



# The Vedanta Kesari

COVER STORY

**Comprehensive Harmony  
Through the Lord of Yoga**

*page 11*



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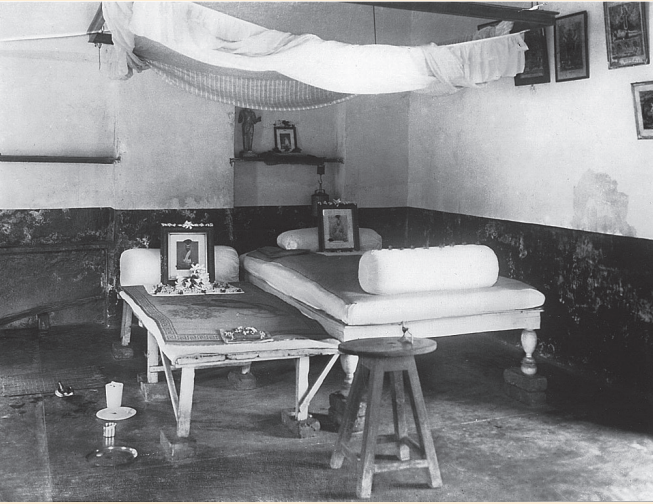


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A Cultural and Spiritual Monthly  
of the Ramakrishna Order since 1914

*June  
2020*

## Shodasi Puja 2020



*Sri Ramakrishna's Room in Dakshineswar*



*Belur Math*



*Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's shrines in Belur Math*

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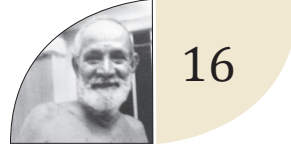
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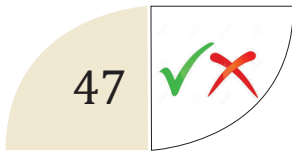
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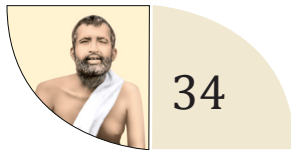


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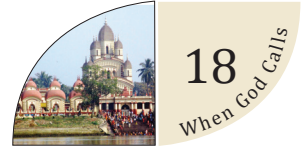


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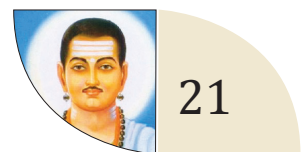
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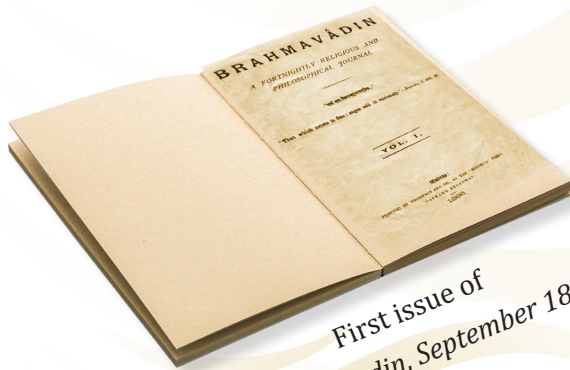
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First issue of  
*Brahmavadin*, September 1895



# The Vedanta

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 *Brahmavadin*. 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. *Brahmavadin* 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:



First issue of  
*The Vedanta Kesari*, May 1914

*"Strike off thy fetters! Bonds that bind thee down,  
of shining gold or darker brass one  
Love, hate — good, bad — and all the dual throng,  
know slave is slave carefed or whipped, rot, fall  
For fetters, though of gold, are not less strong to bind;  
then off with them Sanyasin hold say one tat sat on*

(Handwritten words in Swamiji's own hand)

With this message that marked its mission, Brahnavadin 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 Brahnavadin 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 Brahnavadin'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 Brahnavadin. For, had not their beloved Swamiji repeatedly said, 'The Brahnavadin is a jewel – it must not perish!' And so, the very same month when Brahnavadin 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 realized. 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.

**ECO-FRIENDLY** Trees are the life-breath of our world. To support environment conservation *The Vedanta Kesari* is printed on paper prepared mainly from sugarcane bagasse.



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The relevance of Vedantic wisdom to everyday life is all the more pertinent today than ever before. 'Arise, Awake and stop not till the goal is reached,' is the thundering motto of Swami Vivekananda. The Ramakrishna Mission, as you all know, is a unique organization where sannyasis and lay people come together and endeavour for the common good. Let's join hands in taking forward our revered Swamiji's vision and mission for The Vedanta Kesari.



Swami Vivekananda

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June 2020

The Vedanta Kesari



# Atmarpanastuti

Sri Appayya Dikshitendra

## Sloka - 17

ब्रह्मादीन् यः स्मरहर पशून मोहपाशेन बद्ध्वा सर्वानेकश्चिदचिदधिकः कारयित्वात्मकृत्यम् ।  
यश्चैतेषु स्वपदशरणान् विद्यया मोचयित्वा सान्द्रानन्दं गमयति परं धाम तं त्वां प्रपद्ये ॥१७

I surrender myself to You, O Destroyer of Cupid, who are the only One and beyond all animate and inanimate, who have tied down with the rope of delusion all beings from Brahma downwards, and made them do Your work, who release from bondage by conferring self-knowledge those who take refuge in You and make them attain the state of supreme bliss.

## Sloka - 18

भक्ताग्रयाणां कथमपि पर्योऽचिकित्स्याममत्यैः संसाराख्यां शमयति रुजं स्वात्मबोधौषधेन ।  
तं सर्वाधीश्वर भवमहादीर्घतीव्रामयेन क्लिष्टोऽहं त्वां वरद शरणं यामि संसारवैद्यम् ॥१८

O Lord of all! All other gods are absolutely incapable of relieving even the greatest of devotees from the affliction of transmigration. But You cure this disease by the medicine of Self-knowledge. I am suffering from the severe disease of long standing saṃsāra and so I take refuge in You, the dispeller of the disease of saṃsāra.

## Sloka - 19

ध्यातो यत्नाद्विजितकरणैर्योगिभिर्यो विमृग्य स्तेभ्यः प्राणोत्क्रमणसमये सन्निधायामनैव ।  
तद्ग्याचष्टे भवभयहरं तारकं ब्रह्म देव स्तं सेवेऽहं गिरिश सततं ब्रह्मविद्यागुरुं त्वाम् ॥१९

O Girisha! worship You, the guru who imparts brahmavidya, who are meditated on strenuously and sought after by yogis who have controlled their senses, before whom You appear Yourself at the time of death and impart the Taraka mantra which removes all fear of transmigration

☪ Translated by Sri. S.N. Sastri.





## Wisdom

Once I went to a certain place with Mathur Babu. Many pundits came forward to argue with me. And you all know that I am a fool. (All laugh.) The pundits saw that strange mood of mine. When the conversation was over, they said to me: 'Sir, after hearing your words, all that we have studied before, our knowledge and scholarship, has proved to be mere spittle. Now we realize that a man does not lack wisdom if he has the grace of God. The fool becomes wise and the mute eloquent.' Therefore, I say that a man does not become a scholar by the mere study of books.

There are many pundits who speak words of wisdom. But they merely talk; they don't live up to them. They are like vultures, which soar very high but keep their gaze fixed on the charnel-pit.

A wife endowed with spiritual wisdom is a real partner in life. She greatly helps her husband to follow the religious path. After the birth of one or two children they live like brother and sister. Both of them are devotees of God—His servant and His handmaid. Their family is a spiritual family. They are always happy with God and His devotees. They know that God alone is their own, from everlasting to everlasting. They are like the Pandava brothers; they do not forget God in happiness or in sorrow.

The spiritual wisdom of worldly people is seen only on rare occasions. It is like the flame of a candle. No, it is rather like a single ray of the sun passing through a chink in a wall. Worldly people chant the name of God, but there is no zeal behind it. It is like children's swearing by God, having learnt the word from the quarrels of their aunts.

This shrine of the body should not be left dark; one should illumine it with the lamp of Wisdom. Lighting the lamp of knowledge in the chamber of your heart, Behold the face of the Mother, Brahman's Embodiment. "Everyone can attain Knowledge. There are two entities: Jivatma, the individual soul, and Paramatma, the Supreme Soul. Through prayer all individual souls can be united to the Supreme Soul. Every house has a connection for gas, and gas can be obtained from the main storage-tank of the Gas Company. Apply to the Company, and it will arrange for your supply of gas. Then your house will be lighted.

—Sri Ramakrishna





## The Upper Bird

The Upanishads use a wealth of imagery to describe the Reality. One of the popular parables, presented by the Mundakopanishad, is that of two birds sitting on a tree. One bird is sitting on a lower branch and is busy eating fruits. These fruits are almost by turn sweet and bitter, and thus the bird swings between the experiences of happiness and misery. The other bird, with golden plumage, is sitting on the top of the tree; it is self-content and calmly looks on without eating.

When the lower bird eats a bitter fruit, it feels disgusted with life and wistfully looks up at the upper bird longing for its peace. But it soon resumes eating the fruits. When it again eats a very bitter fruit and becomes miserable, it looks long at the other bird and begins to hop up towards it. But again forgetting all its painful experiences, it reverts to eating fruits. This eating of sweet-bitter fruits and intermittent longing for the peace of the upper bird continues for a long time. Gradually, as the lower bird nears the upper bird, it is enveloped by the golden glow of the upper bird and its own individuality begins to melt away. Finally, it stands transformed into the higher bird! In truth there was always only one bird. The lower bird was “only the substantial-looking shadow, the reflection of the higher”, a mere painful dream.

As can be easily understood, the tree in this parable is our own body. The body offers fruits of sense-experiences – pleasant and unpleasant – and it also undergoes growth, decay, and destruction like a tree. The fruit-eating bird on the lower branch is the jivatma, the individual soul i.e., ourselves. Drugged and dragged by our senses and *vishaya samskaras*,

we experience, as if in a delirium, the life of uncertainties. When we receive heavy blows of misery – in the form of failure, separation, pain, disease, death etc., –, we awaken a little from our hypnotic state and turn towards the upper bird, the pure witness which is the Paramatma, the Supreme Self or God. The drama of our cycle of lives ends when we become one with the Lord.

The point in narrating this well-known parable is to highlight the fact that simply understanding it through the intellect is not enough, because it is not realisation. We can discover our true Self only when we clearly identify the upper bird and establish a relationship with it.

Sri Ramakrishna would now and then ask the devotees, “Well, what is your idea about me? Who am I?” Again, referring to his inner circle of devotees, he would say, “If they can know two things: first, who I am; second, who they are and what their relationship to me is” then “they will not have to practise much discipline and austerity.”

Truly, the upper golden bird is our Ishta Devata Sri Ramakrishna. And he resides in our heart as the upper bird.

The Mahanarayanopanishad points out: “In the citadel of the body there is the small sinless and pure lotus of the heart which is the residence of the Supreme.”

Our task now is to repeatedly turn our mind, even amidst our worldly engagements, towards this ‘spotless spiritual swan’ seated in our heart. The more we do this, the quicker will be our inner journey towards Self-realisation. ✨

# Comprehensive Harmony Through the Lord of Yoga

SWAMI SATYAMAYANANDA

*The 6<sup>th</sup> International Day of Yoga is scheduled to be held in Leh, capital of Ladakh, on 21 June 2020. On this occasion, this article reflects on the deeper significance of Yoga as superfine religious ideas which alone can resolve the conflicts facing humanity. The author reminds us to recognise our unique spiritual inheritance and become its worthy practitioners.*

*Describing the look of a Yogi, Sri Ramakrishna says, "His eyes are wide open, with an aimless look, like the eyes of the mother bird hatching her eggs." The Cover Page tries to present that picture.*

One warm evening watching the speeding traffic on the roads of Los Angeles, I was struck by the progress of society. There are about 185 languages spoken in this city and the cultural diversity is mind-boggling. This mini-world seems to be going on well; the hard-working, healthy people of Los Angeles seem to be madly, yet methodically, rushing about with their lives. Yet there was something missing in the psyche of the people.

## The surface and the underlying structures

The surface, invariably, gives a very different picture. If one, however, perceives the various substructures, then different readings or ideas will emerge. And one should study substructures in order to understand anything. That is why every phenomenon, whether mental or physical, is layered, and that includes societies of the world.

There is a constant tug-of-war going on between the powers of evil and powers of good. Yet we see, since humankind began living in a structured way called society, that humanity is progressing despite the staggering shade of corruption, crime, punishments, police, and

judiciary. Clearly all householders have not been ideal householders. Yet most of the negative comments about society comes from such people. Less than half of the people living in any society follow social and moral laws. Society at times is like a huge prison in which all sorts of abominable behavior is displayed.

## The roles of religion

All societies have evolved by holding on to religion. Religion has been a mighty civilizing factor, for, it raises the brute to the human and the human to the divine. That is why deep down, and long long ago, humanity pinned its hopes for its individual and collective life, and everything else on religion.

Religion has saved humanity more than it has divided it in the past. It brought peace but also caused wars. As religions become dominant, its inadequacies and contradictory nature dogged humanity for thousands of years, especially when different races and cultures began encountering each other.

## The rise of science

Religion suffered a mighty blow, when humanity began searching for truth through



means other than religion, and that was the growth of philosophy and science. All family and social values were religious values. But with the breakdown in the power of religions and the rise of science and scientific inquiry, which is neutral, humankind is left without a solid ground to stand. It is not that science is an enemy of humanity; it is really what we have adopted for progress. Can we today discard both religion and science? It is impossible! What then is the way out? Many answers have been given and tried, and failed.

### Yoga as the perfect solution

We can take the best parts of religion, and yet be perfectly scientific and modern. This solution is Yoga. Yoga philosophy is perfectly scientific, modern, and at the same time religious. Yoga can build a solid family structure and a sane society. In fact, with the growth of its heightened cognitive abilities, humanity is being led to higher mental disciplines, and Yoga has the power to transform this budding human consciousness. In spite of all the problems societies are heir to, we see a gradual and inexorable advance of humanity in almost all walks of life. We are, through the processes of evolution, getting ready to enter this science of higher Consciousness. Yoga will rediscover our roots, redefine our being, and lead us higher towards liberation. It will bring harmony between religious and secular life, between life and death, between individuals and society, between different societies, between bondage and freedom, and so on.

### Collapse of societies and cultures

It is immature to imagine that society is not subject to the many forces of disintegration.

It always is, as this is not the subject matter of the article, we shall pass this important aspect of society by briefly mentioning that the forces of *pravritti*, circling forward, and *nirvritti*, circling inward, are like concentric circles pulling away and countering that pull in every aspect of social life.

*Non-application of religious ideals has reduced civilizations to this state of abject moral and spiritual degradation*

In *Are We on the Road to Civilization Collapse?* Luke Kemp, from the Centre for the Study of Existential Risk at the University of Cambridge says, 'Collapse

may be a normal phenomenon for civilizations, regardless of their size and stage. We may be more technologically advanced now. But this gives little ground to believe that we are immune to the threats that undid our ancestors. Our newfound technological abilities even bring new, unprecedented challenges to the mix. And while our scale may now be global, collapse appears to happen to both sprawling empires and fledgling kingdoms alike.<sup>1</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna, however, describes the malady of the age, that which is disintegrating families and society, in two words—lust and greed. And Swami Vivekananda says further that it is the non-application of religion or religious ideals that has reduced civilizations to this state of abject moral and spiritual degradation.

