



# YUVA BHARATI

Voice of Youth

Vol.40 No.1

Shravan-Adhik Bhradrapad 5114

August 2012 ₹.15/-



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Editor : P.Parameswaran.

# Invocation



VacanamMadhuramCaritamMadhuramVasanamMadhuramValitamMadhuram |  
CalitamMadhuramBhramitamMadhuramMadhura-Adhipater-AkhilamMadhuram |  
Madhurashtakam (2)

2.1: (O Krishna) Your Speech is Sweet and Charming, Your Nature is Sweet and Charming, Your Garments are Sweet and Charming and Your Bent Posture is Sweet and Charming,

2.2: (O Krishna) Your Walking is Sweet and Charming and Your Creation of Confusion is Sweet and Charming; Everything about You is Sweet and Charming, O Lord of Sweetness

# Vivekananda Kendra Calling



This call comes to you from our land's southernmost tip, where the waters of the three seas wash the feet of Mother India. This unique spot may be described as a perfect symbol of unity as well as sanctity. A meeting point of three oceans, it is also a place where the north and the south as also the east and the west lose their separateness. It is here, at the southern extremity of the country, that Virgin Kanyakumari, an incarnation of Goddess Parvati, the consort of Lord Shiva, has been standing in eternal Tapasya, longing to meet her Lord, whose abode is in the Himalayas in the distant north. It is again here only, that one's eyes can feast upon the wonderful spectacle of the golden disc of the morning sun, emerging from the Bengal sea in the east, and at the end of the day's journey, entering into the Arabian sea on the west, scattering a rich riot of colours on the horizon.

This message radiates from a place, which is a veritable symbol of purity and serenity as well. Fascinated by the serenity of the spot, Gandhiji said, "The place furnishes a sight unequalled in history; for this is no port of call for vessels; like the Goddess, the waters around are virgin... This place is eminently suited for contemplation. I wish I were to stay here for ever."

A mind attuned to the elevating atmosphere here, soars high and penetrates deep and refuses to entertain any thought that is base or petty and narrow or ephemeral.

The humble musings, inspired at this hallowed place, will be broadcast to our readers, month after month, through these columns. It is but meet that a beginning is made, with the musings of the great patriot-saint, Swami Vivekananda, who came and meditated here eighty years ago.

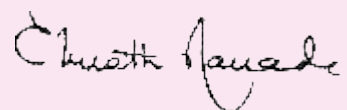
What were the contents of Swamiji's meditation? In the words of his biographers (Life of Swami Vivekananda : By his Eastern and Western Disciples), "They were 'as deep as the Indian ages; they were all on India itself.'" "There, where all was silence, seated by

himself on the last stone of India, he thought of the Purpose and the Fruition of the Indian World. He thought, not of Bengal or of Maharashtra, or of the Punjab, but of INDIA and of its very life. He passed in his thought through all the Indian centuries and he perceived, as few souls have ever done in India, the realities and potentialities of the Indian Experience."

"He saw the whole of India organically and synthetically as a great Master-builder sees the whole architectural design. He saw Religion as the very blood and life and spirit of the Indian millions. He saw its future regeneration as a whole, and he said in the silence of his heart, 'India shall rise through a renewal and a restoration of that Highest Spiritual Consciousness which has made of India at all times, the Cradle of the Nations and the Cradle of the Faith.'

"His mind surveyed the whole of India and everywhere he saw that the poor and the low had been oppressed and downtrodden for hundreds of years in turn by each Power that came in the flow of fortune to rule over them. But he saw that the worst masters and the worst fate that had ever befallen the masses came from within the pale of Hinduism itself. The autocracy of the priesthood, the despotism of caste, the terrible demarcations that these created within the social body, making of the majority of the followers of the Dharma, the outcasts of the earth, - these the Swami saw the almost insurmountable barriers that had blocked the progress of the Indian nation. Deep, deep down into the very heart of things his soul penetrated."

"He asked, with a start that shook his own personality to its very depths: 'But what have we, several millions of Sannyasins, been doing for the masses? Teaching them metaphysics! This is all madness! Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna was right when he said that religion was not for men with empty stomachs! How can the millions rise, how can the millions be spiritual when they are starved? We have, first of all, to improve their material condition and give them education along this line, and then they will themselves solve their own problems. TO EFFECT THIS, THE FIRST THING WANTED IS MEN."



**(This was published as the Editorial of August 1973 issue of Yuva Bharati)**

# Shivo Bhutva Shivam Yajet

Nivedita Raghunath Bhide

Swami Vivekananda when returned to India, he was not alone but with some of his foreign disciples who wanted to dedicate their life in the service of India. Some more disciples like Margaret Noble, Christine Greenstidel etc joined later. When Swamiji travelled from Colombo to the places in South India and Calcutta, these foreign disciples were travelling with him. People saw that J J Goodwin a disciple had shaved his head and was wearing dhoti like a Brahmacharin. All this had great visual impact on the people of India who were under British rule, who were told again and again by missionaries or by the missionary educated Indians that their religion was a bundle of superstitions. But then they saw Swami Vivekananda who when gone to West without any friends and acquaintances was now having followers from West to learn Hindu Dharma and to serve India. This visual impact convinced the people of the relevance and depth of their religion. Margaret Noble had come to India on 28 January 1898 to dedicate her life. In the consecration ceremony she was initiated into Hindu Dharma and was given name 'Nivedita' 'the dedicated' by Swami Vivekananda.

But for Swami Vivekananda only the change of dress or change of names of his foreign disciples was not enough. He knew that the



Western mind would not so easily understand India. Of course just by changing the name; neither the outlook towards life gets changed nor is the insight acquired. It all needs a rigorous training of mind. Swamiji wanted his foreign disciples to serve the Indians in an Indian way and not to force their ideas on the simple folks of India. He did not want them to look at the Indians as curios and as something to be 'civilized'. By looking down upon the religion, customs and traditions of the people one cannot really render the service but only

would further hurt the soul of the people and of the society. Unless his foreign disciples understood India properly, accepted the people as they were, and became one with them they would not be able to render the real service. For that, proper training, proper exposure to India was required. Thus after the founding of Sri Ramakrishna Mission and settling its workings, Swamiji could pay attention to the training of his foreign disciples. He wanted them to see India, to feel India and also to revere India in spite of her the then outward pitiable condition. He wanted his foreign disciples to be Indian in every sense before attempting to serve them. That is: Sivo Bhutva Sivam Yajet – 'to worship Siva, be Siva'. Swamiji decided to take his foreign disciples on a pilgrimage along with few of his brother disciples. The process of being 'Siva' began.

On the evening of May 11, 1898 a large party left from Howrah station to Kathgodam. It took them two nights and a day in the train. At Kathgodam, the rail terminus, they changed to carriages and dandies for Naini Tal. From there it was another thirty-two miles to Almora. In the party to start with were Swamis Turiyananda, Niranjanananda, Sadananda, and Swarupananda, Mrs. Bull, Mrs. Patterson, wife of the American Consul-General in Calcutta, Sister Nivedita, and Miss Josephine MacLeod. Mrs. Patterson, when she heard of this proposed journey, had at once joined the party without caring that she might be compromising herself in the eyes of the official world of Calcutta. Throughout the journey from Calcutta to Naini Tal, in the day time, coming to the carriage of his disciples, Swamiji explained with passionate enthusiasm the history of each place. Sister Nivedita later wrote a book *'Notes of Some Wonderings with*

*Swami Vivekananda'* from her notes written during those travels. Even the basis for her wonderful book 'Web of Indian life' must have been this pilgrimage.

There was not a city that Swamiji did not look on with tenderness, and whose history he did not know. Even each animal became an occasion to narrate the glorious history of India. 'The gorgeous peacocks that now and then flew past, would lend occasion for a graphic account of the invincible Rajputs. The sight of an elephant or train of camels would elicit tales of ancient battles or of caravans of merchants and their merchandise, or of the pomp of bygone Rajas or the Mogul court.' The pain and sufferings that were associated with the frequent famines and pestilences due to the wrong policies of British were also communicated. Swamiji explained 'the daily life of the farm housewife, or the hospitality that peasant folk offered to sadhus. In the telling of these last his eyes would glisten and voice falter as the memory of his own days of wandering stirred.'

