The Vedanta Kesari
A Cultural and Spiritual Monthly of the Ramakrishna Order since 1914
November 2020

Cover Story
Swami Vivekananda’s Contributions to Hinduism

page 11
Mother Hamseshwari Kali

Hamseshwari Kali Temple at Banshberia in Hooghly district is a five-storied Chunar-stone temple, representing Tantric Shatchakrabeda in a human body. Here the Mother is sitting on the lotus blooming from the navel of Shiva. Started by Raja Nrisingha Deb Roy, the temple was completed by his widowed-wife Rani Sankari in 1814.

Swami Shivanandaji, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and 2nd President of the Ramakrishna Order, had deep devotion for Mother Hamseshwari. Along with Swami Turiyanandaji he had once visited the temple during his wandering days. His wish to visit the temple again in old age, could not materialise due to failing health. Then a large colour-print of Mother Hamseshwari was hung on his room wall so that while seated on his bed he could always see the Mother. But as it was not visible at night, a small photo of Hamseshwari was kept under his pillow. Whenever he woke up at night, his attendant had to show him this photograph.

Shivanandaji Maharaj also made arrangements for worshipping Mother Hamseshwari every amavasya (new moon day). Two or three sannyasis and brahmacharins from Belur Math would travel to Banshberia with all the necessary items, and worship the Mother with 16-items, perform homa, and recite Devi Mahatmyam. On those days Maharaj would be fully absorbed in the thought of Mother Hamseshwari, speak of her the whole day, and remain anxious about the puja. He would relax only when the worshippers’ returned at night and reported every detail to him and offered him Mother’s prasad.
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FEATURES

Published by Swami Vimurtananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai - 600 004 and

Printed by B. Rajkumar, Chennai - 600 014 on behalf of Sri Ramakrishna Math Trust, Chennai - 600 004 and


Website: www.chennaimath.org E-mail: vk@chennaimath.org Ph: 6374213070

Editor: Swami Mahamedhananda
He was a much-celebrated and much-feted Swami. His famous address at The World’s Parliament of Religions, Chicago in 1893 had catapulted him to the status of a super star. But Swami Vivekananda was not one to bask in chaffy glory. A letter to one of his trusted followers, from the USA, dated 12 Jan 1895, read, ‘I want to preach my ideas for the good of the world. …What work have you done in the way of advancing the ideas and organising in India? …My life is more precious than spending it in getting the admiration of the world. I have no time for such foolery.’

Swamiji, as Swami Vivekananda was fondly addressed, loved and revered his motherland as his own mother. Every breath of his aspired for her well being and every cell in his body yearned that she regain her lost glory. She had been a beacon light for the world until repeated invasions pillaged her ruthlessly and left her not just poverty-stricken but also psychologically drained. The latter struck at the very core, underlying the urgency for immediate redressal. Swamiji’s panacea for this lay in India’s very own practical and ennobling Vedantic wisdom. Vedanta recognises no weakness. It proclaims that in every individual lies a mine of strength. All that is needed is an effort to draw from it.

Swamiji started looking for the right channel to propagate the powerful message of Vedanta. He opted for the print medium and decided to bring out a journal, giving it the name Brahmatavadin. In February 1895, he sent from USA $100 and a letter to his trusted disciple Alasinga Perumal. The letter read: ‘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.’

If selflessness and devotion would have a form, it would have borne the name of Alasinga Perumal. Brahmatavadin became Alasinga’s calling and the first issue rolled out from a press in Broadway, Chennai on 14 September 1895. The magazine included a poem of Swamiji specially composed for the occasion. It was titled, ‘The Song of the Sannyasin’. One verse ran thus:
One hundred and seven years and going strong….

“Strike off thy fetters! Bonds that bind thee down,
of shining gold or darker hue.
Love, hate — good, bad — and all the dual throng,
Know slave is slave, cared for or shifted, not free.
For fetters, though of gold, are not less strong to bind;
then off with them, Sanyasi hold say one Salt Sat m

(Handwritten words in Swamiji’s own hand)

With this message that marked its mission, Brahmavadin made a determined entry into the strife-ridden climate of pre-independence India. The birth of the magazine was certainly an occasion for celebration but the struggles were far from over.

One of Swamiji’s letters to Alasinga read: ‘I learnt from your letter the bad financial state that Brahmavadin is in.’ This was followed by another letter that carried the line, ‘I pledge myself to maintain the paper anyhow.’

Bolstered by this pledge, Alasinga Perumal braved on, surmounting many an impediment. Sadly, Swami Vivekananda passed away in 1902, at the age of thirty-nine. Alasinga’s intense anguish morphed into heightened devotion towards the magazine. But the next hurdle in Brahmavadin’s journey came in 1909, in the form of Alasinga’s own demise. In May 1914, the magazine, tottering as it was, floundered and ground to a halt.

It was at this crucial juncture, that the Ramakrishna Mission stepped in to revive it. The Mission was itself in its nascent stages with many a teething problem but nothing could come in its way of reviving the Brahmavadin. For, had not their beloved Swamiji repeatedly said, “The Brahmavadin is a jewel – it must not perish!” And so, the very same month when Brahmavadin closed, it was resuscitated with the new name The Vedanta Kesari.

The history of The Vedanta Kesari is much more than just a tale of sweat, toil and a dream realised. It is a narrative of Swamiji’s passion for India and Alasinga’s devotion to his master. It is a celebration of love, transcending forms.
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*Swami Vivekananda*
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Atmarpanastuti
Sri Appayya Dikshitendra

Sloka - 32
अत्यन्तार्तिव्यरि्मगर्ं देव मातामुद्धरेर् क्ुण्णो मतागतिस्व ब् पुरता केन वतानतािनताि ।
कतामतालमबे ब् ्दरितां प्ताितिनतारीर्मन्यतां त्ता्यसववैनं सपदद कृप्यता वस्ु्त्वं रवरिनत्य ॥३२

O Lord, has anyone made unavailable the path of surrender to You in the form “uplift me who am tormented by extreme suffering and am without any recourse”, O Protector of the helpless! (The idea is that this path is always available). What method of prayer greater than this can I adopt? Considering the actual state of things, save me immediately by Your compassion. (The path of total surrender is stressed as superior to the other paths).

Sloka - 33
ए्तावन्ं भ्रम्रनि्यं प्तारप्णोऽ्यं वरताकः श्तान्ः सवतारमन्नगर्रिुनता मणोिनी्यसतव्यताहम् ।
कृत्यताकृत्यव्यपग्मर्ददीनशताखतामृगणोऽ्यं सन्ताड्वैनं दशनरववृर्ं पश्य्से फलं रकम् ॥३३

This miserable one has been subjected to wandering (through innumerable births) so long. I am tired and without any means of escape, O Lord. Now I should be released by You. What do you gain by beating this miserable monkey who does not know what should and what should not be done and seeing him baring his teeth?

Sloka - 34
माता तात: सुत इति समाबध्य मां मोहपाशरपात्यवैं भववलनिधी हा किमीश तवासम् ।
एतावन्ं समयम्यतीमार्तिमापाध्येदुस्मिन् कल्याणी ते किमिति न कृपा कापी मे भाम्यरेखा ॥३४

O Lord, what have You gained by binding me with the rope of delusion to mother, father, son and others and throwing me into the ocean of transmigratory existence? Why is it that Your benevolent compassion has not fallen on me who have been suffering so long? It is only my fate.
A man in the world should practise discrimination and pray to God, ‘Give me faith and devotion.’ Once a person has faith he has achieved everything. There is nothing greater than faith.

One cannot realise God without the faith that knows no guile, the simple faith of a child. Faith! Faith! Faith! Once a guru said to his pupil, ‘Rama alone has become everything.’ When a dog began to eat the pupil’s bread, he said to it: ‘O Rama, wait a little. I shall butter Your bread.’ Such was his faith in the words of his guru.

Faith in the guru’s words. You should depend on his instruction. Do your duties in the world, holding fast to his words, like a person whirling round and holding fast to a pillar.

“One should have such burning faith in God that one can say: ‘What? I have repeated the name of God, and can sin still cling to me? How can I be a sinner any more? How can I be in bondage any more?’

You will certainly realise God if you have firm faith. You may believe in God with form or in God without form, but your faith must be sincere and whole-hearted.

Sri Ramakrishna (to a devotee): “Please tell us the story of the boy who posted the letter.”
Devotee (with a smile): “A boy once heard that God is our Creator. So he wrote a letter to God, setting forth his prayers, and posted it. The address he put on the envelope was ‘Heaven’.”

Sri Ramakrishna (with a smile): “Did you hear that story? One succeeds in spiritual life when one develops a faith like that boy’s.

You must have heard about the tremendous power of faith. ... Rama, who was God Himself – the embodiment of Absolute Brahman – had to build a bridge to cross the sea to Ceylon. But Hanuman, trusting in Rama’s name, cleared the sea in one jump and reached the other side. He had no need of a bridge.

Once a man was about to cross the sea. Bibhishana wrote Rama’s name on a leaf, tied it in a corner of the man’s wearing-cloth, and said to him: ‘Don’t be afraid. Have faith and walk on the water. But look here – the moment you lose faith you will be drowned.’ The man was walking easily on the water. Suddenly he had an intense desire to see what was tied in his cloth. He opened it and found only a leaf with the name of Rama written on it. ‘What is this?’ he thought. ‘Just the name of Rama!’ As soon as doubt entered his mind he sank under the water.

—Sri Ramakrishna
Swami Vivekananda accepting Kali as the Divine Mother who creates and sustains this universe, was a very significant moment in his life. It was also a moment of immense joy to his guru Sri Ramakrishna, who was training him to be Mother’s instrument for uplifting mankind into higher levels of consciousness. This acceptance soon matured into a wholehearted surrender to the Mother’s will, and Swamiji became the perfect instrument to impart Sri Ramakrishna’s great mantras of self-surrender: *Naham naham, tuhu tuhu*, ‘Not I, not I, but thou, O Lord’ and *Ami yantra, tumi yantri*, ‘I am the instrument, you are the operator.’

We find repeated references to this spirit of surrender in Swamiji’s letters, where he declares: “Mother knows best”, “To work I have the right. Mother knows the rest”, “Mother knows what will come next”, “Never mind, ‘Mother’ knows what is best for us. She will show the way”, “‘Mother’ knows best, and we obey”, “for me the ‘Mother’ is my protection and refuge”.

Whether it was his plans for the future, or some events in his life, or his concerns about the monastic order he had set-up and was guiding, he saw their unfoldment as the will of the Divine Mother. He also knew that not syncing with Her will, only meant trouble: “Mother is doing Her own work; ... Alone and drifting about in the will-current of the Mother has been my whole life. The moment I have tried to break this, that moment I have been hurt. Her will be done!”

But what exactly does surrendering to the Divine Mother mean? An example may explain it: When a mother is giving a nice scrubbing bath to her child, he howls in discomfort and pain. At times, the mother even spanks him when he resists being cleaned of all the dirt that he has picked up playing in the ground. Though chided and beaten, the sobbing child still clings to his mother and surrenders to her will, because he knows that only she gives him unstinting love and protection. Similarly, the Divine Mother too cleanses the mirror of our heart so that we can see Her true reflection in it. Wholeheartedly submitting to this painful cleansing, is taking refuge in Her. In a letter to his disciple, Sister Nivedita, Swami Vivekananda writes, “I only know this much: So long as you serve ‘Mother’ with a whole heart, She will be your guide. ... Friends or foes, they are all instruments in Her hands to help us work out our own Karma, through pleasure or pain.” Thus, people around us and even nature become tools to scrub off the dirt of ignorance enveloping our mind and ego. Truly, as Swamiji says, “nothing that happens is against us”.

How to attain this state of complete resignation to the will of Divine Mother? We should begin with disciplining our senses, serving people unselfishly, and performing our family and social duties with excellence, detachment, and an enterprising spirit. These man-making actions will give our ‘I’, the individual sense, a strong positive character. This character-strength will deepen our conviction in our innate divinity and draw us towards spiritual practices. When all our energies are channelised into sadhana, our mind becomes pure and our higher intellect and powers of intuition are awakened. These higher faculties will enable us to perceive the visible universe as “God differentiated and made manifest.” Perfect self-surrender is to accept Mother’s will as it manifests through our family members, friends, foes, and all people and situations we meet — as modelled by the pious weaver in Sri Ramakrishna’s parable ‘By the Will of Rama’. *
Swami Vivekananda was a prince among sannyasis. He was a sannyasin of the highest order, Paramahamsa Parivrajakacharya, who dwelt constantly at the superconscious realm. In the hymn *Sukashtaka*, there occurs the line, रनस्तवैगुण्ये परि रविर्तां कणो रवरि: कणो रनषेः, “What injunction or prohibition can apply to an illumined soul who moves freely on the transcendent path beyond the three gunas?”

Nevertheless, in spite of being a fully illumined soul, Swami Vivekananda lived the life of a true sannyasin, even when he was in the West. Many people think that Swamiji lived a luxurious life in the West. This is not true. He himself wrote in one of his letters that he led a wandering life in India and was doing the same in America also.

Monastic life was for Swamiji what an airport is for a plane. A plane may fly all over the world, but it finally returns to the airport. In the same way, although he travelled all over the world, Swamiji always returned to the monastic way of life. Monastic life was not a limitation but a means of liberation for Swamiji. Monastic life liberated him from family and social bonds and made him free to devote his life to the service of humanity. As a matter of fact, the whole of his public life (which lasted only nine and a half years) was a continual act of self-sacrifice at the altar of love for humanity. During this brief period Swamiji made important contributions to the welfare of humanity.

These contributions can be grouped under three categories: contributions to Hinduism, contributions to the uplift of India, and contributions to world culture. Owing to the limitation of space, I can discuss here only about Swamiji’s contributions to Hinduism.