### The challenge thrown to all Indians

California and Los Angeles have today, it seems, more Yoga centers and practitioners than in India. They started with Hatha Yoga, Ayurveda, etc., and now after more than a century since Swami Vivekananda brought Yoga to the West, people are beginning to understand the mystical, the deeper aspects of this grand philosophy. The pressures of life are naturally orienting them towards Yoga. And

quite naturally also the world is looking at India. This is another great responsibility for every Indian. We are now thrown on the world stage and we must live up to Yoga's expectations.

Amidst all these tribulations and sufferings of the past more than a thousand years, India as an entity, as an ethos, as an ideal, as a civilization, exists because she held on to Yoga. It also means that millions of people had protected this grand science of the inner being by practicing it. Those practices have percolated down to the smallest details of Indian life, holding families, and communities and culture together. This must be revived and inculcated in our people.

The civilization of Mohenjo Daro and Harappa lasted for about 800 years. And except for a few civilizations, like the Vedic civilization that lasted for 1000 years, the average age of an empire is 336 years! We do, however, have the Kushite Kingdom, 1150 years, Aksumite Empire, 1100, years, and Olmecs, 1000 years.<sup>2</sup> The reason why the Indian civilization through its ups and downs is still surviving is because as Swami Vivekananda says, "Each race...has a peculiar bent, each race has a peculiar *raison d'etre*, each race has a peculiar mission to fulfil in the life of the world. Each race must make its own answers, to fulfil its mission. Political greatness or military power is never the mission of our race; it never was, and, mark my words, it never will be. But there has been the other mission given to us, which is to conserve, to preserve, to accumulate, as it were, into a dynamo, all the spiritual energy of the race, and that concentrated energy is to pour forth in a deluge on the world whenever circumstances are propitious."<sup>3</sup>

### The family and society

'The Family is dead; long live the Family.' This contradictory phrase, is like 'the King is

dead; long live the King' which is used to declare the death of the previous King and the ascension of a successor. Similarly, the old family values are dying or dead; new family values are succeeding. If we study changes closely however, we find the changes are more rapid on the surface and as it gets progressively towards the center or core, the changes diminish and stop altogether. The core of the family or individual is not the name, race, religion, language, profession, etc., but the real individual, which is the subject of the study of religion, spirituality, and ethics. These superfine religious ideas are called Yoga. At the core, human beings are the same wherever they are – whether in India, or the West or East or anywhere else.

### Real reformers

Luke Kemp also states that in many civilizations the epicenter of the old collapsed civilization, sometimes revives and goes through another period of growth; moving at times like the rising and falling of waves. In India, where is this epicenter of revival? It is the family, rather the individual woman or man. In fact, the culture of a civilization is mostly held by women. A new India has arisen as Swami Vivekananda pointed out, with the arrival of Sri Ramakrishna.

Indian society has been reformed and revived many times in her long history, and who were the reformers? Avatars, rishis, sages, saints, and seers! We never lacked such spiritual power when it was needed. Our heroes are all spiritual people, not the heroes of the cinema, which many of us very stupidly follow and which only degenerates us. In India, moreover, no imported social doctrines or philosophies ever worked or will work. We must bring out our own doctrines based on our ethos. As it is seen, a revival of any sort in India is always preceded by a spiritual tsunami.

Society then corrects itself and becomes energized.

### The world preparing itself for Yoga

Our lives are predominantly mental. The various forces acting on society primarily act on the mind. In the modern society the mind is under tremendous pressure. Besides, almost every branch of science is trying to understand Consciousness. What we know as even material sciences like Physics, Biology, Chemistry, and so on, are trying to zero in on what makes matter tick. Then we have the various branches of internal medicine, neurology, psychology, etc., also trying to unravel Consciousness. This is an exciting time for civilizations and humanity. For, this is leading us towards what the ancient Yoga philosophy and praxis were trying to unravel and experience at the various states of higher Consciousness. In fact, as Swamiji says, “India’s gift to the world is the light spiritual.”<sup>4</sup> This spirituality is based on the real nature of the individual, and this individual has within himself/herself not just the consciousness and subconsciousness but superconsciousness. Swamiji says, “Consciousness is a mere film between two oceans of the subconscious and the superconscious...I could not believe my own ears when I heard Western people talking so much about Consciousness! Why it is nothing compared with the unfathomable depths of the subconscious and the heights of the superconsciousness! In this I could never be misled, for had I not seen Ramakrishna Paramahansa gather in ten minutes, from a man’s subconscious mind the whole of his past, and determine from that his future and his powers?”<sup>5</sup>

It is on the level of the super-consciousness mind that India and Yoga

discovered the Atman, the infinite Reality. India built its culture and civilization on this Eternality and that is why India and Yoga cannot die. For our basis is the Imperishable Reality. All other civilizations based their life on the perishable verities of the world and that is why there is so much dissension, discord, and destruction. Modern India still has to

understand this truth and so it must be hammered into people’s brains, especially those who are full of second, third, and fourth-hand knowledge.

*Yoga is a means to understand the human being, the universe, and the Reality.*

### What are Yoga’s Applications?

Yoga philosophy has arisen from the ancient Sankhya philosophy. The word Yoga means ‘samadhi’ intense concentration; the other meaning is *samyoga*, ‘yoke’ in English. The basis of the principles and practices of Yoga arose from the internalizations of the ancient Vedic yajnas, fire sacrifices. Intense concentration, the rishis found out, can penetrate the mind’s depths and come face to face with facts that are beyond the senses. In ‘yoke’ we must first yoke the senses with the body, the body-senses with the breath, then the whole thing with the mind, next yoking this with the various levels of the mind, and then finally the whole thing with the soul. In Yoga, we have a continuity spanning an immense length of time. Yoga is a means to understand the human being, the universe, and the Reality. Millions upon millions of yogis and yoginis spent a lifetime, sometimes many lifetimes, to reach the goal of Yoga—*moksha*, liberation.

The reason why there is so much problems in life is because we have not understood ourselves through Yoga Psychology, which was developed to offer a holistic, integrative system of physical,

moral, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual health and well-being. These ancient practices today are becoming more and more relevant.

Yoga philosophy itself, as taught by Patanjali, over 2000 years ago, is the result of collating the various practices of Yoga from the various sects of yogis and traditions. That is why the science is so comprehensive. Over the years, Yoga became an integral part of all spiritual disciplines be they Karma, Bhakti, and Jnana, Mantra, and Rituals. It has harmonized all branches of religious practices in India.

We need to study this science of Yoga to develop and refine the mind in all its phases, know how it works, know our limitations and strengths, our functional and dysfunctional tendencies. Almost nothing is impossible for this science. This system of Yoga includes an understanding of the different layers of our personality as well as knowing our mind in the context of an individual in relation to social life and responsibilities. It shows us how to depend on our own self, and this is the wonderful way to freedom.

This is important today because mental health has become a big issue, besides physical health. Yoga can take care of both problems.

### **Sri Ramakrishna as the *Yogeshvara***

When Sri Ramakrishna saw a print of his picture, the well-known meditation posture. He remarked, "This represents a high yogic state.

This form will be worshipped in every home as time goes on."<sup>6</sup>

We see two important points: a) 'high yogic state' and 'worshipped in every home' and obviously in many hearts, in many places, even in America here, Sri Ramakrishna's prophecy is coming true. And as time rolls on, people from all walks of life will worship, practice, and ultimately realize the 'high yogic state', as embodied by Sri Ramakrishna. In this age of spurious, counterfeit, unauthentic and deviant forms of Yoga practices, the 'Great Master' is the genuine face or symbol or icon of Yoga. That is why Swamiji in his Vespers Hymn to Sri Ramakrishna calls him *Yoga Sahay*, helping (humanity) in Yoga. In this age he is the *Yogeshvara*, Lord of Yoga.

### **Future Humanity**

It is well known that Swami Vivekananda brought Yoga and its latest icon to the West. Is there any other icon of Yoga? Of course, Swami Vivekananda himself has become the icon of Yoga and so was and is the Buddha. These icons show what the future humanity will be: meditative, calm, absorbed in super consciousness, and free. There is a huge interest in Yoga, Vedanta, and Buddhism in the USA. As the saying goes, 'the morning shows the day', so we are seeing a surging interest in this science of Yoga in the West, which we hope will be as widespread in the land of its origination. Of course, it will, because the Lord of Yoga, who is also called the Prophet of Harmony was born to revive this science. \*

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# Reminiscences of Sargachhi

SWAMI SUHITANANDA

(Continued from previous issue. . .)

Swami Premeshananda (1884 – 1967) was a disciple of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. For over two decades he lived at Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sargachhi, West Bengal. Under his inspiration countless people led a life of spirituality and service, and many young men and women entered into monastic life. His conversations – translated from Bengali and presented below – were noted by his attendant who is now Srimat Swami Suhitananda, one of the Vice-Presidents of the Ramakrishna Order.

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The Vedanta Kesari

30.11.60

**Question:** How should sannyasis conduct themselves in the ashrama?

**Maharaj:** Generally, there are two heads in a monastery: a manager and a *mahant* or abbot. The abbot engages only in religious discussions and observes all the activities of the ashrama as a witness. The manager runs the administration.

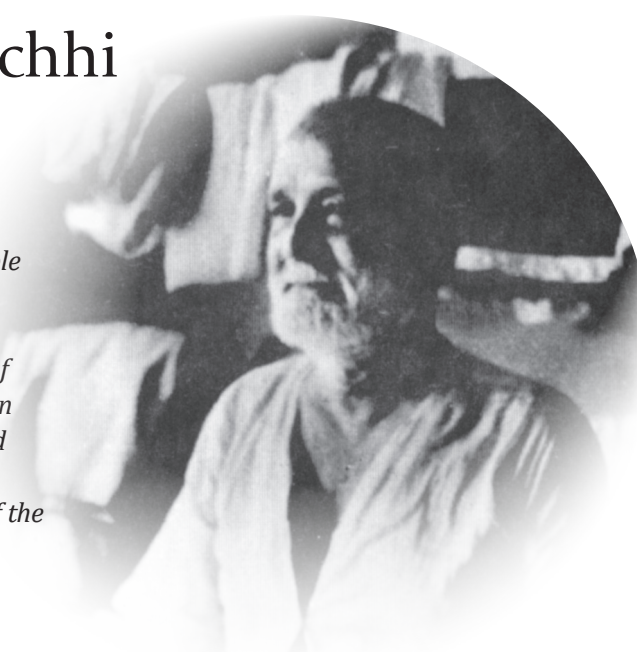
When you have to take up a new responsibility, you should wholeheartedly strive to utilise the opportunity to serve the Master as a servant of his ashrama. In the first month, observe everything in the ashrama. Then identify who is suitable for which work and assign him full responsibility for it. Keep a watch over the health and progress of co-workers. Always mingle with them and engage in spiritual discussions. Finally, again and again, study practical Vedanta. Conduct yourself in such a manner that your body and mind do not break down due to overwork.

**Question:** What is the meaning of अत्मनो मोक्षार्थं जगद्धिता य च ? [‘For one’s own liberation and the good of the world’]

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**Maharaj:** The real purpose of my life is अत्मनो मोक्षार्थम्. If someone truly lives in this spirit, then whatever work he may do will certainly do good to the world. A sannyasi shouldn’t initiate any work on his own – he should carry out only the work that his guru commands him to do. The command of the Order is the same as Swamiji’s [Swami Vivekananda’s] command. The good of the world may still result if a sannyasi does some work on his own after noticing the general indolence (*tamas*) of the people and the country; but the high ideal of monastic life or the lofty sentiment of Swamiji’s prescription *Atmano mokshartham jagadhitaya cha* will not be present in such work. It will be more like social service.

Without worship, the mind cannot be concentrated. Without discriminative knowledge, the mind cannot become subtle. Without meditation, subtle topics cannot be understood. And without work, *pratyahara*, or withdrawal from sense objects, is not possible. As you continue to work and perceive the inherent flaws and misery of the world,





discrimination and renunciation will grow in you.

### 2.12.60

**Maharaj:** Sri Ramakrishna first had a vision of Sita. Sita wore an exquisite smile on her face. Sri Ramakrishna too had such a smile on his face. Another speciality of Sri Ramakrishna was his saying 'Come again!' God knows what kind of spell it created! People were bound to come again. Master Mahashaya ['M'] published a Bengali poem entitled 'You said "Come again"' in the *Udbodhan*. Nowadays we do not hear about this poem. It runs like this:

I beheld His exquisite form  
When I first saw those lotus feet;  
His love-intoxicated eyes  
And his ever-smiling lotus face  
Showered nectar all around,  
As with a five-year-old child  
Eternally overwhelmed with joy!

Blessed art thou, O Rani,  
And blessed is thy temple,  
Where His living Spirit still lingers!

Wherefrom emerged this jewel of a man?  
Is He human or divine?  
Perhaps not of this world,  
But Someone our very own;  
Else, why does He captivate my soul  
At first sight?

At long last,  
My soul's thirst is quenched,  
My life's problems solved,  
My mind's darkness fled—  
How wonderful it is!  
My life is fulfilled  
By the touch of the philosopher's stone!

O Delight of my heart,  
I wonder who Thou art!  
O Apple of my eye,  
How do I return home?  
Where is my home, bereft of Thee?  
Still I must return, heart-rending though  
it may be!

O Indweller of my mind,  
Thou readest all my thoughts  
And with Thine exquisite smile  
Soothest me within and without!

Thou remainest silent,  
Perhaps recalling Thy servant's past;  
Then tenderly, like a loving mother,  
Thou utterest— 'Come again.'

### 4.12.60

**Maharaj:** Ordinary people's understanding of God is that He resides in Vaikuntha, together with Lakshmi, and comes down to earth whenever the necessity arises. But what is the reality? If there's an ulcer somewhere on my body, then the vital force accumulates there. Similarly, this world of living beings is an aspect of *Samasthi*, the Collective Whole. Whenever there is an ulcer in it, i.e., there is a degradation [of dharma] *ग्लानिर्भवति* (Gita 4:7), He creates a form and sends His message through it. It's just like the water on the roof, which comes down through the lion's mouth.

This time that Nirguna Brahman gave Its message through the form called Ramakrishna. That is why we admire the Ramakrishna form so much! But if that body itself were God, then God would have expired as soon as that body perished.

(To be continued. . .)



# Captain Vishwanath Upadyaya

RUCHIRA MITRA

यमेवैष वृणुते तेन लभ्यः

It is attained by him alone whom It chooses (Kathopanishad. 1.2:23)

## Introduction

Frequently, Sri Ramakrishna impressed upon his disciples that God incarnates as a guru to show people the spiritual path: 'God has different forms, and He sports in different ways as Isvara, deva, man, and the universe. In every age He descends to earth in human form, as an Incarnation, to teach people love and devotion. ... The more you proceed towards God, the more you will see that God Himself is the guru and He Himself is the Ishta (spiritual ideal).'

After going through the spiritual practices of all traditions, and reaching the acme of spiritual knowledge, Sri Ramakrishna was eager to play his divine role as the preceptor of this Age. He wanted to share his spiritual experiences with sincere souls. He knew they would come. As he later told his disciples: 'It was revealed to me that I had devotees - my intimate companions, my very own. The Divine Mother told me that many devotees would come here. I got impatient for them.'