The geography of the land too had a message. Swamiji 'lovingly explained the broad rivers, far-stretching forests, and massive mountains -- all of them vital elements in the culture of his people. The baked soil of the plains, the hot sands of the desert, and the dried river-beds, each had its message for him. The attentiveness of his Western disciples, who hung on his every word, stirred Swamiji to draw on his knowledge and love of India and from them fashion his poetic descriptions. He showed his listeners how, in India, culture, custom, and religion were one.'

'The disciples, could now feel the full truth of



what he had said to an English friend on leaving the West, and what he had repeated in his reply to the welcome address in Calcutta: "India I loved before I came away: now the very dust of India has become holy to me; the very air is now to me holy; it is now the holy land, the place of pilgrimage, the Tirtha."

At Almora the party stayed in two separate houses for monks and the foreign disciples. After rising early and taking a walk with his brother-disciples, the Swami would go to the house of Mrs. Bull and her guests. Having breakfasted with them, he would converse for some hours on all conceivable subjects. The days of listening to the pleasant and inspiring historical narratives were over. Here at the merciless attacks on the preconceived notions of his disciples started. At Almora, it was the hardest part of training especially for Sister Nivedita. She was an accomplished woman before she came to India. She had her own perceptions and conceptions about the various issues. Once when Swamiji causally asked her to which country did she belong to? She proudly told to Britain and justified her answer by narrating the greatness of Britain. Swamiji knew then the extent of severity of the training that was required. Swamiji wanted to infuse into her his own passionate love of India, so he did not spare her. Of this period of trial and great anguish Nivedita wrote later in 'Master as saw I him' as follows:

'But with Almora, it seemed as if a going-to-school had commenced, and just as schooling is often disagreeable to the taught, so here, though it cost infinite pain, the blindness of a half-view must be done away. A mind must be brought to change its centre of gravity. It was never more than this; never the dictating of

opinion or creed; never more than emancipation from partiality.'

In one morning class Swamiji told 'Ignorance so determined is wickedness' another day 'Patriotism like yours is a sin' still some other day, British are born in island and thus are narrow in their views'. We can imagine how much of struggle it must have been for his disciple to digest it. Actually it was almost a clash between two strong personalities. Nivedita wondered whether she could ever understand what her master is trying to tell her. Swami Swaroopananda was asked to teach her Bhagavad Gita, meditation etc. All this quietened down her mind to some extent. She could discern that one characteristic of Swamiji was the habit of attacking the abuses of a country or society openly and vigorously when he was in its midst, whereas, after he had left it, it would often seem as if nothing but its virtues were remembered by him. He was always testing his disciples, and the manner of these particular discourses was probably adopted in order to put to the proof the courage and sincerity of his disciples. Once when she started enthusiastically discussing with Swamiji about how school that was planned for the girls would be run by her, Swamiji cut her short by saying, "Remember, you have come here as a learner and not as a teacher, as novice and not as an adept." Notions from the past or plans for the future had no place until she became one with India, until her even spontaneous responses were Indians.. Thus Swamiji's merciless methods continued.

And yet the sufferings were too intense to be ignored. About this Sister Nivedita narrates, "And then a time came when one of the older

ladies of our party, thinking perhaps that such intensity of pain inflicted might easily go too far, interceded kindly and gravely with the Swami. He listened silently and went away. At evening, however, he returned, and finding us together in the veranda, he turned to her and said, with the simplicity of a child, "You were right. There must be a change. I am going away into the forests to be alone; and when I come back, I shall bring peace." Then he turned and saw that above us the moon was new, and a sudden exaltation came into his voice as he said, "See! The Mohammedans think much of the new moon. Let us also with the new moon begin a new life!" As the words ended, he lifted his hands and blessed, with silent depths of blessing, his most rebellious disciple, by this time kneeling before him.... It was assuredly a moment of wonderful sweetness of reconciliation. But such a moment may heal a wound. It cannot restore an illusion that has been broken into fragments. And I have told its story, only that I may touch upon its sequel. Long ago, Sri Ramakrishna had told his disciples that the day would come when his beloved "Naren" would manifest his own great gift of bestowing knowledge with a touch. That evening, at Almora, I proved the truth of this prophecy. For alone, in meditation, I found myself gazing deep into an Infinite Good, to the recognition of which no egoistic reasoning had led me. I learnt, too, on the physical plane,

the simple everyday reality of the experience related in the Hindu books on religious psychology."

Swami Vivekananda was the only person known to her in India, relying on whom she had come to India and had accepted Hindu Dharma. She did not have any financial backing or backing of any organization from her country to fall back upon in difficulty. So, at times, it appears heartless on the part of Swamiji for being so harsh with her. But Sister Nivedita herself explains the significance of this hard training. She writes, "**And I understood, for the first time, that the greatest teachers may destroy in us a personal relation, only in order to bestow the Impersonal Vision in its place.**"

Process of being 'Siva' is of course very painful as one has to swallow the poison and yet not allow it to affect oneself. Only the one, who can do it, can render the real service to the people. History tells us how Nivedita devoted her all for mother India. Bharatmata became her Ishta Devata. Bipin Chandra wrote, 'She came to us, not as an adept but as a novice; not as a teacher but as a learner... She was more Indian than the Indians.'" She was called as Lokamata by Ravindranath Tagore, Agnishikha by Aurobindo Ghosh and Sister by all. What better testimony can we have of Sivo Bhutva, Sivam Yajet!.

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a thousand of Her young men—men  
and not brutes.*

-Swami Vivekananda

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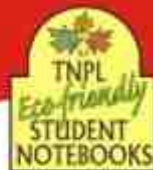
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# Freedom? From What? To Do What? To Be What?

N. KRISHNAMOORTI

Sowmya: Guruji. Bharat is entering the 67th year of its independence. What is freedom? From what do we want to be free? With freedom what should we do? What should we be, when we become free?

Guruji: You have posed a comprehensive question. Freedom is the natural state of man. He should feel free, act and work freely and think and talk freely. His feeling, action, thought and speech should represent his real self completely. At the same time he should not hurt others or abridge others' freedom in his pursuit of his own freedom. Our Rishis and Saints have found out these kinds of freedom can be achieved by following proper ethical, moral, social, aesthetic codes of behaviour. Saints and leaders like Swamiji, Shri Aurobindo, Gandhiji, Sister Nivedita and Bankim Chandra, say that similar to a person having a well-defined personality, our nation too has a soul and a properly defined identity. Freedom both for the individual as well as the Nation, is to be ONESELF.

Sowmya: In which way does the freedom of a person or the freedom of our Nation get curtailed?

Guruji: Saints like Swamiji have recognized two factors that shackle many a Nation. They are external and internal. External first. A man or a Nation may be enslaved, by foreign countries, by other people. India has been



invaded 69 times and every invader has wounded the true identity of this nation. An individual may be forced to mortgage his freedom, for the sake of earning his bread, basic needs of life. On the other hand, repeated denials of opportunity to be oneself may lead a Nation or a person to a state of Amnesia, forgetfulness of his / it's true potentialities. An individual may not be properly educated, properly aware of his true self. He may find

himself in a state of delusion. Similarly a Nation may forget its inherent strength, beauty and wisdom and wealth. An individual's personality may get split. His true knowledge, culture and wisdom may fall into disuse; he may yield to cheap temptations of wealth, shallow unethical sensual pleasures, immediate fulfillment of desires, hurting his long - term and true interests. With a nation, there may rise a small band of people who sell away the nation, lured by cheap and petty selfish gains.

Sowmya: I have read a historical novel by renowned Kannada writer Masti Venkatesa "Chikka Veera Rajendra" in which he describes how two brothers, princes, fight for the Kingship and give away the country to the English. There are so many examples, whereby we lost our freedom because of selfishness and greed - What was Swami Vivekananda's prescription to overcome these obstacles to true freedom!

Guruji: Swamiji talks about de-hypnotizing oneself. For a thousand years every invader has robbed India not only of her material wealth, but also of her faith in herself. The foreigners looted the National wealth and took away Kohinur, Shivaji's sword, Nataraja idol and Mayurasan. But more, they took away our faith in ourselves. They destroyed our social cohesion, our ability to work together, our innate ability to create and hold together the common properties of our Nation, our ponds, our grass lands, our roads, our temples. They bind us together. Our religion, our cultural icons, our social habits were all downplayed by the invader, and repeated "re-education" in alien values took place. Basic information and education about our scriptures and moral codes were denied to our people. The institutions, schools, pathshalas, universities,

Gurukulas that took India's National values to her own children fell into disuse. Some weak - minded individuals among our own people were dazzled by the power of the ruling elite and sold themselves away. Others were simply afraid.

