Sri Krishna Janmashtami 24th August

‘That thou, who bearest the whole universe within thyself at the time of the cosmic sleep, hast been born of my womb is only thy imitation of human ways to hide thy identity.’

—Srimad Bhagavata. 10.3.31
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*The Vedanta Kesari* is one of the oldest cultural and spiritual magazines in the country. Started under the guidance and support of Swami Vivekananda, the first issue of the magazine, then called *Brahmavadin*, came out on 14 Sept 1895. *Brahmavadin* was run by one of Swamiji’s ardent followers Sri Alasinga Perumal. After his death in 1909 the magazine publication became irregular, and stopped in 1914 whereupon the Ramakrishna Order revived it as *The Vedanta Kesari*.

Swami Vivekananda’s concern for the magazine is seen in his letters to Alasinga Perumal where he writes: ‘Now I am bent upon starting the journal.’ ‘Herewith I send a hundred dollars…. Hope this will go just a little in starting your paper.’ ‘I am determined to see the paper succeed.’ ‘The Song of the Sannyasin is my first contribution for your journal.’ ‘I learnt from your letter the bad financial state that Brahmavadin is in.’ ‘It must be supported by the Hindus if they have any sense of virtue or gratitude left in them.’ ‘I pledge myself to maintain the paper anyhow.’ ‘The Brahmavadin is a jewel—it must not perish. Of course, such a paper has to be kept up by private help always, and we will do it.’

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Verse 8

विश्र्वं पशयवत कायतिकारणतया सिसिावमसमिन्धतः
शिष्याचार्यतया तथैव पितृपुत्राधिमना भेदतः |
स्वने जायति वा य एष पुरुषो मायापरिप्रभावितः |
तस्मै श्रीगुरुमूततिये नम इद्वं श्रीदवषिणामूततिये ॥ ८ ॥

8. Obeisance to Śrī Dakṣiṇāmūrti, who is the Guru, (who as) this person¹, being deluded by māyā² sees the world both in sleep and in the waking state, as (full of) differences³ (brought about by such) relationships as cause and effect,⁴ property and owner,⁵ disciple and teacher,⁶ as also father and son, and so on.

Notes:
1) The original word is puruṣaḥ. It is interpreted as pūrṇaḥ, ‘the full’, ‘the complete’. According to another interpretation, it means ‘one who occupies this city or body’. Here it obviously refers to the jīvātman who in essence is Paramātman.
2) This māyā is malina-sattva-pradhānā, that is, the sattva tainted by tamas. It is this māyā that has evolved into this world of causes and effects. Again, it is into this māyā that Īśvara has entered as the jīvātman. Hence, the delusion should be looked upon from the standpoint of the jīvātman.
3) The differences are not only among the various objects, but also between himself and them.
4) What produces and what is produced.
5) The phrase may also be interpreted as ‘servant and master’.
6) Uncompromising Advaita goes so far as to deny even the teacher-disciple relationship as a product of māyā. But one should not forget that without passing through the mill of discipleship such a realisation cannot come.
This universe is created by the Mahamaya of God. Mahamaya contains both vidyamaya, the illusion of knowledge, and avidyamaya, the illusion of ignorance. Through the help of vidyamaya one cultivates such virtues as the taste for holy company, knowledge, devotion, love, and renunciation. Avidyamaya consists of the five elements and the objects of the five senses—form, flavour, smell, touch, and sound. These make one forget God.

A man will cherish the illusion that he is the doer as long as he has not seen God, .... So long will he know the distinction between his good and bad actions. This awareness of distinction is due to God’s maya; and it is necessary for the purpose of running His illusory world. But a man can realize God if he takes shelter under His vidyamaya and follows the path of righteousness.

A jnani sees everything at once—God, maya, the universe, and living beings. He sees that vidyamaya, avidyamaya, the universe, and all living beings exist and at the same time do not exist. As long as he is conscious of ‘I’, he is conscious of ‘others’ too. Nothing whatsoever exists after he cuts through the whole thing with the sword of jnana. Then even his ‘I’ becomes as unreal as the magic of the magician.

The bhakta takes shelter under vidyamaya. He seeks holy company, goes on pilgrimage, and practises discrimination, devotion, and renunciation. He says that, since a man cannot easily get rid of his ego, he should let the rascal remain as the servant of God, the devotee of God.

(If the power of avidya is the cause of ignorance, then why has God created it?)

That is His play. The glory of light cannot be appreciated without darkness. Happiness cannot be understood without misery. Knowledge of good is possible because of knowledge of evil.

—Sri Ramakrishna
Our life in this world is conditioned by several other existences—the most fundamental of which are elements of nature like water, soil, air, and sunlight. Our relationship with these natural forces is always delicately balanced. Today, this balance is being seriously impaired, especially in our relationship with water.

The Water Perspective

About 50% - 65% of an adult human being's body is made up of water. It is the building block of cells, tissues, and organs; it regulates body temperature, aids in digestion, eliminates waste from the body, and performs a host of other vital functions. Again, 70% of our earth is covered with water. Of this, only 3% is fresh water and again only 0.4% of this fresh water is accessible to us because the remaining 2.6% is locked in polar ice-caps, glaciers, or deep inside the earth.

Traditional Engagement

The Vedic rishis recognised the central role of water in creating and sustaining life. Water was recognised as divine, and the rivers as personified goddesses with motherly love for mankind. The Vedic literature has a number of prayers reflecting this attitude towards water. Some lines in the Apah Suktam, or the Hymn for Water sing:

\[
\begin{align*}
O Water, this auspicious sap of yours, please share with us, \\
Like a mother desiring (to share her best possession with her children). \\
O Water, may the auspicious divinity which is wished for be present in you when we drink (water). \\
May the auspiciousness which supports you, flow to us. \\
O Water, may the divinity in Water dwell in the farm lands, \\
O Water, I implore you to give nutrition (to the crops). \\
O Water, you are abundantly filled with medicinal herbs; \\
Please protect my body, so that I can see the Sun for long (i.e., live long). \\
O Water, please wash away whatever wicked tendencies are in me, \\
And also wash away the treacheries burning me from within, \\
And any falsehood present in my mind.
\end{align*}
\]

Truly, water has this dual power—it nourishes and strengthens the material world outside starting from our own body, and it purifies and transforms the subtle inner dimensions of our personality. In traditional homes, even today, the seven sacred rivers are invoked into the water being used for worship, cooking, and even bathing. Sri Ramakrishna too had a deep devotion to Ganga. He called Her Brahma-vari, i.e., Brahman in the form of water. If anybody talked of worldly things for a long time or mixed with worldly people, he would ask that person to drink a little of Ganga water and purify himself.

In sharp contrast to this traditional filial attitude towards water, is the modern approach which commodifies water and all the other natural resources. It is an attitude born of the understanding that the world is created for man’s enjoyment. This mercenary perspective is in a sense at the root of the imbalance in our relationship with Nature.

Mother Earth’s Response

What happens when we exploit Nature? An interesting story from Srimad Bhagavata gives the answer.

A number of people reduced to skeletons due to starvation approached their newly crowned king Prithu who, born in the line of Dhruva, was a part of Mahavishnu. They asked him to alleviate their sufferings and provide them sustenance. Prithu found out that by withdrawing into herself all her vegetation, goddess Earth had created this suffering. In great anger...
when he sought to punish her, goddess Earth took the form of a cow and ran away. But Prithu followed her in all directions. Finally, goddess Earth took refuge with Prithu himself and explained her actions.

She told him, ‘O King! I saw how bad men, devoid of self-restraint, ate up all the cereals that Brahma had created for the purpose of Yajna. When the whole world became full of thieves, I took into myself all these cereals in order to conserve them for the Yajna. Because of the long lapse of time, these are lying in me in a decayed condition. Find a suitable calf and a pot for milking, and then milk, in the form of all your wants, can be drawn from me. O King! Also level me in such a way that the water that the rainy season brings, may spread everywhere and be available even after the season is over.’

Accordingly, using Swayambhuva Manu as the calf, Prithu milked out all plants into his own palm. The rishis used Brihaspati as calf and milked the Vedas and other scriptures into the vessel of the senses. Then the devatas, asuras, gandharvas, animals etc., using their best representative milked whatever they wanted from Earth. Exceedingly pleased with Earth for providing all the requirements of his people, Prithu adopted goddess Earth as his daughter and she came to be known as Prithvi.

Two key points are to be noted here. Lack of self-restraint made men greedy and they ate up more than what they needed and thus disrupted the yajna-chakra or the cycle of sacrifice where each one contributes for the good of the other. The second point is that when approached with the love of a calf, Mother Nature will unlock all her treasures!

The Imbalance

Today, population growth, mismanagement of natural resources, and our selfishness are upsetting our relationship with Nature. We are witnessing heavy rainfalls leading to floods, and deficit or no rainfall creating famine-like conditions. Aggravating this is the pollution of rivers and water bodies by sewage and chemical effluents, excessive groundwater pumping and wasteful use of water. All these are seriously affecting our food security, health, energy generation, and economic growth. Water scarcity is also becoming a point of social tensions and regional conflicts.

The NITI Ayog’s Composite Water Management Index released last year has some alarming statistics and predictions regarding water. It states that currently ‘600 million Indians face high to extreme water stress and about two lakh people die every year due to inadequate access to safe water.’ In its assessment for future, it predicts that by 2020 the groundwater in 21 major Indian cities could be depleted, and by 2030 the water demand in our country could be twice the available supply. In the face of this dim prospect, it is disheartening to know that only 8% of the water received from rains in the entire year is harvested in our country. We have to now act on Mother Earth’s advice to King Prithu and conserve water!

The Call

Recently, the Prime Minister called upon the nation to start a mass movement, as was done for Swachh Bharat, to create awareness about water conservation, and to share knowledge of traditional and innovative methods of water conservation.

Achieving water security is the responsibility of every Indian. This Independence Day, let us pledge to educate ourselves first and then create awareness in others about water conservation and water recycling. Let us work out ways to limit our daily water consumption. Indeed, a mind that wastes natural resources will also waste its mental and spiritual energies. Let frugality be our watchword. This is the duty of every awakened Indian. Virtues have to be first practised by awakened citizens. Only then will it grow and become national virtues.
Dream of life is the creative imagination of one who takes up the responsibility to design his own life. Successful people are those who have big dreams in life and faith in themselves to fulfill them. They creatively imagine their future and actualize it with proper goal setting, thorough planning, intense struggle and stopping not till the goal is reached.

Albert Einstein (1879-1955), one of the most brilliant mathematical physicists of the century and a Nobel Laureate, observes, ‘Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world.... Imagination is everything. It is the preview of life’s coming attractions.... The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honours the servant and has forgotten the gift.... If you want to live a happy life, tie it to a goal; not to people or things....’

It is rightly said that ‘Everything in this world is created twice, first in the human mind and then in the outside world.... Whatever a human mind can conceive and whatever a human mind can believe, all that it can achieve....’ Dream is that which is close to our heart, is an object of intense love and passionate feeling. Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962), an American politician, diplomat, activist, and the wife of President Franklin Roosevelt, says: ‘The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams....’

Walt Disney (1901-1966) was an American entrepreneur, animator, voice actor and film producer. A pioneer of the American animation industry, he introduced several developments in the production of cartoons. It is interesting to note that at age 22, Walt Disney was fired from a Missouri newspaper for ‘not being creative enough’. One of his early ventures, called Laugh-o-gram Studios, went bankrupt. Later, as the creator of Mickey and Minnie Mouse he was nominated for 59 Academy Awards and won 22 Oscars – all for his unparalleled animations. From his own life-experience, Disney conveys: ‘All our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them.... If you can dream it, you can do it. Always remember that this whole thing was started with a dream and a mouse....’

Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam (1931-2015), the 11th President of India and a Bharat Ratna, points out: ‘Dream is not what you see while sleeping, it is something that doesn’t let you sleep.... You have to dream before your dreams can come true....’

Our dream may also be the ideal that we want to realize in life; Swami Vivekananda says: ‘Unfortunately, in this life, the vast majority of persons are groping through this dark life without any ideal at all. If a man with an ideal makes a thousand mistakes, I am sure that the
man without an ideal makes fifty thousand. Therefore, it is better to have an ideal... My ideal indeed can be put into a few words and that is: to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life...'

To GROW in life or in a chosen field, the essential steps are:
G — Goal Setting
R — Reality Checklist
O — Open to Opportunity
W — Willingness to do the required

G — Goal Setting

‘Setting goals is the first step in turning the invisible into the visible.... Goals are like magnets; they will attract the things that will make them come true....’ says Tony Robbins, a successful American author and entrepreneur. Another famous author, Napoleon Hill writes, ‘A goal is a dream with a deadline.... There is one quality which one must possess to win and that is DEFINITENESS OF PURPOSE, the knowledge of what one wants, and a burning DESIRE to possess it....’ Similarly, Jim Rohn, entrepreneur and motivational speaker, points out: ‘Goal-setting is powerful because it provides focus. It shapes our dreams. It gives us the ability to hone in on the exact actions we need to perform to achieve everything we desire in life....’ Walt Disney too confirms: ‘A person should set his goals as early as he can and devote all his energy and talent to getting there....’