**Swamiji’s contributions to Hinduism**

1) **Identity and unity**

One main contribution that Swami Vivekananda made to Hinduism was to give it a proper identity, a totality, a wholeness. Before Swamiji came on the scene, there were only several sects, each more or less independent, each claiming superiority over the others. There was no clear understanding of Hinduism as the common ground of all these sects. Sister Nivedita in her Introduction to *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, wrote: ‘Of the
Swami’s address before the Parliament of Religions, it may be said that when he began to speak it was of “the religious ideas of the Hindus”, but when he ended, Hinduism had been created.’ It was Swami Vivekananda who showed for the first time that Hinduism as a whole has certain basic concepts which are common to all the sects. These basic concepts give Hinduism its distinctive identity.

Swami Vivekananda gave Hinduism not only its identity but also unity. By going to America as the first Hindu missionary to West, by representing Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions in 1893, and by preaching Hinduism in the West, Swamiji himself became the symbol of unity of Hinduism (and not as the head of a new sect). Through his lectures and letters he roused the consciousness of Hindus, reminded them of their common heritage, and strengthened the bond of unity among the Hindus. Swamiji gave Hindus a sense of ‘common community’. Pointing this out, the scholar-statesman K. M. Panicker wrote: ‘This new Shankaracharya may well be claimed to be a unifier of Hindu ideology’.

2) Preservation of Hinduism’s rich diversity

Hinduism is a vast conglomeration of institutions, customs, practices, belief-systems, philosophies, cults, deities, scriptures and so on which constitute its mind-boggling diversity. Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda accepted the whole of Hinduism with all its diversity. They accepted the whole of the Vedas, Jnana Kanda as well as Karma Kanda: all the other scriptures such as Puranas and Itihasas; all the sects such as Shaivism, Shaktism and Vaishnavism; all the schools of philosophy such as Advaitism, Dualism, etc; all the saints and sages; all the forms of worship from idol worship to worship of man as God; all experiences, myths and legends. By accepting and revitalising all the diversities Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda helped to preserve them. By contrast, the reform movements, such as the Brahmo Samaj, tried to force Hinduism into their own Procrustean beds. Had any of these reform movements succeeded in dominating Hinduism, the Hindu religion would have lost much of its priceless cultural and spiritual wealth. That is why Sri C. Rajagopalachari, the First Governor-General of India and an astute politician, once stated, ‘Swami Vivekananda saved Hinduism and saved India; but for him, we would have lost our religion and would not have gained our freedom.’ The truth of the above statement can be understood when we look at the history of Europe in the 16th century. The reform movement known as Protestant Reformation destroyed Christianity’s great spiritual wealth, mystical tradition, monasticism, reverence for saints, sanctity of motherhood, etc., and replaced them with economic competition and the capitalist drive in countries like Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Germany and England. Such a situation was prevented in India by the timely appearance of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in the 19th century.

3) Universalisation

In ancient times, Sanatana Dharma or Eternal Religion of the Indian subcontinent was a universal religion, in the sense that it was open to all. It could absorb various foreign hordes and creeds that were introduced into India. But during the Middle Ages Hinduism closed its doors to foreign elements, and became a narrow ethnic religion. One of the tasks Swamiji set for himself was to make Hinduism once again a universal religion open to all peoples and races.

Swamiji made Hinduism not only universal but also dynamic. He infused a missionary zeal into the ranks of Hindus. He
wanted that India’s ancient message of spirituality should spread to all parts of the world and bring spiritual enlightenment to all people. He exhorted; ‘Up, India, and conquer the world with your spirituality.’

4) Hinduism’s rise to eminence

At the end of the 19th century, people in the West had a poor opinion of India and Hindus. Hinduism was regarded as a religion of superstitions, and Hindus as people who worshipped idols, the cow and the snake. One of the achievements of Swami Vivekananda’s work in the West was to change this wrong view.

According to Swamiji, religion has an essential inner core and a non-essential outer shell. The non-essential shell consists of myths, rituals, customs, festivals, etc. The essential core comprises spirituality. Swamiji showed that in the realm of spirituality, Hinduism is superior to all other religions. Hinduism’s pre-eminence comes from the fact that Hindu spirituality is based on the eternal truths and laws of the spiritual world.

Science has several branches such as physics, chemistry, botany, zoology, etc. But they are all based on the eternal and universal truths and laws of the physical world. In the same way, the different religions of the world are based on the eternal and universal truths and laws of the spiritual world. These spiritual truths and laws were first discovered by the ancient sages of India. We admit the superiority of science in the physical realm. By the same token, said Swamiji, the world should recognise the superiority of Hindu spirituality in the spiritual realm. Since the eternal universal principles of spirituality, which form the basis of all religions, were discovered and systematised by the ancient Hindu sages, Hinduism should be regarded as the Mother of all religions. Swamiji’s establishment of the spiritual pre-eminence of Hinduism has given to Hindus pride in their religion, and has made them conscious of the great wealth of their spiritual heritage.

Several Western scholars (like Max Weber) and some Indian religious leaders had blamed Hinduism for being the cause of India’s downfall and backwardness. They therefore wanted to ‘reform’ Hinduism. Swami Vivekananda clearly showed that Hindu religion was not the cause of India’s downfall; the real cause was social—the neglect of the poor masses and neglect of women.

5) Importance of the Upanishads

Another contribution of Swami Vivekananda to Hinduism was to spread among people the awareness of the importance of the Upanishads as the record of eternal truths and laws of the spiritual world discovered by the ancient Indian sages. The Upanishads together constitute the Vedanta. The term Vedanta is also used to mean the eternal spiritual truths recorded in the Upanishads, and the system of philosophy based on them.

Hindu religious tradition holds the Upanishads to be the Shruti, the highest authority regarding spiritual matters. Swami Vivekananda explained why the Upanishads are regarded as the highest authority. Apart from this, Swamiji provided the following supports for the establishment of Vedanta as a universal philosophy of religion.

Swamiji showed that the eternal truths revealed in the Upanishads are not contradictory to modern science but are complementary to it. In fact, Vedanta may be regarded as a ‘science of consciousness’.

Swamiji interpreted the Upanishads and other scriptures in the modern language in a way which can be understood even by ordinary people. In fact, it is through Swami Vivekananda’s Works that millions of people in
India and other countries have acquired some understanding of the basic principles of Vedanta.

Swamiji did not merely follow the traditional interpretations of Vedanta: he also made original contributions to the understanding and practical application of Vedanta. Whereas traditional Advaitins emphasised the transcendental aspect of Brahman, Swamiji emphasised the immanent aspect. Secondly, Swamiji defined Maya as ‘a statement of facts’, and reduced much of the importance that post-Shankara Advaitins had given to Maya. Thirdly, Swamiji changed Advaita from a philosophy of negation to a philosophy of affirmation of the glory and power of Brahman.

In brief, it may be stated here that just as Shankaracharya re-established Advaita to meet the challenges of the Second Millennium, Swamiji re-established Advaita to meet the challenges of the Third Millennium.

6) Popularization of yoga as a spiritual discipline

The present-day recognition of the importance of Yoga in Hinduism is to a great extent owing to the influence of Swami Vivekananda. Swamiji’s work in this field was along the following lines:

Swamiji separated higher Yoga as a spiritual discipline from physical postures and Yoga for psychic powers.

Secondly, Swamiji made Yoga the practical aspect of Vedanta. The author of the Gita, Sri Krishna made the first attempt to combine Vedanta and Yoga. But in later centuries, owing to the dominance of Vedanta, Yoga came to be neglected. Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda restored the balance by reuniting Vedanta and Yoga in the modern world.

Swamiji made original contributions to each of the four Yogas. These contributions are yet to be studied and understood properly. We don’t have scope here to discuss this important subject further.

Swamiji’s idea of ‘Synthesis of Yoga’ as the means of development of all faculties and the development of all round personality is yet another contribution of Swamiji to Hindu spirituality.

7) Practical Vedanta

Swamiji showed that Vedantic principles not only help a person to attain Mukti but also, if applied in practical life, help him to face or solve the problems of everyday life. As already mentioned, traditional Advaitins stressed the transcendental aspect of Brahman, whereas Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda stressed Its immanent aspect. The immanent aspect is based on two principles: (a) man’s true nature is neither the body nor the mind but the Pratyagatman or Inner Self; (b) the Paramatman or Supreme Self dwells in all people as the Antaryamin, Inner Controller. These two principles, if applied in life, can change our whole outlook on life and can be of great help to us in the following fields:

Moral life: Conventional morality is based on compulsion and fear of God or fear of retributive Karma. But if one thinks of one’s true nature as the Atman, then morality becomes a natural way of life; and one will not abuse one’s body or mind.

Faith in oneself and courage to face the problems of life: If a person realises that there is a divine centre in his soul, he will spontaneously feel faith in himself and inner courage to face the problems of life.

Love and service: If a person understands that the Supreme Self dwells in all people as the Innermost Self, his attitude towards other people will spontaneously change into love and the spirit of service. This idea had always been implied in Hindu scriptures but seldom
found application in social life. Swami Vivekananda brought it out and applied it in social life, especially to inspire people to serve the poor, the downtrodden, the sick, and the neglected.

8) Rejuvenation, reorientation and reorganization of Hindu monasticism

Monasticism is declining in most parts of the world except India. In the Western world Christian monasticism is declining because it is unable to meet the challenges of modern life. Even in India, monasticism is now passing through a critical phase. It is in this context that we have to understand Swami Vivekananda’s efforts to rejuvenate monasticism by giving it a new orientation and by adapting the eternal principles of spiritual life to the rapidly changing modern society.

If we study the history of Hindu monasticism, we can see three great figures who played key roles in shaping Hindu monastic life. First came Sri Shankaracharya in the 8th century. He is said to have organised Hindu sannyasins into Ten Orders (Dashanamis). Another contribution of Shankara was to free sannyasins from social obligations. Yet another work of Shankara was to associate monastic life with learning and scholarship. As a result, from Sri Shankara’s time sannyasins have been the main teachers and preachers of Advaita Vedanta, especially in North India.

The second figure was Madhusudana Saraswati who lived in the 16th century. His great work was to open the doors of monasticism to people belonging to all castes. This led to the induction of large numbers of people into Hindu monasticism, and the creation of huge monasteries known as Akhadas.

The third great figure in the history of Hindu monasticism is Swami Vivekananda who lived in the second half of the 19th century. At the express command of his Guru, Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda brought into existence a new monastic Order known as Ramakrishna Math, adapted to the needs of the rapidly changing Indian society and Hindu ethos and the new role India has to play in world affairs. This has led to a significant rejuvenation of Hindu monasticism. Some of the main changes Swamiji introduced into monastic life are briefly stated below:

The first change he initiated relates to harnessing monastic manpower for social welfare. Since sannyasis are free from selfish desires and attachment to the world, they hold in a potential form great power to do good to human beings, and if this power is given a higher direction, it can quickly bring about social prosperity and progress. The main obstacle to this plan of Swamiji was the belief that sannyasins are free from social obligations and are above the need to do *Karma Yoga*.

Swamiji overcame this obstacle by following a new ideal of service propounded by his Guru, Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna taught that man is to be served as God (*Shivajnane jiva-seva*). Thus the work done by the sannyasis of the Ramakrishna Mission is not social service but worship of the Lord. Revered Madhavanandaji Maharaj once pointed out that the *Karma Yoga* done by our sannyasis is only an extension of *Bhakti Yoga*. Revered Gambhiranandaji called it ‘Seva-Yoga’. Hence the Ramakrishna Mission is not to be regarded as a social service organization but as a spiritual organization.

In the Ramakrishna Order, inner purity of the sannyasis is stressed more than outer austerities. For our sannyasis the ochre robe is a symbol of the fire of inner purity and renunciation.

The Ramakrishna Mission sannyasis follow a modern way of life in food, dress, travel, communication, etc., without
compromising the monastic principles of austerity, renunciation and simplicity.

Non-sectarian outlook: In a beautiful hymn to Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Abhedananda states: पूरज्ता येन वै शङ्करस्वेषिष्ठिष्ठिष्ठतिः। सम्प्रदायविविधो य: सम्प्रदायं न निन्दति, that is, ‘[Sri Ramakrishna] did not belong to any sect, but he showed respect to all sects, and never criticised any sect.’ This non-sectarian approach of Sri Ramakrishna has become a tradition in the Ramakrishna Order. The sannyasis of the Ramakrishna Order do not belong to any sect; they can mingle freely with sannyasins of different Akhadas, as well as with Vairagis, Kanphata yogis and others.

Another feature of the Ramakrishna Order is its openness to all without distinctions of caste, religion or race.

Love as the basis of monastic life: This is yet another important feature of the monasticism of the Ramakrishna Math, which has not, however, received much attention. The basis of community life in most of the Hindu monasteries is the sannyasis’ dependence on one another or loyalty to a Guru or to a common ideal. But in the Ramakrishna Order the basis of community life is Sri Ramakrishna’s great love for his disciples, Holy Mother’s all-embracing maternal love, and the great tradition of brotherly love shown by the direct disciples of the Master. All the sannyasis of the Ramakrishna Order live like children of the same parents. Their love for their brothers is not ordinary human attachment but divine prema, spiritual love, which divinises all human relationships. Holy Mother Sarada Devi has played an important role in the development of this spiritual love, and in holding together the whole brotherhood in spite of the great diversity of its members.

Discipline: Discipline plays no less important a role than love. In fact, the monasticism of the Ramakrishna Order is unique in having a strict code of conduct and written rules which govern not only the sannyasis’ individual lives but also the administration of the whole monastic Order. The willing acceptance by sannyasis of strict discipline helps to keep up the purity, spiritual vigour and work efficiency of the monastic Order. The Ramakrishna Order is meant to last not for a few years but for centuries. Strict observance of discipline is a vital necessity for its protection and continuance into the unseen future.