Sowmya: I remember Swami Vivekananda talking about freedom from the twin evils of Temptation and Fear.

Guruji: Yes. Temptation comes from within. Fear is from our outsider. Dvitiyat VaiBhayam Bhavati. That is why after a thousand years of invasions, our National leaders have started feeling that our Nation should be properly defended from outside aggression, if its freedom has to be protected. Luckily all sections of the society now realize that our mistakes have cost the Nation dearly. Now we have started the preparations for a good defense. But the enemies of the Nation too have realized that such a large Nation like Bharat with intelligent and able soldiers and defense scientists cannot be easily dodged. Therefore they have started various other methods of invading the country. Western science and technology display dazzling arrays of goods and services. Their wealth is tempting out people. Their life - style very easily lures the minds of even the educated people in our land. Their materialistic life style, with great emphasis on BHOGA is exhibited as a sign of a better intelligence, a better world view, a better civilization.

Sowmya: But their life style, their science and technology, their so called riches, their civilization, their human rights have come to them at a very great social cost, personal cost, environmental cost, mental cost.

Guruji: Yes. Their opulent life style, consumerism has destroyed their soul. Their

science and technology have up – rooted their Religion and spirituality. Their civilization has stripped the earth of its natural resources like locusts stripping a farm. Their human rights have atomised the society corroding their family values, social cohesion and community consciousness. All of them together have created human beings with very high rate of alcohol consumption, drug addiction, medicine intake, divorce - rate, violence, mental imbalance and a sickening acquisitive tendency towards material wealth. Before 1950's this life style of the west could be sustained by political enslavement of 80 countries in Asia and Africa. Colonialism filled the coffers of the Western countries. Now that these African, Asian countries are politically free, colonial exploitation takes the form of globalization, marketing and multinational companies. They also use religious conversions as a part of their foreign policy. Now many countries can rob our Nation without capturing political power in Bharat. Our people are ready to purchase their films and consumer goods, copy their business management systems, agree with their world view, imitate their dress and etiquette. We are losing our cultural wealth and material wealth retaining for namesake our political freedom.

Sowmya: One elderly statesman has said. "The old man Gandhiji fought against one East India Company. Now our governments, both states and the central invite thousands of multinational companies, offering them concessions, land, electric supply, tax freedom, opening our markets too." I hear they are going to enter our educational field too.

Guruji: To certain extent, the process usurping our mental kingdom and our mental freedom is already going on. TV, internet, Cinema that justify their easier life style are marketed

aggressively in Bharat. All our universities teach economics, sociology, humanities, history and civilization, why even rural development and tribal welfare based on books written in the west. Books that propagate their world views are imported by ship - loads in Bharat. Many major publishers from the west, have opened their printing and publishing units in Bharat, because Bharat has the largest English reading population in the world. Some of our educated people have started looking at Bharat's society through Western eyes.

Sowmya: What is the answer, the solution?

Guruji: The answer lies in producing a large band of able bodied, well educated young men and women who can overcome Fear and Temptation and stand up for India, her wisdom, her life style, her history. You asked what is Freedom. Freedom is the courage, the wisdom, the sense of refined taste to be ONESELF. You asked me Freedom from what? It is freedom from borrowed values, imitation, half-digested pseudo - cultural pretensions. You asked Freedom to do what? It is Freedom to build a Nation, where every individual will be free to stand up to his fullest height as Gandhiji' said. And it is freedom to have strength and wisdom and freedom to express one's own potential divinity, total goodness as Swami Vivekananda said. You asked freedom to be what? It is freedom to be ONE'S OWN SELF. To these I shall add a full poem from Tagore's pen and a few lines from another of his.

WHERE the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

Where knowledge is free;

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;

Where words come out from the depth of truth;

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;

Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action-

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake. (Gitanjali 35)

Give me the strength lightly to bear my joys and sorrows.

Give me the strength to make my love fruitful in service.

Give me the strength never to disown the poor or bend my knees before insolent might. (Gitanjali 36)

Sowmya: How about the Basic necessities?

Guruji: You should remember that India has made tremendous progress in the fields of Food production, Number of doctors and Housing materials. But unfortunately there is no proper distribution of food grains. India produces 21 crore tons of food grains just sufficient to feed the 120 crores of our people.

But because of mal-distribution, 25 crores of our people go without proper food. Worse, 55% of our people including 35% of our educated class suffer from mal-nutrition because of wrong food habits. Our medical colleges produce excellent doctors. But unfortunately many of them go abroad or stay in cities, denying our rural population its much – wanted medical services. The situation is equally bad in other fields too – Good production but bad distribution. India – oriented social education is needed for our doctors and engineers too.

Swami Vivekananda has said. “ The Charvaka, the Jain, the Buddhist, Shankara, Ramanuja, Kabir, Nanak, Chaitanya, the Brahma Samaj the Arya Samaj of all these and similar other sects, waves of religion, foaming, thundering, surging, breaks in the front, while in the rear follow the filling up of social wants.” Spirituality and material comfort go together in our country.

My son no country in the world ever thought of Human Freedom with such total vision. Live up to its ideals and TRY to deserve your Citizenship.

Sowmya: Yes Sir. That is the least I can do deserve the heritage of our RISHIS, both old and New.

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*The secret of religion lies not in theories but in practice. To be good and to do good –that is the whole of religion.*





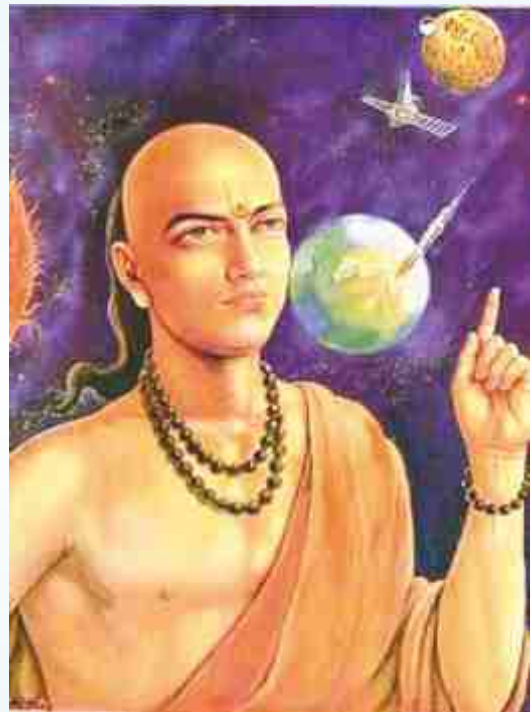
# Economics of the Golden Age of India

Prof.P.Kanagasabapathi

The Gupta Empire existed between the fourth and sixth centuries of the Common Era. It covered a large part of the country comprising primarily of the north and the north-western regions. The period of more than two hundred years under the Gupta dynasty is known as the Golden Age of India. Chandra Gupta I, Samudragupta and Chandra Gupta II are among the prominent rulers during those times.

Records show that the period was marked by prosperity, peace and high levels of achievements in different areas. There were outstanding contributions in various fields such as arts, literature, mathematics, medicine, astronomy, science, technology, philosophy and religion. Renowned scholars such as Kalidasa, Aryabhata, Varahamihira, Vishnu Sharma and Vatsayayana were products of the period.

Aryabhata, the great mathematician and astronomer, stated that it was the earth that rotated on its axis, while the rest of the world held the view that the sky was rotating. He explained the solar and lunar eclipses scientifically and put forth many new concepts. His major work called Aryabhatiya covered algebra, trigonometry, quadratic equations and table of sines. It is significant to



Aryabhata

note that the decimal numeral systems, zero and chess were the products of this period.

Kalidasa is recognized as the greatest playwright and poet in Sanskrit. Vishnu Sharma is the author of Panchatantra which is one of the most translated books in the world. It is believed that the two greatest epics of India namely Ramayana and Mahabharata

were written during this period. Besides, there were many important works in technical subjects on a wide range of areas including astro-physics, medicine and veterinary science. One of the best known universities in the ancient world was established in Nalanda during this time.