A dream becomes a goal when it is time-bound and written down with practical specifications. For example, we may have a dream to see Taj Mahal which may be an idle wish, but it becomes a goal when we say, ‘I shall visit Taj Mahal in Dec 2019 by boarding the Rajdhani Express train to New Delhi and then hiring a vehicle from Delhi to Agra.’ This goal is actualized when we apply for leave from office, book the train-ticket in advance, make all the arrangements for the journey, and finally board the train and reach Agra fulfilling the dream of seeing Taj Mahal. Earl Nightingale rightly says: ‘People with goals succeed because they know where they are going....’

It is we who have to design our life consciously by creative imagination with a clear mind as to the kind of life we want to live, say 10 years ahead. If we have to reach or attain a particular state of life after 10 years, then what should be our position in 5 years, and coming still closer in 2 years, 1 year and so on. Mac Anderson, author and success trainer, rightly points out: ‘Dream big dreams, but never forget that realistic short-term goals are the keys to success.’ Similarly, Brian Tracy, an author and motivational public speaker, says: ‘People with clear written goals achieve far more in a shorter period of time than people without them could ever imagine.... So write down your goals, make plans to achieve them, and work on your plans every single day....’

The goal should be logical, practical and scientifically written in specific terms in our personal diary, and should be read every night before sleeping and on getting up in the morning, giving autosuggestion to the mind to be always goal centred. Such a goal enters the subconscious mind and our whole psyche or personality gets focused on the realization of the goal. The intensity of our thought and strength of mind develops with the continuous thought-flow towards our cherished goal. This concentration of mind is what develops tremendous will-power. In the immortal words of Swami Vivekananda: ‘Take up one idea. Make that one idea your life — think of it, dream of it, live on that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body, be full of that idea, and just leave every other idea alone. This is the way to success.’

R — Reality Checklist

Reality checklist is to jot down, prepare for the realization of the goal. First of all, we
should introspect and understand our present position and how far we are from the goal. Through introspection we have to note down our positive and negative points with respect to the goal, and take practical specific steps to enhance the positive qualities and reduce the negative ones. Success in any field requires many sacrifices, giving up our whims and pleasure-seeking, and delaying all kinds of temporary gratification that distract us from our goal.

Then we have to identify reliable people who have realized similar goals or have advanced far enough so as to help or guide us on the path towards the goal. We should always have the company of such successful and positive people who will inspire us. We should take care to avoid negative people or those who have failed because they may demoralize us. Einstein points out: ‘Stay away from negative people. They have a problem for every solution....’

Sharing one’s ideas and comparing notes with such like-minded reliable people, one can understand one’s mistakes or shortcomings and develop oneself so as to be a fit aspirant for the achievement of the cherished goal. But even if we may take help or guidance from good people, we should never be dependent on others — we should always be independent as far as possible and stand on our own feet with full self-confidence.

People may criticize us, speak ill of us, make fun of us or ridicule us for our big dreams or goals that they are unable to conceive. But we should be wise enough not to be bothered by what people say, and stick to our goals come what may. Einstein observes: ‘Great spirits have always encountered violent opposition from mediocre minds.... Weak people revenge. Strong people forgive. Intelligent people ignore.... A clever person solves a problem. A wise person avoids it....’ Swami Vivekananda states: ‘Each work has to pass through these stages — ridicule, opposition, and then acceptance. Each man who thinks ahead of his time is sure to be misunderstood. So opposition and persecution are welcome, only I have to be steady and pure and must have immense faith in God, and all these will vanish....’

**O — Open to Opportunity**

We find many people usually complaining that they do not find any opportunity to grow in life. But if we ponder deep into the matter, we find that the real factor is the lack of any passionate dream or specific goal. If we do the goal-setting and reality checklist as defined above, and if we are alert and disciplined, and keep our eyes, ears and mind open to tap on every single ray of hope, we will surely find our life filled with opportunities. But when sometimes opportunities don't happen, we have to create them by our hard work and skills.

As Thomas Edison puts it: ‘Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.’ But we will be able to recognise opportunities, only if our mind is ever oriented towards the goal.

Sometimes opportunities come after one faces blows in life, and we should be wise enough to understand them. Einstein says, ‘In the middle of every difficulty lies opportunity....’ Napoleon Hill too points out: ‘Opportunity... often it comes disguised in the form of misfortune or temporary defeat....’ Helen Keller (1880–1968), an American author and the first deaf-blind person to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree, writes: ‘When one door closes, another opens. But often we look so long, so regretfully upon the closed door that we fail to see the one that has opened for us.’

*Success in any field requires many sacrifices*
If we are extremely eager, we will give our full attention to even the smallest of opportunities because they are the keys to bigger ones; we thus climb the ladder of success. Sir Richard Charles Branson, an English business magnate, investor, philanthropist, and founder of the Virgin Group which controls more than 400 companies, became an entrepreneur at the young age of 16 with a magazine called Student as his first business venture. Richard who created new opportunities one after another by his intelligence and hard work, and scripted his way to success, points out a secret: 'If someone offers you an amazing opportunity but you are not sure you can do it, say 'yes' and then learn how to do it later!'

Life in general is continuously changing and creating newer and better avenues for those who are ready to take the challenge and have the courage to innovate as per the times. But one should be ready to work hard till the opportunity becomes a reality of life.

Once a disciple asked his master to explain how and when one can be successful. Instead of replying, the master took the disciple to the nearby river and standing in chest-deep water, held the neck of the disciple and pushed him inside water. When the disciple started struggling and gasping for breath, the master pulled him out and asked, 'What was your thought while inside water?' The disciple replied, 'My only thought was how to get out and breathe….' The master pointed out, 'If your desire to realize your dream or goal will be so strong and deep as that for a breath of air for a dying man, then only will you recognize opportunities, accomplish your goals, and be successful….'

**W — Willingness to Do the Required**

As soon as the opportunity is recognized, and the path is clear, we should ever move onward towards the goal without looking back. Intense struggle is a must in the beginning as well as at every step so as to overcome all obstacles on the path. We should be willing to mould and train ourselves according to proper instructions as is required for the realization of the goal. Every new work or movement on a new path needs thorough training both physically and mentally, so as to do what is exactly required to be done. But if we are egoistic and disobedient to the teacher, we may fall short of success.

Each one of us is endowed with a specific amount of time and energy in life, and success depends on how we utilize our time and energy for the realisation of the goal instead of frittering them away uselessly. Ups and downs are inevitable while travelling on the path towards the goal, and one has to view it as a continuous learning process. We learn from our mistakes and failures much more than from our successes. So, for a wise man, there is no failure as such because he gathers much knowledge in the process and views it as a stepping stone to success. In the words of Albert Einstein: 'Anyone who has never made a mistake, has never tried anything new.... Failure is success in progress.... I have tried 99 times and have failed, but on the 100th time came success.... Failure doesn't mean you are a failure, it just means you have not succeeded yet.... You never fail until you stop trying.... In order to succeed, your desire for success should be greater than your fear of failure….'

Henry Ford (1863–1947), an American business magnate and the founder of the Ford Motor Company, says: 'Failure is simply the
opportunity to begin again, this time more intelligently....'

Sir Winston Churchill (1874-1965), British Prime-minister and Nobel Laureate, who successfully led his country during the Second World War, notes: ‘Success is stumbling from failure to failure with no loss of enthusiasm.... Never, never, never give up.... Success is not final, failure is not fatal; it is the courage to continue that counts....’

Thomas Alva Edison (1847–1931), described as America's greatest inventor who developed many devices that greatly influenced life around the world, including the phonograph, the motion picture camera, and the long-lasting practical electric light bulb, and who was one of the first inventors to apply the principles of mass production and large-scale teamwork to the process of invention, points out: ‘I have not failed, I have just found 10,000 ways that won't work.... Many of life’s failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up....’

Swami Vivekananda exhorts us: ‘Never mind the struggles, the mistakes. I never heard a cow tell a lie, but it is only a cow—never a man. So never mind these failures, these little backslidings; hold the ideal a thousand times, and if you fail a thousand times, make the attempt once more.... To succeed, you must have tremendous perseverance, tremendous will. ‘I will drink the ocean,’ says the persevering soul, ‘at my will mountains will crumble up.’ Have that sort of energy, that sort of will, work hard, and you will reach the goal....’

**Conclusion**

The basic idea is that a dream written down with a date becomes a GOAL; a goal broken down into steps becomes a PLAN; and a plan backed by ACTION makes our dreams come true. Also it is rightly said: ‘Life's battles don't always go to the stronger or the faster man, but sooner or later the man who wins is the man who thinks he can....’

Swami Vivekananda’s words are a constant source of strength, wisdom and inspiration for all those who want to do something great in life — ‘The men of mighty will the world has produced have all been tremendous workers — gigantic souls, with wills powerful enough to overturn worlds, wills they got by persistent work.... Arise, awake, sleep no more; within each of you there is the power to remove all wants and all miseries. Believe this, and that power will be manifested.... Stand up, be bold, be strong. Take the whole responsibility on your own shoulders, and know that you are the creator of your own destiny....’

**References:** Most of the quotations are from Wikipedia.

**Shraddha**

What we want is this Shraddha – faith in ourselves. Whatever of material power you see manifested by the Western races is the outcome of this Shraddha, because they believe in their muscles and if you believe in your spirit, how more will it work! Believe in that infinite soul, the infinite power, which, with consensus of opinion, your books and sages preach. This Shraddha is what I want, and what all of us want, this faith in ourselves, and before you is the great task to get that faith. Be strong and have this Shraddha, and everything else is bound to follow. — *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. 3:319-320
Reminiscences

Reminiscences of Sargachhi

SWAMI SUHITANANDA

Swami Premeshananda (1884 – 1967) was a disciple of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. He inspired countless men and women to lead a life of spirituality and service.

These conversations were noted by the author, now one of the Vice Presidents of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, while serving Premeshananda Maharaj at Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sargachhi, Murshidabad, West Bengal.

(Continued from previous issue...)

11.10.60

Somebody was speaking ill of the attendant. Hearing this, the attendant became depressed. To cheer him up, Maharaj said: Those who are hostile towards you are really your friends. They won’t be the cause of your bondage; they help you to progress on the path of liberation. People with whom you are on affectionate terms actually create your bondage. A person used to severely criticise Sant Tukaram. When that person died, Tukaram shed tears and said, “A true friend of mine has passed away. By criticising me and pointing out all my faults, he kept me on the right path.”

“I want a person to blossom. And, to the best of my ability, I help him progress in his path. Nobody should be forced to be a sannyasi. The first chapter of the Gita deals with the duties of a sannyasi. ‘My grandfather, my guru, my kith and kin are all in front of me – how am I to kill them?’ Everyone faces such dilemmas. The Bhagavad Gita gives the answer to this question.

25.10.60

Maharaj: Till we are forty we like to mingle with young fellows. After forty a feeling of affection enwraps us and we enjoy loving everybody. We experience tremendous attachment; it is a dreadful bondage. Outwardly it appears as if we are looking upon the world with equanimity. But it is not so. You can test yourself by watching whether or not these things attract your mind when you sit for meditation.

26.10.60

This body is like a net – attractive and delicious fishes are caught in it; the mind then carries them to the intellect. The intellect has its own baggage of impressions with which it compares the new arrivals; it then accepts some and casts away others. Continuously watching this play, I have forgotten that I am merely a spectator – I become delighted and morose because of the happiness and sorrow of this instrument called the body. Alas, what a pity!

27.10.60

Maharaj: Just as a devotee remains intoxicated with the God’s game called creation, a man of knowledge remains engrossed with Brahman. He enjoys himself as he dwells on Brahman’s passing from the state of nirguna to saguna; and on topics like the Primordial Power (prakriti), the Great Cause (karan), Creation (sristi), and the Primeval sound ‘Om’ (anahata dhvani), the Great Being (mahat), the ‘I’-Consciousness (ahamkara), and the five Great Elements (pancha tanmatra).
28.10.60

Maharaj: Truly, thousands of books have been published on Vedanta, but you don't find it practiced anywhere. The yoga aspect of Vedanta is not there anymore. What else do you expect? The social system is dysfunctional. What we receive from the present education system is not education, but just literacy. Earlier, in the evenings the villagers used to chant the name of the Lord, or listen to the uplifting stories of Yudhishthira and others. As a result, they would develop ethical discipline and steadfastness. That is real education. Unemployment was never an issue in those days. Society was structured on the basis of professions. The son of a Brahmin would follow his father and earn his livelihood as a priest. His occupation was decided the moment he was born. The same system was followed by others—a blacksmith, a potter or a carpenter. Society is utterly ruined when this structure of social division (according to professions) is destroyed; it leads to hybridization (a mixture of various classes). You must have noticed in the Gita that the purpose of preserving this division of professions is so that all may live united within their community. I have heard that in Russia they are trying to eradicate unemployment.