Describing his longing to meet his devotees who would be able to understand and practice his teachings, he once said: 'There was no limit to the longing I felt at that time. During the day-time I somehow managed to control it. The secular talk of the worldly-minded was galling to me, and I would look wistfully to the day when my own beloved companions would come. I hoped to find solace in conversing with them and relating to them my own realizations. Every little incident would remind me of them, and thoughts of them wholly engrossed me. I was already arranging in my mind what I should say to one and give to another, and so on. But when the day would come to a close I would not be able to curb my feelings. The thought that another day had gone by, and they had not come, oppressed me. When, during the evening service, the temples rang with the sound of bells and conch-shells, I would climb to the roof of the *kuthi* in the garden and, writhing in anguish of heart, cry at the top of my voice: "Come, my children! Oh, where are you? I cannot bear to live without you." A mother never longed so intensely for the sight of her child, nor a friend for his companions, nor a lover for his sweetheart, as I longed for them. Oh, it was indescribable!'

Shortly after this period of yearning, the devotees began to come one by one.

These devotees belonged to two categories: householder devotees and celibate teenagers; most of these teenagers later became sannyasis. Many of these householder devotees were integral to the story of Sri Ramakrishna. Once, Sri Ramakrishna told M., the recorder of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, "You are my own - the same substance, like father and son. ... You were in a state of forgetfulness until you came here. Now you will be able to know yourself. God comes down as guru to make you know yourself."



Beginning from this issue, *The Vedanta Kesari* will present the inspiring stories of these devotees. We pray that it will awaken some of our readers to Sri Ramakrishna's divine call 'Come, my children!' which is even today sounding across the world, attracting many earnest souls.

**I**t was a thrilling dream. A holy man sitting encircled by a mass of light was beckoning him to come near and receive divine knowledge. A thrilled Captain Viswanath Upadhyaya woke up with a sincere prayer for his dream to come true.


It was 1871 or 1872. Sri Ramakrishna's long and intense sadhana at the Dakshineswar Kali temple on the eastern bank of river Ganga had concluded. And the time was ripe for him to impart his divine knowledge to eager spiritual seekers. In those days, on the western bank of Ganga, in Ghosuri, there was a large timber yard belonging to the Government of Nepal. Captain Viswanath Upadhyaya, an orthodox and devout Hindu hailing from Nepal, was its officer-in-charge.

After his dream, Viswanath became restless in his spiritual quest. He soon heard about the saint of Dakshineswar, 'Paramahansa Ramakrishna', who lived deeply merged in God-consciousness and conveyed wonderful spiritual truths in a homely, heart-touching language.

When Viswanath hurried to Dakshineswar, he was dumbfounded; the Paramahansa was the holy man of his dream! Overwhelmed, Viswanath repeatedly prostrated at his feet. His feelings were deeply stirred and tears of joy flowed down his cheeks. He was immensely charmed to hear from Sri Ramakrishna that a childlike faith in God and resignation to God's Will were the essentials of a religious life. He found a close resemblance between Sri Ramakrishna's words and the scriptures. He spent that whole day and night in Sri Ramakrishna's company. Sri Ramakrishna too from the very beginning, treated him like his own and endearingly called him 'Captain'.

The very first visit convinced Captain of Sri Ramakrishna's extraordinary spiritual stature. Being a sincere spiritual aspirant, he carefully observed the different moods of Sri Ramakrishna. He could differentiate the various types of samadhi Sri Ramakrishna used to have, and he applied his Hathayoga knowledge to bring Sri Ramakrishna's mind down to the normal plane. In the following visits, Captain developed the conviction that Sri Ramakrishna was an incarnation of God. He held Sri Sarada Devi, the consort of Sri Ramakrishna, too in deep regard and supplied logs for building a hut for her.

Once, Captain got into serious trouble. During high-tide, the timber yard used to get flooded and some logs would be carried away by the low tide. By the time Captain woke up to these constant losses, the accumulated value of the missing timber had become very high and he found it difficult to account for the lost timber. When rumours about stock shortages reached the King of Nepal, Captain was summoned to Nepal to give an explanation. He was terrified and ran to Sri Ramakrishna for protection. Once Sri Ramakrishna understood that Captain had not done any fraud, he told him to tell the King the truth. He assured Captain that by the grace of Mother Kali he would be free of all suspicion, and would be allowed to return to Calcutta! With this clear assurance of protection, Captain went to Nepal and faced the King with confidence. He admitted the losses and his responsibility for failing to take timely preventive measures. The King was impressed by his straightforward explanation. He was re-posted to Calcutta with a higher position – as the King's Envoy to India. His salary was increased four-fold and his rank upgraded to a Colonel in the Royal Nepal Army!



Dakshineswar Kali Temple

Captain was opposed to all non-Hindu religious traditions. But Sri Ramakrishna worked patiently to broaden his social values and attitudes. He also wrought a deep transformation in Captain's inner life without disturbing the pattern of his external life. Later, speaking about Captain's progress, Sri Ramakrishna said, "What a nice state of mind Captain has developed! He looks like a rishi when he sits for worship..." "Though a man of the world, he is a great lover of God ... he knows the Vedas, the Vedanta, the Bhagavata, the Gita and Adhyatma Ramayana and other scriptures by heart."

Captain felt sorry that the people of Calcutta failed to appreciate the greatness of Sri Ramakrishna. He would comment, "The Bengalis are fools. They have a gem (meaning Sri Ramakrishna) near them, but they cannot recognise it." He told Ramchandra Dutta, one of the prominent house-holder devotees of Sri

Ramakrishna, "I have read enough of the Vedas and the Vedanta. I have met a good number of different types of holy men at different places. But after I have come in contact with Sri Ramakrishna my spiritual yearnings have been fulfilled. What more should I say to you? What we do not find in the Vedas, we find in him. I feel that he is the embodiment of the truths contained in the Vedas and all other scriptures. He is the living proof of the scriptures."

Captain was one of Sri Ramakrishna's first western-educated upper-class devotees. Also among all the devotees, he had the holy company of Sri Ramakrishna for the longest period – fifteen years! His devout wife too held Sri Ramakrishna in highest esteem and used to feed him quite often in her home. By Sri Ramakrishna's grace Captain was able to show how one could hold on to God at all times even while leading a busy life in the world. ✽

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## Basaveswara

K. B. PRABHUPRASAD

*This series on the saints of India, is now covering the life and message of the Veerashaiva saints. The second saint from this tradition presented here is Basaveswara, the great harmonizer.*

“

Of what avail is religion without compassion  
One should have love and compassion for all beings  
Mercy is the very basis of religion  
Lord Koodala Sangama won't approve otherwise.

”  
**T**he very essence of any religion is compassion. It is a universal truth.

Love all. Be kind to all living beings. So says Basaveswara, a great Saiva saint of Karnataka in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. He is one of the greatest thinkers and religious leaders of the world. An embodiment of bhakti and humility, he says:

“

None are smaller than me  
None are greater than devotees of Shiva

”

About 900 years ago, there lived a Saiva Brahmin couple by name Maadarasa and Maadalaamibika in the village called Baagevaadi (now in Bijapur District, Karnataka); it was a well known Agrahaara. Maadarasa was its chief.

Maadarasa and Maadalaamibika were a very pious and ideal couple. Their family deity was Nandeewara. One day after worship in the temple when Maadalaambike was sitting in prayer, a jasmine flower placed on Shivalinga fell into her lap. She took it with devotion, pressed it gently to her eyes and then wore it in her hair. The whole day she was in a mood of ecstasy. At night she had a dream. Shiva from Kailas had sent Nandi, the sacred bull he rode, to her house. A bright light entered her womb. Next morning

she related this dream to her husband. He in turn reported it to the guru who told him that it indicated that a worthy son would be born and he would uplift bhakti and enlighten the whole world. The couple felt very happy to hear these words of prophecy.

In course of time Maadalaambike gave birth to a son. It was a charming babe. Its face shone with brightness, not of this world. But strangely enough it did not cry at all, as new born babies do. It did not open its eyes. It did not move its limbs. The mother was worried. The revered guru of the family, Jathaveda muni was in Koodala Sangama. Maadarasa decided to report this curious state of the baby to him. But as a strange co-incidence, the guru himself was at their doors. The worried parents fell at his feet and stated the problem. Guru looked at the baby and smeared its forehead with the sacred ashes, kept in a box with him. And he whispered Panchakshari (five lettered) mantra “Om Namah Shivaya” in the ears of the baby. Immediately the baby opened its eyes and smiled. Then the Guru tied Ishta Linga and initiated the little infant into a spiritual Order of Veerashaiva. He then told the relieved parents, “Blessed are you Maadarasa. Nandi whom you worshipped in the temple and prayed, has come into your bosom, as your son. He has come to revive and rejuvenate bhakti in this world. Dharma will be re-established. The welfare of the entire mankind will be accomplished by



him. This indeed is your good fortune as also of this land. Name him *Basava*.”

Basava is Kannada language word for Vrishabha the Sanskrit name for bull. Later, when Basava started working for the welfare of the whole society, people out of respect called him Basaveswara. As his unselfish love endeared him to people, they also addressed him as *Anna*, which means elder brother in Kannada. Thus he was popularly known as Basavanna. He was born in 1131 A.D.

As Basava grew up he was the life of his parents, his elder brother Devaraj, and elder sister Naagalambike. He was the cynosure of the whole neighbourhood. Even as he grew up, Basava started asking intelligent questions for which the elders sometimes had no answers. When he was six years old, His father decided to admit him into a nearby gurukula (school). Though very eager to go to school, Basava insisted that his elder sister should also attend the school along with him. In those days, girls were not sent to a formal school. But since Basava refused to go to school without his sister, his father and the guru at the gurukula had to yield to his request and allow Naagalambike to attend the school. Very soon, the guru recognised Basava as a prodigy.

As he grew up Basava noticed that some children stood at a distance from him. Though eager, they could not join him because he belonged to the higher caste and they were untouchables. They lived in a colony outside the village. But disregarding the opposition of his elders, Basava asked them to join him in play. He had only one condition: that they bathe and wash their clothes every day and come well groomed. The thought of equality seemed to be natural to him.

Even among caste Hindus, Brahmins were considered superior to the other three varnas— Kshatriya, Vysya and Shudra. This seemed wrong to Basava. All should be treated

as equal. He said, “All should be pure hearted and have devotion to God Shiva”.

When Basava was eight years old, his father wanted to perform his Upanayanam or investiture with holy thread, which is a must for any Brahmin boy. But Basava argued that he did not need Upanayanam as guru Easaana had already initiated and given him the Ishta Linga which he always wore across his neck and worshipped it every day in the morning, noon and evening. When his father worried about public censure that would come for not performing Upanayanam, young Basava took a bold decision. He told his father, “You may respect this religious tradition. But it is not for me. Let me not put you to embarrassment. I shall leave home and stay in Koodala Sangama, serving guru Easaan and continue my education at his feet”. He accordingly left home once and for all and set out to Koodala Sangama. The young boy’s bold and firm decision amazed everybody.

At Sangama, the guru gave his young student a warm welcome. Basava easily adapted to the routine in the gurukula. Waking up before dawn, he would meditate on Lord Shiva. Then before sunrise, he would pluck flowers for the worship. The sight of flowers always gladdened his heart. He experienced the presence of the divine in every flower as also in the whole of nature. He would worship his Ishta Linga keeping it on his palm, and then worship Lord Sangameswara Linga in the shrine. His guru and friends saw that while performing worship, Basava perceived the presence of the Lord. He would then converse with the Lord in deep devotion and shed tears of joy.

Worship was followed by studies of the Vedas, Upanishads and other scriptures. He had the same concentration in his studies as in worship and would often discuss subtle points of philosophy with his teachers. He also wholeheartedly participated in other activities

of the gurukula. In the evenings, he enjoyed taking long walks on the banks of the river.

His scholarship, devotion to God, modesty, soft words and good behaviour endeared him to the whole gurukula. Gradually during his 12 years of stay at the gurukula, Basava developed a wonderful personality. He was smart, active, simple, frank, modest, soft spoken, cheerful, and could reflect deeply on any topic. These qualities and his scholarship and fervent devotion to God endeared him to the whole gurukula.

Once, Baladeva, minister and commander-in-chief of Bijjala, the king of the province under Chalukya Empire came to Sangama to receive the blessings of guru Esaana. Baladeva was also the maternal uncle of Basavanna. While meeting the guru, he saw young Basavanna, whom the guru praised whole heartedly. Baladeva thought that a brilliant young man like Basavanna should be given some responsible position in the court of King Bijjala. This, he felt would increase the prosperity and fame of the kingdom. He also regarded Basavanna as an ideal husband for his own daughter. The guru too agreed with Baladeva's thinking. Basavanna, who had already given serious thought to his career and goal in life, had never thought of taking service in the king's court and even getting married. He saw both these as entanglements. But his guru advised him to go with his uncle to Mangalawede and accept his proposals. When Basavanna was still wavering, Lord Sangameswara appeared in his dream and told him, "Go dear with your uncle. You have many great things to do. I shall also accompany you. I am always with you. It is I who work through you". Thus, reassured, Basavanna accompanied his uncle into a new field of action.

He started his career as a junior clerk in the state treasury of King Bijjala. He found the office in a mess. The account books were not

properly maintained and just at that time the officials were struggling with an insoluble problem of tallying. There was an error in accounting and they were unable to spot it. When Basavanna politely requested to be allowed to go through the entire accounts, the senior accountants condescendingly gave their permission. Very soon Basavanna found out where the mistake lay. Recognising Basavanna's talent, King Bijjala posted him to a higher post. This caused displeasure and jealousy among some seniors.

There was another incident which made Basavanna win Bijjala's admiration. Once a copper plate containing an old inscription was discovered. The writing was in code language which nobody could decipher. But Basavanna was able to understand it and told the king that the inscription spoke of a great treasure hidden under the throne of Bijjala. Though doubtful, the king ordered for the treasure to be dug out. Truly enough, a huge treasure lay concealed under the throne. When thus the state treasury received enormous wealth, Basavanna humbly suggested several plans to the king to use the wealth for the welfare of his subjects. Greatly pleased, the king appointed Basavanna as the chief of the state treasury.

Later Basavanna married Gangambike the daughter of Baladeva and also Neelambike, the adopted sister of King Bijjala. The new family and the new office increased his responsibility. He set up his own house called Mahamane, where he engaged himself in spiritual sadhana and began his profoundly influential religious mission of unifying the devotees of God breaking the boundaries of caste and class.

Basavanna welcomed all people irrespective of their caste, creed, class, and gender and initiated them into the worship of Ishtalinga. These initiates were called Jangamas or Veerasaivas. They wore the Ishtalinga across their neck and worshipped the Lord directly

thrice a day without the mediation of priests and the usual Sanskrit mantras. Basavanna made suitable arrangements for this simple worship and for the Jangamas' daily food.

This tradition of worshipping the Lord on their own without having to go to temples, where the lower caste people and untouchables were anyhow denied admission, was a revolutionary idea. In this context Basavanna wrote:

“  
The rich build temples  
What can I, a poor man, do?  
My legs are pillars, my body is the temple,  
My head is the golden Cupola;  
Listen to me, O' Koodala Sangama deva  
The material image is perishable  
But the Jangama perishes not.”