There was renaissance of arts during this period. The court of Chandra Gupta II was graced by nine eminent persons (navaratnas) who were experts in literature and arts. The fields of architecture, sculpture and paintings witnessed excellent performance. The world heritage sites of Ajanta and Ellora have rock-cut caves containing some of India's finest murals and sculptures. It was during the Gupta period that most of the beautiful cave temples at Ajanta were built.

Details show that agriculture, handicrafts, industry and trade were flourishing. Irrigation works were undertaken and loans provided to the farmers for buying different items required for agriculture such seeds, lands, bullocks and agricultural implements. The state did not charge any revenue from people who undertook cultivation in barren and waste lands. There were guidelines for development of agriculture along scientific lines.

Different types of industries were functioning. The textile industry with dyeing, bleaching and embroidery was one of the major industries. Other industries include the specialized ones such as ship building, mining, pearl-fishery and metallurgy. The iron pillar at Delhi, standing tall and proud without getting rusted and retaining its inscriptions

inspite of its exposure to the various changes in weather for over several centuries, stands testimony to the metallurgical expertise of the Guptas. Das quotes Fergusson to point out the advanced knowledge possessed by Indians many centuries ahead of the Europeans. " Taking 400 as a mean date and it certainly is not far from truth – it opens our eyes to an unsuspected state of affairs to find the Hindus at that age capable of forging a bar of iron longer than any that have been forged in Europe upto a very late date and not frequently even now."

Trade was taking place with many countries such as China, Ceylon, Java, Sumatra, Ethiopia, Arabia, Persia and Rome. Several items including precious stones, pearls, spices, clothes, cosmetics, perfumes and indigo were



**Ravan Lifting Kailas depicted in Ajanta Caves**

exported. The growth of business activities led to the development of city lives in major centres of trade.

Guilds played a very important role in the economy. The state developed industrial and commercial settlements in different parts of the empire by offering patronage and concessions to the guilds. Guilds carried on



**Ruins of Nalanda**

banking business. They also managed the finances of temples at times and even offered financial help to the government. Guilds were given the required freedom to conduct and regulate their activities.

Encouragement was given to those engaged in the promotion of new ventures. The states charged reasonable rates by way of duties. Systems were established to protect the interests of different sections of people and the common man. The welfare of the labourers was taken care through advanced methods. Das notes: "A very new and interesting feature of the rules regarding the labourers of this period is the existence of rules regarding bonus leave and pension and something approximating to the provident fund. Thus it has been laid down by Sukracharya that even a slight portion should not be deducted from the full remuneration of a servant who has been ill for a fortnight. And if the diseased be highly qualified he should have half the wages. The King should give the servant 15 days a year respite from work. The king should give half the wages to the man who has passed 40 years in his service for life .... He should give the servant 1/8th of the salary by way of reward every year..... He should keep with him as deposit 1/6th or 1/4th of the servant's wages, should pay half of that amount or whole in two

or three years."

All these were possible as the rulers were committed to bring about all- round development in the state. They established the necessary infrastructure and provided the required facilities. They facilitated the society to concentrate in different economic activities without unnecessary interventions. As a result the economy progressed. Living costs were cheap. Gold coins were used in circulation.

Besides, the administration enabled a peaceful atmosphere in the society. Prosperity and peace paved the way for creative pursuits. The state encouraged the process through support and appreciation. Hence there was progress at all levels. The influence of the Guptas extended beyond the borders to the foreign lands. The noted Chinese pilgrim Fa-Hien



**Kalidasa**



**Varaha mihira**

visited India and Ceylon during 399 -414 CE. Narrating his experiences in central India, he noted: "The people are numerous and happy; .....The king governs without

decapitation or (other) corporal punishments. ... Throughout the whole country the people do not kill any living creature, nor drink intoxicating liquor, ...."

The positive environment in the society enabled citizens to nurture and practice higher qualities. Writing about Pataliputra, Fa- Hien observed: "The inhabitants are rich and prosperous, and vie with one another in the practice of benevolence and righteousness." Surely the Golden Age is a proud period, when the economic prosperity was directed towards achieving higher pursuits resulting in the citizens leading a meaningful life. Contemporary India has a lot to learn from it.

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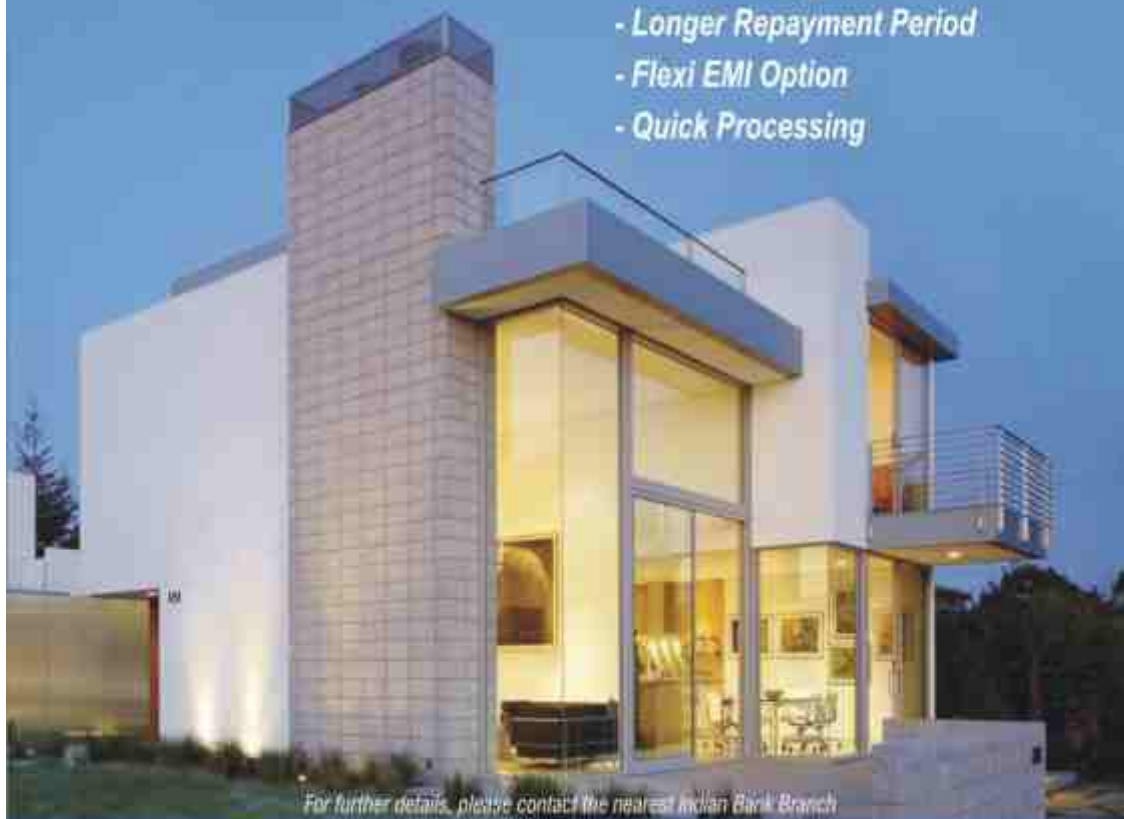
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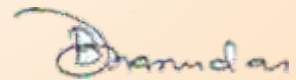
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As though to fulfil the command of Swami Vivekananda, Mananeeya Eknathji had sown the seeds of Publication activity of Vivekananda Kendra with Vivekananda Kendra Patrika launched in February 1972 and Yuva Bharati in August 1973. Thereafter during all these years these two sprouts have branched out into as many as 8 periodicals from different centres in different languages and on allied subjects.

The responsibility of distributing the fragrance and fruits of this well grown "Tree" among the wider section of the literate world has now come on the shoulders of the Kendra's well-wishers and workers. It is therefore decided that every year from 15th August to 22nd should be observed as Publications Drive Period, synchronizing with Mananeeya Eknathji's Punya Tithi falling on August 22nd.