29.10.60

Question: Rajen Ghosh has written that Acharya Shankara is greater than Ramanuja. From one point of view this is correct. Shankara proceeded up to Advaita, whereas Ramanuja stopped at Visishtadvaita.

Maharaj: Shankara came at a time when the Buddhists were engaged in mere intellectualism and the Brahmins in ritualism. He kept Hinduism alive in the midst of all that. But the religion he preached was not useful to the common people. From that point of view Ramanuja is surely greater than Shankara. We too follow the dicta ‘Krishna is revealed wherever the eyes go’ and ‘Shiva is immanent in all living beings’. From this standpoint the religion of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu is out-and-out a mass religion. But Sri Chaitanya didn't propagate any creed. His followers created a creed based on his life.

We have no conflict with anybody. When we enter the shrine we practise extreme dualism. As soon as we come out, we adopt the attitude of qualified monism. And when we sit in meditation we become monists. Therefore, we don't have conflict with anyone.

You should engage in work to test yourself, to check how far you have progressed. And during meditation, observe how much attachment you have for work. Both should run simultaneously. If you proceed in this way you will not get much entangled. Along with this, it is necessary to occasionally live in solitude. The Avatara (Sri Ramakrishna) has come to preach both abhyudaya (material prosperity) and nishreyasa (supreme beatitude).

Question: Shankara said that we cannot attain supreme knowledge by being engaged in work. But in this Order we hear that it is through work that we attain supreme knowledge. How can we reconcile these two ideas?

Maharaj: Shankara said that we cannot attain supreme knowledge by work. Some of our sadhus get agitated if any argument against work is given. They say that unless we work, our mind will not be purified and hence, knowledge cannot be attained. Actually, knowledge is not attained through work; it manifests later when we are able to renounce work. Knowledge is not something that has to be procured or acquired. ‘Love for Krishna (God) is ever realised and is never an object to be attained; it manifests in a mind purified by the practice of spiritual disciplines like hearing about it.’ (—A popular Bengali Vaishnava couplet).

(To be continued...)
'Once upon a time a wood-cutter went into a forest to chop wood. There suddenly he met a brahmachari. The holy man said to him, "My good man, go forward." On returning home, the wood-cutter asked himself, "Why did the brahmachari tell me to go forward?" Some time passed. One day he remembered the brahmachari's words. He said to himself, "Today, I shall go deeper into the forest." Going deep into the forest, he discovered innumerable sandalwood trees. He was very happy and returned with cartloads of sandalwood. He sold them in the market and became rich.

A few days later, he again remembered the words of the holy man to go forward. He went deeper into the forest and discovered a silver mine near a river. This was even beyond his dreams. He dug out silver from the mine and sold it in the market. He got so much money that he didn't even know how much he had.

A few more days passed. One day he thought, "The brahmachari didn't ask me to stop at the silver mine; he told me to go forward." This time he went to the other side of the river and found a gold mine. Then he exclaimed, "Ah, just see! This is why he asked me to go forward." Again, a few days afterwards, he went still deeper into the forest and found heaps of diamonds and other precious gems. He took these also and became as rich as the god of wealth himself.¹

This is one of the most favorite parables of Sri Ramakrishna, which he had narrated more than once to the devotees who came to him. He himself explains the parable of the wood-cutter thus:

'Work is by no means the goal of life. Go forward, and then you will be able to perform unselfish work.... Through unselfish work love of God grows in the heart.² 'With love and longing in your heart, pray to God, "O God, grant me devotion to Thy Lotus Feet and reduce my worldly duties." ... If you go still further you will realize God. You will see Him. In time, you will converse with Him.'

'Work is by no means the goal of life.' To remain engaged in work is like remaining in the forest. 'Go forward, and then you will be able to perform unselfish work.' This is equivalent to reaching the forest of sandalwood trees. 'Through unselfish work love of God grows in the heart.' Thus growing devotion to Lord and reduction of worldly duty is like arriving at the silver-mine. 'If you go still further you will realize God. You will see Him.' This is like getting the gold-mine. 'In time, you will converse with Him.' That is like finding and taking diamonds and other gems.

The article highlights the graded steps of spiritual progress described in Sri Ramakrishna’s parable of the woodcutter and in other scriptures.

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Elsewhere in The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, the Master has elucidated the parable differently:

‘Go forward. The king dwells beyond the seven gates. You can see him only after passing through all the gates.’

‘As you go nearer to God, you see less and less of His upadhis, His attributes. A devotee at first may see the Deity as the ten-armed Divine Mother; when he goes nearer he sees Her possessed of six arms; still nearer, he sees the Deity as the two armed Gopala. The nearer he comes to the Deity, the fewer attributes he sees. At last, when he comes into the presence of the Deity, he sees only light without any attributes.’

‘...The farther you advance, the more will you realize that God alone has become everything. He alone does everything...

‘The nearer you come to God, the more you feel peace. Peace, peace, peace – supreme peace...’

In the context of the awakening of Kundalini, Sri Ramakrishna describes the changes which take place in an aspirant as the Kundalini ascends from the lower to the higher centres:

‘The mind of a worldly man generally moves among the three lower centres: those at the naval, at the sexual organ and at the organ of evacuation... The Kundalini when awakened, passes through the lower centres and comes to Anahata which is at the heart... At that time the mind of the aspirant is withdrawn from the three lower centres. He feels the awakening of Divine Consciousness and sees light... The centre known as Visuddha is the fifth plane... When the Kundalini reaches this plane, the devotee longs to talk and hear only about God. Conversation on worldly subjects, on ‘woman and gold,’ causes him great pain... Then comes the sixth plane, corresponding to the centre known as Ajna... When the Kundalini reaches it, the aspirant sees the form of God. But still there remains a slight barrier between the devotee and God. It is like a light inside a lantern. You may think you have touched the light, but in reality you cannot because of the barrier of glass. And last of all is the seventh plane... When the Kundalini arrives there, the aspirant goes into samadhi...’

Before we study in depth Sri Ramakrishna's comments on his own parable, let us study some other concepts. Take for example the well-known Sanskrit verse which says:

दुर्जनः सज्जनो भूयात् सज्जनः शान्तिमाणुयात् ||
शान्तो मुचयेत िन्धेभयो मुक्तश्रानयान् विमोचयेत् ॥

‘May the wicked become virtuous; may the virtuous attain peace; may the peaceful get liberated; (and finally) may the free help others to gain freedom.’

Most of us are virtuous. But let us remember that that is not all. There are stages ahead and unless one is aware of them and struggles to attain them, there cannot be any progress.

Or, take another well-known couplet which describes the various stages of worship:

प्रथमा प्रवतमा-पूजा जपसतोत्तरद मधयमः ।
उत्तमा मानसरी पूजा सोऽह्वं पूजोत्तमोत्तमा ॥

‘First is image worship; the next is (the vocal worship performed by) hymns and chanting of the name of God. Better still is mental worship. Identification with the deity of the worship is the best.’

The Sanskrit verse quoted above has also a rendering with a reverse order of worship:

उत्तमो ब्रह्मसद्यो ध्यानभािसतु मधयमः ।
जप सतोत्ः अधमो भािः, बाह्य पुजा अधमाधमः

‘The further you advance, the more will you realize that God alone has become everything. He alone does everything’
‘Best is to have union with Brahman. Meditation is the mediocre state. Japa and chanting of hymns is inferior. External worship is the lowest.’

Again, take, for example, the four stages described in the 12th chapter of the Bhagavad Gita where Sri Krishna has indicated a reverse order of spiritual practice:

‘Fix your mind on Me, let your intellect rest in Me, you will live in Me alone hereafter; there is no doubt (about it). If, however, you are not able to fix the mind steadily on Me, then through the Yoga of Practice, seek to attain me, O Dhananjaya. If you are unable even to practice, then be solely devoted to rites for Me; even by doing work for My sake, you will attain perfection. If, however, you are unable to do even this, then taking refuge in Me, and being self-controlled, renounce with effort the fruits of all action. Knowledge is superior to mere practice, meditation is superior to knowledge, superior to meditation is renunciation of fruits of action. From renunciation results peace immediately.’

In the celebrated book on Christian mysticism The Cloud of Unknowing the unknown author has, in the very first chapter divided the life of a Christian into four degrees: Common, Special, Singular and Perfect. A Christian, leading a ‘Common’ life, lives in the world, but, although he has faith, he has no spiritual aspiration. The one, who has divine calling to lead a ‘Special’ life, gets spiritually awakened and tries to lead a spiritual life in a monastery. The ‘Singular’ person leads an intense solitary life of spiritual struggle, and the ‘Perfect’ one attains the coveted goal.

Abdul Bin Mubarak, a Sufi saint has given a very interesting reverse order of virtues. When people asked him what was beneficial, he said, it was a sharp and efficient intellect. People asked, ‘If that is not there?’ He replied, ‘Right conduct is the next best.’ ‘If, even, that cannot be gained?’ ‘A wise brother, who could be consulted if required.’ ‘But if even such a brother or friend is not there?’ ‘In that case,’ the saint said, ‘It is better to remain silent.’ People continued and asked, ‘If even that is not possible?’ ‘For such a person nothing can be more beneficial than death,’ the saint concluded.

In the well-known Vedantic text, Vichara-Sagara by Nishchaldas, similar retrograde steps have been mentioned. After describing the technique of meditation on the attribute-less Brahman with the help of syllable ‘Om’, the sage says:

‘If you are not able to thus meditate on the Attribute-less (nirguna), set your mind on God with attributes (saguna). If you are not able to meditate on the saguna, do your prescribed duties without any desire for results and devote yourself to God (chant the name and glories of Rama). If you cannot even perform actions unselfishly, remain engaged in noble acts. If oh rogue, you cannot even do this, then you shall continue to die and be born again.’

Swami Yatiswarananda has described the stages of spiritual unfoldment, especially useful for a spiritual aspirant, in his book Meditation and Spiritual Life. According to him, an aspirant begins his spiritual journey by being attracted towards a holy personality and by according worship to Him/Her. As he proceeds, he sees more and more divinity in his Chosen Ideal. Further, he realizes that he too is a divine entity, though there is greater divinity in the Chosen Ideal. Next, he finds that both he and the deity are the manifestation of the Supreme Spirit, he being the lesser and deity being the greater manifestation. He now perceives the Supreme Reality more clearly, and still ahead as clearly as he himself. Finally, his existence merges into the Supreme Reality. Later he sees the Supreme Reality not only in his own Chosen Ideal and in all the Divine Incarnations, but also in all living beings. According to Swami Yatiswarananda, there is no limit to spiritual experience.
In Jainism, a ladder of spiritual ascent with 14 stages has been described, which is mostly a ladder of ethical and moral advancement from the first stage of moral depravity and absolute ignorance to perfect moral excellence and self-control. The spiritual progress begins with the fourth stage when the individual accepts the right faith. In the fifth and sixth stages, he/she takes the householders’ and monks’ vows respectively. 7th to 12th stages are the grades of increasing moral excellences according to the Jain concept. In the 13th stage the individual becomes a Jivanmukta, an Arhat. In the 14th he/she casts off the body and becomes Videhamukta, or a siddha.14

Jainas also describe another ladder for the householders—how he gradually advances to the stage of being a monk. He gradually reduces his involvements in worldly activities and goes on increasing his control on his senses. After having passed the eleven steps, he no longer remains a householder, sravaka, but becomes a monk, a muni.