Sri Ramakrishna as the Ideal: In the present age Sri Ramakrishna stands as a perfect embodiment of the two highest ideals of monastic life, namely renunciation of kama-kanchan (lust and lucre) and God-realization as the means for Mukti or liberation. Therefore, Swami Vivekananda placed the life of Sri Ramakrishna before the sannyasis as their highest ideal. The image of Sri Ramakrishna is the most sublime symbol of renunciation, immaculate purity, and Divine Love in the modern world. For sannyasins, the holy image of Sri Ramakrishna serves as the Presha Mantra, goading them beyond the attractions of the three worlds towards the Ultimate Goal of life. Meditation on Sri Ramakrishna purifies the mind, sanctifies one’s actions and divinises one’s attitudes and relationships. The whole Ramakrishna Order is centred on the Ramakrishna Ideal which is its hallmark, distinguishing it from other monastic orders.

I have mentioned here in a brief way only some of the main contributions Swami Vivekananda made to Hinduism. The tragic fact is that the vast majority of Hindus are not aware of the great contributions that Swamiji has made to Hinduism. It is the duty of all of us to study deeply these contributions of Swamiji, to understand their true significance, and strive to make them effective in individual and collective life. *
Maharaj: Swami Vishuddhananda says, “Hold on to Sri Ramakrishna”. If somebody reads his lectures sincerely and seriously, he will understand what it is to “hold on to Sri Ramakrishna”. His holding on to Sri Ramakrishna is just like Sri Ramakrishna holding on to the Divine Mother. He explains the Gita, Upanishads, The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, and other texts in the light of Sri Ramakrishna’s life and teachings. He explains the ultimate conclusions of Advaita Vedanta.1

The saying of the Vaishnavas, Nitya siddha Krishna-prem saadhyaa kabhu nai, “The love of Krishna is the Absolute Perfect State; it cannot be attained by spiritual practices”, is verily a statement of knowledge; it is a Vedantic Truth. It means that at that state my identification with the body-mind-intellect will be cast off and I will remain in the anandamaya kosha, the blissful sheath or dimension of my personality. The Nitya-Vrindavana that the Vaishnavas speak of also represents this dwelling in the blissful sheath. Here too, if an aspirant continues his regular spiritual practices, he attains kramamukti or gradual liberation by going to the Brahma Loka. But if he goes to the Brahma Loka by the dint of some meritorious act, and not by the power of spiritual practices, then he will have to return to this worldly existence.

Our jnanis gradually become fanatics – they won't utter anything other than so'ham, I am He! The bhaktas are also fanatics – they won't even try to understand what so'ham means! Although this is true, if the aspirant’s intellect is sharp and he practices austerities sitting like a log of wood for twenty years, (i.e., unshaken from his resolve and not roaming around) then he will attain perfection. But his mind will not remain steady unless, by the power of his spiritual practices, he develops an inclination to realise the Truth. He will reach that state if he has a powerful brain and strong nerves.

Sri Ramakrishna has said that men of true worth are dead though still living (i.e., they are dead to the world). It means that they are not disturbed by external things. They remain unmoved like logs of wood, and take no notice of the world even if it burns or rots.

If you have come here sincerely in the name of Sri Ramakrishna, then you need not have any fear. Don’t you understand who has come? Parabrahma himself has come this time! We know what will happen to whom and where and when because we have direct access to the
file of the 'Head Office'. If you haven’t come with any ulterior motive – such as seeking fame, comfort, access to food, or opportunity for more work – then you need not have any fear.

The Vibhuti-Yoga chapter of the Gita (Ch.10) contains the essentials of all aspects of Hinduism, like purana, history, Vedanta, and philosophy. Generally, people pause in wonder whenever they come across something grand and magnificent. Whenever people hear that a great man has come, they rush to see him. Man is spontaneously attracted when he sees a giant banyan tree or a vast ocean. This attraction of man towards the grand and great, is used in Vibhuti-Yoga to connect him with God.

2.2.61

Maharaj: Have you understood that there is one Chit or Consciousness behind everything? Even the sun, the moon, the planets, the stars – the manifested vital forces – can work only because this Consciousness is behind them. It is this Consciousness alone that makes a clock work. If you take a grain of sand and analyse it, you will find this same Consciousness present even there. Therefore, the work is done if you catch hold of this One principle.

The Gita initially asks the aspirant to work. If you are not able to refrain from work, then work without any selfish desire. After reaching Sannyasa Yoga, (Ch.5) renunciation of work is enjoined; and in the sixth chapter the Gita teaches, “Inaction is said to be the way”. At that time the aspirant is absorbed in the contemplation of that One Consciousness – where is the inclination to do other work?

In the Gita, Bhagavan also says पुरुष: स पर: पार्थ भक्तया लभ्यस्तवनन्यया | यस्यायोऽन्निः भूतानि वेन | सर्वेष्ट्टं तत्तम् II (8:22) “That Supreme Being, O Partha, in whom are all beings and by whom all this is pervaded, is attainable by one-pointed devotion.” अहं त्वा सर्व्वायपेथेऽवोऽमोक्षविष्यति मां शुचः: II (18:66) “Giving up all duties, take refuge in Me alone. I will liberate you from all sins; do not grieve.”

Our Vishuddhanandajadi never entered into any commotion; he was and continues to remain with his own ideal. In 1926 I saw Yatiswarananda swami. He had a striking look – it’s still imprinted on my eyes. I don’t know how he is now.² What a physique Vishuddhanandajadi has – he is a born yogi! For a man of his age, it is not a small matter to remain seated for 10-12 hours at a stretch on the Kali Puja day; there is no one else like that among us anymore.¹ Some of us have quite a clear intellect and perceive things easily, but don’t have the strength to practice yoga. Others lack emotion. On the other hand, there is a risk involved in studies – the aspirant becomes intoxicated with the intellectual pleasure it provides.

I say, leave God and such ideas alone for the present. Unless your mind reaches the anandamaya kosha, you cannot remain with just the thought of God. Therefore, I say try to go beyond the body-mind-intellect; thereby the mind will automatically attain the blissful sheath. Again, by contemplating God, it becomes possible to go beyond our body-mind-intellect. But when all is said and done, वेषां त्वां त्वना गांपां जनानां पुण्यकर्मणाम् | ते दु:न्दु: हमिन्यं भजन भजनं मां दु:ङ्क्षता: II (Gita, 7:28) “The doers of good deeds, whose sins have come to an end, are freed from the delusion of the pairs of opposites. They worship Me, steadfast in their vows.”

(Continued on page 53...)

1) Swami Vishuddananda (1882 – 1962) was initiated by Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi in 1906 and joined the Ramakrishna order in 1907. He was the 8th President of the Ramakrishna Order.

2) Swami Yatiswarananda (1889 – 1966) was initiated by Swami Brahmanandajaji, a direct-disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and he joined the Order in 1911. He taught Vedanta in Europe for some years and then was the Vice-president of the Order when he attained mahasamadhi.
What is Worth Pursuing?

N GOKULMUTHU

We pursue so many things in life — money, entertainment, health, job, house, car, companion, children, pets, education, skills, knowledge, etc. We pursue all these with the hope that they will make us happy. We somehow seem to have an idea that happiness is the goal of life and these are all the means. With this wrong assumption, seeing poverty, disease, failure, quarrels, war and suffering in the world, we ask the question, “Why is there so much sorrow in the world?” We even declare that if there is a God, He/She must be a very cruel person.

Vedanta declares that happiness is not the goal of life. Wisdom is the goal of life. Swami Vivekananda says, “Sense-happiness is not the goal of humanity. Wisdom (Jnana) is the goal of all life. We find that man enjoys his intellect more than an animal enjoys its senses; and we see that man enjoys his spiritual nature even more than his rational nature. So, the highest wisdom must be this spiritual knowledge. With this knowledge will come bliss. All these things of this world are but the shadows, the manifestations in the third or fourth degree of the real Knowledge and Bliss.”1 If we understand this, then everything in the world and our own life starts making sense. The dualities like success-failure, fame-disgrace, wealth-poverty, health-disease, and pleasure-pain, keep alternating. This whole scheme, when understood correctly, makes us wiser. Through this wisdom, we go beyond the dualities. The dualities no longer affect us. We are ever peaceful and blissful. This is the goal.

However, the maturity to learn the lessons in life to become wiser does not come in the beginning. So there are two other pursuits which form the steps. The first thing worth pursuing is ‘good action’. Vedanta declares that good action produces good karma phala, called punya. This punya gives better opportunities in life and a better understanding of values. That leads to the second thing worth pursuing which is ‘good character’. This positive character — habits and tendencies — of a person is called susamskara. This is what gives us peace of mind, gives us the balance and freedom from bias, which helps us to see the truth, and which gives us wisdom. This wisdom is the third thing worth pursuing, called jnana.

Thus, these three things, punya, susamskara and jnana, are the only things worth pursuing. Again, Vedanta tells us that these three are the only worthy things that a person carries from one lifetime to another. Every material thing that we acquire in life is left back at the time of death. There is a beautiful story about this.

Once there was a rich man in a village. He was a great miser who loved his money very dearly. He never spent the money, nor gave anything to anyone. Suddenly one day he realised that he will eventually die one day. He did not want to part with his money when he died.

He went to the priest of the temple and asked, “Sir, when I die can I take my money with me?” The priest replied, “What a foolish man you are! Has anyone taken his wealth with him when he died? When a man dies, his children fight over his wealth. Strangers cheat the children and take a part of the wealth for themselves. A man spends all his life earning wealth only to find that either the wealth leaves

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him, or he must leave the wealth at the time of his death.” The miser cried out aloud and ran back to his money hoarded in his house. He could not bear the idea that he must part away from his wealth.

Whenever any pundit visited the village, he asked him the same question. The pundits pitied him and explained that he could not take even a broken needle with him. The miser spent sleepless nights in great agony.

One day, Guru Nanak came to the village. The miser asked the great saint, “Oh holy sir, I have spent all my life in earning wealth. I understand that I will die one day. I want to take my wealth with me when I die. Everyone says that I cannot do so. Is there any way by which I can take my wealth with me?” Guru Nanak looked at him with great love and replied, “Oh dear, you have worked hard all your life to earn this wealth. Surely it is yours. You can take it with you when you die.” The miser jumped with joy. Finally, he had found a saint who spoke words of nectar. He fell at the feet of the saint and asked, “Oh great sir, your words have brought me great joy. Please tell me how I can take my wealth with me when I die. No one whom I have met so far seems to know how it can be done.”

Guru Nanak then asked him, “Have you travelled to foreign countries?” The miser said, “Oh yes, several times. I have travelled to several countries to do business. That is how I have earned all my wealth.” Nanak asked, “Is the local currency useful in the foreign countries?” The miser replied, “No. They all have different currencies. But I can buy gold and gems for the local currency here and take them with me. Gold and gems are valued in all countries.” Guru Nanak then declared, “Yes. So, you must do the same with your wealth. The local currency, and even gold and gems are not valued in the world after death. You need to convert all your wealth into a form that is valued across death.” The miser replied, “Yes. You are right. Please tell me into which form should I convert all my wealth into?”

Nanakji answered, “Punya is the only one that is valued even after death. Spend your wealth for the good of the society by building schools, hospitals and temples. With your money help people in distress. This way, you can convert your wealth into punya. Whatever you have converted into punya by such activities can be taken with you when you die. Whatever you have still left as currency, gold, gems, land, houses, etc., must be left back here. You cannot take them with you when you die.”

The rich man was very happy. He did not remain a miser any longer. He lived a simple life, and spent all his wealth for the good of the society.

When we have gained sufficient punya, our thinking opens up. It gets refined. We start valuing character. We begin to pursue freedom from psychological defects like anger, jealousy, arrogance, lust, and greed. When we are sufficiently free from these psychological defects, we will see that real happiness does not come from people, objects and situations. We will be able to meditate. We will have the peace and tranquillity of mind to become introvert, think deeply, and inquire about and understand our own true nature, the nature of the whole existence and our relationship to the whole. This understanding, called jnana, frees us from all anxiety and sorrow. This is called moksha, which is the ultimate goal, according to Vedanta.

Everyone has to start with the pursuit of punya, then proceed to the pursuit of susamskara and then further to the pursuit of jnana. We need not wait. We can start pursuing all the three to the best of our ability, understanding and conviction. Depending on our maturity, that pursuit will make sense to us, bear fruit and take us further.*

References: 1) The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda. 3:4  2) Bhagavad Gita. 6:9  3) Ibid. 6:8  4) Ibid. 6:7
Akka Mahadevi: Bhakta’s Bhakti to Aikya Bhakti
DR SHIBANI CHAKRAVERTY AICH

Spiritual life is a graded journey towards realising the Truth. In Lingayatism, this graded path is referred to as Shatsthala, or the six stages of spiritual progression. This article attempts to understand this spiritual movement as revealed in Akka Mahadevi’s vacanas. The life and message of Akka Mahadevi were presented by the author in our July and August 2020 issues.

In the spiritual history of India, a woman saint of 12 CE, dared to live and move about naked covered only with her long tresses. This was Akka Mahadevi, an embodiment of asceticism and intense dispassion. Beneath this majestic and awe-inspiring persona beat a tender heart throbbing with passionate love for Lord Shiva in the form of Chennamallikarjuna, Lord white as jasmine. Her vacanas, poems of personal devotion to the Lord, reveal a unique amalgam of prema bhakti (ecstatic love), jnana (supreme wisdom) and vairagya (absolute detachment). Along with scaling the heights of spirituality, her undaunted courage and temerity to live life on her own terms in the face of incessant adversities and opposition is an example for womankind.

To study Akka Mahadevi’s vacanas, it is imperative to understand the tenets of Lingayatism since she was born in a Lingayat family. Her vacanas suggest that her formative years were deeply rooted in its ideologies.