Vivekananda Kendra therefore appeals to you to be an Annual or Life Subscriber for any of its 8 periodicals as your tribute to the sacred memory of Mananeeya Eknathji and to strengthen our hands for spreading the Kendra's thought movement, namely, Man-Making and Nation-Building. The list of the magazines and relevant details are given in this Brochure. There is also a following page to be used as Enrolment Form. Please fill up this Form and either send it directly to the respective office of the magazine with remittance or hand over the same to any of the Kendra karyakartas and get Temporary Receipt. The Original Receipt will be sent to you by the concerned magazine's office.



(D.Bhanudas)  
General Secretary  
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Sl. No.	Name of the Magazine	Send Subscription To	Subscription Rates		
			Annual Rs.	Life (10 Yrs.) Rs.	
1.	<b>Yuva Bharati</b> (Monthly - Cultural magazine for Youth in English)	<b>Vivekananda Kendra Prakashan Trust,</b> No.5, Singarachari Street, Triplicane, <b>Chennai 600 005.</b> Phone No.(044)-28440042 Email: vkpt@vkendra.org	160/- For 3 years 460/-	1400/-	
2.	<b>Vivekananda Kendra Patrika</b> (Half-yearly thematic journal in English)  <b>Publication Donation Scheme</b> (Under this scheme both <b>Yuva Bharati</b> and <b>Vivekananda Kendra Patrika</b> will be sent regularly in addition to any one of our other Publications every year)		Annual 250/- For 3 years 600/-	2,000/-  5,000/-	
3.	<b>Viveka Vani</b> (Monthly - Cultural magazine for youth in Tamil)		75/- For 2 years 140/- For 3 years 200/-	700/-	
4.	<b>Vivek Vichar (Marathi)</b> (Monthly thought-provoking magazine in Marathi)  <b>Vivek Jagriti (English / Assamese)</b> Quarterly -- Thought-provoking magazine in Gujarati		Vivekananda Kendra 165, Railway Lines, Solapur –413 001. E-Mail: vivekvarta@yahoo.co.in	100/- For 5 years 500/-	Rs.500/- (20 Years)
5.	<b>Kendra Bharati (Hindi)</b> (Monthly—Cultural magazine for youth in Hindi) Single copy Rs.12/-		Vivekananda Kendra, Uzan Bazar, M.G.Road, Guwahati-781 001. Ph: (0361) 25 10594	55/- For 3 years 150/-	
6.	<b>Vivek Sudha (Gujarati)</b> (Quarterly—Thought -provoking Magazine in Gujarati)		Vivekananda Kendra Hindi Prakashan Vibhag, “Yogakshema”, Gita Bhavan, Jodhpur-342 003. Ph:- (0291) 2612666	125/- For 3 years 350/-	Rs.1100/- (10 Years)
7.	<b>QUEST – Bi-Annual</b> VKIC Newsletter Quarterly		Vivekananda Kendra, 33, Sardar Shopping Centre, Swami Vivekananda Road, Palitana – 364 270. Ph: 02848-253111	50/- For 3 years 125/-	
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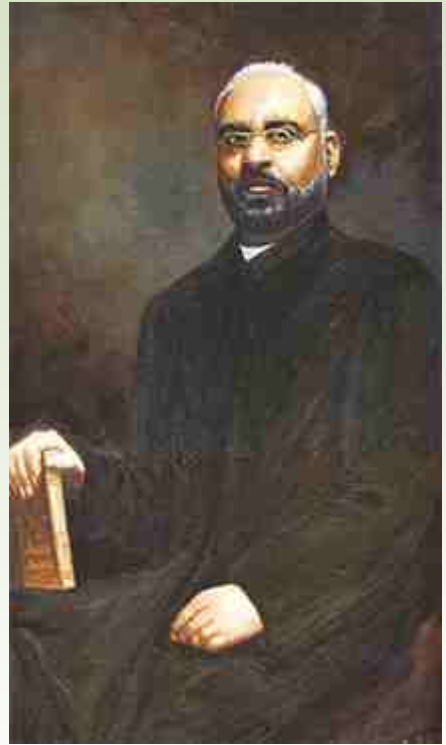
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# The Historic meeting of Vivekananda with Kranti veer Shyamji Krishna Varma

Dr.K.M.Rao



**At Ajmer in Rajasthan in December 1891 – Vivekananda's seismic undercurrents of Influence on the life of Shyamji Krishna Varma – an inference in retrospect.**

**A**fter a little over two and a half months at Khetri, Rajasthan, the Swami felt that he must go forth into the wide world again, unattached. He left Khetri towards the end of October, and went to Ajmer, where he stayed for about three weeks. First he stayed for three or four days with Har Bilas Sarda's friend, Shyamji Krishna Varma. Mr. Sarda's reminescences, relating to Swami's Visit Ajmer in November and December 1891, run as follows:

"I met the Swami more than once at Mount Abu and again at Ajmer. I met Swami Vivekananda four times. I went to Mount Abu to stay with my friend Mukund Singh, who was staying at Mount Abu for the hot season. When I reached there, I found Swami Vivekananda staying with Mukund Singh. Mukund Singh was an Arya Samajist. I stayed with my friend for about ten days and we, Swamiji and I, were together there and talked

about various subjects. I was about twenty one years old then and was impressed by Swami Vivekananda's personality. He was a most delightful talker and was very well informed. We used to go out for our afternoon walks. After dinner the first day, Swami Vivekananda gave a song at Mukund Singh's request. He sang in a most melodious tone, which gave me a great delight. I was charmed by his songs, and every day I begged him to sing one or two songs. His musical voice and his manner have left a lasting impression on me. We some times talked about Vedanta. Swami Vivekananda's talks on Vedanta greatly interested me. His views on various subjects were most welcome to me, as they were very patriotic. He was full of love for motherland and Hindu culture. The time I passed in his company was one of the most pleasant times I have passed in my life. His independence of character particularly impressed me. He is a most pleasant

companion. He had large luminous eyes and discoursed eloquently on religious and philosophical subjects. I was charmed by Swami Vivekananda's songs. What delighted me was his singing. He had a musical and melodious voice and I was greatly entranced by his singing. From Ajmer he went to Bombay presidency.

The next time I met Swami Vivekananda was at Ajmer. He was my guest for two or three days. I remember asking him what his name was before he became a sanyasa. He gave it to me... he left me and went away to Beawar. Sri Shyamji Krishna Varma, one of the most learned men I have met lived in Ajmer in those days, but had gone to Bombay, when the Swamiji was with me. On his return, I spoke to him about Swami Vivekananda's learning, inspiring eloquence and patriotism and told him that he had left only two or three days ago and was in Beawar. Shyamji Krishna Varma as if was instinctively drawn to Vivekananda by some unknown destiny had to go to Beawar the next day and promised with some premonition that he will bring Vivekananda with him back to Ajmer as though they were destined to meet to mould the history of freedom movement. The next day he returned to Ajmer with Swami Vivekananda. Swami Vivekananda was his guest for about fourteen or fifteen days. Some mysterious transmission of thought might have taken place which changed Shyamji Krishna Varma. Later he was closely connected with bomb explosions in India. They used to go out for evening walk. He used to have most interesting discussions with him on such occasions about the predicament of the nation that prevailed at that time. He said: Vivekananda will be a phenomenon in the world if I err not greatly". They used to have long conversations and

talks on various subjects during the day and during afternoon walks. Swami Vivekananda's eloquence, nationalistic attitude of mind and patriotism greatly impressed Shyamji Krishna Varma. He was indirectly instrumental when Shyamji Krishna Varma changed his field of revolutionary activities to England.

Not finding himself safe in India he slipped away to London. There he looked for dedicated young men who could be sent to lead revolution in India. He announced a 'scholarship worth thousands of rupees. Vinayak Savarkar came to England on that scholarship. The famous revolutionary, lala Hardayal, rejected a scholarship offered by Oxford University and accepted the scholarship offered by Shyamji Krishna Varma. London had now become a stronghold of Indian revolutionaries and Shyamji Krishna Varma was their chief.

Shyamji Krishna Varma constructed a three storey building called "INDIA HOUSE" in London for the residence of Indian revolutionaries. It was a kind of free hostel for students where Indian revolutionaries were provided free boarding and Lodging facilities to work for the armed revolution. From here many revolutionaries carried on the movement in France also. Madame Cama and Sardar Singh Rana set up a good organization in France. In Germany they created an active group known as the "Berlin Committee".

