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The Holy Mother

Pravrajika Muktiprana

Man’s Image of Himself

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Universal Prayers

In the beginning there existed the Divine Being, He was the One Lord of all created beings. He upholds this earth and heaven. He it is to whom we offer our prayers.

*Rig Veda X.cxxi.2.*

O, you all, come with speed to Him who is the Lord of heaven; who alone is the guest of all people. He, the Ancient One, desires to come to the newly initiated. Follow only the path shown by Him.

*Sama Veda II.iv.3.*
A New Journal

SRI SARADA Math, a monastic organization of sanyasinis of the Ramakrishna Order, is the outcome of the spiritual awakening effected by the dynamic teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda. It is a symbol of women's rise to strength—strength that is born through faith, 'strength that comes from touching the feet of God'. And it is in the tradition of the Vedic Dharma, as the law-giver Harita says:

* 'Among women there are two classes, those who are seekers of Brahman and those who marry straightaway.'

Sri Sarada Math has completed twenty-five years of its existence and it is now bringing out a journal of its own. The object is to disseminate the great truths of Vedanta, the spiritual teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda and also those of the founders of all faiths, from the most ancient times to the present age, and thus spread knowledge of the mystical insight and experiences of the world's exalted company of teachers, those who are torch-bearers of light and truth. Its purpose will also be to spread knowledge of the different philosophies and the history and culture of this ancient land, India.

The Title

The journal is named Samvit. Samvit means 'knowledge which leads to enlightenment'. While science and philosophy seek truth through the analysis of facts and experiences, spirituality seeks truth through the directness of its awareness. It is a straight path to enlightenment. The teachings of the Upanishads convey their perennial freshness to us through the direct awareness of reality which was experienced by the Vedic sages. Since awareness is 'direct' it stands in no need of testimony or inference, as does the knowledge

* डिलिता: तिरियो महायात्रियो: सचोबाष्ट्र।
of common objects of the world. That is why Patanjali, in his Yoga Sutra calls it, ‘knowledge filled with truth’ (सत्तंत्रता गृह).\(^2\)

A jnani like Acharya Shankara calls it ‘firmly established knowledge’ (रुपकः) :

\[\text{That consciousness which is fully manifested in all the three stages of waking, dream, and deep sleep; which is the witness to the world; which is interwoven in the whole body of creation from Brahma to an ant, and which gives the direct experience that “I am” and is distinct from the objective world is firmly established knowledge.}\] \(^3\)

When this awareness grows, the enlightened one \(\uparrow\) ‘lives only to work out his praabda karma, for in the fire of samvit his past and future karmas are burnt out.’\(^4\)

The bhakta sees samvit as chit-shakti, the power of God Himself. In the Vishnu Purana we find Dhruva praising Sri Vishnu:

\[\text{\(\uparrow\) ‘In You who are the support of all, there is that power of knowledge called samvit, which is blissful and inseparable; there is neither delight nor sorrow (born of sattvic or tamasic gunas) nor a mixture of the two (due to the rajasic guna) in You who are verily above and beyond the three gunas.’}\] \(^5\)

The greatest mystic of the present age, Sri Ramakrishna, had reached the stage of perfect knowledge or enlightenment. Spiritual aspirants have been told by teachers that such a stage of perfection is attained by a rare few. But Sri Ramakrishna stressed the point that all are destined to arrive at the same goal some time or other, some earlier, some later. He therefore wanted us to begin by cultivating God-consciousness, instead of accepting the state of avidya, ignorance, as the natural state for a human being. His words are simple: ‘As a lamp cannot burn without oil, so a man cannot live without God.’ In order to activate this awareness in the person before him,

\[\text{\(\star\) ज्ञात्स्वप्नसुगुरुतंशु खुटटरा या संबिलुक्रमते \} \\
\text{\(\star\) ना ध्यानाविश्वसिधिकल्पनालिन्युक्त भोगा भवतालिको।} \\
\text{\(\star\) सैद्यवाल न च दृश्यलिंकित दृष्यमः \) ... } \\
\text{\(\star\) भूत भविस्त्र व दुःखित प्रदहता संविधन्ये भावे।} \\
\text{\(\star\) प्रार्थ्य संविदं स्बवः।} \\
\text{\(\star\) ह्यूदापर्वती सांतवचं संविप्रयोगः सवसंविद्यते।} \\
\text{\(\star\) ह्यातत्सकरं मिष्टा रिव सो गुणवत्तिते।} \]
the only blessing which he uttered was ‘Chaitanya hok’, ‘May you be spiritually awakened.’