St. Teresa of Avila, the Christian mystic-saint of Spain has also provided us with a ladder of spiritual ascent in her spiritual classic Interior Castle. According to her, this castle within has seven mansions. The first three are related to ordinary prayer, or what is called in Christian terminology active prayer. The first mansion is the soul’s state of grace but it is surrounded by sin. It is only starting to seek God’s grace through humility. The second is the mansion of practice of prayer, i.e., of having thoughts of God daily. The third is the mansion of exemplary life: In this by divine grace there is so great a love for God that the devotee wishes to give up mental and venial sins and there is no limit to spiritual experiences.
desires to do charitable service to human beings. The mansions from the fourth onwards are considered mystical, in the sense that they are concerned with contemplative life. According to St. Teresa, first there is mental prayer, followed by the prayer of the quiet in which human will is gradually lost in God’s will. Then an ecstatic state of bliss and peace is achieved. The last two stages are compared to ‘betrothal’ and ‘marriage’ with God. With every advance, human will gets reduced and God’s will takes an upper-hand.15

A similar concept is described by Madhusudana Saraswati in the eleven steps of advancement on the path of devotion to God, Bhakti, in his book *Sribhagavad-Bhakti Rasayana*.16 They are: Serving the holy or the company of the holy. This results in obtaining the grace of holy sages. Faith in the values related to Bhakti (Bhagavad Dharmas) thus arises. Listening to the glories of Hari and such related practices naturally follow. In the fifth stage there is sprouting of love for God. This fifth stage is the very nature of Bhakti. The succeeding six stages are the fruit of this stage, and are attained on the maturity of this stage. Then the individual realizes his real nature and there is increase in love for God. Up to this seventh stage, spiritual practices have to be done. The remaining four stages are achieved without any self-effort. These include God Realization due to exuberance of divine love. Next, there is establishment in devotional practices. Imbibing the qualities of God in oneself is the next stage. The highest stage is when the Bhakta is not able to bear the slightest separation from God and feels excruciating pain in such separation.16

The *Yoga Vasishtha* describes seven stages of ascent to the highest knowledge: Renunciation of worldly attachments and activities through discrimination and cultivation of traits like restraint of the senses and the mind, abstinence from sensual thought, forbearance, faith, and meditation out of an intense desire for liberation constitute the first plane, *Shubheccha*. Formally approaching a guru and undertaking study of and reflection on Vedantic dicta under his or her guidance is the second stage, *Vicharana*. The mental capacity to apprehend subtle spiritual truths, developed through practice of contemplation on Vedantic truths, *nididhyasana*, marks the third plane, *Tanumanasa*. The fourth plane, *Sattvapatti*, is characterized by the non-dual realization of the oneness of Atman and Brahman, resulting from *sravana*—instruction on Vedantic mahavakyas, comprehensive unitary statements, by a competent teacher. When the mind practicing *nirodha*, restraint, moves beyond objective or *savikalpaksamadhi* to *nirvikalpaksamadhi*, an objectless state, then it is said to have reached the fifth plane, termed *Asamsakti*. The permanent and steady establishment in this state, born of sustained effort on the previous planes, is termed *Padarthabhavini*, the sixth plane. When the yogi is so established in Brahman, so soaked in the bliss of samadhi as never to return to a lower plane, either of one’s own accord or through others’ efforts, then that yogi is on the ultimate plane, *Turyaga*.17

The message conveyed through these ladders is quite obvious and can be summarized in one word: ‘Progress’, a word which everyone understands. A father wants his son to ‘go forward’, in his studies, so does the student want to move forwards from 10th to 12th, thence to graduation, post-graduation, doctorate and so on. A poor man possibly might begin his life as a petty street vendor, carrying a basket of fruits on his head. He earns a little and gets a trolley to carry his goods. He further progresses and puts up a small shop in a rented place. He continues to labour and goes forward to a bigger shop of his own and may finally become the owner of a super-market or a mall. A person might begin his/her career as a petty teacher in a middle school, but may continue to
progress by persistent effort and ultimately reach the post of a principal or a director of an educational institution. We are, however, interested here in the achievements of a sincere spiritual aspirant as he struggles to go forward, as described by Sri Ramakrishna.

The forest of Sri Ramakrishna’s parable in which the carpenter dwelled could mean leading a worldly life – in the world forest. The world is often described as a forest, in religious literature – sansara-aranya. To enter the forest of sandalwood would mean beginning to lead a noble life, by giving up lust, greed, anger, attachments and aversion etc. As one settles down in a nobler way of life, he gradually becomes in drawn and peaceful. It is not a fact that all good people are peaceful. They continue to be restless although they may not be wicked. To be peaceful and introspective is like reaching the silver mine. According to Sri Ramakrishna, these mines of silver, gold and gems stand for higher spiritual stages: love, ecstasy, etc.

One of the major problems of spiritual life is being stuck at the level of sandalwood forest. Whether a person might be living in the world or in the monastery, the urge to turn within and seek spiritual experience somehow dies. This is also as serious a danger as ‘woman and gold’ which is lust and greed. How is it that among thousands of people, only a few strive for spiritual excellence? And even among those who thus strive a rare few attain it as pointed out by Sri Krishna.18 Like the world of ignorance – the world-forest, the forest of sandalwood – the world of wisdom, of vidyamaya also has its own allurements. A person may not get bound by attachment to spouse, children, name and fame, wealth and prosperity, but might get caught up by the desire to do good to others, something against which Sri Ramakrishna has repeatedly warned. If God were to appear before you, he would ask, would you ask for schools and hospitals, or for knowledge and devotion? While he loved and respected Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and demonstrated his respect for him by visiting him and praising him in front of the assembled people, he also frankly said that there was a treasure within his heart, and if he were to get a glimpse of it, he would not get involved into philanthropic activities.19

Just as there are levels of achievements in the worldly life, there are also various levels in a religious life. Joining a holy monastic order as a novice; becoming a pre-probationer and later a probationer; having the preliminary vows; getting initiated into sannyasa; becoming the head of a centre in due course—these are some external landmarks in the life of a monk. Unfortunately, in the course of time, these become all important and the inner journey, the actually all important spiritual advancement becomes secondary if not altogether forgotten. Sri Ramakrishna’s another favorite parable is of a monk who got a cat to save his loin cloth from being torn by the mouse; then a cow for its milk; and finally acquired a piece of land for fodder...!

Thus, there are three main dangers—apart from many minor ones: not to have a clear idea about the goal and the path, and not to firmly hold on to them; to get stranded on the way; and lastly, to get side-tracked. It is very important in the spiritual journey from the sandalwood forest onwards to know clearly where we stand or upon which station we have reached. It is equally important not to stop at intermediate stations. Most of the mediocre aspirants get stranded, or side tracked, either due to ignorance of the path and stages ahead or due to carelessness.

Three main dangers:
1) Not having a clear idea about the goal and the path.
2) Getting stranded on the way.
3) Getting side-tracked.
But there have always been sincere and alert aspirants who do not stop and in one leap, as it were, reach the goal. Swami Vivekananda was one such heroic aspirant who in one bounce reached the Nirvikalpa Samadhi. In a charming little best seller story, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, the author has described a seagull named Jonathan, who was different from others of his species and rapidly ascended the heights of flying feats. Complimenting him, his instructor once said: ‘...You are pretty well a one-in-a-million bird. Most of us came along ever so slowly. But you Jon, learnt so much at one time that you didn’t have to go through a thousand lives to reach this one.’

Let us therefore carefully find out where we stand in the spiritual journey. Here a number of ladders or gradations from different sources have been given. An aspirant may assess himself / herself according to one or more of them and continue the journey without stopping till the goal is reached. *

References


Freedom is the Watchword

Freedom is the watchword. Be free! A free body, a free mind, and a free soul! That is what I have felt all my life; I would rather be doing evil freely than be doing good under bondage.

Freedom is only possible when no external power can exert any influence, produce any change. Freedom is only possible to the being who is beyond all conditions, all laws, all bondages of cause and effect. In other words, the unchangeable alone can be free and, therefore, immortal. This Being, this Atman, this real Self of man, the free, the unchangeable is beyond all conditions, and as such, it has neither birth nor death.

What we want is freedom, not life, nor pleasure, nor good. Creation is eternal, without beginning, without end, the ever-moving ripple in an infinite lake. There are yet unreached depths and others where stillness has been regained, but the ripple is ever progressing, the struggle to regain the balance is eternal. Life and death are but different names for the same fact, they are the two sides of one coin. Both are Maya, the inexplicable state of striving at one point to live and a moment later to die. Beyond all this is the true nature, the Atman.

—Swami Vivekananda
Philosophy of Bhagavad Gita

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There are various divergent concepts thriving under the name of Hinduism. Amidst this diversity, there are some core common concepts on which almost all Hindu saints agree. Some of these concepts as presented in the Bhagavad Gita are listed here. References to the relevant verses from the Gita are given in brackets.

1. All creatures, including human beings seek happiness. If questioned under what conditions we want happiness, the answer is always, everywhere and unconditional. If unconditional happiness is possible, it should be here and now. The only reason we are not happy is because we are not availing the intrinsic happiness and fulfilment. Problems will be there in life. Even in the worst of situations, we always have the freedom to put up a brave, cheerful face and handle the problems head on. This emotional independence by which we can assert our happiness that is independent of people, objects and situations is the goal. This is called Moksha. (2:11, 2:55-2:57, 2:71)

2. We are not able to avail the happiness because of wrong assumption about our identity. If we know and assert our real identity, we will be happy naturally, because that is our true nature. We need to go step by step from where we are. First, we need to get out of lethargy into activity. Second, we have to turn selfish activity into selfless activity. Third, we need to develop the capacity to be introvert. Finally, we need to find deep within ourselves our real nature. (5:7, 6:3, 6:10, 6:27, 4:33, 4:34, 18:20)

3. Most of modern Hinduism is based on the Vedanta philosophy. On the foundation of the basic tenets of Vedanta, Hinduism allows people to have variations in the details and encourages diverse practices to suit different temperaments. Hinduism believes in the principle of Unity in Diversity. (4:1-4.3, 4:11, 7:21, 9:14, 9:15, 12:8-12:11)

4. The individual, called jiva is the possessor of freewill. As freewill is ‘free’ from matter, memories and emotions, the jiva is not a part or product or property of the body or mind. The jiva is an independent entity, who expresses and experiences through the body and mind. (15:7, 15:8, 15:9, 15:16, 2:12, 2:13, 2:22)
The jiva is wholly responsible for all the situations faced in life. (6.5) The present situation faced by the jiva is the result of the past actions (physical, verbal and mental) of the jiva. The future situations that will be presented to the jiva will be the result of the past and present actions of the jiva. The jiva cannot escape the good and bad consequences of its actions, even by death. (6:41, 6:42, 16:18, 16:19, 16:20, 9:3, 13:22) This is called the Law of Karma.

Isvara is the sum total of all that exists. (7:4, 7:5, 11:7, 11:13, 11:38) Isvara is that Supreme Being, to whom the entire material Universe is the body, the sum total of the minds of all jivas is the mind, and He identifies with the whole of existence. So, Isvara is everywhere as everything. (11:5, 9:4, 13:14, 13:15, 13:16, 13:17)

Devatas are the cosmic equivalents of the various faculties of an individual. For example, the sum total of the seeing faculty of all the jivas put together forms the seeing faculty of the Isvara, and is represented by the Surya devata. Worship with a desire for specific worldly security and prosperity is done to the corresponding devata. This kind of worship is inferior to worshiping the Isvara. (7:22, 7:23, 9:25)

Isvara has created, or rather has become or appears as, the jagat (Universe) for the benefit of the jivas to express and experience, by which they will mature in wisdom, which is the purpose of the existence of the Universe. For this, Isvara creates, sustains and recycles the Universe. (9:17, 10:20, 13:17) The jivas continue to exist with all their past effects and impressions intact even on recycling of the Universe. (8:19)

Isvara knows the innermost thoughts and intentions of every jiva. (10:20, 18:63) Isvara oversees the reward of every physical, verbal and mental action of every jiva in a fair and appropriate manner. (4:11, 9:19, 7:21, 7:22) This does not make Isvara judgmental because, Isvara is not different from the whole of existence. It is Isvara, as it were, that enjoys or suffers as the jiva itself. (13:15, 13:23, 9:24) Isvara is compassionate to every jiva. In fact, the jiva is not apart from Isvara. (7:7) It is just the Law of Nature that results in the reward, under the supervision of Isvara. Isvara wants every jiva to learn from the good and bad experiences encountered in life and grow in wisdom. (4:33) Even if the jiva has done a lot of bad deeds before, making a resolution to change for good and trying to be good henceforth is the most valuable decision, because the current intention is more important. (9:30,31)

Isvara’s teachings are available in the form of the Vedas, which was revealed to rishis in the distant past. (4:1) Isvara teaches the jivas through various saints in all places and in all ages. (4:2, 4:3, 4:34) Isvara is accessible to any sincere jiva in any place in any age. (7:21, 4:10) Occasionally, Isvara comes in the midst of the jivas in the garb of another jiva (incarnation) to help and teach the jivas. Isvara has come innumerable times in the past and will come innumerable times in the future. (4:6, 4:7, 4:8) Any teaching of anyone in any age is acceptable as authentic if it does not contradict the Vedas. (13:25, 16:23, 16:24)
IN THIS ISSUE:

Message 8
Be open to learning from anyone

Swami Vivekananda asks us to be ready and open to learning from everyone around us, and not trapped in our limited notions of learning. In his own words:

“We must be always ready to sit at the feet of all, for, mark you, every one can teach us great lessons.”

CW:III: 272
The story of Avadhuta
- a role model in learning from everyone

An upa-guru is anyone from whom something can be learnt. The Great Avadhuta (mentioned in Bhagavata) had 24 upa-gurus - Earth, Wind, Sky, Water, Fire, Moon, Sun, a Dove, a Python, Ocean, a Moth, a Honeybee, an Elephant, a Honey-gatherer, a Deer, a Fish, a Courtesan, a Kite, a Child, a Maiden, an Arrow-smith/Hunter, a Snake, a Spider, and a Worm.

Here are three examples of how Avadhuta learnt from his upa-gurus -

One day as the Avadhuta was walking across a garden, he saw a marriage procession coming towards him with loud beating of drums and great pomp. Nearby he saw a hunter deeply involved in aiming at a bird and not caring for the noise of the procession, casting not even a passing look at it. The Avadhuta, saluting the hunter, said, "Sir, thou art my Guru. From you I have learnt what is concentration".