The core doctrine of Lingayatism is delineated in its Shatsthala philosophy. It propounds that a soul’s spiritual journey is like the steps on a ladder. Each step is a step forward towards inner purification and the attainment of the supreme goal of life – God-realisation. These stages of a soul’s spiritual evolution are commonly termed as ‘sthala’. The Lingayats identify six (sat) such sthalas that the soul must climb to attain realisation.

The word sthala also has a broader and deeper connotation. In Sanskrit, the word means ‘place’ or ‘ground’, which is associated with foundation. In this sense sthala refers to Brahman, the source of all.

Among the saranas, Basavanna and Chennabasavanna have given different interpretations of Shatsthala. Basavanna advocates that the devotee should proceed on the Shatsthala pathway in a sequential stepwise process, probably because he thinks it would be easier to begin at the beginning and work through the rest of the way. On the other hand, Chennabasavanna appears to have stated that one can begin at any stage and still achieve the goal of God-Realisation.

All saranas, however, assent to the six stages of spiritual growth, namely: Bhakta Sthala, Maheshvara Sthala, Prasadi Sthala,
Pranalinga Sthala, Sarana Sthala and Aikya Sthala. Each sthala characterises certain qualities in a devotee, culminating in the union with the Absolute in the Aikya Sthala.

In the first three sthalas, the seeker is a devotee of the Lord; there is *dvaita* (duality — the devotee and the Lord). The next three sthalas are progressive steps towards *advaita* (oneness with the Lord). Although many vacanas have been written on the Shatsthala, no one can possibly describe this doctrine more eloquently and beautifully than Shatsthala Chakravarti Chennabasavanna. His vacana, describing the Shatsthala stages says:

If he is a bhakta, he should be free from all desires of the mind and body.
If he is a Maheshvara, he should have no longing for another’s wealth, another’s concerns and another’s wife.

If he is a Prasadi, he should forget the pleasures of taste and keep his body pure.
If he is a Pranalingi, he should renounce his body and mind and merge with the linga.
If he is a Sarana, to whom nothing exists and he exists for the Linga.
He who enjoys, not self, but Him in everything achieves true Lingaikya.

Sarana Akka Mahadevi’s spiritual journey can also be charted along the lines of the Shatsthala philosophy. Although love knows no steps or rules, an analysis of her vacanas lends clarity to the blossoming of a devotee’s heart soaked in divine love. In her quest for union with her eternal husband, Lord Chennamallikarjuna, her vacanas show the escalation of her love, faith and surrender in intensity and depth. Herein is an endeavour to understand her vacanas in the context of Shatsthala.

Bhakta Sthala

On the path of God-realisation the first and the last step is devotion and faith. As the spiritual aspirant progresses, these two factors evolve in depth and intensity. In the Bhakta Sthala stage the devotee develops devotion and unflinching faith in the Ishtalinga given by the Guru. It can be said to be the first step of true devotion, as although the worship is external, it is based on the understanding that the Ishtalinga is the symbol of Supreme Consciousness. The main purpose of this worship is to attain *chitta shuddhi* or mental purification. Without the prerequisite of chitta shuddhi, knowledge of the Self cannot be attained. It would be equal to pouring water in a dirty vessel. This inner purification can be attained by strictly following moral codes of conduct, like speaking the truth, non-violence, respecting everyone, having compassion, selfless service, etc. As the mind gains purity, it
loses interest in material things and devotion deepens. Akka Mahadevi says:

_For Linga’s sake_

For Linga’s sake I wear my clothes,  
For Linga’s sake I deck myself,  
For Linga’s sake I serve;  
For Linga’s sake I look around.  
Because my inner and my outer self  
Are all for Linga.

She reveals the heart of a devotee who lives for the Lord by virtue of intense love for the Divine. Just as a lover, blinded by love for the beloved, performs every action with the intention of pleasing the beloved, Akka Mahadevi did everything for the Lord. She dedicated to the Lord even the most mundane day-to-day activities such as dressing, serving or looking. This becomes possible only when there is an understanding, based on love, that ‘I belong to the Lord’. With this attitude, the devotee naturally supersedes the ego, as the individuality is willingly sacrificed on the altar of love for the Divine.

_Physical form of Lord_

I lost my heart on seeing the handsome one,  
Adorned with jewelled crown  
And wristlet made of snake.

In this stage, the devotee is attached to the physical form of the Lord. Akka Mahadevi glorifies the beauty of her beloved Lord Chennamallikarjuna. Since the mind is not matured, it cannot conceive the Lord as formless Consciousness and therefore revels in the form of the Lord. It is this attraction to the form that leads the devotee to the formless as the mind becomes purified by virtue of one-pointed longing for the vision of the Lord.

In longing for His sight by day,  
I pine and waste.

This intense longing is the panacea for the challenges of a spiritual seeker – sense control and mind control. The mind is like a monkey that refuses to rest in one place. Since the senses reach out wherever the mind wanders, they become an impediment in one’s spiritual life. But for a devotee like Akka Mahadevi, sense control becomes natural when the mind dwells only on the Lord. All the activities of the senses get absorbed in the worship of the Lord.

My senses have been dedicated unto  
Thy:

I do not know what else there be!  
Thou art my ground, Thou art my goal.

In this context, some of the practices of the _nava vidha bhakti_ as expounded in the primarily Vaishnava text _Srimad Bhagavata_ can be observed in the life of Akka Mahadevi. Although a follower of Lingayatism, she naturally imbibed some of these practices as an expression of her devotion. It denotes that the language of Pure Love is one. These external practices help the devotee to remain focused on the Lord so that all the senses become an offering to the Lord.

_Smaranam (remembrance of the Lord)_

Waking up in the morning,  
I recall your name, Sir.

_Kirtanam (singing glories of the Lord) and Archanam (worship)_

Being calm, I worship you.  
With mutual love, I sing of you.

_Vandanam (bowing to the Lord)_

I’ll never cease to say, “I bow to you”,  
Even if you slay me.

_Maya_

The biggest challenge to a spiritual seeker is to untie the knot of _maya_. Akka Mahadevi
wrote many vacanas on her struggle with this power of illusion. In this stage, the devotee strives hard to overcome this seemingly invincible enemy of spiritual progress. All spiritual practices are meant to overcome this obstacle that shrouds the Reality.

Even a devotee of Akka Mahadevi’s stature professes her inability to conquer maya merely by self-effort. The reason is that maya is not separate from the Lord but an integral part of the Lord, like fire and its heat. So the Lord’s maya can be said to be as powerful as the Lord. However, maya is dependent on the Lord for its manifestation but the Lord remains independent. Often the example of the shadow of a person is used to demonstrate this complex relation between the Lord and maya. The person is independent of his or her shadow but the existence of the shadow depends on the existence of the person. Just as one cannot get rid of one’s shadow, it is extremely difficult to overcome the Lord’s maya. Only by surrendering to the Lord and invoking Divine grace, a devotee can break through the shackles of the elusive maya. Akka Mahadevi seeks the Lord’s grace in a spirit of abject surrender:

If I say No, Maya says Yes, it is!
If I refuse, Maya keeps still her hold...
Save me, save me!

Public opinion

The True Self does not need accolades or recognition. Being beyond all limitations of body, mind and intellect, it remains untouched by the experiences of life. Any concern about public opinion remains within the domain of the individual ego. A spiritual seeker who comprehends and assimilates this knowledge naturally imbibes the virtue of equanimity. Even a clear intellectual understanding helps the spiritual aspirant to face praise and calumny alike.

A spiritual seeker, treading the path of knowledge, is able to discern Truth from untruth with astute intellect and discrimination. On the other hand, a devotee, following the path of devotion, is able to conquer the ego and its vagaries due to love for the Divine. As a true bhakta’s only love and concern is the Lord, all actions are performed only for the Lord’s sake. The bhakta remains indifferent to fruit of the action. Bhakta Akka Mahadevi voices:

Do those whom Lord Cenna Mallikarjuna loves
Care for the world’s regard?

Along with devotion to the Lord her vacanas show that there was inner clarity and understanding of the nature of the world. This faculty of discrimination emerges from deep devotion in a bhakta’s spiritual journey. While ‘living’ for the Lord, the bhakta makes many decisions or choices that are not pleasing to the world. The poignant life of Akka Mahadevi demonstrates this fact. While encountering many such experiences the bhakta naturally develops the faculty of discrimination. In one such vacana Akka Mahadevi says:

You build a house on a hill
Yet are frightened of animals;
How would it be?...

Losing interest in material things

When the mind is filled with thoughts of the beloved Lord, a true devotee’s indifference to the world is expressed through thoughts, words and actions. With an understanding of the nature of the world and its objects the devotee loses interest in the material things of the world. The frills and fancies that attract the mind of an ordinary person lose their charm for a devotee. Akka Mahadevi highlights the transient nature of worldly pleasures:

(Continued on page 42...)
Let’s exercise on the trapeze,” Naren said to Hari as they entered the neighbourhood gym. The trapeze hung in a shed but when the boys went inside they saw the iron bar trailing the ground. Looking up they noticed the cord had snapped from one of the two hooks in the ceiling. “Oh no,” Naren exclaimed, disappointed, “it’s broken!”

Walking around the trapeze, they studied it carefully. “It needs a new rope,” Naren observed, “which has to be slung back through the hooks and tied securely. Let’s try repairing it, Hari!”

After removing the old, frayed cord, the boys met the manager and asked for his help. He sent them to the warehouse behind the gym. There, searching amongst the equipment, they found a length of stout rope, and back in the shed, they tied the bar to it. “Now,” Naren said, “we have to hang this from the ceiling.” Curious onlookers gathered, watching the boys...
take turns to sling the rope around the hooks. But after many failed attempts, Naren declared, “We need a ladder.”

“Ahoy there,” a loud voice called out and a tall, British sailor shouldered his way through the crowd. “Let’s get this trapeze up, shall we?” his blue eyes twinkled in a friendly way. “Now keep a tight hold on the bar,” he told the boys and in a single throw, looped the rope easily through the two hooks. Twisting the ends of the rope around his hands, he nodded at the boys. As they let go of the bar, he gave the rope a strong tug. The solid iron swung sharply towards him. Naren shouted a warning. The sailor tried to step aside but the bar struck him smack on the head. With a cry of pain he collapsed on the floor.

The crowd scattered, leaving the boys alone with the injured man. “He’s bleeding,” Hari cried out in alarm, “we are sure to be arrested because he is English!”

“I don’t care about all that,” Naren said, tearing off a piece from his dhoti, “we must do everything to help him. Quick, get some water.” By the time Hari returned, the sailor’s wound had been bandaged. Holding the glass to the man’s lips, Naren gently urged him to drink. The sailor moaned and his eyes fluttered open. After sipping some water, he slowly sat up, wincing in pain. “There is an empty school next door,” Naren told him, “we can make arrangements for you to stay there…and please don’t worry…we’ll take care of all the expenses.”

When the boys told their families and friends about Tim, the kind sailor, everyone contributed some money towards his care. Naren visited Tim every day and the latter brightened at the sight of the cheerful boy. One day, when Naren reached the school, he saw the sailor at the gate. “I was waiting for you,” Tim smiled, “to thank you for all that you’ve done for me.”

Naren caught his hand, “Are you going away then?”

“Yes, I must catch my ship and sail home, laddie.”

“Then please accept this little gift,” Naren pulled out a purse from his pocket, “there’s some money in it…a small compensation for the earnings you lost because of the accident.”

Tim stared at Naren speechless. “A friend in need is a friend indeed,” he murmured after a moment, his blue eyes smiling gratefully into Naren’s brown ones. “I shall never forget you, laddie,” he said and making a farewell salute, quickly strode away.

Without the idea of personal responsibility, no one can achieve anything great.
—Swami Vivekananda
focus in this issue:

Mission of the Vedanta - 1

Moving on from Madura, Swami Vivekananda visited the ancient town of Kumbakonam. Here he delivered his first address on the Mission of the Vedanta. For the purpose of our exploration, we have divided this lecture into two parts:

Part 1: Swami Vivekananda explores the Hindu religion and also explores why Vedanta is the best religion.

Part 2: Swami Vivekananda lays out the role of Vedanta in awakening India.

In this issue we will focus on Part 1.

[A] RELIGION IS THE BEDROCK OF INDIA

1. Religion is the one and sole interest of the people of India.

```
Have you heard of the parliament of religions? Yes! I heard that an Indian sannyasin has gone there and got success too!

While our peasants may be ignorant about latest world trends, they are up-to-date about religion
```

"I found that the very peasants working in the fields... were already acquainted with the fact that there had been a Parliament of Religions in America, that an Indian Sannyasin had gone over there, and that he had some success.

1. The Hindu race is one whose vitality, life principles and very soul is in religion.
2. Almost every great nation has one great ideal which forms its backbone. With some it is politics, with others it is social culture; others again may have intellectual culture and so on for their national background.
3. But this, our motherland, has religion and religion alone for its basis, for its backbone, for the bed-rock upon which the whole building of its life has been based.

Continue overleaf >>
This is the line of life, this is the line of growth, and this is the line of well-being in India — to follow the track of religion.

1. The religious ideal has been living in India for thousands of years. For good or for evil, our vitality is concentrated in our religion.
2. You cannot change it. You cannot destroy it and put in its place another. Just like you cannot transplant a fully grown tree into another soil.
3. We have been born and brought up in the very midst of these ideas of religion, till it has entered into our very blood and become the very vitality of our lives.

India’s roots are in religion.

“..that our religion does not conduce to well-being in this world, that it does not bring gold to us, that it does not make us robbers of nations, that it does not make the strong stand upon the bodies of the weak and feed themselves with the life-blood of the weak. ...It cannot send cohorts, under whose feet the earth trembles, for the purpose of destruction and pillage and the ruination of races. Therefore they say — what is there in this religion?

