that should be remedied in future editions is the unwarranted changing of gears in respect of the usage of tense in the narrative.

N.HARIHARAN, MADURAI, TAMILNADU

INDRA’S NET
By Rajiv Malhotra

The book under review examines the case of Hinduism and Swami Vivekananda’s nationalistic and other teachings vis-à-vis biased narrative of western academia.

With well researched and coherent arguments in his purvapaksha, Rajiv, a distinguished researcher and author living in USA, busts top eight of the many myths propagated by biased academicians: that India is but a balkanized reality; colonial indology gave basis for Hinduism; it had no prior definition or unity or coherence, it was manufactured and did not grow organically; yogic experiences are divorced from proclaimed Hindu paths to enlightenment; seva and karma yoga were built on western social ethics; Hinduism is founded on oppression and sustained by it; and Hinduism presumes the sameness of all religions. Almost all these myths are the handiwork of certain western academics. This has led to the creation of false notions which have since assumed a legitimacy and life of its own.

Rajiv, in his inimitable uttarapaksha style of writing, examines and explains the key issues at large: understanding the quiet historical continuity of Indian civilization over several millennia despite devastating disruptions from various political and academic sources.

Defending the unity of Sanatana Dharma in its varied manifestations is all the more challenging. Rajiv has done a commendable and timely service
to Swami Vivekananda and to the cause of Sanatana Dharma with this insightful work that lays bare issues obfuscated by high punditry and immensely damaging otherwise.

This book should be a must read for every thinking Hindu and all lovers of Hinduism. It is not to be dismissed off trivializing the issues at stake, perhaps through complacency or a sense of false humility, putting trust in the divine providence, which attitude Swami Vivekananda would never approve of. It is a well-argued and well-presented case for Hinduism and for the contribution Swami Vivekananda made for its rejuvenation and modernisation.

T S MOHAN, BANGALORE

**Thiruppavai**

*By M Appalacharyulu*

*Published by the author, Lord Yogananda Lakshmi Narasimhaswami Temple, Vedatri Mahakshetram, Vijayavada, Andra Pradesh. Hardback, pp.262 Price not given*

*Thiruppavai*, that famous Tamil work celebrating the devotion Aandal had for Mahavishnu, needs no introduction to Tamil readers. It is a poem the verses of which are traditionally repeated in the month of Margazhi (December 15th January 15th) to mitigate the effects of evil and create a spiritual aura which adds to the beauty of the gentle winters of South India.

This is an English translation of *Thiruppavai* by Sri Appayacharyulu and in doing this he has rendered a great service to non-Tamil speakers as well as to those who have learnt the hymn by heart but would like to know what exactly it conveys—both literally and figuratively.

The work consists of thirty verses, describing the cowherd families of Gokula, whose only joy on earth was the presence of Sri Krishna and mingling with him. The unearthly quality of this unselfish and pure love has formed the basis of much writing, for it symbolises the unity of the individual with the Absolute (*jeevatma* with the *paramatma*).

Sri Appalacharyulu has taken each verse and explained it line by line, in some cases even phrase by phrase. Each verse is transliterated into the English script and the *talam* and *ragam* specified. This is a very good addition for those interested in the music of the hymn, especially initiates into this tradition, reading the Thiruppavai for the first time.

Each and every one of the thirty verses that go to make up this great spiritual work, which has equally well-documented literary merit, has been extensively and intensively explained. The commentary is so minute that if a single word is laden with meaning, it has been separated from the line to bring out its significance to the whole.

Literature in translation is a very difficult genre: even the most true-to-the-original can lose some of the flavour of the original. This particular work has the added responsibility to render religious and spiritual longings and beliefs into a language that does not have the words for certain Hindu concepts, into which it is often hard to put nuances of personal belief which a single term in a native tongue makes perfect sense and creates understanding. Sri Appalacharyulu has taken on a difficult task and accomplished it fully.

Though there are many editorial discrepancies and typos which should be looked into to complete the pleasant look, the book has been produced well on art paper with an easy to read font.

PREMA RAGHUNATH, CHENNAI

**Walking with the Immortals—the Narmada parikrama**

*By K.K. Venkataraman.*

*Published by Vivekananda Trust. Copies available with the author at Chennai. kkv198788@gmail.com 2015, paperback, pp.144, Rs.100.*

‘While a dip in Ganga washes away the sins, a mere gaze at Narmada is believed to have the same effect’, says the author. This book is not a travelogue but an inspiring record of a spiritual quest by a devotee circumambulating (*parikrama*) river Narmada (*Jata Shankari*), covering 2,600 kms.