The Motto

स न: दुनया बुद्ध्या संयुन्नतु ।
May He endow us with good thoughts.

Svetashvatara Upanishad, III.4.

The grandeur of the Upanishads lies in their conception of the Virata Purusha, the One Absolute Being who is ever present within the hearts of beings, as well as outside. Every person, therefore, can receive the message of truth in his heart just as the sages did. And yet a human touch is given when every man or woman is given the will to seek for some special grace or divine aid. Hence this prayer is offered to Him:

May He who creates, protects and controls the world by His inscrutable power of maya confer bliss and wisdom on the devoted by destroying their errors and sorrow. May He, the Lord of all, endow us with good thoughts.

References

1. As quoted in P. V. Kane, History of Dharmashastra (Poona, 1941), II.xii.293.
2. I.48.
4. ibid., verse 3.
5. I.xii.69.

Man according to the Vedanta philosophy, is the greatest being that is in the universe, and this world of work the best place on it, because only herein is the greatest and the best chance for him to become perfect.

Swami Vivekananda
Sri Sarada Devi: the Holy Mother

PRAVRAJKA MOKSHAPRANA

The spiritual and cultural traditions of India are such that one born and brought up in this milieu can prove his worth and lead a perfectly pious life in spite of having little or no learning at all. The lives of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi are glowing examples of this. Today the world considers them to be great souls because of the glorious lives they lived.

The malady of the present age is the loss of faith or shraddha. Having no shraddha to live by and being tormented by an inordinate desire to enjoy life, man is tossed between doubt and despair. He has no goal before him. He has lost his sense of values. Indeed, humanity today is at the cross-roads. However, in this age of uncertainty there have been noble lives which act as beacon lights. The simple and unsophisticated lives of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi serve as such to lead men towards the Supreme Goal.

Outwardly the Holy Mother’s quiet life seems to have nothing outstanding about it. Still how pure, pious and wonderful it is! Her life is an untouched ‘shafali’ flower at the feet of God. It is believed that spiritual and secular life are opposed to each other. It is beyond the power of the common man to comprehend how spiritual life can mould one’s worldly life, how it can guide and control it. This is why he fails to grasp the essential principles of religion and they seem formidable to him.

As long as Sri Ramakrishna was there in his mortal frame it pleased the Mother to keep herself in the background. It was only after his passing away that she appeared before us in her full glory. Prayer, sacrifice, austerity and self-control—all that we desire most in spiritual life—may be seen blended so naturally in the simple character of the Holy Mother that they found expression in her daily activities, her conversation, her dealings with people, and also in the way she discharged her duties towards her relatives. Day and night she went about her domestic chores, serving her devoted children and looking after all the members of her vast household. She was quite oblivious of her own interests. Her love for her children broke all barriers of caste and creed and prompted her to serve them tirelessly.

Pravrajika Mokshaprana is the second President of Sri Sarada Math and the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission. Her deep understanding of Indian culture is known to those who have read her articles published in Bengali.
This is possible only when the mind rises above all mundane desires. As I think of it, my mind fills with wonder. When Sri Ramakrishna’s mind soared high to the lofty state of superconsciousness, he entered into *samadhi*. But when the Holy Mother’s mind rose to such heights, she attended to the minutest needs of her devotees. The result was that no one noticed her natural state of *samadhi*. No one, therefore, could gauge the depth of her divine personality. It was only by her grace that one could sometimes have a glimpse of her unfathomable love and compassion, and marvel at her divinity.

If we study each of the aspects of her life as revealed to us we shall see with wonder that she manifested perfection in everything she did in her daily life. And this is what we should aim at, namely, manifestation of the perfection already in us. The more we dwell upon her divine life the more shall we feel benefited and blessed.

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**Meeting Sri Sarada Devi**

**V. Narayanan**

On this day, the birthday of Sri Sarada Devi, the consort of Sri Ramakrishna Deva, I am reminded of that holy day nearly sixteen years ago, when my parents, having read in *The Hindu* that Sri Sarada Devi had come to Madras, took me along with them to meet the great lady. In those days, ignorant and childish as I was, I had heard the names of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda but had no idea of their greatness nor that of Sri Sarada Devi. I had heard from my father that Swami Vivekananda was a master of Vedantic learning, that his lectures had helped us to clear many of our doubts and to counter criticisms levelled against Hinduism, and that his talks had kindled in us feelings of patriotism and love for our religion.