There is vitality enough, and it comes out in torrents and deluges the world when the time is ripe and requires it.

[B] COMPARING RELIGION IN INDIA AND THE WEST

Ours is the true religion because it teaches that God alone is true, that this world is false and fleeting, that all your gold is but as dust, that all your power is finite, and that life itself is oftentimes an evil; therefore it is, that ours is the true religion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion in the West</th>
<th>Religion in India</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For the West, God is the Being who helps to clean and furnish the world for people.</td>
<td>This little sense-world of three days duration is not to be made the end and aim of all, is not to be our great goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hence, the world (politics, social improvement, etc.) is the goal of mankind and God and religion are helpers to attain that goal.</td>
<td>It teaches renunciation, and tells all nations - ‘Children, you are slaves of the senses. There is only finiteness in the senses’. Renunciation is the way to the goal, and not through enjoyment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is a curious fact that while nations after nations have come upon the stage of the world, played their parts vigorously for a few moments, and died almost without leaving a mark or a ripple on the ocean of time, here we are living, as it were, an eternal life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Western approach</th>
<th>Indian approach</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The West is trying to solve the problem of ‘how much a man can possess’,</td>
<td>We are trying to solve the problem of ‘on how little a man can live’.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those who train themselves to live on least and control themselves, will gain in the end, and those who run after enjoyment and luxury, however vigorous they may seem, will have to die and become annihilated.
5.0  The thoughtful men of the West find in our ancient philosophy, especially in the Vedanta, the new impulse of thought they are seeking.

1. There is a tide of world-weariness that seems to have come upon the Western world. The races of the West are eager for some new philosophy.

2. While most people still cling on to political and social changes as the panacea for all evils, among the great thinkers of the West new ideals are growing; they are recognizing the need for a change of soul itself to cure the evils of life.

6.0  It is Vedanta, and Vedanta alone that can become the universal religion of man, and that no other is fitted for the role.

The theory of the Ishta

“..our religion a most intensely impersonal one — a religion based upon principles ... Yet as I have said, our religion has ample scope for the authority and influence of persons

- Through the wonderful theory of the Ishta, Vedanta gives each and every individual the fullest and the freest choice possible among all the great religious personalities.
- One may take up any one of the prophets or teachers as one's guide and the object of one's special adoration. But one must keep to a firm background of eternally true principles.

7.0  Of all the scriptures in the world, it is the one scripture the teaching of which is in entire harmony with the results that have been attained by the modern scientific investigations of external nature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Western mind</th>
<th>Indian mind</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The ancient Greek mind started by analysing the external world.</td>
<td>The ancient Hindu mind started by analysing the internal world.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“ It seems to us, and to all who care to know, that the conclusions of modern science are the very conclusions the Vedanta reached ages ago; only, in modern science they are written in the language of matter. This then is another claim of the Vedanta upon modern Western minds, its rationality, the wonderful rationalism of the Vedanta
1. It is shown in the Vedanta that behind that idea of the unity of the whole show, the real Soul is one. There is but one Soul throughout the universe, all is but One Existence.

2. This great idea of the real but basic solidarity of the whole universe has frightened many, but it is the one great life-giving idea that the world wants from us today.

3. Without this, our mute masses cannot be lifted, and this land of ours will never be regenerated.

To be continued...
"Sleepyhead, wake up!" The all-too-familiar voice of the Swami jolted her out of her sleep.

Poorva found that she was back in the stables. Jumping off the horse, she said, "Swami Thatha, I went for a long, long ride, all by myself on this fabulous horse!"

Poorva turned to pat the animal and got the strange feeling that it was bowing its head to the Swami. Enough of your fantasies, she chastised herself. "Thatha, I must tell you about the wonderful cave that I saw." Poorva described everything to the last detail.

The Swami said, "From your description, I gather that you’ve visited the wonderful Namakkal cave temples. They are a good distance from here; in fact, outside the boundaries of the Chera kingdom. Your time has certainly been well spent, though I must say many years have passed since you left this palace."

Seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, years – none of these make sense to me any more, mused Poorva. But the Swami’s words, for sure, make a lot of sense. So I shouldn’t miss out on what he is saying. She reined in her wandering thoughts.

"Those caves are man-made, carved painstakingly out of huge rocks. The main deity you saw in there was Lord Ranganatha, wasn’t it? Behind Him were the figures of Sage Markandeya, the one blessed to be eternally sixteen; Varuna, the rain god; Thumburu, a celestial musician; and Narada, whom you yourself identified. Along with them were also Patanjali, a rishi who wrote on yoga; the gods Brahma and Surya; the two demons Madhu and Kaithabha; the moon god, and a few others.

The one that you missed seeing was the Narasimha cave. In there is an impressive sculpture of the Lord tearing up Hiranyakashipu. Another exquisite carving is that of Lord Vamana with his umbrella."
These caves were excavated early this century by the Athiyas, the local chieftains of the place. They were probably the ones who carved all these images."

The Swami merrily added, "Too much of history at a time can be tiresome. So let us get back to the ‘present’. Lots of things happened here since you left. Kulashekhara is married and now has two children: a son, Dridhavrata, named after his father, and a daughter, Ilai."

"I seem to have missed out on an awful lot."

"Don’t worry, you’re in time to watch the most important event in this king’s life – the transformation of King Kulashekhara into Kulashekhara Aazhvaar," the Swami announced. "Let’s get into the palace. In the next few days, several important events will unfold."

At the court, Poorva found the king engrossed in conversation with many scholars. She heard him ask, "What is eternal in life? Who is the Supreme God?"

A unanimous answer came forth from all present: "Lord Narayana."

Time raced by. Poorva observed that, though the king was attending to the affairs of the state, he was spending more and more hours on the study of religious texts. He was particularly fond of listening to the Ramayana. Poorva sat happily next to the king during the story sessions. One day, an amazing event took place.
The storyteller was dramatically describing the war between Rama and the raakshasas Khara and Dooshana: “Here was Rama, fighting single-handed, and on the other side were 14,000 raakshasas ...”

All of a sudden, there was an unexpected interruption. It was King Kulashekhara commanding his courtiers, “Summon the army. I’ll go to the help of Rama.”

“Goodness gracious,” Poorva exclaimed. “The king believes he is part of the story! I wonder what is going to happen now!”

The storyteller rose to the occasion. “O king,” he said, “the war is over and Rama has won a tremendous victory over Khara and his troops.”

The king immediately calmed down, and Poorva appreciated the storyteller’s presence of mind. On other days too, she found the king getting upset whenever Rama was in trouble, and each time, the storyteller handled the situation shrewdly.

With each passing day, Poorva found the king attending less and less to the affairs of the state and spending almost all his time meditating on God, listening to His stories or singing about Him. “Totally immersed in God, like an Aazhvaar,” said Poorva casually. That last word alerted her. “No, he is an Aazhvaar,” she quickly corrected herself. “He has certainly become one.”
Many were the days when Poorva heard the king sing with immense feeling. “Those are his compositions,” volunteered the Swami. One night, while exploring the west wing of the palace, she heard the king singing a lovely song, Mannupugazh kousalaithan. The last line of the song went: Raaghavane thaalelo. She further observed that every verse ended with the word thaalelo. The music, slow and melodious, lulled her. Her eyelids drooped, and in that ‘yawny’ state, she heard the Swami say, “Thaalelo is a key word in Tamil lullabies.” He chuckled, “Those lullabies were for Rama, not for you.”

His voice had her wide awake. She looked around for the Swami, but there was no sign of him or of anyone else, for that matter. The king continued singing. His music filled the quiet night with bliss.

On another occasion, she heard the king sing a set of ten songs. “These songs contain the gist of the Ramayana,” whispered the Swami helpfully, and he hummed a few lines as he walked past her: ‘For the love of the dark-eyed Sita, He broke the Siva-Dhanush, then victoriously took the bow from the axe-wielder and drove away the sworn enemy of kings – Parasurama; I worship the feet of those that worship Him.’

And thus things went on, until one day Poorva heard the king declare that he would like to go to Srirangam to worship Lord Ranganatha. The courtiers held a discussion amongst themselves: “The king is in such a God-intoxicated state, he’ll surely not return to Thiruvanchikulam. So many times we have heard him sing of the Lord, lamenting: ‘When will I see Him and lower my crowned head at His adorable feet? … I do not cherish this life of wealth, glory and power … My heart shall always worship and praise the holy feet of the devotees of the Lord of Srirangam’.

“It will be disastrous for the state to be without a king. But it is obvious that the king honours the devotees of the Lord as much as he worships the Lord Himself. Hence, we’ll assure him that we’ll invite many Srivaishnavas to the palace every day and he can honour them to his heart’s content. Further, with guests around, a host doesn’t simply leave his house. The king is bound to stay back.”

It seemed as though the courtiers had succeeded, at least for the present, in persuading the king to abandon his plans of leaving the kingdom, for Poorva saw hordes of Srivaishnavas throng the palace every day. The king seemed very happy with this arrangement, but the constant stream of visitors made the courtiers unhappy. Their disgruntled looks and secretive behaviour made Poorva suspect that they were up to something devious. She could not have been more right.

(To be continued…)
A Bengali gentleman, staying in the western frontiers of pre-independence India, had deep love for God. One day he was possessed with the agony of not having realised God. He became madly restless. The thought so pained him that he went to jump from the top of a hill and kill himself.

A cowherd boy saw him and said, “What are you doing?”

Thus obstructed, he eagerly asked the boy, “Shall I realise God?”

The boy immediately replied, “Surely you will.”

The man took this assurance as from God himself, and returned to Bengal.

While returning, he inexplicably got down at Bally railway station. In those days Bally was the nearest stoppage to reach Dakshineswar. Alighting in this unfamiliar place, the bewildered man, as if drawn by an invisible force, crossed the river Ganga and came to Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar.

This was Kedarnath Chattopadhyay. Formerly, he used to live at Lahore. At first he frequented the Brahmo Samaj and joined other religious sects in his search for God. Now this divine pull made him an ardent devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. His first visit was in 1880. He is referred to as Kedar in The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna.

The Gospel records that Kedar was about fifty years old. He was an accountant in a government office and lived in a suburb of Calcutta. For several years Kedar was at Dacca, in East Bengal, where he had become a friend of Vijay Goswami. The two would spend a great part of their time together, talking about Sri Ramakrishna and his spiritual experiences. Kedar with his devotional temperament, cherished the attitude of the gopis of Vrindavan. Words about God would make him weep. The Master told about him, “Ah, what a beautiful nature Kedar has! No sooner does he come to me than he bursts into tears. His eyes are always red and swim in tears, like a chanabara in syrup.”

One day Kedar very happily arranged a religious festival for Sri Ramakrishna. A singer had been hired by another devotee, and the whole day passed in joy. Sri Ramakrishna was listening to the songs when the sight of Kedar awakened in his mind the episode of Vrindavan in Sri Krishna’s life. Intoxicated with divine love, the Master stood up and sang, addressing Kedar:

Tell me, friend, how far is the grove
Where Krishna, my Beloved, dwells?...

Sri Ramakrishna assumed the attitude of Sri Radha to Krishna and went into deep
samadhi while singing the song. He stood there, still as a picture on canvas, with tears of divine joy running down his cheeks. Kedar knelt before the Master. Touching his feet, he chanted a hymn:

We worship the Brahman-Consciousness in the Lotus of the Heart, The Undifferentiated, who is adored by Hari, Hara, and Brahma...

Once, Sri Ramakrishna said about Kedar: “He is very nice. He accepts both the Absolute and the Relative. He believes in Brahman, but he also accepts the gods and Divine Incarnations in human form.” In Kedar’s opinion, Sri Ramakrishna was such an Incarnation. Kedar famously told Sri Ramakrishna with folded hands: “The will of God! It is all your will.”

As a devout Vaishnava, he used to say, “One should be lowlier than a straw and patient as a tree.” And, “The more clay there is in the jar, the less water it holds.”

Although Sri Ramakrishna loved Kedar as his own, he didn’t overlook Kedar’s flaws in character. One day, Kedar decorated Sri Ramakrishna’s feet with flowers and garlands. The Master was in samadhi. Kedar believed in certain queer practices of a religious sect to which he had once belonged. He held the Master’s big toe in his hand, believing that in this way the Master’s spiritual power would be transmitted to him. As Sri Ramakrishna regained partial consciousness, he said to the Divine Mother, “Mother, what can he do to me by holding my toe?” Kedar sat humbly with folded hands. Still in an ecstatic mood, the Master said to Kedar: “Your mind is still attracted by lust and lucre. What is the use of saying you don’t care for it? Go forward. Beyond the forest of sandal-wood there are many more things: mines of silver, gold, diamonds, and other precious stones. Having a glimpse of spirituality, don’t think you have attained everything.” The Master was again in an ecstatic mood. He said to the Divine Mother, “Mother, take him away.” At these words Kedar’s throat dried up. In a frightened tone he said to Ramchandra Datta, “What is the Master saying?”

Later Sri Ramakrishna said, “I wanted to pass my hand over his chest, but I could not. He has knots and twists inside. It was like a room smelling of filth, which I could not enter. His attachment to the world is very deep; it is like a natural emblem of Siva, whose root spreads as far as Benares. One will never succeed if one is attached to the world — to woman and gold”.

Once Sri Ramakrishna said, “I had a vision of the Indivisible Satchidananda. Inside It I saw two groups with a fence between them. On one side were Kedar, Chuni, and other devotees who believe in the Personal God. On the other side was a luminous space like a heap of red brick-dust. Inside it was seated Narendra immersed in samadhi. Kedar, a believer in the Personal God, peeped in and ran away with a shudder.”