A temple built in stone or brick and mortar may be destroyed or fall in course of time, but a Jangama will never perish. So the body itself should be treated as a holy shrine; it should always be kept clean and the mind pure, so that it is worthy of being God's abode. And in this shrine when devotees surrender to the Lord and pray with deep faith and intense devotion, their prayers are certainly heard. Basavanna writes:

“  
If one calls in faith does not Shiva respond?  
But without faith or trust people of this world  
Only call and complain that Shiva is not merciful.”

Basavanna wanted his message of revolutionary ideas to reach the masses. So he chose the simple spoken language to convey his message. Thus, vachana, a poetic prose expressing an idea in a few lines took form. Even uneducated persons of low birth could express their thoughts, feelings and experiences in this common man's language.

When Bijjala, broke out of his vassalage to the Chalukyas and declared himself as an independent king with Kalyana as his capital, Basavanna moved to this capital. Soon, people started coming from different places to meet

Basavanna. Among the great personages who thus came to Kalyana, were Allama Prabhu, Siddharameswara, Akka Mahadevi, and the king of Kashmir. This bhakti movement embraced people from lower castes like washermen, weavers, fishermen, blacksmiths, cobblers, barbers. These downtrodden people accepted Basavanna as their guru, received initiation with Ishtalinga, and even expressed their ideas, thoughts, feelings and experiences in vachana form. They accepted and followed the principle of kaayaka (honest labour) and dasoha (service of the Jangamas).

Basavanna created a unique forum called Anubhava Mantapa, where all the Shiva Sharanas including women met to express their thoughts and mystical experiences. Sharana means one who has totally surrendered to Shiva and who never yields to worldly temptations. Basavanna was a rational mystic and condemned belief in good and bad omens, planetary influence, hell and heaven, auspicious time and inauspicious time, etc. He insisted that his followers should be clean in body and mind, eat only vegetarian food, and lead a righteous life shunning all bad habits like drinking liquor, smoking, and chewing tobacco. He never preached or admonished to correct others. His vachanas are always in the form of advising himself on how to live. He says:

“  
Why do you correct the defects of the world?  
You set right your mind. You set right your body...  
Koodala Sangama Deva won't approve  
those who bother about neighbours.”

Referring to heaven and hell he writes:

“  
Heaven and mortal world are not somewhere.  
Speaking truth is heaven, uttering lies is mortal world;  
Righteous behaviour is Heaven and unrighteous is Hell.  
Those who are acceptable here are acceptable there also  
Those who are not acceptable here are  
not acceptable there also.  
Koodala Sangama Deva.”

(Continued on page 37...)



## The Talented Naren

GITANJALI MURARI

*A fictional narrative based on incidents from the childhood of Swami Vivekananda.*

The bell pealed loudly through the school and as soon as the Mathematics teacher left the classroom, Naren turned to his friends, "I read a wonderful story yesterday..."

"What is it about?" Hari and Shibu leaned forward on their desks, eager to listen.

"It is about a very brave policeman," he answered, "who caught a fearsome dacoit... listen well..."

The bell rang again and even before its sound faded away, another teacher entered the room.

"I'll tell you the rest later," Naren whispered to his friends.

"Today, we will study parts of a plant," Mukherjee sir announced. "Open your textbooks to chapter 2..."

"Finish the story," Shibu urged from the seat behind Naren.

"Yes please," begged Hari from the adjacent desk, "it has reached such an interesting point..."



Naren turned to face them, speaking rapidly, "Everyone in the village was scared... they did as the dacoit told them and tied up all their money and jewels in bundles..."

"Look at this diagram," the teacher droned. "This is a leaf...this the stem...now, let us study the flower closely..."

The students began to scribble in their notebooks, their attention wavering between Naren's excited murmur and the blackboard.

Mukherjee sir stiffened. Above the scratching of pencils, he could clearly hear a soft voice. Swiftly walking to Naren's desk, he tapped him with his stick, "Can't you see you are disturbing everyone?" he scolded, "stand up..."

"I am sorry sir," Naren said, getting to his feet. "I..."

"Perhaps you are so smart that you needn't pay attention," Mukherjee interrupted angrily, "Tell me, what are we studying today?"

"Parts of a plant, sir," Naren answered promptly.

"Harrumph," Mukherjee snorted, "that is written on the board. But can you name the parts?"

Naren counted on his fingers, "Seed, root, stem, leaf, flower...and fruit..."

The whole class gasped, the boys muttering to each other, "How did he hear the lecture when he was busy talking?"

"Silence," the teacher thundered and after a puzzled glance at Naren, told him to sit down.

"You," he pointed suddenly at Hari, "were you the one talking?"

"N...n...no, sir..."

"Then name one part of the flower..."

Hari went pale. "I...I...don't know sir," he squeaked.

"Stand up on the bench," Mukherjee ordered and turned to glare at Shibu. "You answer..."

Shibu shook his head, hanging his head in shame.

"You too stand on the bench...let those passing by this room know you have been punished for bad behaviour..."

As the teacher made to walk away, he noticed that Naren had clambered up on his seat. "I did not ask you to stand," he said, "you were paying attention, unlike these two boys..."

"Sir, my friends have been punished because of me," Naren began solemnly, "I was telling them a story...so, I too must stand with them..."

"If that is true, then how were you able to answer the questions?"

"While I was talking, I was also listening to you...shall I tell you the parts of a flower?"

"Go ahead..."

*(Continued on page 33...)*



# Vivekananda Way

ISSUE 29

PULLOUT FOR REFERENCE



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

Lectures covered thus far in this series include:

1. First public lecture in the East  
(Issue 22: India - the punya bhumi)
2. Reply to the address of welcome at Ramnad  
(Issue 23: India - the giant awakens)
3. Vedantism  
(Issues 24, 25, 26)
4. Reply to the address of welcome at Pamban  
(Issue 27: The responsibility placed on us)

### focus in this issue:

## On Real Worship

Rameshwaram is an ancient town on the island of Pamban, at the tip of the Indian peninsula, in the state of Tamil Nadu. It is significant for many Hindus, as a pilgrimage to Varanasi is considered to be incomplete without a pilgrimage to Rameshwaram. The town, along with the Ramanathaswamy temple, is one of the holiest Hindu Char Dham (four divine sites) sites comprising Badrinath, Puri and Dwarka.

We saw previously that Swami Vivekananda had arrived in Pamban, where he had been received joyfully and with the greatest veneration. After his talk in Pamban, the Swami came to Rameshwaram to pay a visit to the Ramanathaswamy temple. Here, he gave a short but striking lecture, in which he sifts out the externals of worship and shows us what indeed is the real test of religion.



“ **He who wants to serve the father must serve the children first. He who wants to serve Shiva must serve His children – must serve all creatures in this world first. It is said in the Shâstra that those who serve the servants of God are His greatest servants.**

“ **...unselfishness is the test of religion. He who has more of this unselfishness is more spiritual and nearer to Shiva. Whether he is learned or ignorant, he is nearer to Shiva than anybody else, whether he knows it or not.**

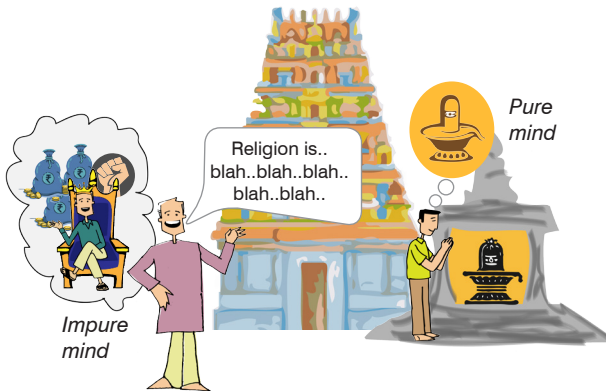


> Turn overleaf to explore further...

# Key messages from this lecture...

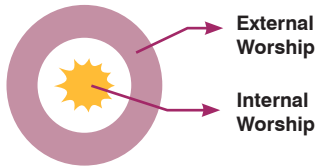
## 1 External worship vs. Internal worship

It is in love that religion exists and not in ceremony, in the pure and sincere love in the heart.



Unless a man is pure in body and mind, his coming into a temple and worshipping Shiva is useless.

The prayers of those that are pure in mind and body will be answered by Shiva, and those that are impure and yet try to teach religion to others will fail in the end.



External worship is only a symbol of internal worship; but internal worship and purity are the real things. Without them, external worship would be of no avail.

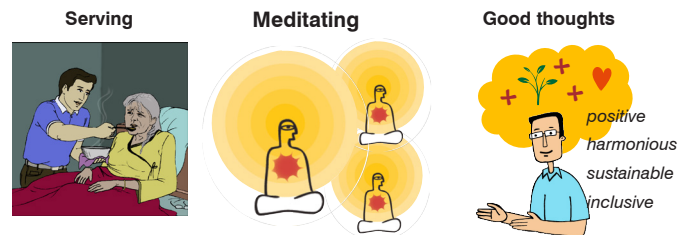


## 2 What is a Tirtha?

**Tirtha (place of pilgrimage)** is a place which is full of holy things and holy men. But if holy people live in a certain place, and if there is no temple there, even that is a Tirtha.

If unholy people live in a place where there may be a hundred temples, the Tirtha has vanished from that place.

For example:



The mere existence of temples, without people with pure and holy thoughts does not make a place a Tirtha



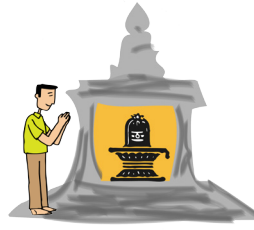
It is most difficult to live in a Tirtha; for if sin is committed in any ordinary place it can easily be removed, but sin committed in a Tirtha cannot be removed.



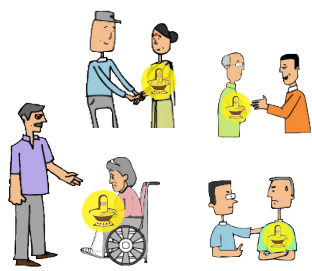
### 3 The gist of all worship — to be pure and to do good to others

**He who sees Shiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the diseased, really worships Shiva; and if he sees Shiva only in the image, his worship is but preliminary.**

**He who has served and helped one poor man seeing Shiva in him, without thinking of his caste, or creed, or race, or anything, with him Shiva is more pleased than with the man who sees Him only in temples.**



Seeing Shiva *only* in the image



Seeing Shiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the diseased

**💡 Seeing Shiva in the poor, weak and diseased is not the same as helping out of a sense of charity or pity**

### 4 Two kinds of devotees

#### A STORY OF A RICH MAN AND TWO GARDENERS

##### Gardener 1: Varun



Varun is lazy and does no work. His garden is overgrown with weed and wild plants.

When the master visits his garden...



*Master! I'm so lucky to see you today. You are so great...*

Varun showers accolades on his master, but has nothing to show in his garden.

##### Gardener 2: Tarun



Tarun is a man of few words. Tarun works hard in his garden growing all sorts of fruits and vegetables.

He walks the long distance to his master's house, and lovingly presents all the vegetables and fruits that have been produced in the garden.



**💡 Who is the more beloved?**

**Shiva is that master, and this world is His garden, and there are two sorts of gardeners here;**

**— the one who is lazy, hypocritical, and does nothing, only talking about Shiva's beautiful eyes and nose and other features;**

**— and the other, who is taking care of Shiva's children, all those that are poor and weak, all animals, and all His creation.**

**Which of these would be the more beloved of Shiva?"**



## 5 Chitta-shuddhi - the outcome of good karma

Let me tell you again that you must be pure and help any one who comes to you, as much as lies in your power. And this is good Karma.

By the power of this, the heart becomes pure (Chitta-shuddhi), and then Shiva who is residing in every one will become manifest.



Purification of the heart through serving others



Good karma wipes out the ignorance and wickedness covering our hearts.

## 6 Selfishness is the chief sin

Selfishness is the chief sin, thinking of ourselves first.

He who thinks, "I will eat first, I will have more money than others, and I will possess everything", he who thinks, "I will get to heaven before others I will get Mukti before others" is the selfish man.

The unselfish man says, "I will be last, I do not care to go to heaven, I will even go to hell if by doing so I can help my brothers."



I will be last, I do not care to go to heaven, I will even go to hell if by doing so I can help my brothers.

How unselfish are you?

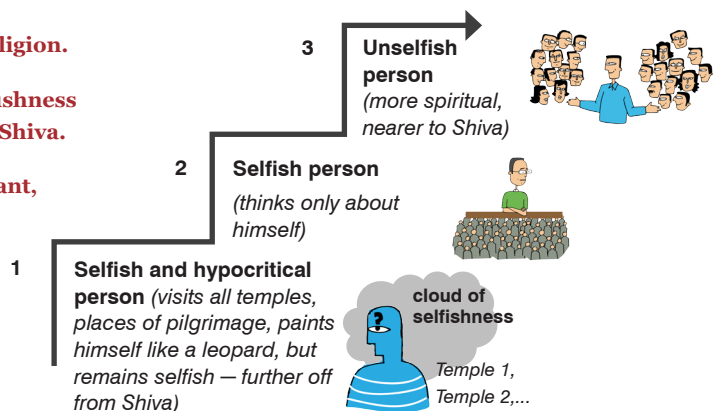


## 7 What is the test of religion?

... unselfishness is the test of religion.

He who has more of this unselfishness is more spiritual and nearer to Shiva.

Whether he is learned or ignorant, he is nearer to Shiva than anybody else, whether he knows it or not.





# POORVA

Magic, Miracles and the Mystical Twelve



LAKSHMI DEVNATH



## The Light Beckons

The Stories of Nammaazhvaar and Madhura Kavi

(Continued from previous issue. . .)

Poorva saw a man walking, his total concentration focused on a bright light moving ahead of him in the skies. His gait suggested that he was intent on keeping it within sight. The light continued to travel. So did the man. As time passed, Poorva's excitement turned into boredom. "Monotony sure doesn't suit me," she muttered. "This reminds me of the old movies shown on TV, where the same scene goes on and on."

She had barely finished complaining, when the man stopped in front of a tree. Sitting in deep meditation beneath it was a young boy. His face was exceptionally luminous. The man had arrived at the source of the light. He stared at the boy with awe and reverence.

Equally astonished, Poorva questioned the Swami, "Who is this boy?" Before he could answer, she gazed at the tree and declared, "Wait a minute ... This is the same tree under which the couple had left their baby. But there's no baby ... hello, is there anything here that adds up?"

"Allow me to sum it up," the Swami said with his characteristic simplicity. "That boy is Maaran. He is now sixteen years of age."

"Oh yeah, the same radiance ... what? He's sixteen! What happened in between?"

"Sshhh! Stay silent and watch," said the Swami, gently waving her questions away.

The man who had followed the light to this tree was now asking passers-by about the boy. Poorva observed that all of them talked about the youngster with awe and respect. The man then walked towards the tree and asked Maaran, "Master, if the subtle spirit is embodied in the gross matter, what will it eat and where will it lie?"

Immediately, the boy opened his eyes and answered firmly, "That it will eat and there it will rest."