Barefooted, with no money or other possessions, the author walked an average of twenty km a day completing the *parikrama* in 131 days. His experience as a Captain in the Army and
memorable service at Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya in Arunachal Pradesh stood by him
during the arduous parikrama. Divine grace was
visible throughout the parikrama to overcome privation.

The author walked by himself, not in a group,
but with belief in the invisible company of the
Divine including Hanuman, performing parikrama
eternally.

Swamiji told his Western audience how
unlettered Indian rural folk rendered selfless
service and discussed spirituality with ease but not
politics. Venkataraman experienced these qualities
in abundance. Service was offered transcending
caste/religion; even an affluent lady offered her
only blanket to the guest. To add variety, however,
some pseudo parikramavasis were indulging in abuse
of sweet dishes served by a philanthropist.

‘Walking with’ the author, we find his
experiences varied, exciting and informative.

A valuable and welcome addition to the
spiritual travelogue in the contemporary India.

P. S. SUNDARAM, MUMBAI

**GLORY OF VISHNU**

By Dr. M. Varadarajan

Published by Dr M. Varada-
rajan, Bhaktamrutam, F 10
Ashok Manar, 9&10 First
Cross Street, Krishna Nagar,
Chrompet, Chennai - 44. 2014,
paperback, pp.64, Rs.100.

Five essays that draw
us to portrayals of Vishnu in
literature and the religious world of Tirumala.

Dr. Varadarajan is a prolific writer and has the
advantage of having studied the Srivaishnava
scriptures directly from his spiritual guide, Sri
Ananthanpillai Krishnamacharya of Tirupati.

It is said that though Rama said that he
considered himself just a human being, there were
a few persons who knew that he was the Supreme.
One of them was Mandodari, the chief queen of
his arch-enemy Ravana. When news reaches her of
Ravana’s death, she comes to the battlefield and sees
his lifeless body and is deeply grieved. Mandodari’s
mourning has a logical progression. There was
none capable of defeating Ravana, not even Indra.
So how can anyone believe that a mere youth,
a mendicant, one who had been sent out of his
kingdom, could kill the King of Lanka? Mandodari
realizes that Rama’s image is a mere form but he is
actually the Ancient One, the Paramatma.

Varadarajan studies with the help of Peria-
vachan Pillai’s commentary the manner in which
Mandodari visualizes Rama as the Supreme. The
second essay is actually by Kumuda Varadarajan
and is a flashback that goes on in Sita’s mind in
Ashoka grove.

The last three essays in the collection will
be of interest to the lay reader, as they centre
around the Tirupati temple, its association with
Adisesha and Sri Ramanuja’s priceless services in
restoring the glory of the pilgrim centre and giving
the rituals a shape that has endured till today.
The slender book concludes with a brief essay on
Manavala Mamunigal’s shoreless devotion for Lord
Venkateswara.

PREMA NANDAKUMAR, TRICHY

All that we see in the universe has for its basis this one struggle towards freedom;
it is under the impulse of this tendency that the saint prays and the robber robs. . . .
The saint is oppressed with the knowledge of his condition of bondage, and he wants to
get rid of it; so he worships God. The thief is oppressed with the idea that he does not
possess certain things, and he tries to get rid of that want, to obtain freedom from it; so
he steals. Freedom is the one goal of all nature, sentient or insentient; and consciously
or unconsciously, everything is struggling towards that goal. The freedom which the saint
seeks is very different from that which the robber seeks; the freedom loved by the saint
leads him to the enjoyment of infinite, unspeakable bliss, while that on which the robber
has set his heart only forges other bonds for his soul.

—Swami Vivekananda, CW, 1.109
Wisdom in Verses
Translation of Dohavali of Goswami Tulasidas
Swami Brahmeshananda

Dohavali is an important work by the famous saint-poet Goswami Tulasidas. Written in Awadhi language, it contains both spiritual and secular wisdoms with specific emphasis on devotion to Sri Rama and chanting Rama Nama. The book abounds in nuggets of wisdom as well as intense devotion to Sri Rama.

English translation is by Swami Brahmeshananda, a senior monk and a former Editor of The Vedanta Kesari and an author of many books on spiritual matters.

Pages 222 + ix. Price: Rs. 70/- + Postage: Rs.30/-for single copy.

Published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai - 600004 Email: mail@chennaimath.org

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– Swami Vivekananda

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Men are taught from childhood that they are weak and sinners. Teach them that they are all glorious children of immortality, even those who are the weakest in manifestation. Let positive, strong, helpful thought enter into their brains from very childhood.

—Swami Vivekananda
Teach yourselves, teach everyone his/her real nature, call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakens. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come, when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.

—Swami Vivekananda

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