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# WINDS OF CHANGE

## VIVEKANANDA OF THE “SISTERS AND BROTHERS OF AMERICA”

Philip Goldberg

*"Columbus had discovered the soil of America, but Vivekananda her soul."*  
-BANKIM CHANDRA CHATTERJEE

**"More learned than all our professors put together"**

The matter of obtaining credentials for the Parliament of Religions was solved by Harvard philologist and historian John Henry Wright, one of many prominent New Englanders who were impressed by the visiting Swami. In a letter to the parliament's chairman, Wright called Vivekananda "a man who is more learned than all our learned professors put together." Assured of being credentialed, Vivekananda returned to Chicago, only to lose the address of the parliament en route and end up on the curb on Dearborn Street.

### **A celebrity**

"For the faithful, the patient, the hermetically pure, all the important things ... work out rather beautifully" - wrote J. D. Salinger. The observation certainly applied to Vivekananda, for whom things had worked out rather beautifully in Boston and were about to once again. He had not been sitting alone on the curb when a woman named Belle Hale emerged from her home. When she learned that the stranger was a delegate to the parliament, Mrs. Hale extended him every courtesy that a traveler could wish for and



accompanied him to the parliament's office. In a short while, he would be as big a celebrity as a foreign religious figure could be.

### **As a scene stealing star**

Amid the six-month celebration of industrial progress, World's Parliament of Religions was a seventeen-day island of high-minded tranquility. Visitors to the Columbian Exposition rode the World's First Ferris Wheel

and previewed futuristic machines, all illuminated by light bulbs powered by alternating current, a new invention of Nikola Tesla, who would become Vivekananda's friend and student. As for the parliament, the invitation to religious leaders had been well received for the most part, although some ministers accused those attending it as "treason against Christ", that "the Christian religion is the one religion", and did not wish to affirm "the equality of the other intended members and the parity of their position and claims." There was a similar denunciation on behalf of Islam, leaving the parliament with only one Muslim from New England. Aside from those discordant notes, enthusiasm for the convocation was overwhelming. Vivekananda soon emerged as a scene-stealing star; had he not made such a spectacular impression, the parliament would not likely have been remembered, much less revived on its centennial in 1993.

### **A delegate to the Parliament of Religions**

For the opening ceremonies, four thousand spectators crammed into a hall in a massive new building on Michigan Avenue (later housing the Art Institute of Chicago). Along with the dark-suited western clergy, the dais featured, "strange robes, turbans and tunics, crosses and crescents, flowing hair and tonsured heads". The parliament heralded "a new era of religious peace and progress dispelling the dark clouds of sectarian strife." (In a sad irony, the date of the event was September 11, precisely 108 years before the world was shaken by deadly evidence of the difficulty of fulfilling those ideals.)

### **Before the "Sisters and Brothers of America"**

In the words of the parliament's chairman, Dr. John Henry Barrows, "Religion, like the white light of heaven, has been broken into many colored fragments by the prism of men. One of

the objects of the Parliament of Religions has been to change the many-colored radiance back into the white light of heavenly truth." It was a remarkably pluralistic message for that era! One of the twenty-four delegates to speak on opening day, Vivekananda began his speech with "Sisters and Brothers of America." He was interrupted by an ovation that lasted two to four minutes. This ovation and enthusiastic reception has been attributed to the unusual intimacy of the speaker's greeting, as also his noble bearing. He went on to say, "...I am proud to belong to a religion that has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal tolerance but we accept all religions to be true ... As different streams, having their source in different places, all mingle their water in the sea; so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee." Deploring sectarianism, bigotry, and fanaticism, he said, "I fervently believe that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, that it is the death-knell to all persecution with the sword or the pen, and to all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal."

### **"Human eloquence at its highest pitch"**

In the words of Harriet Monroe, the editor of a well-known journal, "The handsome monk in the orange robe gave us in perfect English a masterpiece. His personality, dominant, magnetic; his voice, rich as a bronze bell; the controlled fervor of his feeling; the beauty of his message to the Western world he was facing for the first time - these combined to give us a rare and perfect moment of supreme emotion. It was human eloquence at its highest pitch". These impressions were



echoed by other reporters as well.

### **Countering misconceptions about his heritage**

For the next sixteen days, sessions were held morning, afternoon, and evening, often to crowds so big that speakers had to repeat their lectures in an adjoining hall. Vivekananda spoke several times, each scheduled appearance drawing a larger crowd than the one before. His primary themes were carried into his post parliament work, and to a large extent, they set the standard for the Vedic teachers who followed in his footsteps. Countering misconceptions about his religious heritage, he presented Vedanta as the essential core of the tradition. Hindus are concerned with realization, not dogma, he asserted: "Thus the whole object of their system is by constant struggle to become perfect, to become divine, to reach God, and see God; and this reaching God, seeing God, becoming perfect even as the Father in Heaven is perfect, constitutes the religion of Hindus."

### **Correcting the wrong image of Hinduism**

He confronted the image of Hinduism as idolatry: "I may tell you that there is no polytheism in India. In every temple, if one stands by and listens, one will find the worshippers applying all the attributes of God, including omnipresence, to the images." Christians too employed images and symbols, he said, they "devote their whole lives to their idol of a Church and never rise higher, because with them religion means an intellectual assent to certain doctrines and doing good to their fellows." "Temples or churches or books are only the supports, the helps, of one's spiritual childhood; but on and on one must progress' in the quest for divine realization.

"The Hindu is only glad that what he has been cherishing in his bosom for ages is going to be taught in more forcible language and with further light from the latest conclusions of science." This foreshadowed the methods used by most Eastern teachers who came to the West.

### **A great favourite at the parliament**

Vivekananda's reception grew to legendary proportions; clearly the dignified Swami was a crowd-pleaser. Calling him "a great favourite at the Parliament," *The Boston Evening Transcript* said, "If he merely crosses the platform he is applauded, and this marked approval of thousands he accepted in a childlike spirit of gratification, without a tram of conceit." His "barrel chest and broad shoulders," writes historian Carl T. Jackson, gave him "a physique better suited to an athlete than an Indian holy man". Principally as a result of Vivekananda's persuasive presence, minds were changed; the heathens were not as primitive as the westerners had imagined. In the words of Lucy Monroe, "The impertinence of sending half-educated theological students to instruct the wise and erudite Orientals was never brought home to an English speaking audience more forcibly."

### **Condescension provokes a defiant response**

The confident assertions of Vivekananda and other delegates from the East irritated those who viewed the parliament as a platform for the Christian gospel and that the gathering would "usher in the triumph of Christ's truth, when at the name Jesus every knee shall bow", and that "Christianity is to supplant all other religions, because it contains all the truth ... " Such condescension provoked a proud and defiant response from Vivekananda. He

deplored the missionaries who helped the hungry "only on condition that the Hindus become Christians, abandoning the faith of their fathers and forefathers." The people of India, he asserted, "have more than religion enough; what they want is bread, but they are given stone ... Send missionaries to teach them how to better earn a piece of bread and not to teach them metaphysical nonsense." He improvised: "We who have come from the East have sat here day after day and have been told in a patronizing way that we ought to accept Christianity because Christian nations are the most prosperous." And yet, he went on, "We look about and see England the most prosperous Christian nation in the world, with her foot on the neck of two hundred and fifty million Asiatics ... Christianity wins its prosperity by cutting the throats of its fellowmen." After also deploring the Muslim invasion of his homeland, he concluded, "Blood and the sword are not for the Hindu, whose religion is based on the laws of life."

### **Pluralism and not exclusivism**

In his final address, at the closing ceremonies, he said that a dream of religious unity could not be accomplished by the triumph of

anyone faith: "Do I wish that the Christian would become Hindu? God forbid. Do I wish that the Hindu or Buddhist would become Christian? God forbid." "The parliament", he said, "has proved to the world that holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world," adding that he pitied anyone who "dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others".