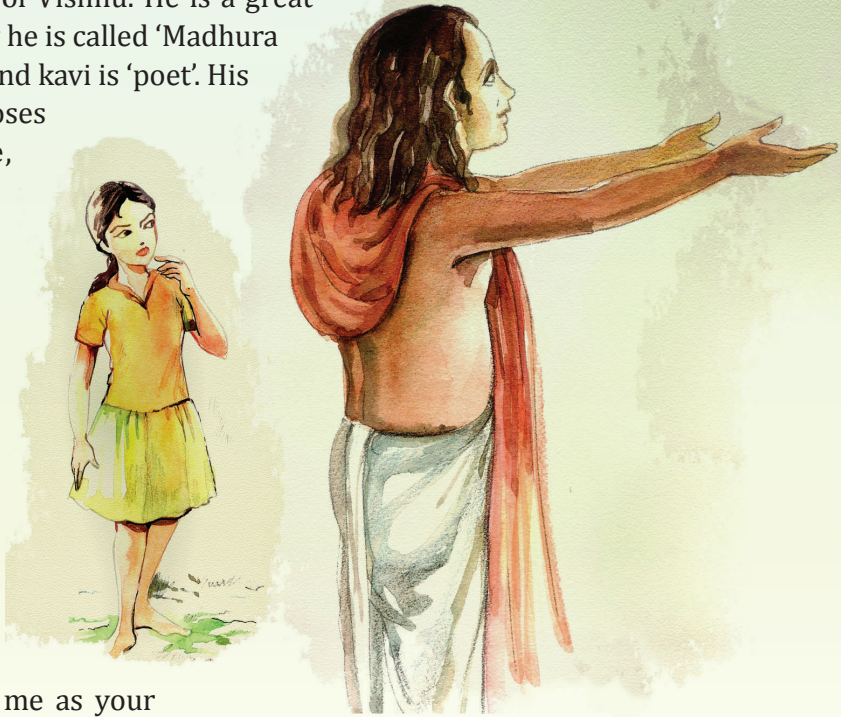


The man appeared elated, though Poorva felt thoroughly disappointed. She mumbled, “This is like an art film. It simply goes over my head.”

“They speak high philosophy.” The Swami clarified, “The boy is saying that the soul mistakes itself for the body ...”

Poorva interrupted, “I don’t mean to be rude, but it doesn’t interest me. Tell me, Thaatha, who is this gentleman?”

The Swami answered, “This ‘gentleman’, as you refer to him, is Madhura Kavi. He was born at Thirukkooloor, a place close by. Madhura Kavi is an incarnation of Kumudha – one of the celestial beings in the kingdom of Vishnu. He is a great scholar and poet, and that is why he is called ‘Madhura Kavi’ – madhura means ‘sweet’, and kavi is ‘poet’. His name means ‘a poet who composes sweet songs’, and he is one, indeed. He had gone on a pilgrimage to the north of India. At Ayodhya, he chanced upon this light and has followed it all the way down here. Now, because of this answer he heard, Madhura Kavi has realized that this boy is a great saint who lives, eats and breathes God.”



As the Swami talked, Madhura Kavi’s voice reached them. He was saying, “Revered Master, please accept me as your disciple and educate me on all philosophical matters.”

Suddenly, the place was filled with a blinding light. The Swami directed Poorva to look up. And who should she see descending from the skies but Lord Vishnu and Goddess Mahalakshmi, seated on Garuda! The king amongst birds landed near the tamarind tree. Poorva saw the Supreme Lord and His Consort bless the young Aazhvaar and his disciple. Palms clasped together, she watched the celestial scene in awe. It lasted for barely a few seconds and then disappeared. Strains of melodious music filled the air. It was Nammaazhvaar singing, inspired by the vision.

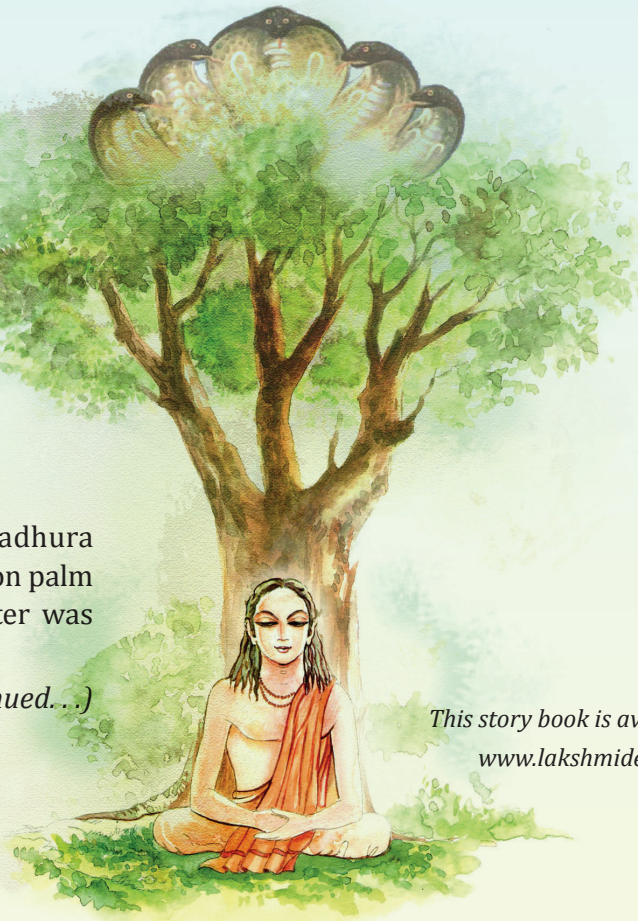
“Master and disciple have found each other. The young saint has broken his long silence. In one of his songs, Nammaazhvaar says: ‘Arise, O Mind, worship the feet of the One who has abundant auspicious qualities, unsurpassed and unequalled ...’” The Swami paused to add, “Nammaazhvaar sees God in everything around him. In another song, he says: ‘Food, water and the betel I chew are all my Krishna’”



Poorva observed Madhura Kavi furiously note down on palm leaves whatever his master was singing.

*(To be continued...)*

This story book is available through  
[www.lakshmiddevnath.com](http://www.lakshmiddevnath.com)



## The Talented Naren

*(Continued from page 26...)*

“The petal, the stamen, the...”

“That’s enough,” Mukherjee waved his hand, looking awestruck.

“It’s *really* my fault, sir,” Naren pleaded.

For a long moment, Mukherjee stared into the big, earnest eyes and then a hint of a smile softened his stern face. “You are very gifted Naren...but I will allow your friends to sit only if you promise to never distract the other boys again...”

“I promise sir,” Naren agreed smiling broadly and as Shibu and Hari took their seats, the class burst into joyful cheers. ✱

Everything can be sacrificed for truth,  
but truth cannot be sacrificed for anything.

—Swami Vivekananda



# A Day in the Life of Sri Ramakrishna

SWAMI CHIDEKANANDA

*This is a re-presentation of one of Sri Ramakrishna's visits to Kolkata, which is found in The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna in the chapter 'Visit to Nanda Bose's House'. In this time of social distancing when social visits are unwelcome, let us swing back in time and accompany Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples on this visit.*

It was 28 July 1885. The time was about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. It is very hot and humid. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in Balaram's drawing room with some devotees.<sup>1</sup> Narayan, a close devotee, mentioned to the Master that Nanda Bose, an aristocrat of Baghbazar, had many pictures of gods and goddesses in his house. So, Sri Ramakrishna decided to visit Nanda Bose's house (hereafter called Basu Bati). Putting on a pair of black varnished slippers and a red-bordered cloth and repeating the name of God, he got into a palanquin which had been brought for him. M., or Mahendranath Gupta, the author of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, walked alongside the palanquin.<sup>2</sup>

## The owners

According to the family records, Nanda Lal Basu and Pasupati Basu (later called Nanda Lal Bose and Pasupati Bose), sons of the renowned Basu family of Kantapukur in Shyambazar, North Kolkata, were the owners of Basu Bati. In about 1876, they acquired a large plot of land in Baghbazar and constructed the large mansion known as Basu Bati.<sup>3</sup>

In the nineteenth century, Kolkata was divided into two towns. There was the 'White Town,' where British officers and other

Europeans lived, and the 'Black Town,' where the natives lived. To avoid being counted as residents of the 'inferior' Black Town, many zamindar families in the Black Town had designed or remodeled their homes according to the European style of architecture prevalent at that time.<sup>4</sup> Many of these buildings combined a Western exterior and an Eastern interior, with a large, open-spaced inner court-yard that had a *Thakur dalan*. Thakur dalan is a verandah or raised platform with a roof along the outside wall of a house. Large religious festivals or pujas were usually held there.<sup>5</sup>

Inside the Basu Bati, there were paintings depicting Hindu puranic figures and also European aristocrats. The portraits of the Hindu gods and goddesses were painted by the famous 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengali artist Bamapada Banerjee (1851-1932).<sup>6</sup> Sri Ramakrishna was especially eager to see these paintings.

## The architect

The architect of Basu Bati was Nilmani Mitra, who also happened to be the first Bengali to qualify as a civil engineer. Mitra's family is connected to Calcutta's history in a number of ways. He was a descendant of Rudreshwar Mitra, who was the elder brother of Kashishwar Mitra, who had built the famous Kashi Mitra



Ghat on the Ganga River. In addition to a number of palatial buildings in Calcutta, Mitra had also designed the chariot at the Jagannath temple of Mahesh in Serampore, which both Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi had visited.<sup>7</sup>

– 45 feet from base to top and 7.5 feet in diameter) greeted the visitors. The front façade was over 270 feet.<sup>10</sup> Basu Bati was inside a sprawling estate covering 14 acres and extended up to what is now Acharya Prafulla and Jagadish Chandra Bose Roads. It contained a large garden, a stable, and even a zoo!<sup>11</sup>

### Other historic events in Basu Bati

In addition to Sri Ramakrishna's visit, Basu Bati witnessed some more historical events. In 1891 when a dispute arose between the Star Theater and Girish Ghosh, the father of Bengali Theater, the Basu brothers allowed Girish Ghosh's plays to be held at Basu Bati. In 1897 on his victorious return to Kolkata from the West, Swami Vivekananda was first taken in a horse carriage from Sealdah train station to Ripon Women's college, and then to Basu Bati. On the way, the young students unharnessed the horses and pulled Swamiji's carriage themselves upto Basu Bati.<sup>8</sup> Later, in 1905 when the British partitioned Bengal, Basu Bati saw the Hindus and Muslims opposing the partition coming together in a friendship thread-tying ceremony. Finally, when the British imposed tax on Indian cotton, advocates of the Swadeshi movement started spinning their own clothes in Basu Bati and encouraged the locals to purchase Indian-made homespun clothing.<sup>9</sup>

### With Sri Ramakrishna

Most likely, Sri Ramakrishna would have headed north, past Girish Ghosh's house on what is today known as Central Avenue, and then turned right onto Baghbazar Avenue. After walking for a kilometre on Baghbazar Avenue, when they turned left they would have beheld Basu Bati, a majestic, huge structure whose sixteen monumental decorative columns each topped by iron brackets, (and approximately 42



*Basu Bati House as it was during Sri Ramakrishna's time*

As the palanquin "entered the gate of Nanda's house, crossed the spacious square, and stopped in front of the building, the members of the family greeted" Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna went up the wooden staircase and proceeded to a large room on the first floor whose roof was around 25 feet high, and on whose walls hung the pictures of gods and goddesses.<sup>12</sup> Nanda Bose and his brother Pasupati saluted Sri Ramakrishna.

Surrounded by devotees, Sri Ramakrishna went around seeing the pictures. "The first photo was of Vishnu with four arms. At the very sight of it, Sri Ramakrishna was overwhelmed with ecstasy and simply sat down on the floor and remained a few minutes in that spiritual mood."<sup>13</sup> In the second picture Rama was blessing Hanuman, with His hand on the devotee's head. Hanuman's gaze was fixed on Rama's Lotus Feet. Sri Ramakrishna gazed at the picture for a long time and exclaimed with

great fervour, "Ah me! Ah me!" Then when he saw the picture of the Vaman avatar, he joyfully cried out, 'Vaman!' and looked at him intently. At the sight of Annapurna's picture, he exclaimed with great fervour, "Grand! Grand!"

After seeing some more pictures of Sri Krishna, Radha, Kali and others, Sri Ramakrishna went and sat with Nanda Bose and others. He told them "I am very happy today. It is grand. You are a real Hindu. You have these pictures instead of English ones." In that room there hung on the wall, Keshab Sen's Navavidhan picture in which Sri Ramakrishna also figured. When Sri Ramakrishna saw that picture, a person pointed out, "You are in that picture as well." Sri Ramakrishna replied, "Yes, everything is there. This is the ideal of modern times."<sup>14</sup>

Explaining the meaning of this picture, Srimat Swami Prabhananda Ji, one of the present vice-presidents of the Ramakrishna Order, writes: "In the picture, Sri Ramakrishna draws Keshab Chandra's attention to a wonderful scene in front of them... which

features a church, mosque, and temple...also Christ and Chaitanya can be seen dancing in divine ecstasy [amidst] devotees of God belonging to different religions and denominations including a Vaishinava, a Ramanujite, a Tantrika, a Sikh, an Anglican Christian, a Chinese follower of Confucianism, a Muslim, and a Parsee...Pointing to this group Sri Ramakrishna drives home the idea of the harmony of religions."<sup>15</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna then entered into an ecstatic spiritual mood and spoke with the Divine Mother. A few minutes later, looking at the house he said, "It is a huge mansion. But what does it consist of? Bricks, timber, and clay."<sup>16</sup> Indeed, today that palatial building is in a dilapidated condition and nothing is left but just 'bricks, timber, and clay.' The present address is 65/1A Baghbazar St., Baghbazar.

There soon followed a very interesting conversation between the rational bohemian Basu brothers and Sri Ramakrishna. We will understand the structure and implications of that conversation in the next issue.

(To be continued ...)

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#### References

- 1) *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. p. 815
- 2) <https://www.livehistoryindia.com/amazing-india/2019/07/21/basu-bati-a-timeless-legacy-of-bengali-heritage>, Sanjana Ray
- 3) *Ibid*. But as the author points out, Basu Bati did not merely mimic European styles; it was a "blend of Bengali and Islamic influences".
- 4) <http://double-dolphin.blogspot.com/2017/07/basu-bati-bagbazar-cuttackolkata.html>, Deepanjan Ghosh.
- 5) *Ibid*, Ghosh.
- 6) For further details of Thakur's visit to Mahesh, please see *Journeys with Ramakrishna* by Swami Prabhananda, pp.254-64.
- 7) *Life of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern and Western Disciples*. 2: 217-218.
- 8) <http://double-dolphin.blogspot.com/2017/07/basu-bati-bagbazar-cuttackolkata.html>, Deepanjan Ghosh.
- 9) Approximate measurements were done by Architect Abhishek Bhattacharya of Entally, Kolkata on 6 April 2020.
- 10) *The Great Houses of Kolkata (1750-2006)*, Joanne Lea Taylor, p. 129
- 11) *Srisrikathamrita, Srīma*, p.875. Though not mentioned in the English Gospel of Ramakrishna, it is mentioned in the *Bengali Kathamrita that Sri Thakur went upstairs and entered the large hall, 'uparer halgharer upasthita hoylen'*.
- 12) *Gospel*. p. 816
- 13) *Ibid*.,
- 14) *Ibid*.,
- 15) *More about Ramakrishna*. Swami Prabhananda, p. 203
- 16) *Gospel*. P. 817

# Basaveswara

(Continued from page 24. . .)