We went to meet Sri Sarada Devi with all the excitement and enthusiasm of seeing a great person, and not in the attitude of disciples approaching a guru. The Mother was then staying in a house near the Ramakrishna Math at Mylapore. We were charmed by the infinite sweetness of her compassionate glance from the first, and we longed to go to her again and again. At that time it did not occur to

V. Narayanan’s deeply religious parents were disciples of the Holy Mother, and so was he. A scholar of Sanskrit, Tamil and English literature, he frequently wrote for newspapers like *The Hindu*, and journals like *Triveni* and *Vedanta Kesari*. He took part in the publication of the first Tamil Lexicon.
us to wonder what was the irresistible attraction that constantly drew us to her presence. Even now, when I look back, I cannot understand what there was in common between Mother and ourselves. Mother did not know English, Tamil or Sanskrit. There was no chance of our understanding even a word of Bengali. Her countenance was always illumined by divine purity and a lovely smile. I was a young boy without any religious fervour and with all human limitations. In spite of all this, there must have been some common link between us. There is a saying that even the worst sinner will get what destiny wills. This coming together may truly be said to be the work of destiny.

As long as the Holy Mother was in Madras, we went to meet her every day and were blessed by her love. A few days later the time came for us to part. By that time, however, I had come under the loving spell of Swami Ramakrishnanananda, who was then head of the Ramakrishna Math, so the separation from Mother did not affect me much. My parents, in the meanwhile, had received the blessing of mantra diksha from Mother. I shall never forget that sacred day when Mother came to our house and accepted our humble offerings.

Five or six years passed. As I did not know the full greatness of Sri Sarada Devi, I did not miss her as much as my parents did. Study of the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and repetition of the sacred mantra had increased their eagerness to meet her again. However, my father could not take leave from his office because of the pressure of work, so it was decided that I should accompany my mother to Calcutta when my studies were over. From Calcutta my mother and I had as escort to Jayrambati, a Brahmachari sent by the Belur Math.

Jayrambati is about fifteen miles from the Vishnupur railway station. It is a small village but a place of pilgrimage, for Mother had been born there and had lived there for many years. She is enshrined now in a temple that has been built there for her, but for my mother that village even then was a temple; for was it not sanctified as her Guru's dwelling-place? Tiny though it was, the natural beauty of the hamlet was very attractive. The Brahmachari who was our escort was devoted to Mother. Showing us the village lake he would say, 'This is the lake where Mother takes her bath', and he would then prostrate himself on its banks. He would take us to the temple of the Goddess Simhavahini and bow down there saying, 'This
deity is worshipped by Mother’. When in her presence, he would stand, hands folded and fingers on lips, in an attitude of utter humility. Though I knew of the devotion of my mother to Sri Sarada Devi, the attitude of this Brahmachari was truly astonishing. I was a young lad at the time and a newcomer to the path of Bhakti; it was the devotion of Brahmachari Virupaksha that kindled in me the flame of devotion to the Holy Mother.

The people of the village used to visit Mother frequently and she would engage in joyful conversation with them. Not knowing the Bengali language, I could not share fully in the happy atmosphere at these gatherings. Much of my time was spent chatting with Mother’s brother Sri Mukherji, on the outer verandah of the house. Brahmachari Virupaksha acted as interpreter between us, for Sri Mukherji knew no language other than Bengali.

We spent three nights in Mother’s place. During this time, we visited Kamarpukur, the birth-place of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, which is three miles from Jayrambati. On our way there, we saw the groves where he had meditated and many a time experienced samadhi, the pond whose waters had been sanctified by his daily bath, and the holy Shiva temple where he had offered worship. His house stands exactly as it was and a Tulsi grove marks the spot where he was born. His brother’s son, a serene soul, now lives in the ancestral house. From the serenity on his face we were able to have a glimpse of the peace and joy which we are told illumined Sri Ramakrishna’s face. He showed us the Raghuvir Shila, the family deity worshipped by Sri Ramakrishna.

The thought occurred to me then that perhaps I could stay there forever worshipping that Raghuvir Shila. But at the same time I recollected what Sri Ramakrishna had said once to one of his devotees who had mentioned to him with sadness that he was a married man: ‘Is that so? Then you must fulfil those duties. Even as a householder you may follow me’.