### **Authoritative representative of Hinduism**

The courtesy extended to Asians was not to be confused with being respected as equals, said Reverent Barrows in his concluding remarks. Philosopher Joseph Campbell would later describe that kind of arrogance cloaked intolerance as "you worship in your way, and I'll worship Him in His." But statements like Barrows were balanced by more ecumenical voices. Mervin-Marie Snell, the president of the scientific section of the parliament, wrote: "Never before has so authoritative a representative of genuine Hinduism ... been accessible to American inquiries and it is certain that the American people at large, will, when he is gone, look forward with eagerness to his return." They did not have to wait long)

**to be continued...**



*Whatever retards the onward progress or helps the downward fall is vice; whichever helps in coming up and becoming harmonized is virtue.*

# Swami Ramakrishnananda

## A True Servant of the Lord

Swami Baneshananda

In his commentary to the *Katha Upanishad*, Acharya Shankara defines the word *shraddha* as *astikya-buddhi*. Though some scholars translate the term *astikya-buddhi* or *shraddha* as 'faith', it is much more than that. Like the term *shraddha*, the term *astikya-buddhi* too is difficult to translate. One meaning could be devotion with complete commitment. The most important aspect of this is the total identification with one's chosen spiritual ideal (*ishta*). This sense of oneness with *Ishta* may be called as *astikya buddhi* which is a total faith in the existence of the *Ishta* as one's all in all, one's redeemer in all situations.

Many may be devoted to God but it not very easy to feel the living presence of the Lord in and around us always. It is the unbroken awareness of God that makes life fully God-centered. To achieve this feat one needs absolute sincerity, struggle and hard work for a long time, and above all, God's grace. This struggle to attain spiritual perfection is what is known as spiritual life.



Spiritual life becomes rewarding when one's conviction is strengthened, when we get the privilege to know of such a God-immersed life. Then spiritual reality no longer remains a myth but becomes a palpable reality. Though it is not easy to find such an example in physical form in our midst, there is no dearth of such examples in the vast world of religious

literature. Swami Ramakrishnananda's life presents an ideal example of such a life.

The Gita (3.21) says that whatever holy men prove to be possible for human beings, others should simply follow it. The life of Swami Ramakrishnananda, an ideal holy man, is a befitting illustration of this idea. Swami Ramakrishnananda, otherwise known as Shashi

to his near and dear ones, lived a life that was completely absorbed in God. Therefore, all his works, from cooking in the kitchen to meditating in the shrine, had only one purpose—service; service to his Master, Sri Ramakrishna in all forms, in the picture on the altar as well as in the living beings. It is

astonishing to note how natural it was for him to live in the unceasing awareness of the Master.

Once Swami Shivananda, the second President of the Ramakrishna Order, observed, 'It was his [Shashi's] life's vow to serve Thakur [Sri Ramakrishna] in every living being and to help everyone to manifest his/her inner divinity. He sacrificed himself at the altar of this vow'<sup>1</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna taught his disciples to serve others as manifestations of God (*shiva-jnane jiva-seva*). Shashi Maharaj's life was a shining example of this teaching of the Master. The awareness of God's presence permeated every moment of his life. Everything would reveal its divinity at Shashi's reckoning. So he would serve the Lord through whatever he did. The scriptures say that God is both immanent and transcendent. The two most practical means to approach God are meditation on the transcendent and service to the immanent aspects of God. Shashi Maharaj's ideal of service was never devoid of this comprehensive view of the Reality. In her Introduction to the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Sister Nivedita writes: "If the many and the One be indeed the same Reality, then it is not all modes of worship alone, but equally all modes of work, all modes of struggle, all modes of creation, which are paths of realization. No distinction, henceforth, between sacred and secular. To labour is to pray. To conquer is to renounce. Life is itself religion. To have and to hold is as stern a trust as to quit and to avoid." Shashi's life was a living instance of this understanding of the Reality.

Sri Vaikunthanath Sanyal, one of Sri

Ramakrishna's lay disciples, justly said, 'Shashi used to see the Lord present everywhere as even one suffering from jaundice would see everything yellow. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that there is no meaning in serving people as veritable manifestation of God without first installing the Lord in the shrine of one's own heart,"

Many people who had known Shashi Maharaj have given graphic descriptions of his personality and character. In almost all such reminiscences, we come across a particular trait or trend of his devotion: his life was saturated with the ideal of serving his Master in whatever way possible. Special mention should be made about his unswerving devotion to the ritual worship of Sri Ramakrishna. In his worship there was less ritual, but more love. Swami Achalananda, a contemporary, rightly observes it in the following manner: 'While preparing morning offering he used to cut the tip of each of the soaked grams [*to facilitate easy eating*]! In this worship of his there was no display of pomp or intricacies of ritualistic mantras excepting for earnest desire, deep reverence of the heart, devotion and love."

Sometimes his uncommon allegiance to the worship of Sri Ramakrishna would seem to some casual observers to be bordering on obsession. This was also a reason for some criticism. But when we read Swami Adbhutananda's assessment we know how unfounded such criticisms were! Swami Adbhutananda, one of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, reminisced 'Who could be greater in service than he: Our dear Shashi used to beg food and feed us all. It was because of his ritualistic worship that we could get a

few morsels of food daily. Shouldn't one call him a giver (*data*) who would feed so many mouths?<sup>14</sup>

A young monk, who had the good fortune to assist Shashi Maharaj in his works, reminisced about Shashi Maharaj's love and concern for him during the time of his departure from Chennai: "The next day, after waking up he [Shashi Maharaj] served morning offering to Sri Sri Thakur. Then he spread a seat for me and called me, "Come here." When I came to him, he put a mark with curd on my forehead and asked me to pay my obeisance to Thakur. After that he asked me to sit down for food. I obeyed. He stood near the door weeping—tears rolled down his cheeks .. I was wonderstruck! After I had finished my breakfast he called a cab. Both of us got into the cab .... He bought a ticket on interclass at the station and came to the train. Next he went into the compartment, wiped a seat with the hem of his cloth, put whatever food he had carried with him on it and then

made my bed. Then he gave me the ticket and called me, "Now get into the train." I obeyed him. He stood near the door. Tears rolled down his eyes again. The train started. He kept on gazing at me ....<sup>15</sup>

It was really hard for the Indian mindset at that time to accept the concept of service to man as service to God, much less the idea of monks doing secular work. Even now this mindset has not completely changed. The writer himself has confronted such instances where learned monks hold the view that menial works like cooking, cleaning etc. are secular work! Sometimes one wonders if work in the offices or behind the tables are not secular! Is it really secular to cook food for

others? And again, is it really sacred to eat food cooked by others? The Lord alone knows the answer! Once Swami Turiyananda said to one monk, 'Don't have any doubt. Know it for sure to be His work and pour out all your body, mind and heart to Him. You will achieve everything from this. Your Samadhi and the like will be attained with this itself. Have no doubt; get into it. In Swami Vivekananda Darjeeling Swamiji [Swami Vivekananda] told me, "Haribhai, I have introduced a new path this time. So long people knew that liberation is achieved through meditation, Japa, discrimination etc. alone. Now our young men will be liberated, nay liberated while living in this body, by doing His work. It is his [Sri Ramakrishna's] instruction; do not doubt it."<sup>16</sup>

If a man is himself unable to change his fate then others can help him to do so or at least to reduce the onslaught of it! Shashi once said to Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, the famous Bengali novelist, 'I am a great believer of the theory of

"fate" (the Law of Karma). But I have no faith in the idea that one cannot undo

fate .... There is no other unchangeable reality than the Lord. Wherever there is disease, there is a remedy; wherever there is darkness, there is light; ....<sup>17</sup>

Once a young man criticized beggars. Shashi Maharaj reprimanded him saying, 'One should regard the beggars, the afflicted and the poor as "*daridra- narayana*" (God in the form of the poor). This is the appellation given by Swami Vivekananda. Do not differentiate between the *daridra-narayana* by any religious distinction of Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, etc. Serve them all as children of God with equal love. You should regard yourself fortunate when you get an opportunity to serve them. Do not hate the beggars; because we are not

This year is Swami Ramakrishna's 150 year Jayanthi

less "poor" than they. [Imagine] how they are satisfied with just a little!"<sup>8</sup>

Once the birthday celebration of Sri Ramakrishna was drawing near. But enough money was not yet collected for the most important part of the celebration, *daridra-narayana-seva*. One day a certain devotee who was staying overnight in the ashrama woke up at midnight hearing a sound. He saw that Swami Ramakrishnananda was breathing deeply while pacing there like an entrapped lion. Seeing him in this condition the devotee got frightened. Ramakrishnananda was then intensely praying to Sri Ramakrishna for [the provisions for] *daridra-narayana-seva* .... By the grace of Sri Ramakrishna help came the very next day unexpectedly."