There is another vachana which presents a universal code of conduct:

“  
Do not steal, do not kill, and do not utter lies;  
Do not be angry, do not detest others  
Do not praise yourself; do not condemn the  
opposite view.  
This is purity within and this is outer purity  
This is the way to please our Lord Koodala Sangama.”

Basavanna's sudden rise and popularity made the other courtiers jealous. Witnessing Basavanna feeding a large number of Saranas, they complained to the king that Basavanna was misusing his power and using the treasury to feed his people. When asked by Bijjala about it, Basavanna replied: “The expenses of Mahamane are met by the earnings of devotees. Since you have suspected my integrity, please get the accounts and cash balance of the treasury checked, this very moment.” The account scrutiny was done in the king's presence and found to be perfectly correct. It also came to light that the State's income had doubled. Behind this was Basavanna's teaching of kaayaka, which exhorts everyone to earn by manual labour and this integrity also reflected in prompt tax payment.

Basavanna's outlook on life is reflected in a number of striking incidents. Basavanna held that the rich people who have property in excess are big thieves. One midnight a thief broke into Basavanna's residence and entered his bedroom. In the dim light of the oil lamp, he deftly stole Basavanna's wife Neelambike's necklace and bangles. When he was removing her earrings, Neelambike woke up yelling “Thief, thief”. Basavanna, though appearing to be asleep was all the while aware of what the thief was doing. When his wife started shouting, Basavanna whispered in her ears, “Keep quiet. Do not obstruct our friend from taking your ear rings. Give him all your

ornaments. He is not a thief. If a thief comes into the house of a bigger thief, it is none other than Sangameshwara.”

Basavanna was always kind hearted and looked at things from the point of view of the poor. One night, Basavanna was informed that bandits had stolen the cows of Mahamane. Basavanna quickly went to the cowshed and saw the calves which were left behind crying for their mothers. He immediately ordered his men, “The poor chaps have done a mistake by taking away only the cows and leaving behind these calves. They will not have gone far. Go quickly and give these calves also to those bandits.” Though aghast, the servants who knew their master's nature, handed over the calves to the bandits. Basavanna's kindness for animals and his compassion for them, made the thieves feel ashamed of themselves. They returned the cows and their calves to Basavanna and thereafter led an honest life.

After the death of Baladeva, King Bijjala made Basavesvara his Chief Minister. Basavanna proved quite efficient in this new office. He led his usual simple life, but his thoughts were always high and his heart was full of love and compassion. While dispensing justice he was firm and never yielded to personal considerations. He was fearless even in the face of great difficulties and danger. Describing his life, he says, “I speak the truth and live as I speak”. He was ever polite and civil, and walked “with folded hands and bowed head”, while moving among the common folk. His utterances were like a string of pearls. In one of his vachanas he writes:

“  
If you speak, it should be like a garland of pearls,  
If you speak, it should be like the brightness of a gem  
If you speak, it should be like crystalline shaft  
If you speak, Linga should assent in admiration  
If what is contained in word is not in deed,  
How can Koodala Sangama Deva be pleased?”

In another vachana he writes, "Soft words are as good as chanting, soft words are as good as doing penance. A sure way of pleasing Sadashiva is to speak softly and to speak truth".

The high ideals lived by the Shiva Sharanas, and Basavanna's powerful personality and his acceptance of the poorest and the lowliest, infused a new strength in the masses. Basavanna's fame spread across the whole region. But the jealous courtiers of Bijjala were waiting to bring down Basavanna. They got an opportunity when Madhuvarasa, a Brahmin, and Haralayya, a cobbler, were initiated and given Ishtalinga. In the oneness of being Lingayats, Madhuvarasa, with the approval of Basavanna and other Lingayat elders, gave his daughter in marriage to Haralayya's son. In those days of rigid caste system, inter-caste marriage was an unpardonable offence. The courtiers and brahmins rose in violent protest against this marriage. They demanded that the king should protect the ancient religious customs. Yielding to their pressure the king sentenced Madhuvarasa and Haralayya to death. Deeply pained, Basavanna at once resigned from the Chief Minister's post and quit Kalyana which was polluted by this injustice. He returned to the holy Sangama, an abode of peace, where he spent the rest of his life in prayer and meditation. Sometime around 1167 A.D. Basavanna merged into Lord Sangameswara.

Basaveswara's invaluable teachings can be briefly encapsulated thus:

1) Everyone, irrespective of gender, caste, creed, and profession is equal, and has the right to education and spiritual enlightenment.

2) Worship of Ishtalinga dispenses with priest or mediator between God and devotee; it also dispenses with temples, to which the untouchables are not allowed to enter.



Basaveswara

3) It is not necessary to renounce the world to lead a spiritual life. True devotion and virtuous conduct should be given importance.

4) Purity of mind is more important than the knowledge of scriptures.

5) Any food or enjoyment should first be offered to God and then partaken as *prasada*.

6) Every able bodied person must earn his/her livelihood by honest means of livelihood. No profession is high or low. What matters is sincerity and honesty in work.

7) Wages should match the work done and rewards for work done well should not be accepted.

8) No money should be hoarded for future need.

9) Keeping aside some money for the maintenance of the family, the rest of the earning should be spent in the service of the Jangamas who go from place to place spreading the message of devotion and teaching the worship of Ishtalinga.

Basaveswara preached a rational mysticism in which devotion to God is combined with loving service to fellow beings. \*



## RAMAKRISHNA MATH, UTTARKASHI

Ganganagar, P.O. Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand, 249193

Mobile: 9447051231; Email: [uttarkashi@rkmm.org](mailto:uttarkashi@rkmm.org)

### ***Offering to Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna: An Appeal***

Dear Devotees & Friends,

Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math declared open a Math centre at Uttarkashi, an ancient holy town in the Garhwal Himalayas on 20 Oct 2017. There was already an ashrama, named "Ramakrishna Kutir", on a small piece of land since 1963. It was maintained directly by the Belur Math, and sadhus of our Order used to stay for intense tapasya in the traditional monastic way, begging food from outside and living a simple austere life. The same tradition continues till date.

In view of expanding Swami Vivekananda's ideal of service and spirituality among the masses we plan to purchase some land measuring at least one acre around Harsil Valley, near Gangotri. Along with retreat centres for sadhus and devotees, some welfare activities for the benefit of the poor and underprivileged will be taken up after acquiring and developing the land.

An estimated cost of **Rs. 2 crores** is required to set up and develop this additional unit of our Math. We request our friends and devotees, trusts and corporate bodies to contribute liberally to complete this project of welfare and spirituality at the earliest.

Donations can be made by NEFT/RTGS to the account given below:

A/C Name : **Ramakrishna Math, Uttarkashi**  
Bank Name : **Union Bank of India**  
Branch Name : **Uttarkashi Branch**  
A/C No. : **601802010006696**  
IFSC : **UBIN0560189**

**Foreign contributions** may kindly be sent through the headquarters at Belur Math (Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, Howrah-711202; email- [accounts@rkmm.org](mailto:accounts@rkmm.org)) requesting it to credit the fund in Uttarkashi Math A/c.

Kindly send us email (to [uttarkashi@rkmm.org](mailto:uttarkashi@rkmm.org)) or SMS (to **9447051231**) after the transaction intimating the purpose of your donation as "**Donation for purchase of land and development of the Math.**" Please also send your PAN and full postal address.

Donations towards our Math are exempted from IT under 80G Act.

May Sri Ramakrishna, Ma Sarada, Swami Vivekananda bless you all.

Yours in the Lord,  
Swami Amaleshananda  
*Adhyaksha*



A New Sri Ramakrishna Math at Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu

### AN APPEAL TO SERVE GOD IN MAN

Dear devotees and well-wishers,

We pray that Sri Ramakrishna may shower His blessings on all your endeavours.

Thanjavur is a historically and culturally important city, famous for its art and ancient architecture, especially temples.

It was Swami Vivekananda's earnest desire to install Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna in every town and spread the culture of worship and service. We now propose to begin a centre in Thanjavur and initiate various activities:

- **Youth Camps** - to develop self-confidence, awareness of health and yoga etc.
- **Balaka Sangha** - to train children in cultural and spiritual traditions, etc.
- **Spiritual Practices** - daily puja, bhajans, japa yajna, parayanam, discourses.
- **Spiritual & Cultural Literature** - promotion and sale.
- **Seminar/Workshops** - for teachers, doctors and other professionals.
- **Medical Services** - for the poor and needy.

*To establish a new centre and conduct the above activities, an amount of **Rs. 7 Crore** is required. We invite you to contribute whatever you can and be a part of this noble mission.*

**Names of those who contribute Rs.10,000/- and above will be inscribed in the Math premises.**

**Donations are exempted under Section 80 G of the Income Tax Act, 1961.**

Donations may be sent cheque/DD in favour of "Sri Ramakrishna Math".

For Online donation please visit <https://donations.chennaiamath.org>

After online payment please intimate us by email your address, and PAN number.

Yours in the Service of the Lord,  
Swami Gautamananda,  
Adhyaksha.

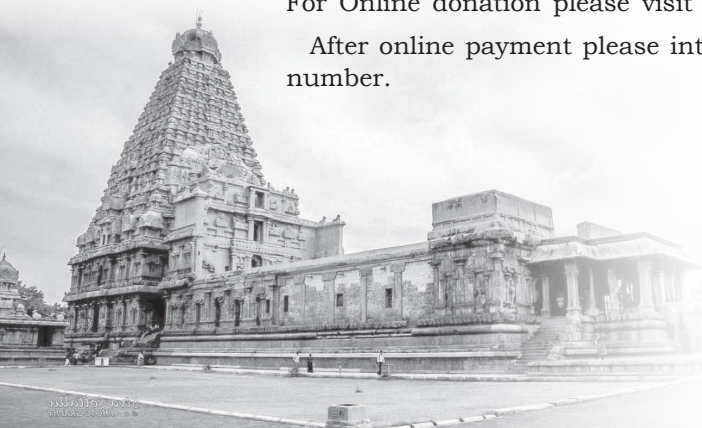
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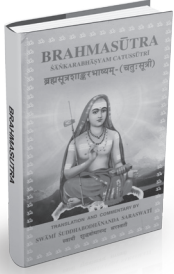


## URGENT NEED FOR A GENERAL PHYSICIAN

The Dispensary at Mayavati, Uttarakhand, urgently needs a General Physician (Male). One with a spiritual bent of mind will be preferred. The Dispensary provides an ideal setting for a spiritually oriented doctor where he will be able to serve God in patients, and also be benefited by the sublime ambience of the Himalayas. If he wishes, he can stay with his family. The dispensary will pay the candidate reasonably and will provide him free boarding.

Anyone interested should write to us at [mayavati@rkmm.org](mailto:mayavati@rkmm.org)

Advaita Ashrama  
(A branch of Ramakrishna Math)  
P.O. Mayavati, Via Lohaghat  
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Phone: 05965-234-233



**BRAHMASUTRA  
SHANKARABHASHYAM  
CHATUSSUTRI**

Tr. and Commentary by **Swami  
Shuddhabodhananda Saraswati**

*Published by Sri Visweswar  
Trust, A-203, Parijat, Lallubhai  
Park Road (West) Extn.,*

*Mumbai-400 056. Email: sssbvt@gmail.com.  
2017, hardbound, pp.406. Price-not given.*

**I**t is a rare good fortune to get unasked-for, a highly scholarly and at the same time mathematically precise book for review.

The translator informs us that there are as many as 150 commentaries on the Brahmasutras and many commentaries on the Chatussutri Shankara-Bhashya. The speciality of this commentary is that there are as many as 72 captions with further sub-titles which makes the difficult subject easily comprehensible. There is also a detailed table of contents and an exhaustive multiple index for quick access to topics of choice.

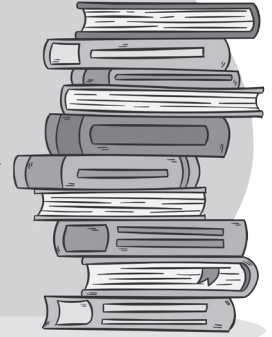
Apart from the chapters dealing with Adyasa Bhashya and the four chapters dealing with the first four sutras of the Brahmasutras, there is a Preface and an Introduction in the beginning and Summing Up with Epilogue in the end. The main text of the commentary has the Brahmasutra and the Shankarabhashya in Devanagari script, followed by English translation in bold letters and the commentary by the author in English.

The extremely informative Introduction provides a concise description of Vedanta and Brahmamimamsa. It gives the correct perspective on the authorship, significance of prasthanatrayam, the importance of chatussutri, the gamut of Vedanta with the role of Brahmasutras elaborated by Madhusudana Saraswati in his Vedanta-Kalpalatika, the methods of reasoning employed in Brahmasutras, and the appropriateness of the Adyasa Bhashya.

The bhashya with its translation and commentary have been classified under topic-

## BOOK REVIEWS

*FOR REVIEW IN  
THE VEDANTA KESARI,  
PUBLISHERS NEED TO SEND  
US TWO COPIES OF THEIR  
LATEST PUBLICATION.*



wise captions. This enables the subject matter to be grasped easily, especially where the bhashya is too lengthy. Most of the standard scriptures on the Vedanta like the Brahmasutras, commentaries and works of Shankaracharya and other great Vedantic acharyas, do not present the matter topic-wise with captions. The commentator has set a new trend which, I am sure, will have revolutionary effect on the future works on Vedanta.

Another feather in the cap is the last chapter: Summing Up. It is a brief and clear summary of all the chapters including the Introduction, which helps the reader to recapitulate what he has already read. This chapter also includes Epilogue which deals specially with the scriptural texts which show the experiential nature of Brahmajnana and its essential constituents.

Many Sanskrit terms used in Vedanta have no equivalent words in English. Hence, in most places the original Sanskrit terms are used along with their English equivalents or with explanations, at places even at the risk of repetition or of lengthening the sentence. Most of the vague terms of Vedanta are clearly defined.

The learned translator has many other works, both books as well as MP3 audio CDs to his credit, a list of which is provided at the end of this

volume. Going through this volume one is strongly tempted to listen to his scholarly audio CDs and get enriched, both spiritually and intellectually.

Once Sri Ramakrishna had commented: "What is the gist of Vedanta? Isn't it 'Brahman is true and the world is unreal?' Then give up the unreal world and hold on to Brahman."

One has just to hold on to one of the many prakriyas explained in the Epilogue and get direct brahmanubhuti. For an uttam adhikari or highly qualified aspirant, Bramajnana is so simple! The philosophical extensions are for those who find this simple process too difficult!!

\_\_\_\_\_ SWAMI BRAHMESHANANDA, VARANASI



## Recalling Professor NVC Swamy

On 1 May 2020, Professor NVC Swamy, one of the eminent reviewers and article contributors of *The Vedanta Kesari* passed away in Bengaluru. "How fortunate I am to have been brought under the influence of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda!" – this is how Professor Swamy described his long association with the Ramakrishna Order.

Professor Swamy's reviews were analytical, honest, graceful, and encouraging. If he found anything lacking in the book he was reviewing, he mentioned it in a way that would not offend the author and yet at the same time, the author or publisher would learn to rectify or improve it. We often cited his book reviews as worthy of emulation to the new reviewers.