The following morning, I was seated on the front verandah conversing with Sri Mukherji, when Brahmachari Virupaksha said to me, ‘Mother is calling you.’ I went in. Mother asked me to sit on a darbhasana close to her and, pointing to a picture of the coronation of Lord Ramachandra, indicated by a sign to me that I should meditate on Lord Rama and Sri Sita Devi. Her face was filled with compassion as she whispered in my right ear two sacred mantras. How had
she come to know about my secret longing in Kamarpukur? How did she know who was my Ishta Devata, my Chosen Ideal? This was beyond my comprehension. My initiation was over in a minute, for there were no elaborate instructions about anganyasa or karanyasa (dedicating various parts of the body to tutelary deities). She sent for Brahmachari Virupaksha and told him to tell me: 'Repeat these mantras continuously and meditate on them. You need not set apart a special time nor observe any special rules of purity or impurity. You do not need any other mantra. From these alone will flow all kshema, good.' And thus she blessed me.

Many a time obstacles come in the way of my doing japa and meditation according to her instructions; and my own enthusiasm is often lacking. But one thought never leaves my mind. Frequently, in times of both joy and sorrow, her form appears before my eyes. There are no spoken words, but can I ever forget the infinite compassion that flows towards me from her countenance?

To me, at a distance, doubtful of my own worthiness and therefore hesitant to approach her in all her greatness, she had sent a call, beckoned to me to sit close to her, and with all the love of a mother for her child, bestowed on me that gift which was sweetest to me—the Lord's Name. Her divine face, as she showered her blessing upon me stands ever before my eyes and fills me with bliss. What other need can there be? *

* This talk was published in Tamil in the Ramakrishna Vijayam in December, 1926.

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God is one's very 'Own'. It is the eternal relationship. One realizes Him in proportion to the intensity of one's feeling for Him. Don't be afraid. Always remember that somebody is protecting you.

Sri Sarada Devi
Vedanta as the Science and Art
of a Comprehensive Spirituality

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

Vedanta is the philosophy of total vision. Vidya and avidya, the
Self and the not-Self, Brahman and the world, are basically one, not
two. Avidya affirms the world as a self-sufficient reality. Vidya
affirms God as the Other, as a far-away reality. When true know-
ledge arises this opposition is overcome, so says the Isha Upanishad:
‘He enters into blinding darkness who worships avidya;
Into greater darkness, as it were, do they enter who
delight in vidya.’*

This true knowledge involves comprehension of the total Reality,
of the truth of both Being and Becoming. Philosophic knowledge or
vision cannot be complete if it ignores or neglects any aspect of
knowledge or experience. Philosophy is the synthesis of all knowl-
dge and experience, according to the Upanishads and according
also to modern thought. Brahmavidya, philosophy, is the basis and
support of all knowledge (सर्वविद्या), says the Mundaka Upanishad.†
All knowledge, according to that Upanishad, can be divided into two
distinct categories – the apara, the lower, and the para, the higher. It
boldly relegates all sciences, arts, theologies, and even the holy
scriptures of religions, including the Vedas, to the apara category.
And that is para, it says ‘By which the imperishable Reality is realized’
(ध्या तद्वर श्रवितम्यते).‡

The vision of the Totality, therefore, must include the vision of
the para and apara aspects of Reality. If brahmavidya is the pratishta,
support of sarvavidya, totality of knowledge, it must be a syn-
thesis of both the apara and the para forms of knowledge.

This is endorsed by the Gita in its statement that jnana, philos-
yphy, is the synthesis of the knowledge of the not-Self and the
Self.† The synthesis of the knowledge of the not-Self, avidya, which
is positive science, with that of the Self, vidya, which is the science

* प्रत्यक्षाय: प्रत्यक्षनातमेवप्रविधापुरसते।
ततो पूव इति ते समवे उपविवायचं रत:। 9.
† ऐंगलार्थोपीयो संस्कर्णं यत्नवांम चतं नम। xiii-2

Swami Ranganathanandanda of the Ramakrishna Order is the President of the Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad. He is the author of Eternal Values in a Changing Society and The Message of the Upanishads.
of religion, will give us true philosophy, which is knowledge flowing into vision and maturing into wisdom.

This is purna-jnana, fullness of knowledge, according to Vedanta. It is vijnana, comprehensive knowledge, as termed by Sri Ramakrishna. The Gita speaks of this as jnana coupled with vijnana (ज्ञान विज्ञानसंगम), and proclaims the attainment of this as the summit of spiritual achievement.