Swami Chandreswarananda writes, 'Once almost a whole family in Coimbatore perished in the attack of Plague. There was none left in the family excepting a few orphaned children. Shashi Maharaj gave shelter to these children in his great heart and arranged for their education etc. Thus came into existence the present huge Ramakrishna [Mission] Students' Home in Chennai.'<sup>10</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna's 65th birth anniversary was celebrated in 1900 at Madras (now Chennai) under the stewardship of Shashi Maharaj. *Brahmavadin*, the monthly magazine published from Chennai carried an editorial praising the celebration. The editorial mentions among other things: 'The pomp and grandeur of the celebration was more than the previous year. Some five thousand people, among whom were Christians, Muslim Fakirs and Hindu monks, were served with cooked Prasad"

In this way, Swami Ramakrishnananda exemplified the liberal teachings of his guru. Serving people, particularly the less privileged ones, of all classes, castes and creeds with cooked food on the occasion of Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversaries was a regular feature. He used to see the presence of God in all people and tried to serve Him in and through his service to them.

The assessment of Sri Ramachandra Dutta, a distinguished householder disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, was: 'If there is something called Seva (selfless service) in the world then it was Shashi who knew the true meaning of it. If one can be termed as *sevak* (One who knows how to do it) then it is Shashi who is the best.'<sup>12</sup>

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(Courtesy Swami Ramakrishnananda 150 Birth Anniversary Souvenir)

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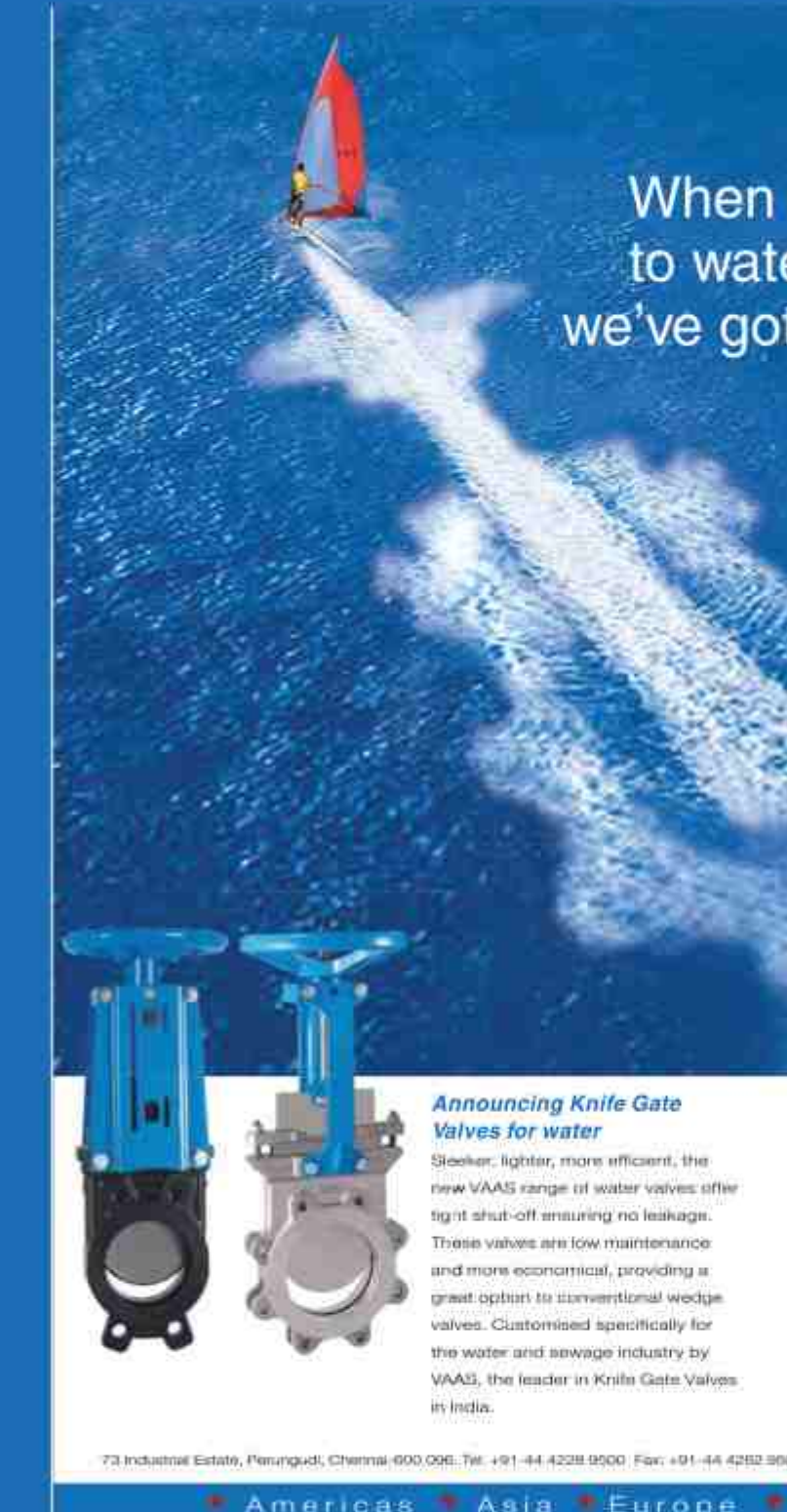
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# Walking the Red Carpet

Jignesh Vasani



I had read and heard a lot about fire walking in the newspapers, science magazines, movies, and on the TV. All the information resonated the same fact-completely scientific. The skin can endure any burning sensation for about 5 seconds. To set the context, I was aware and well informed of what was to follow.

One fine day, I decided to take the big step and do the Red Hot Burning Coal Walk. I tried convincing myself with all the data and facts that I had accumulated. Thoughts were running in all directions, and across the spectrum. The fact was that the mind had divided itself into two idiots. One was stupidly justifying the walk and the other was egoistically trying to convince me not to walk. I realized that these thoughts were nothing but veiled expressions of fear.

On the day of the activity there was tremendous anxiety. I could not see any red hot coals as they were all covered by dancing flames. I had no information about the flames. I told myself not to worry, that the flames would die down and then I could walk over it. I decided to just run over it as fast as I could. However, I was told to take 3 steps over the dancing fire.

I resisted; with vigorous strength the mind started questioning my intent of walking. But I stood firm by one thought – no questions of

retreating. I thought of many things in that agonizing ten second wait. I remembered a shloka from the Bhagavad Gita, for the first time:

“Neither any weapon can pierce nor fire can burn the real me; Neither can water wet me nor can wind dry me.”

“God! Please make sure this is true,” I pleaded with all my heart, I started repeating all the prayers that I had ever learnt (very few!) I lifted my right foot, closed my eyes for a second, and then starting the fire in the eye, proceeded to take the first step.

All thoughts vanished as if there was nothing but fire everywhere. No thoughts and therefore no fear. I simply moved to the other side of the fire; as if I was walking over some beautiful green lawn. When I reached the other side, I was back to reality. Could not believe what had just occurred. Instantly the national mind took over and began analyzing. “There has to be some scientific explanation, something similar to the one I had read and seen on TV related to heat.” A voice in my head said, “If you really believe that, then why were you scared in the first place?”

Ridiculing my inquisitive mind, the so called national intellect, I knew that I had, even if it was for a fraction of a second, moved beyond

the “body, mind and intellect” trinity. It was a feeling of true freedom. Now, I was back with the trinity where I had been living for ages.

The walk on fire was followed by a day of introspection that revealed a few interesting dimensions about my son own self, lessons that will forever be a part of me.

- First Step. The first step towards a seemingly difficult activity is the most important one. Fear born out of “information of past experiences” will always obstruct one from taking the first step. However, with the first step one realises one's won potential and gets a lot of confidence to move

forward.

- Just Do it. Once you know that you have to walk the path, start walking. Do not wait for the right moment. The more you wait, the more are the doubts created.

Thus unknowingly a small, serious, harmless activity created a lot of inward thinking, right from who I am to what is the purpose of life and how to act in the world to relies it. This activity set me thinking about my achievements and failures of the past. It carved a path ahead for me. Now, it was up to me to take the first step....

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