A kite with a fish in its beak was followed by a number of crows and other kites, which were trying to snatch the fish away. In whatever direction it went, the other birds followed it. At last the kite let go of the fish. Another kite instantly caught the fish. Now it was its turn to be followed by a whole lot of birds. The first kite was now sitting calmly on the branch of a tree. Seeing this quiet and tranquil state of the bird, the Avadhuta, saluting him, said, "Thou art my Guru, for thou has taught me that peace of mind is possible in this world, only when one has given up clinging to false desires".

The Avadhuta found another Guru in a bee. The bee had been storing up honey with long and great labour. A man came from somewhere, broke the hive and drank up the honey. The bee was not destined to enjoy the fruit of its long labour. On seeing this, the Avadhuta saluted the bee saying, "Lord! Though art my Guru; from Thee I learn what is the sure fate of stored riches".

Story Source: Adapted from Tales & Parables of Sri Ramakrishna published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai
What stops us from learning from others?
Here are 6 barriers that any one of us may face...

**Barrier 1: Age**
Two people are having a discussion. One of them is a 25 year old who is explaining new developments in his field. The older person, 75 year old Ramesh, feels...

> All these are newfangled ideas. These kids of today think that they have invented everything!

Ramesh's ego of age prevents him from learning from youngsters, who may have new, radical ideas.

**Barrier 2: Position**
A project manager asks a junior employee to take a seminar on a new software for all the team members. Vignesh, a team lead feels...

> He is just a junior. What can he teach us?

Vignesh thinks he has nothing to learn from those who are lower in position than him, thus blocking off opportunities to learn.

**Barrier 3: Education/Expertise**
Lalita is a post graduate in agricultural engineering. She visits a rural farmland for research. While interacting with a farmer...

> Why don’t these villagers listen to what I’m saying? I’m the expert after all. Instead, he keeps talking about how their silly methods work...

Taking the stance of an expert, Lalita is blind to the valuable traditional wisdom & knowledge which only a farmer will be able to offer.

**Barrier 4: Experience**
A new person joins an NGO after many years of experience in the finance industry. During a team discussion, he shares his ideas of how things can be done. However, another employee Shravan feels...

> I’ve been working in this field for 10 years! What does a finance person like him know about all this!

Because Shravan feels he is ‘experienced’, he is unable to keep an open mind & learn from someone with less/no experience in his field.

**Barrier 5: Preconceived opinion of the person**
A well-known journalist has written a detailed article on a controversial subject in a magazine. Here’s how Anu & Vir, two readers, are thinking about it...

This journalist supports XYZ political party. He will definitely be biased. I’d rather not read it.

This journalist is highly acclaimed. If he is reporting, it must be right.

Both Anu & Vir's preconceived opinions stop them from keeping an open mind, instead they've arrived at a conclusion without reading or engaging with it.

**Barrier 6: Not invented here**
Krish is working in a tech giant. When he hears of a lesser known start-up working on the same breakthrough technology that he is working on...

> Our firm has spearheaded most of the breakthrough inventions of the last decade. I doubt if these people will come out with anything of value!

In fact, it'll be helpful for them to collaborate & learn from us.

Such a pride in his own capabilities and knowledge, makes Krish believe that there will be nothing that he can learn from others.
Practice learning from others

Map what you have learnt from each of these sources of knowledge, and what more you can learn in the future

Share examples of your experiences of trying out these practices, on www.vivekanandaway.org

Any questions that come up in your mind while doing so, can also be discussed here.
“Poorva,” the Swami called out to her as he watched her pace up and down outside his room.

She came and stood hesitantly at the doorway.

“Bored?” the Swami asked.

She half smiled, not sure what her reply should be, or even how she should address him. It was now two days since he had come to their house, and Poorva was discovering that he was far from what she had imagined him to be. He was a soft-spoken, gentle old man, who never seemed to lose his cool.

“Why don’t you come inside, Poorva? I’d like to talk to you.”

She sat on the floor, a few feet from him.

“Your mother tells me that you like to read traditional stories.”

She nodded.

“Which are your favourite ones?”

The warmth in his voice made her respond to him. “I like the stories of Rama, Krishna, Gajendra, Parikshit ... I have a huge collection of picture books about all the gods and goddesses.”

“I think I may have something new to tell you.” His wrinkled face lit up as he smiled.

“What?” Poorva’s interest was roused.

“Before I come to that, tell me, what do you like about the stories that you’ve read?”
Poorva was beginning to enjoy the conversation. “I like everything about those stories, especially the miracles that go with them.”

“Would you like to experience some miracles?”

“You mean, watching DVDs? No thanks, I prefer books any day.” She felt comfortable talking to this friendly old Swami.

“No! That was not what I had in mind. We could go on a journey to –”

“I don’t want to go temple-hopping.” She did not allow the Swami to complete his sentence, but she wondered simultaneously what it would be like to travel with a swami. He would probably sing bhajans all the way. And her vacation would end up being full of ‘holy days’ instead of holidays. Poorva laughed aloud. The ice between them had been broken.

“No, it’ll be a holiday filled with miracles and stories of real people …”

Poorva giggled. “Sounds great. And when do we go?”

“No time better than now.”

“And how? In a pushpaka vimaanam?” She was sure he was kidding.

“No. I’ll close my eyes and pray. You close yours too.”

Poorva looked at the Swami. Amma and Appa were repeatedly pleading with her, “Spend some time with Swami Thaatha. He’ll tell you interesting stories.” Now the Swami was saying she could ‘watch’ some stories. And he did not appear to be joking. Poorva was beginning to feel curious. “I’ll give it a try.” She closed her eyes, half in jest and half seriously.

“O … MMM …” she heard the Swami chant. His voice, soft and soothing, filled her ears and mind.

***

“Poorva.”

As if she had been waiting for his permission, she quickly opened her eyes. “Uff! I was getting really bored simply sitting here, doing nothing” she remarked.

Ah, what was this she saw? Everything had changed! The people around her, the streets, the houses, they all looked different and very old-fashioned. She saw bullock carts and horse-drawn carriages – there was not a single car, or even a bicycle, for that matter!

Slowly, she steadied herself and pushed back a curl that had fallen on her forehead. She took in her new surroundings and exclaimed, “We seem to be in a different land!”

“Yes! And in a different time too,” the Swami added helpfully.

“So you weren’t joking, after all. But this is fun. Where are we?”

“In a place called Thirukkovalur.”

Before she could ask him anything more, the skies darkened. The next minute, there was a heavy downpour. Looking for shelter, they both stepped into the outer verandah of a house. The place was
small and dark. Poorva huddled in a corner. “Aachoo!” she sneezed. “Aach ...” She was about to sneeze again. It stopped halfway when she spotted someone.

“Look, I can see someone lying there,” Poorva whispered, pointing towards the centre of the verandah.

The sound of footsteps caught her attention. She saw one more person hurrying in. He too was obviously looking for shelter from the pouring rain.

“There isn’t any space here,” Poorva whispered again.

“Be quiet. Let’s listen to them,” the Swami suggested.

“If there is place for one to lie down, there is place for two to sit.” With these words, the man who was lying down sat up and offered the visitor a place beside him.

“That was very nice of him.” Poorva had barely completed her sentence, when yet another person rushed in.

“He definitely can’t fit in here.” She shook her head, then heard a voice say, “If two can sit, I suppose three can stand.”

Poorva figured that it was the voice of the second man. She craned her neck and saw the three men huddling together. A rat scurried past her in the darkness and Poorva almost jumped out of her skin in fright.

Splash! The next moment, she had slipped and fallen into a pool of water.

“Thank God, it was only a puddle you fell into, not a poigai,” the Swami remarked as he helped her up.

“Poigai? What on earth is that?” Although she was thoroughly wet, Poorva’s curiosity had not been dampened.

The Swami replied, “It’s a Tamil word for ‘pond’. The person who was lying down when we came in – his name is Poigai Aazhvaar.”

For a fraction of a second, Poorva was stunned that the Swami knew the identity of the stranger. The old man was certainly some sort of a magician. Otherwise, how could she be here? He also seemed to know everything! Poorva concluded that her granduncle was indeed an extraordinary Swami.

She asked, “And who are the other two?”

“They are Bhootham Aazhvaar and Pey Aazhvaar.”

“You mean ghosts?” Poorva shrieked, for she knew that bhootham and pey in Tamil meant ‘ghost’. She was shocked that anyone could have names like that.

“No, no, they got their names for other reasons.” (To be continued...)

The book is available through www.lakshmidevnath.com
QUESTION: The expression Jnanamisra-bhakti (Bhakti mixed with Jnana) is frequently used in Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. Kindly explain its real meaning and how it should be practised. How is it different from ordinary Bhakti?

MAHARAJ: To make the matter clear, the expression ‘ordinary Bhakti’ must be explained. Ordinary Bhakti can be understood to mean ‘conventional devotion,’ i.e., acceptance of certain creeds and practices and of certain devotional observances that have come to one through family tradition. But it becomes genuine Bhakti only when it is made dynamic by Sraddha, the deep-seated acceptance of spiritual values as a dominant factor in life.

In all Bhakti there is an element of Jnana. For man to love anything, there must be some preceding knowledge of it. But the demand for knowledge ceases when a strong link of affection is established. This affection may be based on the gains you are likely to have by serving the person faithfully and winning his favour; or it may be based on the feeling that the person is one's ‘own’, irrespective of what one gets from him or not. When anything is one’s ‘own’, it becomes sweet, irrespective of gains.

Now in Bhakti also, these factors can be observed. Generally man thinks of God as the omnipotent and omniscient Creator. The divine majesty is in the forefront of his thought and to win the favour of such a being by prayer and adoration is considered very necessary for his welfare here and hereafter. But when man becomes more philosophical in outlook and less and less anthropomorphic in his conception, his mind is weaned away from thoughts of worldly return. He thinks more and more of the basic relationship between him and the Supreme Being and he draws more and more emotional sustenance from a sense of his dependence on Him and His capacity and readiness to save man from Samsara (worldly bondage). It ends in self-surrender through philosophic reflection and adoration. This kind of devotion is what is called Bhakti which is mixed with Jnana. In its highest development, it may end in mergence in the Divine.

In contrast to this, there is a kind of devotion with the main emphasis on sentiment. Here the majesty of God, though known in a way, is only in the background of thought. That God is one's ‘own’ becomes so dominant in this kind of devotion that the sense of His nearness practically displaces the sense of His might. How a soul can have such a sense of nearness as to feel the Omnipresent and the Omnipotent to be an object to be loved in a personal way as father, mother, friend, husband, etc., is one of the mysterious aspects of divine love. This kind of love is chiefly...
depicted in the life of Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavata Purana*, where Bhakti takes an intensely personal form and the Almighty is loved as one’s ‘own’ child or friend or beloved. This kind of Bhakti is sometimes called ‘ignorant Bhakti.’ But it is not that ignorant as the term might indicate. For it is not as if there is no awareness of divine majesty, but it is overshadowed by the sense of one’s ‘ownness’ and by the intensity of affection.

It is in contrast to this type of devotion that the earlier pattern is described as Jnanamisra-bhakti, where a feeling of philosophic relationship rather than a personal relationship is more dominantly present. This philosophic relationship can ultimately end in a sense of oneness with Him also.

So Madhusudana Saraswati, a great Advaitic scholar and an equally great theoretician on Bhakti, says: ‘I am His; He is mine; I am He — devotion takes these three forms according to the maturity of one’s spiritual striving.’ Now the attitude ‘I am His’ and ‘I am He,’ we can say, are born of Jnana at different stages of development. In the first of these, we may say that there is a full and dominant consciousness of divine majesty, and so it is mixed with Jnana. In its maturity, the Jiva surrenders and is merged in the Supreme Spirit. The Bhakti and the Jnana become absolutely unified.

But in ignorant Bhakti, where the feeling is that the Lord is ‘mine’, as in the case of the associates of Sri Krishna, they do not care even for His power to give Mukti (liberation). They do not love Him for his power, but only because He is their ‘own’ and is the quintessence of perfection. They do not seek Mukti, but only Seva, the privilege of being His servants through eternity. Most people are fit only for Jnanamisra-bhakti and not for this kind of super devotion which can overcome the sense of divine majesty in the feeling that He is one’s own. If pure Jnana obliterates the I-sense by mergence, this kind of Bhakti obliterates it by the sense of ‘mineness’ with the Lord and the service following that sense.

There is a little difference in opinion between the teachers of knowledge and those of love, though both admit the power of Bhakti. The Jnanis hold Bhakti to be an instrument of liberation, the Bhaktas look upon it both as the instrument and the thing to be attained. To my mind this is a distinction without much difference. In fact, Bhakti, when used as an instrument, really means a lower form of worship, and the higher form becomes inseparable from the lower form of realisation at a later stage. Each seems to lay a great stress upon his own peculiar method of worship, forgetting that with perfect love true knowledge is bound to come even unsought, and that from perfect knowledge true love is inseparable.

— *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. 3: 34
By having a relationship with Isvara, which is based on faith, gratitude and love, the jivas can face the ups and downs of life with poise. The relationship will help them to be honest, compassionate, disciplined, unselfish, peaceful and happy even under extreme situations in life. With this equanimity and poise, the jivas will be able to learn from the various experiences, grow in wisdom and understand that they are not apart from Isvara. (12:13-12:20, 9:34, 12:6, 12:7) This relationship is called *Bhakti*.