‘At the end of many births, the wise man attains Me with the realization that all this (universe) is Vasudeva (the indwelling Self); such a great-souled one is rare to come across.’

The Nitya and the Lila

The Atman or Brahman is the changeless Reality; It is termed Nitya, the Eternal, in Vedanta. The relative world when viewed in the light of this Nitya is termed Lila, God’s cosmic play. And we then get the equation: the Nitya and the Lila are one. It is also expressed in another way: Brahman and Shakti, Being and Its power of Becoming, are one. Some of the most profound utterances of Sri Ramakrishna have this for their theme:

‘A man should reach the Nitya, the Absolute, by following the trail of the Lila, the relative. It is like reaching the roof by the stairs. After realizing the Absolute, he should climb down to the relative and live on that plane in the company of devotees, charging his mind with the love of God. This is my final and most mature opinion.’

Again:

‘If you accept the Nitya, you must also accept the Lila. It is the process of negation and affirmation. You realize the Nitya by negating the Lila. Then you affirm the Lila, seeing in it the manifestation of the Nitya. One attains this state after realizing Reality in both aspects: Personal and Impersonal. The Personal is the embodiment of Chit, Consciousness; and the Impersonal is the Indivisible Satchidananda, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss.

‘Brahman alone has become everything. Therefore, to the vijnani, this world is a “mansion of mirth”. But to the jnani it is a “framework of illusion”.’

* बच्चना जन्मनायने ज्ञानमाया प्रसुते ।
वायुदेव: सर्वभूति स महात्मा भुकुल्ले:॥ vii-9
Perfection Here and Now

The vision of the unity of One and the many has tremendous consequences for the life and thought and work of man. It alone ensures man’s all-sided growth, makes for the development of his head and heart side by side, and assures the attainment of perfection here and now. It unifies the paths of Jnana, Karma and Bhakti, and makes for a perfect character. The Gita proclaims this message as its central theme; it finds unique expression in verse eighteen of its fourth chapter:

‘He who sees inaction in action, and action in inaction, he is wise among men, he is a Yogi, and a doer of all action.’*

The story of Sri Ramakrishna’s imparting of this total vision of God to his beloved young disciple Naren, as Vivekanand was known in his pre-monastic life, is a fascinating episode. The Master had been educating his disciple in this total vision ever since they first met four years before. Naren had already realized the philosophical significance of Shakti or the personal aspect of God, as inseparable from Brahman, the impersonal Absolute. The episode registering this growth in Naren’s comprehension had taken place two years earlier, and the Master had been highly pleased then.

The Master was suffering from the fatal disease of throat cancer; only a few months of earthly life remained for him. The intense suffering on the plane of the body was matched by an unparalleled intensity of divine moods and unceasing spiritual ministrations to disciples and devotees. Young Naren was consumed with longing for the vision of God. Quoting a letter from Swami Shivananda, a fellow disciple of Vivekananda, dated 7 December 1927, Romain Rolland writes about this memorable episode thus:

‘One day, Swami Shivananda told me, he was present in the garden of Cossipore, near Calcutta, when Naren really attained this state. “Seeing him unconscious, his body as cold as that of a corpse, we ran in great agitation to the Master and told him what had happened. The Master showed no anxiety; he merely smiled and said: ‘Very well!’ and then relapsed into silence. Naren returned to outward consciousness and came to the Master. The Master said to him: ‘Well, now do you understand? This (highest realization) will

* कर्मयोग कर्मयोगकर्म कर्म यः।* ।
ि बुद्धिमान्नुष्योपि स युक्तम्: कर्मयोगस्मेत्। ii 18
henceforth remain under lock and key. You have the Mother’s work to do. When it is finished, She will undo the lock.’ Naren replied: ‘Master, I was happy in samadhi. In my infinite joy I had forgotten the world. I beseech you to let me remain in that state.’ ‘For shame!’ cried the Master. ‘How can you ask such things? I thought you were a vast receptacle of life, and here you wish to stay absorbed in personal joy like an ordinary man! . . . This realization will become so natural to you, by the grace of the Mother, that in your normal state you will realize the One Divinity in all beings; you will do great things in the world; you will bring spiritual consciousness to men, and assuage the misery of the humble and poor.’