Sri Ramakrishna had high opinion of Kedar as a sadhaka. He asked Kedar to bless his young disciples Narayan and Baburam (Swami Premananda) that they might have devotion to God.

In Sri Ramakrishna’s divine play, Kedar represents the sincere devotee who has attained true devotion for God and received God’s appreciation. Yet attractions for sense pleasures persist in such a devotee’s subconscious mind, which makes God shy away from bestowing them enlightenment. Kedar’s life teaches us that to succeed in spiritual life we have to consciously strive to eradicate worldly desires even at the subconscious level.

References: *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna; Spiritual Talks* (Advaita Ashrama)
AN APPEAL TO DEVOTEES AND WELL-WISHERS

Dear Friends, Namaste. We pray for you and your family.

Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai has been rendering service for over 120 years to the society in the fields of Health, Education, Publication of Spiritual & Inspirational books and magazines both in English & Tamil, cultural activities, relief work etc. In order to execute the projects on hand, we appeal to you for contribution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service activities in brief</th>
<th>Expenses</th>
<th>Your support needed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance of Vivekananda Centenary Girls Hr. Sec. School for underprivileged (900 students)</td>
<td>Monthly Rs.7,20,000/-</td>
<td>Rs.8000/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Per student Rs.800/-</td>
<td>For 10 Students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintenance of Sri Ramakrishna Math National School for underprivileged children (350 students)</td>
<td>Monthly Rs.2,80,000/-</td>
<td>Rs.8000/-</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Per student Rs.800/-</td>
<td>For 10 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehabilitation Service to Leprosy afflicted persons – 120 beneficiaries</td>
<td>Monthly Rs.1,20,000/-</td>
<td>Rs.10,000/-</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Per beneficiary Rs.1000/-</td>
<td>For 10 beneficiaries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medical Service to 600 - 800 poor patients daily</td>
<td>Monthly Rs.5,40,000/-</td>
<td>Rs.9,000/-</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Per patient Rs.900/-</td>
<td>For 10 patients</td>
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<td>Nursing Assistants Training for poor rural girls – 30 students per batch of 1 year</td>
<td>Per batch Rs.7,50,000/-</td>
<td>Rs.25,000/-</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Per student</td>
<td>For student</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rural development – Education, Women Welfare &amp; Medical Help, Alcohol de-addiction – 100 beneficiaries</td>
<td>Monthly Rs.1,00,000/-</td>
<td>Rs.5000/-</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Per beneficiary Rs.1000/-</td>
<td>For 5 people</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sri Ramakrishna Daily puja, Neivedyam and Arathi</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rs.10,000/-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daily Annadhanam for 200 devotees</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rs.10,000/-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sadhu Seva per day for 50 members</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rs.5,000/-</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Donations for both Thanjavur & Chennai Math may please be sent by cheque / DD favouring “Sri Ramakrishna Math”. For Online donation please visit https://donations.chennaimath.org Transfer directly & intimate us along with PAN details through email. Donations are exempted from Income Tax under Section 80G.

May the blessings of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna be on you is my earnest prayer to Him.

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Yours in the Service of the Humanity,
Swami Gautamananda Adhyaksha
The Story of India-Japan Relationship by Swami Medhasananda will be Advaita Ashrama’s next forthcoming book. The book mainly deals with Swami Vivekananda and Okakura Tenshin, their meetings and mutual influences; and making this the ground, the author explores the story of Indo-Japan relationship.

Swami Vivekananda was a staunch admirer of Japan for various reasons, and so was Okakura an ardent admirer of India. The study of their chemistry makes for an illuminating understanding of Indo-Japan relationship, especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century contexts.

Readers placing their orders before 15 August 2020 will be offered a special 25% discount. They should write to mail@advaitaashrama.org with their postal address and other contact details (phone number and email ID).

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Uniqueness of the Ramakrishna Incarnation and Other Essays

Revered Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, the twelfth President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, was loved and revered by monks and devotees alike for his profound learning, untiring energy, loving heart, and, above all, his spiritual accomplishments.

During the long tenure of his spiritual ministry, Revered Maharaj delivered discourses at various places both in India and abroad in response to the earnest requests of spiritual seekers. This book is a compilation of forty-one of these discourses.

Monks and devotees would meet Swami Bhuteshanandaji nearly every day during his tenure as President of the Ramakrishna Order and ask him various questions on spiritual life. Selected questions and Maharaj’s answers to them have been given at the end of the book.

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**INDIAN CULTURE: ITS TIMELESS APPEAL AND AGELESS CHARM**

Edited by Swami Atmashraddhananda.

Published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai - 600 004. 2016, hardbound, pp.374, Rs.275/-.

Indian Culture its Ageless Charm and Timeless Appeal’ is a Vedanta Kesari presentation brought out on the occasion of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. An invaluable publication, the work addresses an important need — a genuine understanding of Indian culture, its traditions, arts and values. Invaluable, because of the sweeping changes in the field of art and culture, and the need to introduce our youth to the priceless nature of Indian cultural heritage and thus enable them to understand the profound legacy that they are custodians of. This is a vital endeavour if our age old wisdom, art, cultural and spiritual traditions are to be nurtured and preserved as they have been for thousands of years.

Swami Vivekananda declares: “The more advanced a society or a nation is in spirituality, the more is that society or nation civilised”, “It is culture that withstands shocks, not a simple mass of knowledge,” and “The Divine Being was always within, the nearest of the near. Him we have been seeking outside and at last found that He is in the heart of our hearts.”

These core ideas propounded by Swami Vivekananda are brought out through various articles in this publication, elucidating varied aspects of Indian culture and its eternal nature. The core of dharma, the scriptures of India and the contributions of ancient India are explained. Culture or Samskriti is defined as also the role played by Swami Vivekananda as a true ambassador of Indian culture. The need for culture and India’s inherent spirituality are discussed followed by the profoundly spiritual life-stories of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi.

Along with the aspects of Indian philosophy and Vedic heritage, facets of Indian art, dance, music and yoga are also explored. Traditional clothing, cuisine and the rationale behind customs like rangoli, namaste, arti, bhajan, mantras and more are explained. Shilpa shastra, Ayurveda and scientific achievements like those of Aryabhatta are studied.

At a crucial time when Indian culture is open to immense debate and scrutiny, this publication is an invaluable effort at comprehensively compiling the core and most vital aspects of an age-old culture based on the strong foundation of spirituality and philosophy. Cogent, authoritative, factual and meticulously compiled, it is a must read for young people as well as anyone who seeks to understand the nuances of Indian culture.

JAYANTI VARMA, CHENNAI

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**TOWARDS ETERNITY (A Meditation on Scriptures)**

by Vijay Kaskhedikar

90, Jaiprakash Nagar, RBI Colony, Khambla, Nagpur - 440 025. 2016, paperback, pp.131.Rs.40/-.

Vedanta proclaims in no uncertain and resounding voice: ‘Brahman is both Immanent and Transcendent, both material and intelligent principle of this most marvellously vibrant universe; the Self is Brahman’. These sublime revelations about the ultimate reality were made by the Rishis, the seers of the mantras.

This book which presents the above Vedantic theme is appropriately titled “Towards Eternity” (A meditation on scriptures). The author has chosen three of the major Upanishads for the study viz., the Mundaka, the Katha and the Brihadaranyaka, besides the Bhagavad Gita.

The note of blessings from Swami Harshananda, Adhyaksha of Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore and a detailed Foreword by Swami
Brahmasthananda Adyaksha of Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur impart authenticity and value to this study. The author says that he was inspired to attempt this book by listening to the Vedanta classes conducted by late Swami Shivatatwananda, followed by the personal discussions he had with the revered Maharaj.

The author initiates the discussion with the profoundly penetrating and cosmic question in the Mundaka Upanishad: “Adorable Sir, what is ‘That’ by knowing which all else will be known?” posed by grihasta Saunaka, a mumukshu, to the sage Angirasa.

Drawing upon Swami Vivekananda’s declarations: ‘Religion is Realization and self-Realisation is God-realisation,” the Self being potentially divine, the author quotes several related mantras of Mundaka; one being the magnificent metaphysical metaphor of ‘two-birds on a tree’ which Swamiji was very fond of quoting with rapture because of its profound mystic symbolism is Vedantic contemplation.

Of course dwelling on the Katha Upanishad one cannot but quote ‘Awake, Arise’. These immortal words uttered by the Rishi millennia ago re-echoed in the magic voice of Swami Vivekananda on two levels: 1) To awaken the Western world from its spiritual sterility. 2) To reawaken the fallen Indian etherised by Western moha. The author also deals with the much acclaimed story of Nachiketa, the archetype of shraddha who went to the abode of Yama, the Lord of Death, and returned enlightened having learnt from him the secret of Self-knowledge.

The author says with conviction that one who listens devoutly to the illuminating dialogue between Rishi Yagnavalkya and his seeker-wife Maitreyi, Ushasta, Kahola and erudite Gargi in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad will be absolved of the least trace of scepticism and agnosticism. The author aptly compares the lofty spiritual nature of conjugal relationship between Sage Yagnavalkya and his seeker-wife Maitryi with that of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, the divine couple as it proves that conjugal life is possible beyond sensuality.

In the penultimate chapter the author brings out the disillusionment of Arjuna born of his attitudinal misconception. Arjuna did not as such, oppose killing but was hesitant to kill his dear kith and kin and thereby his seeming compassion was nothing but irresolution and mawkish sentimentality. Sri Krishna redeems Arjuna from despondency by imparting the wisdom of the higher law of Karma Yoga, that even a bloody war when waged with a sense of high purpose in response to the call of duty does not defile a doer.

The shanti mantras pertaining to these Upanishads appended in the end of the book would be helpful for recitation daily before study and meditation.

This book on the whole, would serve as a good primer for sadakas.

SUNDARA RAMAN, CHENNAI

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**THE ESSENCE OF YOGAVASISTHA**

Compiled by Sri Jnanananda Bharati Translated by Samvid


Yogavasistha or Yogavasistha Maharamayana is reputed to consist of 32,000 slokas. However, the printed editions consist of around 28,000 slokas. The complete edition is perhaps available in private collections. There is an abridgement of this great Vedantic text, known as Laghu Yogavasistha which has 6000 slokas.

*The Essence of Yogavasistha* is a republication by Samata Books of the original text Sri Vasistha Sangraha, a publication of Sri Sringeri Jagadguru Samsthanam. It is a condensation of the original into 1698 slokas. This compilation is done by Sri Swami Jnanananda Bharathi. The abridgement maintains the flow of the original teaching. The English translation by Sri Samvid, presents subtle thoughts in a lucid manner.
Akka Mahadevi: Bhakta’s Bhakti to Aikya Bhakti

The body of yours is not indestructible,
The pleasures of the world do not last forever.

Maheshvara Sthala

The Bhakta Sthala devotee, endowed with devotion and dispassion, progresses from faith in the form of Ishtalinga to an intellectual understanding of God. It can be said that Maheshvara Sthala is the starting point of jnana, knowledge, in a devotee’s spiritual journey. With this expansive vision faith becomes rooted in conviction. The hallmark of this sthala is unwavering and unflinching faith in God, which is accompanied by deep-seated devotion and unconditional surrender. This faith is established with the grace of the Guru and the devotee considers the Guru’s words as words of the Lord.

The human intellect has the power of discernment but it is clouded with ignorance and unintelligent attachment in the case of most people. So perceptions and decisions are mostly distorted. Only with shraddha (broadly defined as faith), it is possible to attain purity of intellect. Since Maheshvara Sthala is characterised by shraddha, a devotee attains clarity of intellect. This enables the devotee to go through all experiences of life as a gift from the Lord and the spirit of acceptance keeps the devotee always happy and cheerful.

Look you, if you would know,
You cannot know:
For He is greater than the Great.
I could not sound
The depth of Chenna Mallikarjuna
And had to own defeat!

The Maheshvara devotee is aware of the mahatmya, or greatness, of the Lord and that helps in establishing unflinching faith. With the growing understanding of the prowess and divinity of the Lord, the devotee progresses by leaps and bounds in the spiritual arena. It leads to the realisation that the Lord is like an ocean whose depth cannot be measured. Any attempt in trying to know the Lord in completeness would result in utter failure. The immensity of the greatness of the Lord cannot be fathomed.

Even as a treasure hidden underground,
As savour lurking in a fruit,
As gold in stone, as oil in sesamum,
As fire is hidden in the wood,
Or Brahma in the heart,
No one can know the abode Of Chenna Mallikarjuna.

This vacana shows the growth of knowledge in Akka Mahadevi. It resounds with the message from the scriptures that everything is Pure Consciousness. Yet the Lord remains invisible to the eyes of the ordinary people as the real nature of the Lord cannot be perceived with the mind or the senses. Akka Mahadevi uses many similes and metaphors in this vacana to demonstrate the real nature of the Lord, which is the essence in the external world of objects.

Prasadi Sthala

As the name of this sthala suggests, the devotee accepts everything as God’s Prasad. All experiences of life are accepted in this spirit, and the devotee becomes receptive to God’s grace. With complete faith when this devotee casts eyes on everything, he or she is able to behold God in all His manifestations. Equipped with this vision, the devotee bows down in humility to everyone and everything. Love and compassion become the devotee’s second nature. Therefore, the characteristic of the Prasadi is surrendering the ahamkara, ego. The
sense of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ is sacrificed to the Divine will. Since he or she works without the feeling of doership, the Prasadi becomes a perfect instrument in the hands of the Lord through whom the Divine Will gets executed. Also, since actions are performed without any desire for the fruits, the chain of karma is broken. Endowed with detachment, the Prasadi inherits the treasure of a still mind. The disposition of such a person is naturally happy and cheerful.

Beholding the Lord in all His manifestations
When all the world is the eye of the Lord, Onlooking everywhere, what can you Cover and conceal?