To develop the relationship with Isvara, *puja* (worship) is a very effective exercise. Isvara can be worshipped as without form or through any form. It depends on the temperament of the worshipper. (12:2, 12:3, 12:4) The worship can be physical, verbal or mental. As Isvara is everywhere, knows the innermost thoughts and is compassionate, all that is needed is love and sincerity. (9:26) Isvara will know even if the jiva calls Him by any name. Isvara can be worshiped as male or female or neither or beyond. Isvara can be worshiped through any aspect of Nature, any of the devatas or any form. (11:5) Different forms of mental worship are called *upasana* (meditation). Hinduism has developed a detailed system of preparations and procedures of meditation that is suitable to people of different temperaments. (6:10-6:28) Usage of images and other representations of Isvara helps to concentrate the mind and form a personal emotional relationship with Isvara. Stories of incarnations, saints and devotees, stories of divine personalities which incorporate various aspects of Isvara, allegories that help meditation on various qualities of Isvara and various legends help forming a personal relationship with Isvara. Any form of worship invoking an all-pervading, all-knowing, all-powerful and compassionate entity is accepted as worship of Isvara. (7:21, 7:22)

As Isvara is the whole of existence, anything that the jiva does is an offering to Isvara and any situation that the jiva faces in life is from Isvara only. Thus, every moment of life is an interaction with Isvara only. So, doing full justice to the current situation in which the jiva is placed by doing its duty as an offering to Isvara, is itself a form of worship of Isvara. (18:46, 9:27, 11:55) This is called *Karma Yoga*.

At every level – physical, emotional, intellectual, sub-conscious and pure Consciousness – the individual (jiva) is not separate from the whole (Isvara). The individuality of the jiva is only an appearance and it is only for the sake of convenience of transaction. The individuality is not real. When the jiva understands fully and deeply that it is not apart from Isvara, the goal is reached. Freed from the cycle of desire, action and result, the jiva merges with Isvara and attains real peace. This goal is called *moksha* - freedom. (13:31, 13:32, 6:29, 6:30, 6:31, 2:71, 2:72)

The Hindu way of life is harmonious living with the world, people and other living beings in it, knowing the interconnectedness of everything, considering *everything as divine*. Hinduism encourages and celebrates diversity. All daily rituals, traditional customs, festivals, stories, legends, pilgrimages and art forms of Hindus are designed to imbibe these principles. Engaging with them knowing how they are connected to the principles given here will lead to a rich cultural, emotional, intellectual and fulfilling life. *
Dear Devotees,

Association with the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission motivates people to come together and serve the humanity as a form of worship.

Ramakrishna Vivekananda Educational Trust run by the devotees of Bhagwan Sri Ramakrishna at Mariyamman Kovil (near Thanjavur) is rendering Service in the rural areas of Thanjavur District for the past 26 years. Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai is going to open a Centre in the historical Town of Thanjavur for further expansion of the service activities. We earnestly seek generous contribution for this project.

1. Getting land for the Ashrama Rs.80 lakh
2. Establishing the Ashrama with a new Temple Rs. 3 crore
3. For rural development projects Rs. 1 crore
4. For Nitya Pooja of Sri Ramakrishna Rs. 50 lakh
5. Endowment for Sadhu Seva Rs. 50 lakh
6. For the renovation of the existing Temple Rs. 20 lakh

Sri Ramakrishna Math
31, Sri Ramakrishna Math Road,
email : mail@chennaimath.org
website : www.chennaimath.org    For more details : 98409 87307

May the blessings of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna be on you is my earnest prayer to Him.
Exceptional Traits of Swami Vivekananda
by Dr. Sudhish Chandra Banerjee

Swami Vivekananda was an inborn genius with a multi-dimensional personality. Though usually considered a spiritual leader or a prophet of modern India, his human aspect too was equally interesting and a matter of deep study by all those who aspire high in life. The exceptional traits of this great personality have made the world wonder and have been inspiring millions in various walks of life.

Psychological Aspects of Spiritual Life
By Swami Nityasthananda

The Psychological Aspects of Spiritual Life is a subject of vital importance in modern times. With the struggles of a fast competitive life, our mental health is bound to be affected, and unless we take the necessary precautions it may lead to severe problems. Also for those who aspire for a higher spiritual life, a calm and pure mind is a must. Hence understanding our mind and its workings becomes a dire necessity.
AN APPEAL

Dear Friend / devotee / well-wisher,

You all know that Sri Ramakrishna spent the last few months of his life (naralila) in Shyampukur Bati and Cossipore. In Shyampukur Bati, Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda and other brother disciples spent 70 days together. Here Sri Ramakrishna was worshipped as Mother Kali on Kalipuja night by Girish Ghosh and other devotees. He also experienced a good number of bhavas, samadhis and various such higher spiritual realizations.

In November 2017 this holy place was recognized as a full-fledged branch centre of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. Now, as the matter stands, this house is 190 years old. For the proper preservation of this house, thorough repair work is urgently needed. There is a severe scarcity of accommodation for the inmate sadhus here. Also, to extend our seva work we need more space (rooms).

To meet the above urgent needs we have to purchase one or two nearby houses.

For this, we need a minimum sum of Rupees Four Crores.

I fervently appeal to all the devotees, donors and well-wishers to donate generously to make the above project successful.

All donations to Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission are exempt from income tax vide IT act, 80G,1961.

Donation may please be sent through A/C payee CTS cheque, Demand Draft or Bank Transfer to:- Adhyaksha, Ramakrishna Math, Shyampukur Bati, 55, Shyampukur Street, Kolkata – 700 004.

Bank Details

United Bank of India, Baghbazar branch.
A/C no. 0090010362696,
IFSC : UTBI0BAZ101,
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State Bank of India, Baghbazar Branch
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For a donation of Rupees Two Lakhs and above, the name of the donor will be displayed in marble stone in a suitable place.

Donors are requested to provide their ADDRESS, PAN NUMBER, MOBILE NUMBER, E-MAIL.

Present Activities:
- Homoeopathic charitable dispensary (40-50 patients weekly two days);
- Distribution of dhotis, sarees, blankets to poor people every year;
- Regular spiritual talks, Devotees conventions, Memorial lectures, Inter-school recitation & lecture competitions on moral values etc.

With warm love and namaskar,

Swami Parasharananda
Adhyaksha
The publication from the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, comprises papers presented at a seminar titled *Concept of Spirituality in Art: Past, Present and Future*. The seminar was a part of Swami Vivekananda's 150th Birth Anniversary Celebrations. The editor’s note captures the spirit of the publication by emphasising on Swami Vivekananda’s insistence that bhava was integral to true art.

The welcome address by Swami Suparnananda explains how man connects with himself to manifest beauty and truth. The keynote address by Swami Bhajanananda defines spirituality and describes how global spirituality is developing today. He analyses what art is, as also reality and values from Western and Oriental perspectives.

The next essay talks of spirituality in art, both Indian and Western and looks at the Ajanta art and the works of Michelangelo and Raphael as examples. A case study of selected Indian sculptures and paintings follows with a vivid description of the figure of a Bodhisattva from Bodh Gaya that is now part of the collection at the Indian Museum, Kolkata. The discipline and concentration that mark the expression on the face of the figure indicates intense spirituality. So also the late 5th century CE seated Buddha from Sarnath, Varanasi. The dancing Nataraja is depicted with his tiger skin symbolizing the beastly nature in man, the snakes the ego and the dwarf the ignorance.

Sacred art as depicted by various cultures and religions is the next paper and studies Buddhist, Taoist and Christian art. The paintings of Uttaradhyayana Sutra which give a pictorial form to Mahavira’s teachings is the following topic of study. Spirituality in Indian painting through the years 1905 to 2005 is traced. The paper titled ‘In Search of Sacred Dance’ draws heavily from the works of Havell and Stella Kramrisch. ‘Realising God Through Art’ is an enlightening article on spiritual aspects of ancient art, with explanations from texts on the same. The challenges that the creative process throws up is addressed in the next article.

The publication also contains beautiful colour pictures of art, painting and sculpture elaborating the topics discussed, and making it a valuable compilation of information that will help understand the spiritual dimension of Indian art.

**A Story of Self-Sacrifice**

*by Shri Kumud Ranjan Roy Chowdhury* Translation by Prof. Shirshendu Chakrabarti.

*Published by Sharvanti Bhowmik, Nahar Amrit Shakti, Chandivali, Mumbai - 400 072. 2015, paperback, pp.44, Price not given.*

History is the sum total of the stories of the lives and times of several exceptional individuals and events that have impacted the human character over a period.
of time. But when such history comes to be told after a lapse of time, Truth is often obfuscated by facts, facts are colored by emotions, and emotions tainted by self-interests. Thus, among all forms of writings, the effort to present a biographical narrative, that too concerning a close relative or an associate, is riskier and is fraught with danger of over or understatements depending upon the quality and qualification of the narrator himself.

*A Story of Self-sacrifice*, a small book (can also be called a book-let) originally written in Bengali by Shri Kumud Ranjan Roy Chowdhury in 2000 as a verbal tribute to his elder brother in the latter’s birth centenary year, and later translated into English in 2015, is mercifully largely free from any such blemish. The hero of this brief bio-sketch is the late Ketaki Maharaj, (Swami Prabhanand Ji) who was born in 1900, as the eldest of the five boys in the Kali Roy Chowdhuri household of Pahranpur, District Sylhet, now in Bangladesh. The boy, from his very childhood, was ‘a character of indomitable courage, strong self-confidence, tremendous mental strength and had demonstrated ability to give himself away, unstintingly….’ and, thus was able to enter into monastic life even in the face of the threats, intimidation and tempting alternative choices offered by his ‘ferocious’ father, by ‘boarding a ship, leaving behind his shawl in the hands of the cousin who had chased him up to that point’ - symbolizing his determination to renounce the world behind.

Eventually, the 21-year old graduate, travelled to Belur Math and was ordained into sannyasa by Swami Shivananda, one of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. The Mission, which itself was in its formative years then, assigned the greenhorn Ketaki to start work forthwith, in Khasi-Jayanthi Hills area. It is important and necessary for the readers to understand the geo-socio-political environment prevalent then to be able to really appreciate the three dimensional enormity of the task assigned to the young monk. It was the time when the British were the rulers and with their express support and protection Christianity was already well-entrenched in this region, the language was alien, the people unfamiliar, the surroundings dangerous, the climate inclement, and, above all, the people from the plains were highly despised by the locals. Undaunted and fired with the zeal of a committed pioneer, Ketaki started his work in 1923 in the tiny village of Shella. He built his own dwelling on the hill-side – a paranakuti, literally – and depended upon alms for survival. His first daunting task was to establish acceptability. He learnt, only in a matter of three months, the Khasi language which did not even have a script of its own. In a short period of time he succeeded in establishing the first primary school in Shella in 1924. The Durbar of Shella Confederacy also came to his help in establishing, in due course, an ashram and a charitable clinic – the first institutions of the Ramakrishna Mission in the entire hill belt. Establishment of a high school, a students’ hostel, a charitable clinic and another ashram in Cherrapunji followed, in quick succession, thanks largely to the assistance rendered by King Usiyem, the then monarch of Cherrapunji. Ketaki’s priority on children’s education was a profound strategy both to gain acceptance by the locals and also to inculcate, from childhood, love for character building, discipline and noble ideas and ideals in boys and girls which would be indispensable to their becoming responsible citizens in later life.

All this had a price to be paid. In the midst of the physical threats schemed by Catholic missionaries, 20 hours work every day, physical strain involved in moving from hilltop to hilltop on foot, and neglect of his own health started telling on Ketaki’s life. Inspite of it all, Ketaki succeeded in building a team of volunteers from among the Khasi youth. When he observed that the plains people despite their enthusiasm did not have the strength and firmness of character necessary for working in rapport with the simple hill people, Ketaki persisted, overcoming many obstacles often risking his life. The inevitable followed. He was diagnosed as infected by an unknown virus, that affected his body from head to toe. It affected his brain and all his muscles
atrophyed and finally resulted in his sad demise in 1938. Like many great souls before him, he walked into history with his head held high, his spirit unconquered and left behind a record that would inspire and empower many others to follow him.

The booklet also contains a fair sprinkling of interesting tidbits of the Roy Chowdhury family and, a rather long introduction to the author himself. One can read this entire presentation with interest, and some profit, in a single sitting. Readability and value of the work could have been enhanced quite substantially, if the pages were laid out more aesthetically and the photographs used were more clear in production. This observation, however, does not take away even a wee bit the merits of the author/translator/publisher in bringing to light a life which otherwise would have been lost to posterity.

______________________VIJAYNATH BHAT, MYSORE

**GITA BODH**
by Uday Karanjkar,
Published by Author, Flat C-9 ‘Pinnac Memories’ Phase-I, Kothrud, Pune- 411 038. Email: uday.gitabodh@gmail.com, 2015, Art paper, hardbound pp.543, Rs. 1599.