As an eminent scientist, Dr. Swamy had much to say about the Consciousness juxtaposed with Upanishadic ideas and Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. He contributed a number of articles to *The Vedanta Kesari* which reflect his deep scholarship in science and Vedanta.

Professor NVC Swamy served in IIT Madras in various academic and administrative positions and finally retired as its Director. As the director of IIT, he conducted a non-credit course on the life of Swami Vivekananda in IIT Madras. It used to be held on Friday evenings and over 60-70 students attended it. After leaving IIT he was keen to see these discussions continue. So he requested Swami Brahmeshanandaji, who had just come to assume the charge as editor of *The Vedanta Kesari*, to conduct classes on a regular basis. This is how the Vivekananda Study Circle, a recognised student body of IIT Madras, was started in 1997 with the editor of *The Vedanta Kesari* interacting with the VSC students at IIT Madras campus every Sunday morning. This initiative has now inspired the creation of similar student bodies in some other IITs.

After his retirement Professor Swamy conducted classes for young children under the aegis of Vivekananda Bala Mandir in Chennai Math. He would tell them stories and anecdotes from lives of Thakur-Ma-Swamiji. It would require much commitment to teach little children the basics of moral and spiritual teachings in the light of Swami Vivekananda, soon after handling the onerous responsibility of director of IIT Madras!

—**Swami Atmashraddhananda**, former Editor, *The Vedanta Kesari*

# Pariprasna

*Srimat Swami Tapasyananda Ji (1904 – 1991) was one of the Vice-Presidents of the Ramakrishna Order. His deeply convincing answers to devotees' questions raised in spiritual retreats and in personal letters have been published in book form as **Spiritual Quest: Questions & Answers**. Pariprasna is a selection from this book.*



## **Meditation**

**QUESTION:** What is the purpose of meditation?

**MAHARAJ:** The purpose of meditation is to help man attain a direct and immediate experience of his basic nature as Sat-chid-ananda. In our ordinary waking moments the mind is outward-going, through the portals of the senses and it gets a direct knowledge of external nature or the environment in which one's bodily life is cast. Consciousness is like a line with two ends, A and B, A standing for the subject side which is aware of the other end B, which is forming itself continuously into various modes or images due to stimulations coming from outside through sensations or through the awakening of memories within. Now in the ordinary functioning of the mind, the subject side is very weak, taken up as it is entirely with B, the form-taking end of consciousness. Consequently we are totally ignorant of the nature of A and its background and are entirely identified with the body-mind and the experiences that are had through them. Meditation is the process of stopping the image-forming tendency of B by shutting it off from the stimulations of external objects and of memory impressions and then making the undisturbed light of consciousness to look at itself (A) and its source. To counteract the memory impression, the mind will have to be concentrated in the early stages on contrary thought-images, which will gradually wean the mind from its mode-taking tendencies and settle it in the ultimate subject. This analysis is specially meant to show that meditation is not indulging in some sweet imaginings and seeking formations of one's own subjective impressions. On the other hand meditation seeks to overcome all the subjective impressions and until this is achieved, thought will never settle in its own background. In the experience that is gained through really successful meditation, there is no place for the subconscious mind and its impressions. It is what takes us to the bedrock of reality.

--\*-- --\*-- --\*--

**QUESTION:** The pastoral image of Sri Krishna, blue in colour and holding flute in hand, impinges in one's mind on that of Sri Ramakrishna in his sitting posture, absorbed in Samadhi. Is this type of overlapping tantamount to disloyalty?

**MAHARAJ:** The Supreme Being is personal, but he is not a person in the sense we are persons. Ordinarily a person is also an individual, and as such the rule that A can be only A and not B applies to him. But not so to God as personal. He is personal but not an individual. He is the matrix or archetype of all persons and of all forms. So there is no question of disloyalty when two forms come

*(Continued on page 46...)*

## Sri Sarada Devi as Shodasi

SMT. LAKSHMI DEVNATH

PAGE SPONSOR : DR. SUBRAMANIAMHARATHIYAR R., KANCHEEPURAM

The young girl stood by the window of her modest house in Jayarambati. Her eyes shone with the green of the luxuriant paddy fields as they swayed to the gentle breeze. In striking contrast to the luster in her eyes was a dull heaviness in her heart. Barring her Bhanu pisi, the entire village was taunting her with the jibe that she was married to a mad man. Saradamani sighed as she turned away from the window and smiled. Her people were wrong in their surmise. Whirling in the hypnotic currents of the world of senses, they could not just fathom someone who defiantly stood beyond its magnetic field, mocking its famed irresistibility. Saradamani mentally embraced her Bhanu pisi, the only one outside of herself who had perceived the preternatural personality of her husband Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, and set about planning her trip to Dakshineswar, her husband's domicile.

She had been married at the age of five to him who was then all of twenty-three. The alliance may have seemed odd to many but

certainly not to the couple. Story goes that two-year old Sarada was once carried along to an evening of Jatra, a folk-theatre performance at the nearby village of Sihore. As the story-teller dramatically unfolded the tale of Krishna and

Rukmini, the lady holding Sarada, planted a

fond kiss on the little girl's cheek and endearingly asked her,

"...whom are you going to marry little

Thakurmani?" (as

Sarada was then called), "Him," little

Thakurmani,

pointed her chubby index finger at

young Ramakrishna sitting in the crowd.

The other half of this story is even quainter.

Discerning that his parents were desperately

searching a bride for him Ramakrishna remarked,

"The girl born to be my wife is at Jayrambati, the daughter of Ramachandra Mukherjee and Shyamsundari."

In the year 1872, at Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna warmly welcomed his young wife. This did not surprise her given what she had experienced of him as a gentle and loving personality. However, a question that he earnestly asked of her a few days later did lift her eyebrows.



June 2020

45

The Vedanta Kesari



The author, a close devotee of Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, is a researcher and writer with various books and articles on Indian music and culture to her credit. [lakshmiddevnath@gmail.com](mailto:lakshmiddevnath@gmail.com)

“Do you want to drag me down into this world of Maya?” he posed.

“No, she cryptically responded, “I am your partner in the spiritual path.”

Her answer was charmingly unhesitant and sparkingly truthful. It was what he had expected. He was a Paramahansa, endowed with an uncanny ability to separate the worthy from the flawed and the evanescent from the real. He knew *all* about her. Yet, he had asked. Because, he wanted the world to know what he knew about Saradamani.

On a new moon night, when not a ray of reflected sunlight reaches the earth, he performed the Shodasi Puja with his wife as the goddess. To an ordinary person, the ritualistic worship of a human could seem bizarre or downright outrageous. But Sri Ramakrishna was the quintessential devotee who could perceive even the slightest spark of the Supreme in the most banal. In his wife he divined a smouldering luster. The Shodasi Puja manifested in her that Primordial Principle in whose womb this entire Universe had germinated. He prostrated before her uttering, “O Mother of the Universe, I salute thee again and again.” Saradamani, who had risen into an exalted state of consciousness, presented an arresting picture of ecstatic bliss. In this elevated plane the unique couple

bonded even as they stayed committed to a life of uncompromising celibacy. Saradamani came to be venerated as the Holy Mother by Sri Ramakrishna’s devotees. She was an embodiment of compassion, purity and love. Sri Ramakrishna himself had the utmost regard for his spiritual partner. The Holy Mother once shared, “Not once did he tell me a harsh word or wound my feelings. He did not strike me even with a bunch of flowers.”

Through the performance of the Shodasi Puja, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, no proclaimed iconoclast, quietly established the exalted status of his wife in his divine mission and more significantly that of women in the Universal scheme. In a day and age that had relegated women to the status of second-class citizens, the Paramahansa’s path-breaking Shodasi Puja marked itself out as a red-letter event not only in the annals of the religious and spiritual history of India but also in the annals of women empowerment across the world. Swami Vivekananda, the foremost disciple and a passionate crusader of his master’s ideals went on to declare: “Is there any sex distinction in the Atman (Self). Out with the differentiation between man and woman---all is Atman!” And on another platform... “There is no hope for that family or country where there is no estimation of women....” \*

## Pariprasna

*(Continued from page 44...)*

to the mind, provided the aspirant has the understanding that the one Satchidananda is apprehended in all divine forms.

It is, however, better to meditate on one form alone. If another form comes, we can mentally dissolve the one in the other and feel the common identity of both in the Supreme Spirit who is expressing himself as all these forms. If one’s meditation is supported by this element of knowledge, no sense of overlapping or disloyalty will arise. Sri Ramakrishna adored the Supreme Being in all forms and all these formful manifestations that he realized, were experienced by him as entering into himself. So he is called Sarva-deva-devisvarupa—one who is the embodiment of all Gods and Goddesses. So no divine form is alien to him. \*

# Deciding between Right and Wrong

GOKUL MUTHU N

*In any given situation, we have various options for action. We will have to choose one. The author presents here insights from the scriptures that help in making the right choices.*

**O**ur decision-making is influenced by two faculties. One faculty, called *manas (mind)*, evaluates the various options based on likes and dislikes. Another faculty, called *buddhi (intellect)*, evaluates the options based on right and wrong. Animals also make decisions. However, their decisions are always based on likes and dislikes. Only humans have the *buddhi*, which works through the mirror neurons in the pre-frontal cortex. Using this faculty, we are able to mentally run various simulations of what will be the consequence of the action to us and others, in the near-term and long-term. Based on this we can make better decisions. This *buddhi* is the one that separates human beings from animals.

The Katha Upanishad calls decisions based on *manas* as *preyas*, and decisions based on *buddhi* as *shreyas*. Following *shreyas* uplifts us towards becoming a better person, while actions following *preyas* will lead to deeper entanglement in senses. A noble person is one who ignores *preyas* and acts as per the decisions based on *shreyas*. (Katha Upanishad, 1.2:1,2) He or she will do what is right, even if it is inconvenient or gives pain, and will avoid doing what is wrong, even if it is convenient or gives pleasure. This faculty or capacity to act righteously is called will power. Exercising the will power is the only way to increase it.

What is right and what is wrong? How do we decide in confusing situations? Can we depend on our gut-feeling or conscience? Is there guidance from our scriptures on this? This is a question that is asked very often.

In most of the situations in our life, what is right and what is wrong is quite unambiguous. Only in some situations, things are gray. In the situations where it is clear, if we do not do what is right and refrain from what is wrong, we will be violating our own judgement. The intellect is uncomfortable with this. The intellect then starts looking for a justification for the wrong action. This results in indecisiveness in a similar future situation. Over a period of time, this becomes a habit. So, every time we violate our intellectual conviction, we push more situations into gray areas, thus weakening our intellect. In this process we also weaken our will power. So, in matters where we know what is right and what is wrong, following our intellectual conviction is very important. Without this, mere knowing is of no use.

Now, the next question is, how to strengthen our *buddhi* to be able to make better decisions and how to reduce the gray areas. Here the Hindu scriptures, especially the Bhagavad Gita give a lot of guidelines.

One guideline that Gita gives is to depend on the scriptures regarding what is to be done and what is not to be done (16:24). There are several series of verses like: prerequisites for

knowledge (13:7-11), divine treasures (16:1,2,3) and three types of tapas (17:14 - 16), which enumerate right action and attitude. In general, the lists include truthfulness, non-violence, self-control, absence of arrogance, forbearance, cheerfulness, cleanliness, silence, respect to elders, helping others, etc.

Another guideline that Gita gives is to depend on the words of people of good character (13:25). The conduct of wise people can be referred to as the standard of righteousness. In fact, Gita says that it is the duty of leaders to set an example to others by their actions (3:21,25,26). It is helpful to be familiar with the life of saints. Then, when we need to decide something, we can think, "What would the saintly person do in this situation?" Taittiriya Upanishad also mentions this in verse 1.11:4. Gita has several lists of the qualities that saintly people possess like qualities of a wise person (2:55-71), qualities of a person in transcendental state (14:22-25), and qualities of a devotee (12:13-20).

Gita mentions the Golden Rule: "Do to others what you would like others to do to you." It says, "Keeping yourself as the yardstick, seeing others as equal to you, consider what is pleasurable and painful to them." (6:32). This is often a great way to discern right from wrong.

Another hint that Gita gives is this. After doing the action, would you be comfortable in the presence of God or would you avoid Him? The Lord is the giver of the fruits of all action. He is impartial. So, if you do the right thing, you will not fear His presence. You will feel protected. When Arjuna saw the Lord in the form of Time, he saw that good people were bowing to Him and bad people were trying to run away from Him (11:36). So this is one means to decide. A variation of this is to think if you can tell, with dignity, to your mother (or anyone whom you revere) about what you did. If you can, then it is right. Otherwise, it is wrong.

The merit of an action can be evaluated from the attitude of mind (to you and to others) that it would create or enable. If the action pulls down the mind to make the person identify with the body, it is bad. If it makes the person identify with the mind, it is better. If it makes the person identify with pure Consciousness, it is best (18:20 - 22). For example, hunger and disease pulls down the mind to the body. So alleviating these in people is a noble activity. Giving secular education uplifts towards identifying with the mind. Giving spiritual knowledge uplifts towards identifying with the Self. These define the relative merits of these activities.

Another way is to seek the "greatest welfare of maximum number of people". Gita says, an action that is done as a duty (for the welfare of others) without seeking personal benefit is greatest. An action done for only personal benefit is not so good. Action that brings loss to oneself and others is bad (18:23 - 25).

Every person does any action only if it gives benefit in the short-term or in the long-term. Gita says, an action that gives benefit in the short-term but harms in the long-term is wrong. An action which appears inconvenient in the short-term but gives benefit in the long-term is right (18:37,38). This analysis can be used in many situations to decide on the course of action.

Thus, Bhagavad Gita gives several ideas to decide between right and wrong. One or more of these can be used in any situation. When we have decided, it is important that we follow what is right and refrain from what is wrong. Even after all these, if we are not able to decide, we can discuss with people. If there is no opportunity for that, or we are not able to decide even after that, we can do whatever we think is the best out of the various options and pray to God to show more light next time. \*



# Music and Mynah in Gramercy Park

DIANE MARSHALL

*This article is reproduced from Ka Jingshai – The Light, a biennial e-zine (also a printed magazine) published from Ramakrishna Mission, Shillong in Khasi, English and Hindi languages. The magazine portrays the culture and spirituality of Meghalaya in a universal context through art, poetry, literature and humour.*

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Common Hill Myna-

Swami Vivekananda's life has been well-studied, but details about some of the things he did continue to surprise us. Can you picture him conversing in English with a hill mynah in the middle of New York City—or singing in Norwegian?