Surrendering the ego
I shall remain ever a servant to the servants Of the wise ones who dedicate themselves To the Guru, Linga and the mendicant

Stillness and equanimity of mind
Once born in the world, Praised or blamed, One must not get angry But remain at peace.

Accepting everything as God’s will
What is to come tomorrow, Let it come to me today, What is to come today, Let it come right now.

Pranalinga Sthala
The devotee’s worship becomes internalised at this stage. It is called the state of anubhavabhakti or experiential bhakti. All the rituals performed for the Ishtalinga are now performed for the Lord within, residing as the Supreme Consciousness. The bilvapatra, which is traditionally offered to worship Lord Shiva, has three leaves on a stem. In the inner worship of a Pranlingi, the three leaves correspond to sadbhakti (bhakti based on understanding), sujnana (knowledge of the Paramatma) and sadkriya (good or noble work). Bhakti (nishkama bhakti) is the jala (water), sadguna (good qualities) are the flowers, sadbhavana (good mental disposition) is the dhoopa (incense), knowledge is the deepa (lamp) and self-surrender is the naividyā (food offering to the Lord). This kind of worship is possible only when the devotee has attained complete chitta shuddhi (purity of intellect) and manas shuddhi (purity of mind). Although the mind is there, it is sattvik (completely pure), rid of all negativities and latent tendencies. Such a mind is able to perceive the truth, but is not established in the state of Oneness. It can be said that it is the beginning of non-duality in which an experiential understanding dawns on the devotee that the atman is the Paramatman. This profound knowledge is not complete in this sthala but the devotee gets glimpses into the Reality. This sthala is marked with the dawning of peace and equanimity.

In Akka Mahadevi’s spiritual journey one of her vacanas highlights the state of a Pranalingi:

Because our mind is clouded, the Guru gave A symbol; but mark you, brothers mine: If you would have the true Enlightenment, For Pranalinga there is no substitute! Why do you toil in vain In wavering piety? If you should worship Lord Chenna Mallikarjuna With knowing heart, you’ll never again Return to birth.

Akka Mahadevi observes in this vacana that the Ishtalinga given by the Guru is only ‘a symbol’ to help the spiritual seeker focus the
mind on the Lord. The impure mind is like an unclean mirror that cannot reflect the pure atman. It is almost impossible for such a mind to dwell on the formless aspect of the Lord. However, she asserts that although initially the form of the Lord helps the devotee, finally the devotee has to transcend image worship and realise the indwelling Lord. That is the only way to enlightenment. Only by experience can one be established in the Truth. This is indicated in the words ‘knowing heart’—the knowledge of the Lord is the knowledge of the Self. This knowledge helps one to cross the ocean of samsara. If this knowledge is not gained, then, in the words of Akka Mahadevi, worship of the Lord remains as ‘wavering piety’. At this stage, lingayat sarana Chennabasavanna observes that the body of the devotee becomes the Linga. Akka Mahadevi describes this state in her vacana:

He manifested Discipline  
Within the body; and  
Made clear this discipline to be  
Linga; established Consciousness  
Within the breath; and showed  
This Consciousness to be Jangama.

The vacana highlights an elevated state of surrender in devotion. In order to reach this state of Pranalinga, the devotee has to discipline the wandering mind and the reckless senses. Without control over the mind and senses it is not possible to delve within or turn inward. Akka Mahadevi says that this seemingly impossible task is attained with the grace of the Lord. When a true devotee constantly contemplates on the Lord, the mind becomes one-pointed and the senses become an offering in worship of the Lord through every action. The love and sincerity of the devotee invokes the grace of the indwelling Consciousness (Linga), which lends inner strength to the mind and the body of the devotee to accomplish this feat. In the preceding sthalas the devotee practices tratak yoga (gazing with one-pointed concentration at the Ishtalinga). This is not merely a mechanical exercise but an expression of the devotee’s love for the Lord. When a devotee practises tratak yoga with devotion, the breath gradually becomes regulated and the awareness level increases. This is indicated by Akka Mahadevi in her words, "established consciousness within the breath". As one progresses in tratak yoga the object (Ishtalinga) gradually disappears from the vision of the devotee, and the mind turns inward. The gap between subject and object gets depleted, and a heightened state of awareness is attained. Endowed with this awareness the devotee is able to experientially discern the Reality, the eternal, all-pervasive Consciousness, the spirit of the Jangama. Although the experience is not the same as abiding at this stage, it augments the inner conviction of the devotee and lends peace to the longing soul.

Sarana Sthala

The main feature of this sthala is that the devotee lives the dictum ‘Sarana sati, Linga pati’ (sarana is the wife, linga is the husband). It is the highest state of devotion within the realm of duality; the blossoming of the bud of devotion, expressed in its fullness, through complete surrender to Lord Shiva. The word ‘sarana’ itself means surrender. The unique fragrance of this sthala is the attitude of the devotee towards the Lord impregnated with deep love and faith. The devotee manifests the mood of a loving and chaste wife whose thoughts, words and deeds remain inextricably intertwined with the will of her husband.

In Vaishnav literature this mood of the devotee is denoted as madhurya bhava or kanta bhava. In its fullest manifestation it leads the devotee to the experience of non-duality wherein the devotee ceases to be. Sarana Sthala can be said to be just a step lower to the
pinnacle of non-duality in the ladder of spiritual progress. The advanced devotee partakes in the bliss of the Lord having experienced His 'Real' nature. This sthala has been described as the stage of ananda bhakti (blissful devotion). Since the sense of individual identity is nearly obliterated the devotee becomes a perfect instrument in the hands of the Lord. While the great Lingayat, sarana Basavanna, who is considered the archetype of this sthala, engaged in the noble service of mankind, one does not find such instances in the life of Akka Mahadevi. Most of her vacanas, in this sthala, are an expression of madhurya bhava.

Akka Mahadevi expresses her experience of this sthala in the following vacana:

In dedicating the body unto Linga,
The body is made bodiless;
In dedicating the mind to Consciousness,
The mind is turned to naught;
In dedicating the will to Bliss,
The will is turned to void;
Because my body, mind and will
Have perished, my body has attained
A disembodied state.
Because the Linga enjoys
My body's joys, I have become
A dedicated spouse
To my Linga.

At the outset this vacana suggests Akka Mahadevi’s complete surrender of body, mind and will to Lord Chenna Mallikarjuna. On deeper introspection it reveals that the ‘surrender’ to her beloved Chenna Mallikarjuna is essentially surrender to her own true nature. Dedicating the body to the Linga, mind to Consciousness and will to Bliss denotes rising above the body-mind identification, which finds expression in the words ‘disembodied state’. The individual ego is sacrificed on the altar of love for the Divine. This sthala can be exemplified with the meeting point of river and ocean. The river, after a long tedious journey, gushes to lose itself in the vast ocean. Similarly, the devotee loses his or her individuality and partakes in the bliss of Sat-Chit-Ananda but willingly retains the threadbare identity of a beloved in order to relish the rasa of devotion.

The best example of this state is the gopis of Vrindavan, who lost their identity with their pure love for Sri Krishna. In Srimad Bhagavatam Sri Sukadeva explains this state of the gopis: “With all their sins burnt up by the unbearable heat of separation from the Beloved, and with the mind pacified and purified by embracing the Beloved in meditation, they attained to the Paramatman, though they looked upon Him as a lover.” (X.29:10-11).

Despite attaining samadhi, the gopis retained their individuality as the beloved of Sri Krishna. They remained Krishnamayis (drowned in love for Krishna). However, it is interesting to note the difference in the gopis’
behaviour when they met Bhagavan again after several years. Although they were ecstatic on seeing Him, the external exuberance was subdued as they experienced the bliss of Bhagavan within themselves, the tears of longing having given way to inner fulfillment. This state is the Sarana Sthala.

Akka Mahadevi, who also practised madhurya bhava like the gopis of Vrindavan, revealed this unique and quintessential state of a true bhakta in her words, “Because the Linga enjoys my body’s joys, I have become a dedicated spouse to my Linga.” The bhakta’s body is like an empty vessel filled with God Consciousness. The body belongs to the Lord and so the bhakta feels that all its attributes and pleasures are now enjoyed by the indweller Consciousness. However, it is important to note the difference between Sarana Sthala and Aikya Sthala. As this vacana points out, although in the Sarana Sthala, where the bhakta has attained complete surrender to the Lord, the residue of ‘I’ remains – Akka Mahadevi referred to her body still as ‘My’ body. In Aikya Sthala all sense of duality is annihilated as the devotee attains this state of oneness.

Aikya Sthala

The devotee reaches the destination – God realisation – in this sthala. It is an expression of the Upanishadic dictum: “Everything is Brahman”. In other words, on realising one’s true nature, the devotee recognises ‘I ALONE AM’.

The illusionary boundaries of ‘I’ and ‘You’ disappear, and everything is accepted. The world of names and forms was merely a misinterpreted apparition, understood to be mere appearances and not ‘Real’. The veil of ignorance that clouded the vision of the devotee is removed to unveil the Truth in everything. On realising one’s Self, the same Self is beheld in all the forms and the awareness that everything is the Lord, dawns on the devotee. This state is described by devotees as the state of ‘union’ with the Lord. The vacana sastra asserts that this unity is nothing other than void (Bayalu). After having attained this pinnacle of spiritual glory, Akka Mahadevi declares:

I am not a Bhakta, Sir,
For I do not know
How to serve the master.
I am not a Mahesvara, Sir,
I do not know
How to observe rites and vows
With stubbornness.
I am not a Prasadi, Sir,
For I do not know
The difference between
The offered and the unoffered.
I am not a Pranalingi, Sir
For I do not know the mystic way.
I am not a Sarana
For I do not know
The concept of Linga being the Husband
And Sarana being the wife.
I am not an Aikya,
For I do not know
What is Union
O Chennamallikarjuna,
I hold a place of no-stage (Void)
In the six-fold stage! *

Bibliography

The Science of Vedanta

There are three fundamental ideas in Vedanta which appeal to scientific minds. These are:

1) Principle of Generalisation:
The first principle of reasoning is that the particular is explained by the general, the general by the more general, until we come to the universal.... From humanity we generalise to animals, next to life, and at last to existence.

2) Principle of Evolution:
That the explanation of a thing comes from within itself is completely satisfied by Vedanta. The Brahman has nothing outside of Himself. All this indeed is He: He is in the universe: He is the universe Himself. “The difference between man and man, between angels and man, between man and animals, between animals and plants, between plants and stones is not in kind, but only in the degree of manifestation.” That is the principle of evolution or greater manifestation.

3) Principle that Evolution is Cyclic:

This is the mind-boggling concept of evolution presented by Swami Vivekananda. Evolution is not linear but it is cyclic, for, that which evolves must have been involved earlier. The tree gets involved in the form of the seed; in the seed there is all that is required to evolve itself into a full-grown tree. And this process continues.

There are two more grand ideas which appeal to scientific minds. These are:

1) Solidarity of matter, of thought, and of spirit.

Supposing we are materialists, we shall have to conclude that the whole universe is simply an ocean of matter, of which you and I are like little whirlpools, in a continuous state of flux. So with thought. It is an ocean of thought, in which your mind and my mind are like whirlpools. That is why my thoughts are entering into yours, and yours into mine. That again is why some are capable of reading the minds of others. And as spirit we are essentially one.
2) Why do we perceive matter, mind and spirit when all that exists is the spirit?

Existence being the highest generalisation, and all matter being one, all minds being one, and all spirit being one, how do we perceive matter, mind and spirit as three things in that universal existence? Universal existence as perceived by the five senses is matter; that universal existence as perceived through the intellect is mind; and when the spirit sees, the universal existence is seen as spirit. Consciousness is not matter, but whatever is real in matter is Consciousness. Upon It the senses are painting chairs, and tables, and rooms, and houses, and worlds, and moons, and suns, and stars, and everything else. Similarly, Consciousness as perceived through the intellect is mind; and it is spirit when seen by the spirit. The human mind experiences the joy of sense pleasures (*vishayananda*); to meet its own specific needs, it sees this Consciousness as various forms of gods and goddesses too and enjoys the joy of devotion (*bhajanananda*). And so, there is really no polytheism in Hinduism; it is the one Reality appearing in various ways. There are, in addition, special manifestations of this Consciousness from age to age as Incarnations of God. Further, one experiences the bliss of Brahman (*brahmananda*) in samadhi.

**Pointers to Brahman**

Referring to his being an incarnation of God, Sri Ramakrishna once asked ‘M’ (Mahendranath Gupta, the author of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*) whether the manifestation was fractional or complete. ‘M’ confessed that he did not understand ‘fractional’ and ‘complete’ manifestation of God, but he understood the analogy of a ‘round hole in the wall’. Asked to explain he said, “There is a round hole in the wall. Through it one is able to see part of the meadow on the other side of the wall. Likewise, through you, one sees part of the Infinite God.”

Thus, an incarnation of God or the Personal God which is the highest reading of the Impersonal by the human mind, enables one to gain the experience of Brahman or Consciousness. After the demise of an incarnation, he continues to live in his subtle body which devotees continue to see if they pray to him and call on him with great yearning. Gods and goddesses and their images too are pointers to Brahman. What is more, everything in this universe, being pervaded by Consciousness, can be meditated upon as Brahman.

**Image of Consciousness**

One day the priest of the Radhakanta temple, in the Dakshineswar Kali Temple complex where Sri Ramakrishna was also a priest, accidentally dropped the image of Krishna, breaking one of its legs. The pundits advised Rani Rasmani, who built the temple, to install a new image, since the worship of an image with a broken limb was against the scriptural injunctions. But the Rani asked Sri Ramakrishna for his opinion. He said: “This solution is ridiculous. If a son-in-law of the Rani broke his leg, would she discard him and put another in his place? Wouldn’t she rather arrange for his treatment? Why should she not do the same thing in this case too? Let the image be repaired and worshipped as before.”