The Srimad Bhagavad Gita is a spontaneous dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna. Because of this, there is no clear flow in the topics discussed. In the words of Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati of Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, ‘The Gita is to be understood as a whole and not in parts. But the problem is that the whole cannot be understood without understanding the parts and the parts cannot be understood without understanding the whole!’ This book tries to cover all the topics covered in the Gita as a sequence of concepts. This book is the result of 30 years of study of Vedanta by the author under the guidance of Swami Satswarupananda Saraswati of Arsha Vidya Gurukulam.

The book first covers the theory part of the Gita (Brahmavidya). The real nature of the Jiva is not the body, mind or intellect. It is pure Consciousness. It is because of the identification with the body, mind and intellect, the Jiva goes through various births according to the law of Karma. Isvara manifests as the Creation through His Maya for the benefit of the Jivas. The Ultimate Reality of the Jiva, Creation and Isvara is Brahman, which is the substratum, just like gold is to ornaments. The purpose of life is to realize oneself as the pure Consciousness different from the body, mind and intellect.

The second part of the book covers the practical part of the Gita (Yogasastra). The man who runs after possessions and pleasure needs to turn towards Dharma to become a refined human being. Then by discrimination, the person sees the transitoriness of the creation and gains dispassion. By offering all actions to Isvara and by accepting all situations in life as Isvara’s gift (Prasada), the person attains purity of mind (Chittashuddhi). This will give the longing to be free. Such a person approaches a Guru and through the process of listening (Sravana), logical analysis (Manana) and contemplation (Nididhyasana), realizes the Truth. Then he lives as a free person (Jivanmukta).

The book very thoroughly deals with each topic with a lot of colourful illustrations and charts. The references to relevant verses in the Gita are given at the end of each chapter. The dealing with the topics is too in-depth for a casual reader and the book is too costly. It will be good if the author comes up with an abridged version of the book with an overview of the important topics for a casual reader as an introduction. This book is a valuable guide to people who are seriously interested in the teaching of the Gita.

________________________ GOKUL MUTHU, BANGALORE
A Special Gift by Subhas Chandra Bose

SWAMI SURARCHITANANDA

A small but significant act that reflects Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose’s special connection with the Ramakrishna Order is discovered in this article by the author who is a sannyasi of the Ramakrishna Order and serves in Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai. surarchitananda@rkmm.org

Subhas Chandra Bose, as we know, paid high tributes to Swami Vivekananda. On many occasions he stated in no uncertain terms the influence of this ‘full-blooded masculine personality’ on him. The books Vivekananda’s Influence on Bose by Nanda Mookerjee and Great Thinkers on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, both published by Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, shed much light on this subject. The 12-volume Collected Works of Netaji, published by Netaji Research Bureau, Kolkata, has some more nuggets of information that reveal Bose’s deep feelings for Swami Vivekananda and his efforts to spread his message across the world.

One such very interesting information is found in Bose’s correspondence with Emilie Schenkl. It appears in the seventh volume as Letters to Emilie Schenkl 1934 – 1942.

Bose met the young Austrian woman Emilie Schenkl for the first time at Vienna in June 1934. He hired her to prepare his work The Indian Struggle. He duly acknowledged her assistance in the preface to this book: ‘In conclusion, I have to express my thanks to Fraulein E. Schenkl who assisted me in writing this book and to all those friends who have been of help to me in many ways.’ Bose corresponded regularly with Schenkl, and they married on 26 December 1937. They had a daughter Anita, born in Vienna on 29 November 1942.

The correspondence between Bose and Schenkl is mostly about their concern for each other’s health, politics, books, spirituality and other things. In some of his letters, Bose encouraged Schenkl to study Swami Vivekananda. In one such letter we come across a very interesting information; he writes:

38/2 Elgin Road
or 1Woodburn Park
Calcutta
31 Dec. 1934

Dear Frl. Schenkl,

…. I have noted your enquiries about the books on India and Indian Philosophy and I shall try to give you the required information as soon as possible. ...

You may be aware that the National Bibliothek, Vienna contains the complete works of Swami Vivekananda which I presented last year to them. Please make use of them if necessary. Swami Vivekananda’s books contain one of the best expositions of Indian Philosophy.

Yours sincerely,
Subhas C. Bose

Even while engaged in fighting the British Empire, Netaji sought to spread Indian culture and philosophy by presenting a set of The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda to National Bibliothek, Vienna.

An enquiry to Österreichische Nationalbibliothek/Austrian National Library
has confirmed this information. Mag. Wilma Buchinger of Abteilung Informations services / Research Department has provided proof of this donation from Bose.

Netaji has written:

Presented to National Bibliothek on behalf of Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Almora, Himalayas (India).

Subhas Chandra Bose  
(Former Mayor of Calcutta)  
Wien, 28. 6. ‘33.

This tiny note of gift is written in the fourth volume of *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Fourth Edition, published by Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati in 1932. He donated the volumes on 28 June 1933, and identified
himself as the ‘Former Mayor of Calcutta’. ‘Wien’ is the German word for Vienna. These volumes are currently available at ÖNB Modern Library Facilities, Heldenplatz, Vienna.

The gift becomes even more charming because Netaji has presented it on behalf of Advaita Ashrama! We don’t know if Advaita Ashrama asked him to make this gift. It is probable that Netaji, to whom Swamiji and the Ramakrishna Order were so dear, voluntarily chose to be the unofficial ambassador of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement.

Netaji Bose was one of the chief architects of India’s freedom movement. He firmly believed in Swami Vivekananda’s ideals of freedom and harmony of religions. About Swamiji he writes, ‘Swamiji harmonised East and West, religion and science, past and present. And that is why he is great. Our countrymen have gained unprecedented self-respect, self-confidence and self-assertion from his teachings.’ There is no doubt that Bose intended everyone—people from the East and the West—to benefit from Swamiji’s message, and his donation of The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda to Österreichische Nationalbibliothek is a testimony to this fact.

I cannot write about Vivekananda without going into raptures. … His personality was rich, profound and complex and it was this personality – as distinct from his teachings and writings – which accounts for the wonderful influence he has exerted on his countrymen…. A Yogi of the highest spiritual level in direct communion with the truth who had for the time being consecrated his whole life to the moral and spiritual uplift of his nation and of humanity, that is how I would describe him. If he had been alive, I would have been at his feet.

—Subhas Chandra Bose

References

1) Great Thinkers on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Kolkata, Third Revised Edition, February 2013, p. 162 (hereinafter Great Thinkers)
2) Collected Works Volume 7: Letters to Emilie Schenkl 1934-1942, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Netaji
3) Great Thinkers, pp. 163-164
4) Letters to Emilie, pp. 8-9

Research Bureau, Kolkata, and Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 1994, Editors’ Introduction, p. xv
**Ghatika – An Ancient Educational Institution**

**DR. CHITHRA MADHAVAN**

Beginning from this issue we will present less known and enlightening nuggets of information about our ancient culture as revealed in our temples, images, symbols, and inscriptions.

The author is a historian focussing on temple architecture, iconography and epigraphy. She is a recipient of two post-doctoral fellowships, and author of nine books and several research papers. She lives in Chennai. drchithra@gmail.com

Education was given great importance in ancient and medieval India. Many centres of learning functioned in the premises of temples or close to these shrines. One such important educational institution of the ancient Tamil country was called the *ghatika*.

These ghatikas functioned during the reign of the Pallava kings and even later. Though there were many ghatikas across the far-flung Pallava kingdom, the best-known was in the hoary city of Kanchipuram, the capital of the Pallavas. Kanchipuram (75 km from Chennai) is even today one of the most sacred and historical places in India.

Various explanations have been given for the Sanskrit word ‘ghatika’. According to Dr. C. Minakshi, a great scholar of Pallava history, the word originates from the root ‘ghat’ which in sanskrit means ‘to strive after’, and ghatika was an institution where students stove after higher knowledge.

The earliest reference to the ghatika in Kanchipuram is from the Talagunda Pillar inscription which is in Karnataka. It belongs to the reign of King Kakusthavarman (5th century C.E.) of the Kadamba dynasty. It records that this king’s ancestor Mayurasharman along with his teacher Virasharman went to Kanchipuram to study at this ghatika. Scholars have traditionally stated the date of Mayurasharman to be c.345 - c.370 C.E.

Though the exact location of the famous ghatika in Kanchipuram is not known, scholars have opined that after the construction of the Kailasanatha (originally called Rajasimheshwara) temple in the 8th century...
C.E., it must have functioned in its premises, as inferred from the data available in a few inscriptions. The subjects taught at the ghatika are also not specifically mentioned, but it can be gathered that it must have primarily been a centre of learning to impart the knowledge of the Vedas and also ancillary scriptures.

The members of the ghatika (ghatikaiyar) in Kanchipuram seem to have played an important role in the political sphere too. An 8th century C.E. inscription etched on a wall in the Vaikuntha Perumal temple in Kanchipuram, constructed in the reign of the Pallava king Nandivarman II Pallavamalla (731-796 C.E.), reveals this role played by the ghatikaiyar. At a time when the Pallava kingdom was bereft of a ruler, the ghatikaiyar, along with other important men of this city, were instrumental in bringing a twelve-year old prince from a collateral branch of the Pallava family to Kanchipuram and coronating him as the king. This pre-teen boy was King Nandivarman II Pallavamalla who ruled well for sixty-five years.

The honourable place given to this famous ghatika and its members is revealed by another 8th century inscription of the Chalukya King Vikramaditya II. This ruler came all the way from present-day Badami (ancient Vatapi) and conquered Kanchipuram, driving away the then Pallava king Nandivarman II Pallavamalla. Vikramaditya II occupied Kanchipuram, but did not destroy it. He was fascinated by the Kailasanatha temple in this city and generously donated to it. His inscription is still to be seen in this temple. This Kannada epigraph ends with these words ‘those who destroy these letters and the stability of the king’s charity which was thus given, shall enter into the world of those who had killed the great group of men (mahajana) of this ghatika’. This ghatika functioned for a long time thereafter, as attested to by an inscription of the reign of Rajendra Chola I of the 11th century.

*Photographs from the internet.*
Religion: Being True to Your Own Nature

The greatest religion is to be true to your own nature.¹

This is a pretty simple, straight-forward statement. Being true to our own nature is the greatest religion that is or can ever be. That is it. End of story. While this is really simple, this is also, by far, the grandest statement that Swamiji has uttered on religion. Why? Let us see presently.

Our religious books mention some things about man, God and the universe. We should believe in those things. That is religion, as is generally understood. The closer these ideas are to our selfishness, the greater acceptability those ideas get. Such is the trend in religion. So long as the religious ideas do not clash with, or unsettle, our present life-style, they are considered practical.

‘Vedanta preaches the ideal; and the ideal, as we know, is always far ahead of the real, of the practical, as we may call it. There are two tendencies in human nature: one to harmonize the ideal with the life, and the other to elevate the life to the ideal. It is a great thing to understand this, for the former tendency is the temptation of our lives. I think that I can only do a certain class of work. Most of it, perhaps, is bad; most of it, perhaps, has a motive power of passion behind it, anger, or greed, or selfishness. Now if any man comes to preach to me a certain ideal, the first step towards which is to give up selfishness, to give up self-enjoyment, I think that is impractical. But when a man brings an ideal which can be reconciled with my selfishness, I am glad at once and jump at it. That is the ideal for me.... What I think is practical, is to me the only practicality in the world. If I am a shopkeeper, I think shop keeping the only practical pursuit in the world. If I am a thief, I think stealing is the best means of being practical; others are not practical.... You see how we all use this word practical for things we like and can do.’²

When Swamiji says ‘The greatest religion is to be true to your own nature’, he completely breaks away from this kind of inertial thinking. Our own nature is that we are divine.

Vedanta ‘does not preach an impossible ideal, however high it be, and it is high enough for an ideal. In one word, this ideal is that you are divine, “Thou art That.” This is the essence of Vedanta; after all its ramifications and intellectual gymnastics, you know the human soul to be pure and omniscient, you see that such superstitions as birth and death would be entire nonsense when spoken of in connection with the soul. The soul was never born and will never die, and all these ideas that we are going to die and are afraid to die are mere superstitions. And all such ideas as that we can do this or cannot do that are superstitions. We can do everything. The Vedanta teaches men to have faith in themselves first. As certain religions of the world say that a man who does not believe in a
Personal God outside of himself is an atheist, so the Vedanta says, a man who does not believe in himself is an atheist.

‘Not believing in the glory of our own soul is what the Vedanta calls atheism. To many this is, no doubt, a terrible idea; and most of us think that this ideal can never be reached; but the Vedanta insists that it can be realized by everyone. There is neither man nor woman or child, nor difference of race or sex, nor anything that stands as a bar to the realization of the ideal, because Vedanta shows that it is realized already, it is already there.