One of Swamiji's very devoted friends and supporters in New York was Emma Cecilia Thursby (1845–1931). She was a classically trained singer, and she had a very successful career as a concert soloist during the 1870s and 1880s, traveling throughout Europe and North America. She had an incredible three octave range and she could sing difficult arias by Mozart such as "Der hölle rache" and "Ma che vi fece, o stelle" with ease. After her London debut in 1879 *The Times* wrote:

"Her voice, a high soprano, is sympathetic, and her method singularly free from all mannerisms. . . . the production of the voice, especially in the higher registers, is remarkable for its ease and absolute purity of intonation."<sup>1</sup>

During the winter of 1895 Miss Thursby and her close friend Sara Chapman Bull (1850–1911) arranged several lectures for Swamiji in New York City. It was an intensely busy period for him, teaching classes in the morning and giving lectures in the evening. It was also a busy and fruitful period for Miss Thursby, as her biographer noted:

"The Vedanta philosophy of Vivekananda had, indeed, aided her in at last reaching a strong conviction in her usefulness. She would henceforth devote her life to teaching of that art of singing in which her achievements had been so brilliant; to that art of friendly intercourse in the spirit of which her "Fridays" had already been established; and to that art of kindness and compassion and sacrifice to which so much of her life had already been dedicated."<sup>2</sup>

Miss Thursby formerly sang at the Broadway Tabernacle, a large church close to Swamiji's rented rooms at 54 West 33rd Street. In later years, between 1905 and 1911, she was





34 Gramercy Park East NYC

a professor of music at the Institute of Musical Art (now Juilliard School) in New York.<sup>3</sup>

On Monday 28 January Swamiji gave a talk in Miss Thursby's drawing room. She lived at 34 Gramercy Park East. Gramercy Park was the first planned residential development on Manhattan, begun in the 1830s. It resembles the green squares of London where elegant terraced houses surround a small park bound by a wrought iron fence. Gramercy Park is Manhattan's only private, gated park. The neighborhood has long been popular with actors and performers. No. 34 still stands at the corner of East 20th Street and Gramercy Park East, and its distinctive facade remains original. Built in 1883, it was New York's first co-op apartment house with its own Otis elevator. The original elevator, the one that Swamiji would have used, was replaced in 1995.

The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* featured Miss Thursby and her most famous student, Geraldine Farrar, in an article on 27 July 1924. It described her concert career, her voice, and the cultured life in her Gramercy Park salon:

"In her home in Gramercy Park, one of the few remaining spots in Manhattan that retain the charm of old New York, Miss Thursby holds a salon, which is said to represent more truly

than any other in the whole country the salon of the Beau Monde, Paris. In a spacious, low-ceilinged drawing room that is filled with art treasures, souvenirs, gifts from all over the world, Miss Thursby and her sister, Miss Ina Thursby, receive on Fridays in January. At one end of this big room hangs a life size portrait of Miss Thursby by George P. A. Healy, an American painter who received important

recognition in Paris. At these at homes one meets a cosmopolitan company, among whom are stars of the opera and the theater, authors, painters, sculptors, scholars, diplomats, statesmen, social leaders and persons of



Swami Vivekananda, NYC 1895

distinction in different activities from all over the world. . . .

Also among the guests from the Far East were Tagore, Das Gupta, Suami Viva Kananda, the Begum of Janpira and her sister, the Princess, who are thoroughly familiar with Hindu music, in which Miss Thursby also takes a keen interest. One of her most diverting experiences, musically, was in teaching Viva Kananda to sing the songs of Grieg with the quality of voice in which he recites his Sanscrit chants, which, she says, is rarely beautiful.”<sup>4</sup>

Lillian Edgerton, the journalist who interviewed Miss Thursby, wrote of Swamiji in the present tense, as if he were still alive in 1924. It is quite possible that Miss Thursby gave her that impression, and it indicates that Swamiji remained a living presence in her life.

Emma Thursby and Sara Bull were bonded not only as friends but also as artists. They were like musical sisters. In the early 1870s Miss Thursby and Norwegian violinist Ole Bull had performed in concerts together. Ole’s young wife, Sara, would have accompanied them on the piano, perhaps not on the stage, but certainly they spent many hours making music together in rehearsal and at home. Swamiji was frequently a guest at Sara Bull’s home in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In that pre-electronic era the piano played a fundamental role in middle-class homes. It was as important as the hearth. Although Swamiji sometimes complained of “thumping” on the piano when he stayed with people who merely played pop songs, the music that filled the homes of Mrs. Bull and Miss Thursby was artistry of the highest order.

It is fascinating to contemplate the musical exchange between Swamiji and Miss Thursby. He taught her the theory of Indian music, and she taught Swamiji to sing some songs by the Norwegian composer, Edvard Grieg. Ole Bull had mentored Grieg when he

was a teenager. After Ole’s death, Sara Bull kept in touch with his Norwegian compatriots and fellow artists. By 1895 Grieg had established a high reputation as Norway’s leading composer. His style was Romantic and nationalistic—probably a very good musical choice for Swamiji. There is no mention of which songs Swamiji may have practiced, but the dignified, meditative “En Svane” is a good example to listen to. Swamiji’s voice, according to written descriptions, was rich and deep—probably in the baritone range.



*Emma Thursby*

It stands to reason that Swamiji visited 34 Gramercy Park East many times. And during his visits there he must have met Mynah because “Mynah ruled the household.”<sup>5</sup>

Mynah was a remarkable bird and personality. “He spoke grammatically and often with disconcerting fluency in five languages:” English, French, German, Malay and Chinese.<sup>6</sup> He could sing songs, mimic the banjo, and play melodies on the piano by stepping on the keys.



Gramercy Park NYC 1905 handtinted

“This Mina (sic) was loquacious, weirdly knowing, vain and snobbish.”<sup>7</sup> Mynah had his own room and was treated more like a child than a pet. Swamiji especially liked animals, and I can imagine him conversing with Mynah like he was an old friend. Thursby had adopted him in Ems, Germany about 1887. The German ambassador to China, who had acquired the bird in India, gave him to Miss Thursby and instructed the bird to stay with her.<sup>8</sup> Henceforth, Mynah called Miss Thursby “Mamma.”

Mynah travelled wherever Miss Thursby went. She would let him fly free when they went to places like Green Acre, Maine. Sarah J. Farmer was very fond of Mynah, and she wrote a letter praising the bird.<sup>9</sup> It is possible that Swamiji first met Mynah at Green Acre in 1894, as did Swami Abhedananda in 1898. Mynah was surely welcome at Sara Bull’s houses at Green Acre and in Cambridge. Mynah loved to

play in Gramercy Park. He would watch the children from the window and would beg, “Mamma, mamma, I want to get out! I’ll come right back.” This, however, Miss Thursby seldom allowed because Mynah had once been stolen from Gramercy Park, and she had had a terrible time getting him back.

An article in the Washington D.C. *Evening Times* stated that both Swami Vivekananda and Swami Abhedananda admired Mynah.

“It is a marvel,” said they; “a fit bird to perch upon the sacred finger of Lal Rao. Peace be unto it.”<sup>10</sup>

While it is good to have confirmation in print that Swamiji appreciated Mynah, it is bizarre to think of him reverencing a deity called Lal Rao. Either the journalist misunderstood whatever he was told or clearly fabricated this “sacred finger of Lal Rao” business. Who was Lal Rao? In the 1890s the only Lal Rao known to Americans was a

fictional character, the Indian butler in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's second Sherlock Holmes mystery, *The Sign of the Four*. Although this journalist got his facts scrambled, I think it can be assumed that on separate occasions Swamiji and Swami Abhedananda said nice things about Mynah.

On 1 December 1898 Mynah made a celebrity appearance at the New York Ornithological Society show, delighting the crowds. Later, at home, he gave his last interview to a journalist from the *New York Herald* who declared him the "Smartest Bird in the World."<sup>11</sup> On 30 December, he entertained a group of underprivileged children.<sup>12</sup> Shortly after that, Mynah, who was about fifteen years old, became ill and died 27 January 1899, pitifully crying in French "au revoir."

Mynah's strange existence soon got even stranger. Postmortem, the bird was autopsied by three physicians—none of whom were veterinarians or ornithologists. They determined that Mynah died of spinal meningitis and that his brain and vocal chords were unusually large. Then Mynah was stuffed by a taxidermist and he was exhibited under a bell jar in Miss Thursby's apartment. In time, she apparently relinquished her attachment to Mynah's feathered form. When she was interviewed in 1924, she said that Mynah was buried under a willow tree in Gramercy Park.<sup>13</sup>

The story of Mynah's death was reported in newspapers all over the country. It gained a lot of attention in Hawaii. South Asian mynahs were introduced to Hawaii in 1865 to control an infestation of army worms. This worked as a temporary measure, but as the birds thrived, the environmental balance was upset—as often happens with

the introduction of non-native species. By 1899 Hawaiians were agitated because mynahs were accused of spreading another invasive species, lantana, by eating and excreting its fruit. The mynahs of Hawaii were common mynahs (*Acridotheres tristis tristis*). It is believed that Miss Thursby's Mynah was a hill mynah (*Gracula religiosa*), a bird that is currently endangered in Meghalaya, India.<sup>14</sup>

Problems of conserving wildlife now confront every country on the planet. In Swamiji's day, bird populations in America were being decimated to provide feathers for the fashion industry. During the mid-1890s ladies hats were often decorated with entire birds. Such ostentatious display was everywhere that Swamiji went. Even Mynah must have noticed it. Especially hard hit by this greedy slaughter for feathers were the Florida snowy egrets, members of the same family of birds that inspired Ramakrishna's first samadhi as a boy. Little Gadadhar went into ecstasy when he saw a flock of beautiful *shada bak* flying freely against dark rain clouds. So much depends upon the beauty of birds!

In February 1896 two Boston women organized the Massachusetts Audubon Society to stop the killing of egrets for hat decoration.<sup>15</sup> (One of the Vice-presidents was Mrs. Louis Agassiz who had helped arrange Swamiji's



Gramercy Park NYC

lecture at Radcliffe College.) Protective laws such as the Lacey Act of 1900 began to change the exploitative mindset of the culture. The sale of wild bird plumes was outlawed in 1910. Eventually, women—aided by the apocalypse of World War I—ended the fashion for feathered hats.

Worldwide, the hill mynah is not considered threatened, but locally there is cause for concern. They are “virtually extinct in Bangladesh due to habitat destruction and overexploitation for the pet trade.”<sup>16</sup> This scarcity has now spread to north-eastern India. Hill mynahs live and breed in the upper forest canopy. They are very difficult to breed in captivity. If hill mynahs were easily bred in captivity, then there would be no incentive to capture them from the wild. Therefore, current suppliers to the pet trade need to abide by sustainable practices or there will be no future for them.

The extinction of the passenger pigeon is a cautionary tale. Native to North America, it was once the most abundant bird population in the world. The birds traveled in flocks so large that they blotted out the sun when they flew overhead. People killed them by the thousands—partly to eat, but mostly just for “sport”. They did not believe that such a plentiful creature could disappear from the earth. Yet a population counted in the hundreds of millions in 1871 had shrunk to just dozens by 1895. The last passenger pigeon died in 1914. When Swamiji was at the World’s Fair in Chicago, Americans shocked by their own wastefulness were trying to explain to themselves the near extinction of the buffalo.

Miss Thursby’s pet Mynah was beloved, but in one important respect he had a lonely existence. Mynah never had any relationship with his own kind, and that is the fate of most birds sold into the pet trade. \*



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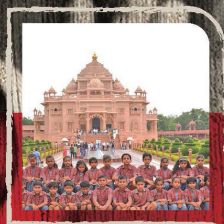
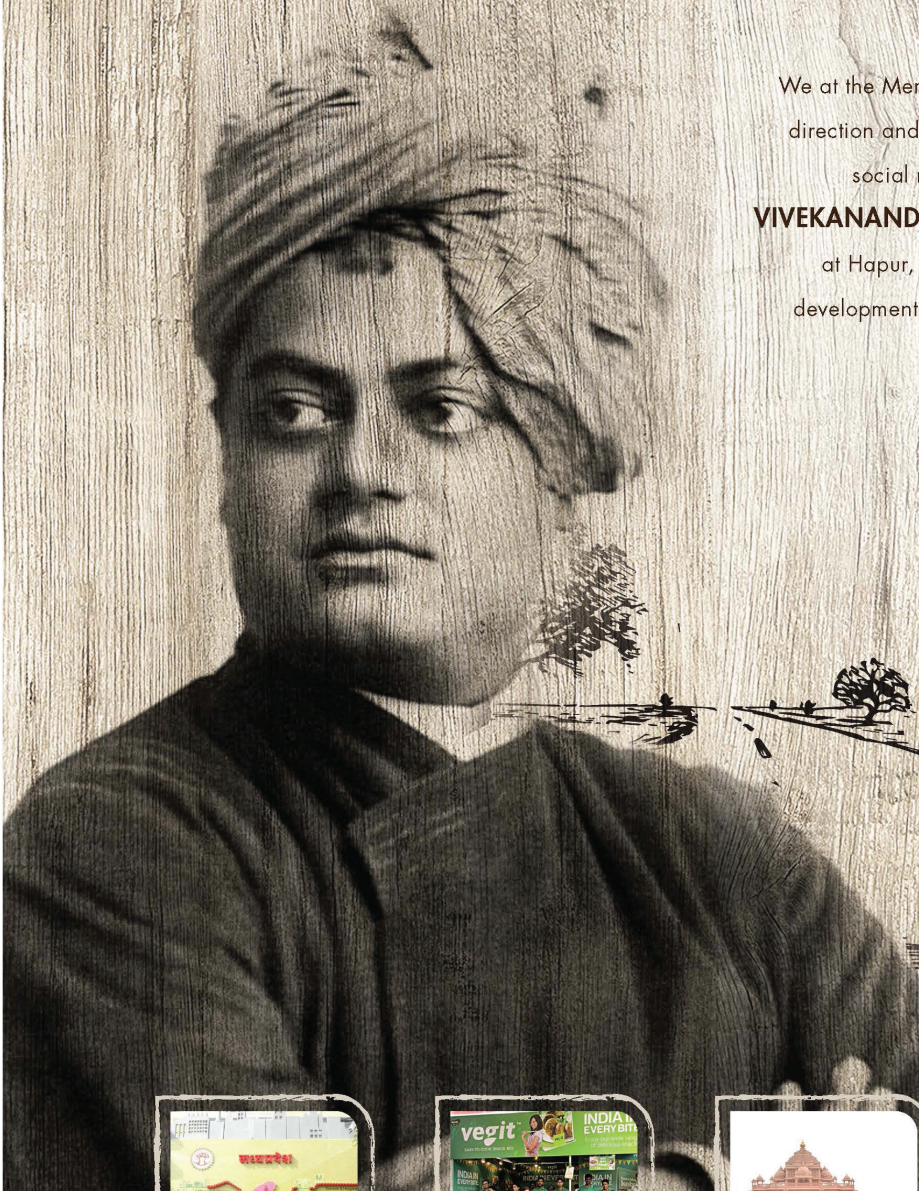


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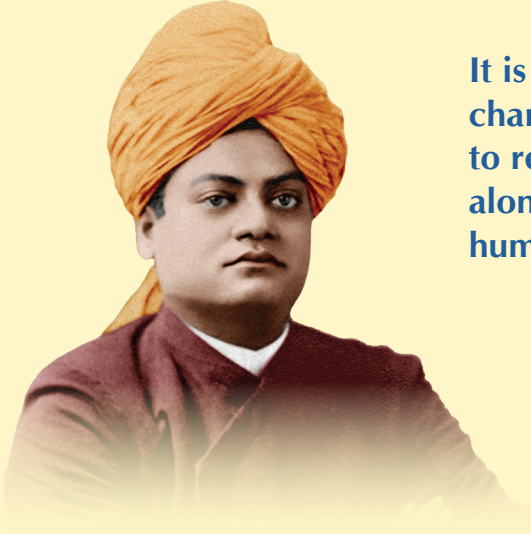
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to realise the truth, which  
alone will tell in the future of  
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