One notices in this solution that God is to be accepted as one of the members of the family and not merely as an image. A question arises...
here whether the fracture in the leg of the image implies a fracture in the leg of the deity represented by the image. The explanation for this is that the deity is Consciousness and akhanda, without parts, and hence cannot be broken. In this regard he said, “Can the One, who is an indivisible Whole, be broken?” It is the all-pervading Consciousness seen through the senses as the material image that is worshipped, and not the material image. All the articles used in the worship are also that Consciousness. It pains a devotee to see a defective image of his chosen deity and therefore the mending of the image is essential.

Another incident will clarify the point that it is Consciousness that is worshipped and not a piece of stone, metal or wood. ‘M’ raised the question to Sri Ramakrishna: “Sir, suppose one believes in God with form. Certainly He is not the clay image!” Sri Ramakrishna interrupted him and said: “But why clay? It is an image of Spirit.”

Swami Vivekananda elucidated this point to the Maharaja of Alwar, who said that he had no faith in idol worship. Asking the Dewan to bring down the picture of the Maharaja hanging on the wall, Swamiji asked the Dewan to spit on it. He pointed out that the picture was but a piece of paper, that the Maharaja was not bodily present in the picture (contrasting the case of the image). Yet all refused to dishonour it for they saw in the photo the likeness of the Maharaja. So is it with the devotees who worship stone, wooden, clay and metal images of gods and goddesses. An image brings to their minds their chosen deity, or some special form and attributes of the Divinity, and helps them to concentrate. They do not worship the material image but the supreme spirit which is in the image. And God appears to all according to their understanding and their representation of Him.

**Living gods and goddesses in images**

After the temple of Dakshineswar was built and the image made, there was delay in fixing an auspicious day for the installation. The image, kept packed in a box lest it should be damaged, suddenly perspired and the Rani got the command in a dream, “How long will you keep me confined this way? I feel suffocated; install Me as soon as possible.”

When Sri Ramakrishna began performing the ritualistic worship of the Mother, he initially “used to see a hand of the Divine Mother or a foot, bright and delicate, or Her sweet, affectionate and smiling face, supremely beautiful.” Later on “he saw, even at times other than those of worship and meditation, the full figure of the effulgent Mother, smiling and speaking, guiding and accompanying him and saying, ‘Do this, don’t do that.’ Formerly when he offered cooked food etc., to the Mother, he used to see an extraordinary ray of light coming out from Her eyes and touching the offered articles, taking their essential parts, and withdrawing itself again. Now, he saw that even before the offering was made, the same Mother in Her very person, sat down to take the offerings, illumining the temple with the effulgence of Her holy presence.” “Previously, at the time of worship and meditation, he saw a wonderful living Presence in the stone image before him. Now he did not see that image at all when he entered the temple; but saw instead, the living Mother Herself standing there.” He said, “I put the palm of my hand near Her nostrils and felt that Mother was actually breathing. I observed very closely, but I could never see the shadow of the Mother’s divine person. I heard from my room the jingling sounds of the Mother’s anklets, as she went upstairs like a merry little girl. I came out to verify and found that She, with Her hair dishevelled, was actually standing on the verandah of the first floor of the temple and was now viewing Calcutta, and now the Ganga.”

This
is what an ‘image of Consciousness’, a living image, means!

Narendranath (premonastic name of Swami Vivekanadna) was a member of the Brahmo Samaj. He had no sympathy with polytheism and image worship. One day, soon after the demise of his father, Narendra, faced with poverty at home, strangely requested Sri Ramakrishna to pray to the Divine Mother to remove his poverty. Sri Ramakrishna bade him pray to Her himself. As Narendranath stood before the image of the Mother, he beheld Her as a living Goddess, ready to give wisdom and liberation. Unable to ask Her for petty worldly things, he prayed only for knowledge and renunciation, love and liberation. Sri Ramakrishna sent him back to the temple twice more. But Narendra, standing in Her presence, prayed only for knowledge and renunciation, love and liberation.

Vision of God

One early morning at three o’clock, Gopal-Ma, a lady devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, was about to finish her daily devotions, when she was startled to find Sri Ramakrishna sitting on her left, with his right hand clenched, like the hand of the image of Bala Gopala. She caught hold of the hand, whereupon the figure vanished and in its place appeared the real Gopala. Gopala begged her for butter. She pleaded her poverty and gave him some dry coconut candies. Gopala sat on her lap, snatched away her rosary, jumped on her shoulders, and moved all about the room. At day break she hastened to Dakshineswar. Gopala accompanied her, resting his head on her shoulder. She clearly saw his tiny ruddy feet hanging over her breast. On entering Sri Ramakrishna’s room, she found that Sri Ramakrishna had fallen into samadhi. Like a child, he sat on her lap, and she began to feed him with butter, cream, and other delicacies. The mind of Gopala’s Mother was steeped in bliss. She saw Gopala frequently entering the Master’s body and again coming out of it. When she returned to her hut, still in a dazed condition, Gopala accompanied her. She spent about two months in uninterrupted communion with God, the Baby Gopala never leaving her for a moment. Sri Ramakrishna said that such vision of God was a rare thing for ordinary mortals.

Once Swami Prabhavananda was discussing with a swami these spiritual visions of Gopala’s Mother. The Swami expressed his opinion that her visions belonged to the transcendental plane and that she had not actually seen Sri Krishna. How could one see God in the external world with physical eyes? To this, his guru Swami Brahmananda commented, “Show me the line of demarcation where matter ends and spirit begins.” In other words, when the eye of the spirit opens one sees Brahman everywhere.

Totapuri, Sri Ramakrishna’s guru for Vedantic sadhana, was suddenly laid up with a severe attack of dysentery. Finding it impossible to fix his mind on Brahman, he decided to drown in the Ganga. He walked into the river straight to the other bank as though there was not enough water in the Ganga for drowning! Standing dumbfounded on the other bank, he looked back across the river. Suddenly, he saw on all sides the presence of the Divine Mother. She is in everything; She is everything. Without Her grace no embodied being can go beyond Her realm. Man has no free will. He is not even free to die! She is the Shakti that Totapuri had been meditating on as Brahman all his life.

Worship in images

Sri Ramakrishna once instructed two lady devotees as follows: "Worship Siva. In order to perform the worship of God you will be
preoccupied for a long time with such religious duties as plucking flowers, making sandalpaste, polishing the utensils of worship, and arranging offerings. As you perform these duties your mind will naturally be directed to God. You will get rid of meanness, anger, jealousy, and so forth. When you two sisters talk to each other, always talk about spiritual matters. The thing is somehow to unite the mind with God. Your thought of Him should be without any interruption. If you worship with love even a brick or stone as God, then through His grace you can see Him. ... Once the mind has become mature, one doesn’t have to continue formal worship for long. The mind then always remains united with God; meditation and contemplation become a constant habit of mind.”

To another lady devotee who felt distracted during her meditation due to her attachment to her nephew, Sri Ramakrishna advised that she should look upon the boy as Bala Gopala; very soon she had exalted spiritual experiences thereby. To another who kept goats his advice was to see God in the goat. The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi also pointed out that even a stick used to tether cows to the ground for grazing can be meditated upon as Brahman. Thus bearing in mind that the all-pervading Consciousness is being worshipped, any object can be used as a symbol.

This leads to the question, ‘If God can be worshipped in images, why not in humanity?’

Worship of God in human form

Sri Ramakrishna and his wife Sri Sarada Devi lived together at Dakshineswar with their minds soaring above the worldly plane. A few months after Sri Sarada Devi’s arrival, Sri Ramakrishna arranged a special worship of Kali on the day of Phalaharini Kali Puja. Instead of an image, he placed on the seat the living image, Sri Sarada Devi herself. The worshipper and the worshipped went into deep samadhi and in the transcendental plane their souls were united. After several hours Sri Ramakrishna came down again to the relative plane, sang a hymn to the great Goddess, and surrendered at the feet of the living image, himself, his rosary, and the fruit of his life-long sadhana.¹⁴

As a logical development of this worship, Swami Vivekananda gave humanity the lofty ideal of ‘service to humanity in the spirit of worship of God’ which is popularly known as Shiva Jnane Jiva Seva. Here, all men and women, nay, everything in the universe becomes images of God. *

References

1) The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda. 1: 369-75
2) The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. pp. 838-39
3) The Gospel. p. 11
4) Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master, p. 152
5) The Gospel. p. 80
6) Life of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern and Western Disciples. 1: 268-70
7) Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master. p. 139
8) Ibid., 165-66
9) The Gospel. p. 59
10) The Gospel. pp. 64-65
11) The Eternal Companion, Life and Teachings of Swami Brahmananda. p. 6
12) The Gospel. p. 31
QUESTION: The Upanishads give to the dream state an importance almost equal to that of the waking state. Ordinarily, we try to progress by learning from our waking experience. How are we to press into service our experience of dreams for our spiritual progress?

MAHARAJ: In some of the Upanishads there is an attempt made to analyse the three states of waking, dream and sleep and put them on a state of equality ontologically on the assumption of the fourth or pure consciousness or awareness that runs through and records the experience of all the three. It is however doubtful whether we can put all the three states on a status of equality, while remaining in the waking-consciousness itself. What the philosopher attempts is probably to abstract himself from the waking-consciousness and view it as a memory, just like a memory of dream and sleep. In so abstracting he is attempting to stand on the Fourth. But this process of abstraction can become a fact of experience, apart from being a mere speculative assumption only if, through proper spiritual discipline on waking, a split, as it were, takes place in his consciousness and the subject pole of consciousness is able to stand apart and remain unaffected by all the fluctuations of the object pole of consciousness. In the case of a person attempting this discipline, an intellectual understanding through imaginative abstraction from waking consciousness and a putting together of all the three states on the same ontological status may be helpful in spiritual practice. Such abstraction may help the person to be established in pure intelligence, the seer unentangled by anything that is seen. It is the awareness in which these states of waking, dream and sleep arise and subside.

Even without going to such metaphysical heights, the experience of dream can in itself give us a ground for strengthening our conviction in a spiritual world-view. One of the great stumbling blocks in the way of a spiritual world-view is the opposite materialistic view that we know only matter as existing independently and whatever intelligence we have experience of, is only of intelligence manifesting in brain-matter as a by-product of the functioning of brain-matter itself. So matter should get precedence over intelligence or spirit and there is no intelligence or consciousness other than what we find in living brain-matter. This can be answered only by presenting the opposite thesis that, consciousness is primary whereas matter is dependent on it. In the first place the statement—that intelligence is only what manifests in brain-matter as human consciousness—is a dogmatic assumption. It is more plausible to assume that the brain is only a field for intelligence to manifest as human consciousness, just as a bulb is the field for electricity to manifest as light. Such a view is supported by the fact that metaphysically the very concept of matter presupposes an intelligence which reveals it. Matter can be understood only as something external impinging on an intelligent subject. If you say there is a line, you have to admit both its
As an aspirant goes on doing virtuous deeds, his selfishness diminishes. The more his own expansion occurs by the process of feeling for others, the easier it becomes for him to make the mind God-oriented. We say that if someone sincerely becomes a philanthropist, he need not bother about God and such concepts. Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swamiji came this time and underwent tremendous amounts of suffering so that the country rises. Today, their altruistic thoughts are striking the brains of worthy people. It is this alone that has excited the people of the country. This time an uprising will take this form. Perhaps later, a religious awakening will take place. However, there is a moot point. Those who desire liberation are there, and will be there, at all times; they are always following their own way. Our people, as soon as they put on ochre clothes, think, ‘O, what I was before and what I have become now!’ They think wrongly that perhaps they are absolved from abiding by the scriptural rules of conduct.

(To be continued...)

Reminiscences of Sargachhi

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(To be continued...)

(Continued from page 18...)
The Directorate of School Education, Government of West Bengal, presented the Best School Award to our Malda school on 5 September, Teachers’ Day. The award consisted of a trophy and a sum of one lakh rupees.

Rajkot Ashrama held a webinar, in association with the Parliament of World’s Religions, Chicago, USA, on “Interfaith Harmony for World Peace” on 11 September in which the General Secretary Swami Suvirananda Ji and a number of swamis and eminent scholars from different countries spoke.

Sri Satya Pal Malik, Governor of Meghalaya, visited Shillong centre on 10 September.

Values Education and Youth Programmes

Delhi centre conducted 22 online workshops on values education in September. In all, 1295 teachers from different parts of India attended these workshops.

Health

Eye Camp: Manasadwip centre: 51 treated, 67 given spectacles; Rajkot centre: 45 treated, 35 operated.

Relief Work

Coronavirus Relief

Our centres in Salem, Hyderabad, Asansol, Darjeeling, Gadadhar ashrama in Kolkata, Jalpaiguri, Malda, Bagerhat (Bangladesh), Durban and Phoenix (South Africa), Lusaka (Zambia) distributed Coronavirus relief among 3516 families. The relief items included 5490 kg Flour, 2481 kg Semolina, 3025 litres Cooking oil, 8203 kg Pulses, 1505 kg Salt, 815 kg Sugar, 658 kg assorted spices, and other grocery and sanitary items.

Cyclone Rehabilitation

Manasadwip centre distributed asbestos sheets, tin sheets, and other necessary items to afflicted families in South 24 Parganas district to help them repair and renovate their houses that had been damaged by Cyclone Amphan. In all, the centre will provide this help to repair and renovate 215 houses; so far the work on 182 houses has been completed. Taki centre helped 13 families in North 24 Parganas district to repair and renovate their houses that had been damaged by Cyclone Amphan.
“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.
Do not hate anybody, because that hatred which comes out from you, must, in the long run, come back to you. If you love, that love will come back to you, completing the circle.

— Swami Vivekananda

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