‘All the powers in the universe are already ours. It is we who have put our hands before our eyes and cry that it is dark. Know that there is no darkness around us. Take the hands away and there is the light which was from the beginning. Darkness never existed, weakness never existed. We who are fools cry that we are weak; we who are fools cry that we are impure. Thus Vedanta not only insists that the ideal is practical, but that it has been so all the time; and this Ideal, this Reality, is our own nature. Everything else that you see is false, untrue. As soon as you say, ‘I am a little mortal being,’ you are saying something which is not true, you are giving the lie to yourselves, you are hypnotizing yourselves into something vile and weak and wretched.

‘There is this strongly conservative tendency in human nature: we do not like to move one step forward. I think of mankind just as I read of persons who become frozen in snow; all such, they say, want to go to sleep, and if you try to drag them up, they say, ‘Let me sleep; it is so beautiful to sleep in the snow’, and they die there in that sleep. So is our nature. That is what we are doing all our life, getting frozen from the feet upwards, and yet wanting to sleep.

‘Therefore, you must struggle towards the ideal, and if a man comes who wants to bring that ideal down to your level, and teach a religion that does not carry that highest ideal, do not listen to him. To me that is an impracticable religion. But if a man teaches a religion which presents the highest ideal, I am ready for him. Beware when anyone is trying to apologize for sense vanities and sense weaknesses. If anyone wants to preach that way to us, poor, sense-bound clods of earth as we have made ourselves by following that teaching, we shall never progress. 3*

References

2) Ibid. Vol-2: Practical Vedanta - Part-I
3) Ibid. Vol-2: Practical Vedanta - Part-I
Modern work environment has evolved from the ideas of a few, very influential, modern thinkers. Modern activity involves a person, or a group of persons, who brings in the capital, and develops infrastructure where many more can participate as wage-workers. This gave birth to the modern corporate work culture. The system was excellent and very efficient. Only one issue needed clarification – who gets to enjoy the fruits of the work?

Thinkers such as Adam Smith specified that since the promoters of the activity took risk and invested money, they naturally get the greater part of the fruits of the work. This philosophy developed as Capitalism. As opposed to this school of thought, equally powerful thinkers such as Karl Marx held that since it was the labour of the wage-workers that directly brought in the profits, the workers ought to get the greater part of the fruits of the work. This philosophy developed as Communism. The entire modern work environment is a fine balance between these two seemingly opposing forces.

We say ‘seemingly opposing’ because, deep down, both are based on a common idea – all aspects of human work can be converted into money.

In 2003, Christopher K. Hsee, Fang Yu, Jiao Zhang, and Yan Zhang conducted an amazing psychological experiment in the University of Chicago which reveals an incredible thing about the way we work in the modern socio-economic paradigm.¹

They designed two tasks. One was a short task of six minutes. The other was a long task of seven minutes. The six minutes task would get you one gallon of Haagen Daaaz vanilla ice cream, while the long task would get you one gallon of Haagen Daaaz pistachio ice cream. (In Chicago of that time, Haagen Daaaz was a very popular brand, and people were known to prefer the vanilla flavor to the pistachio flavor.) People were asked to choose the task they wished to perform. Most people chose to perform the short task since that would get them their favorite brand and flavor of ice cream. This was expected.

Then they brought in a minor change in the experiment. They announced that the same short task of six minutes would get them 60 coupons, which they could exchange for one gallon of Haagen Daaaz vanilla ice cream, and the same long task of seven minutes would get them 100 coupons which could be exchanged for one gallon of Haagen Daaaz pistachio ice cream. Notice that nothing has changed except that a coupon system has been introduced. People were asked to choose the task they wished to perform. But in this case, completely contrary to expectation, over 50% of the people chose the longer task, which gave them 100 coupons, which in turn could be redeemed for an unpopular flavor of ice cream!

This is the illusion of ‘Medium Maximization’. People will naturally work for outcomes. But, if you introduce a medium into the work, people will work for maximizing the medium and forget about the actual outcome!
Sri Ramakrishna used to tell a wonderful story.  

A Barber who was passing under a haunted tree, heard a voice say, ‘Will you accept seven jars full of gold?’ The barber looked around, but could see no one. The offer of seven jars of gold, however, roused his desire, and he cried aloud, ‘Yes, I shall accept the seven jars.’ At once came the reply, ‘Go home, I have carried the jars to your house.’ The barber ran home. He saw the jars before him. He opened them and found them all full of gold, except the last one which was only half-full.  

A strong desire now arose in the barber’s mind to fill the seventh jar also, for without it his happiness was incomplete. He therefore converted all his ornaments into gold coins and put them into the jar; but the mysterious vessel was, as before, unfilled. This exasperated the barber. Starving himself and his family, he saved some more amount and tried to fill the jar; but the jar remained as before.  

So one day he humbly requested the king to increase his pay. The king doubled his pay. All this pay he saved and put into the jar, but the greedy jar showed no signs of filling. At last he began to live by begging from door to door, and his professional income and the income from begging—all went into the insatiable cavity of the mysterious jar. Months passed, and the condition of the barber grew worse every day.  

Seeing his sad plight the king asked him one day: ‘Hallo! When your pay was half of what you now get, you were happy, cheerful and contented; but with double that pay, I see you morose, care-worn and dejected. What is the matter with you? Have you got ‘the seven jars’? ‘The barber was taken aback by this question and replied, ‘Your Majesty, who has informed you of this?’ The king said: ‘Don’t you know that these are the signs of the person to whom the Yaksha consigns the seven jars. He offered me also the same jars, but I asked him whether this money might be spent or was merely to be hoarded. No sooner had I asked this question than the Yaksha ran away without any reply. Don’t you know that no one can spend that money? It only brings with it the desire of hoarding. Go at once and return the money.’  

The barber was brought to his senses by this advice, and he went to the haunted tree and said, ‘Take back your gold, O Yaksha.’ The Yaksha replied, ‘All right.’ When the barber returned home, he found that the seven jars had vanished as mysteriously as they were brought in, and with it had vanished, his lifelong savings too. *

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News of Branch Centres

Srimat Swami Prabhananda Ji, one of the Vice-Presidents of the Order, laid the foundation stone for the proposed Monks’ Quarters (Chandramani Bhavan) at the Viveknagar campus of Agartala centre on 18 May, the sacred Buddha Purnima. Srimat Swami Gautamananda Ji, one of the Vice-Presidents of the Order, laid the foundation stone for the proposed Community Hall and Monks’ Quarters on the Nagachi campus of Ramanathapuram centre on 6 June. Srimat Swami Suhitananda Ji, one of the Vice-Presidents of the Order, dedicated the Monks’ Dining Hall at Narottam Nagar centre on 17 June, the sacred Snan Yatra day. Swami Suvirananda Ji, the General Secretary of the Order, laid the foundation stone for the proposed Boys’ High School Building at Shivanahalli centre and also inaugurated the new Computer Section at the centre’s school on 27 June. The General Secretary also inaugurated: (i) the newly constructed multipurpose building at the Ayodhya sub-centre of Lucknow Sevashrama on 2 June, the sacred Phalagarini Kali Puja day; (ii) the first floor of Vijnanananda Sadhu Nivas at Kanpur Ashrama on 3 June.

Taki centre held Parents’ Counseling Programmes at two places in North 24 Parganas district in which 150 parents participated.

International Yoga Day was observed at these centres with yogasana demonstrations and talks: Chennai, Chandigarh, Jammu, Kochi, Madurai, Pala, Ponnampet, and Rajkot.
As part of its centenary celebrations, Salem Ashrama conducted (i) a conference for 500 medical students from 7 colleges, and (ii) a special programme for 100 sanitation workers of Salem Municipal Corporation.

**Guests of Honour**
The Governor of Uttarakhand Smt. Baby Rani Maurya, participated in the 119th Foundation Day celebrations of Kankhal Sevashrama on 1 June. Sri Tathagata Roy, Governor of Meghalaya, visited Vivekananda Cultural Centre of Shillong Ashrama on 8 June.

**125th Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda’s Addresses at the World’s Parliament of Religions**
The following centres held various programmes:
- Almora: Cultural competitions (2794 students from 30 educational institutions); Asansol: Youth convention (600 youth);
- Hyderabad: Talks and cultural competitions (20,797 students in 82 schools); Kankhal: Quiz and elocution competitions (88 students from 22 schools);
- Mangaluru: Lecture programmes (2450 youths in 6 colleges);
- Mumbai: Public meeting (250 people); Rajkot: Lecture (150 persons);
- Shimla: Youth Convention (59 youth) Devotees’ Convention (52 devotees);
- Vadodara: Lecture (325 people).

**Value Education & Youth Programmes**
Centres in the following cities/towns held workshops, motivation talks etc:
- Delhi: 49 workshops in 16 states and 2 union territories attended by 2767 teachers;
- Pune: Personality Development programme for 227 police personnel; Rajkot: Leadership training for 270 youth, and motivation programme for 50 board exam failed students;
- Shillong: Seminar for 55 teachers from 12 schools; Silchar: Programme for 374 students and 78 teachers; Taki: Programmes in two schools for 325 students.

**Value Orientation Programmes by the Institute of Culture, Golpark**
In the period from April 2018 to March 2019, the Institute of Culture, Golpark conducted 226 youth conferences for age group 15 to 25 years. Of these 59 conferences were for urban youth attended by 5,681 boys and 5,151 girls, and 167 conferences were for rural youth attended by 14,487 boys and 13,692 girls from 334 villages. 12 district level cultural competitions in the city of Kolkata and in 15 districts of West Bengal were also conducted in which 13,766 youth above the age of 25 participated. The institute organised 5 Teachers’ Conferences attended by 362 men and 247 lady teachers and 27 Guardians’ Conferences attended by 2036 fathers and 2384 mothers. 41,825 Books and booklets on the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda were presented to the participants in all these different programmes. As part of its regular Value Education Programmes, the Institute held, in its premises: (i) 46 Vivekananda Anushilan Classes which were attended by 1394 boys and 884 girls, and (ii) 42 Academic Counselling Sessions by experienced psychiatrists for 83 boys and 61 girls. All the programmes were conducted with the financial assistance of Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India.

**Healthcare Services**
Through 12 centres in India, the Order conducted eye-camps in which 11552 patients were treated, 283 given spectacles, and 655 operated.

Aalo centre conducted 20 ENT camps in which 903 patients were examined.

Guwahati Ashrama conducted a free medical camp during
Ambubachi Mela near Kamakhya Temple from 22 to 25 June in which 7622 patients were treated.

Srimat Swami Shivamayananda Ji, one of the Vice-Presidents of the Order, and the Governor of Uttarakhand inaugurated in the Kankhal Sevashrama’s hospital an operation theatre complex, ICU, surgical ward, emergency department and CT scan facility.

The General Secretary inaugurated the Digital Cathlab at Lucknow hospital.

**Swachchha Bharat Abhiyan**

Mangaluru Ashrama conducted the following activities in June: (i) five cleanliness drives in Mangaluru involving 2150 volunteers, (ii) awareness campaigns for 25 days in which volunteers reached out to 1600 households in different parts of Mangaluru city, spreading awareness about waste management, (iii) cleanliness drives in 106 villages of Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts, (iv) talks on cleanliness in 130 schools of Dakshina Kannada district which were attended by about 13,000 students, and (v) magic shows on the cleanliness theme in 19 schools in Udupi district.

**Cyclone Relief**

In the aftermath of severe damage to the homes and public infrastructure caused by the Cyclone Fani that made landfall in Puri on 3 May, Bhubaneswar Math, Puri Math, and Puri Mission centres in Odisha conducted relief operations and distributed 4486 solar lanterns, 9972 dhotis/lungis, 7095 saris, 1486 tarpaulins, 4000 towels, 4000 mosquito nets among 10603 families.

**Drought Relief**


**Summer Relief**

Thirsty wayfarers were given buttermilk and drinking water by the following centres:

- Raipur centre in Chhattisgarh: 5400 litres of buttermilk;
- Vadodara centre in Gujarat: 7200 litres of buttermilk and 31,000 litres of drinking water;
- Chennai Mission Ashrama: 30,000 litres of buttermilk;
- Salem centre in Tamilnadu: 9600 litres of buttermilk;
- Hyderabad centre: 37,024 litres of buttermilk;
- Bagda centre in West Bengal: served cold water, molasses and gram to 3879 thirsty wayfarers.

**Fire Relief**

Aalo centre in Arunachal Pradesh distributed blankets, dresses and utensils among 3 families whose houses were completely destroyed in a fire accident.

**Distress Relief**

Through 11 centres in India, the Order distributed 2097 shirts, 1714 trousers, 398 jackets, 9055 notebooks, 150 school bags, 150 umbrellas, and 50 cycles.
“If the poor cannot come to education, education must go to them.”

- SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

We at the Merino Group are committed to this direction and make it our mission to fulfill our social responsibility. With the SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ARUNODAY VIDYALAYA, at Hapur, we strive to ensure the all-round development of the children belonging to the weakest section of the society.
You cannot teach a child any more than you can grow a plant. All you can do is on the negative side — you can only help. It is a manifestation from within; it develops its own nature — you can only take away obstructions. — Swami Vivekananda