After the passing away of his Master, Vivekananda proclaimed the message of this total vision, with its practical implications, in both East and West. He developed out of it a dynamic and broad spirituality comprehensive of every facet of life and activity. In her ‘Introduction’ to the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Sister Nivedita, the English disciple of Swami Vivekananda, brings out in a powerful utterance the practical implications of her Master’s philosophy. After referring to his all-inclusive Advaitic vision, she continues:

‘It is this which adds its crowning significance to our Master’s life, for here he becomes the meeting-point, not only of East and West, but also of past and future. If the many and the One be indeed the same Reality, then it is not all modes of worship alone, but equally all modes of struggle, all modes of creation, which are paths of realization. No distinction, henceforth, between sacred and secular. To labour is to pray. To conquer is to renounce. Life is itself religion. To have and to hold is as stern a trust as to quit and to avoid.’

Work Is Worship

This is the corollary of the philosophy of total vision. Work is worship. Inner and outer, the Self and the not-Self, are distinctions helpful in the analysis and study of experience, provided they are understood as provisional. In the final estimate, they have to be transcended. ‘Reality is undivided in things apparently divided’, says the Gita.*

The Mahanarayana Upanishad says:

* प्रविष्टव ६ दूरंदु  विष्णवलिख त मिर्तण्ड ६ xiii-16
Samvit

‘Narayana (the indwelling Divine) exists pervading all things, externally as well as internally.’*

The very opening verse of the Isha Upanishad proclaims that ‘the divine Reality envelops everything in this changing universe’.†

Based on this total vision, this Upanishad gives its due place to avidya or aparā vidya, as well as to vīdya or para vidya. The spiritual education of man must take him from the aparā to the para, and back again to the aparā, which now will appear to him not as enveloped in blinding darkness but as suffused with divine light. It is then that work becomes truly worship. The discipline of the aparā fits man for the pursuit of the para. Without it, that pursuit may well become a gamble. This warning is uttered by the Gītā as well:

‘Man does not achieve the state of actionlessness by merely abstaining from action; nor by mere renouncing of actions does he attain spiritual perfection.’‡

Work in the world is a school of spiritual education for man. If work is performed merely for worldly gain, it piles up only bondages for him. On the other hand, the pursuit of vīdya, the pursuit of the knowledge of the Self, becomes the pursuit of the ego and therefore of denser darkness, when it is not backed by purity and strength of character arising from disciplined action in the world of avidya. A view similar to that of the Upanishad is also expressed by Swami Vivekananda in a moving passage in his lecture on ‘Vedanta in its Application to Indian Life’:

‘Bring all light into the world; light, bring light! Let light come unto everyone; the task will not be finished till everyone has reached the Lord. Bring light to the poor, and bring more light to the rich, for they require it more than the poor. Bring light to the ignorant, and more light to the educated, for the vanities of the education of our time are tremendous! Thus bring light to all and leave the rest unto the Lord.’

Vivekananda speaks of the need to bring more light to the educated, because education today makes for vanity and the fattening

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* प्रत्यावर्त्तित तत्वद्वन्त एक्ष्य नारायण: विस्तरः | xiii-5
† ईश्वर शर्मिन्द तर्पे वस्त्रकाम जगतां सरलोऽसि |
‡ न कर्मचार्याः नारायणाः विद्वान्। गुणोपन्ने। न च संयस्तानेकु लिंदि समस्तिक्षति। iii-4
of the ego, and not for illumination of the heart. If the uneducated are in need of light, the educated are in more need of it. This is in tune with the language and sentiment of the Isha Upanishad. If we lose our way in the world of action, it is a matter of pity. But if, in the name of contemplation, we become self-centered and callous, it is a matter of greater pity, as it involves the loss of both the not-Self and the Self; we fail to achieve character as well as vision. The Gita teaches that true spirituality confers on man all-round efficiency—efficiency in the field of action, and efficiency in the field of thought and contemplation. This total efficiency is the product of a total vision of Reality. This teaching the Gita derived from the Upanishads and developed into the science and art of a comprehensive spirituality, that is ब्रह्मचारिण्यमात्मकविद्या।

* This article is based on extracts from The Message of the Upanishads and is published with the author's permission.

References

1. Mundaka Upanishad 1.i.1.
2. ibid., 1.i.5.
3. The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna (New York, 1942), 257.
4. ibid., 477-8.
5. Life of Ramakrishna (Mayavati, 1954), 268.
6. (Mayavati, 1940), I.xiii.

It is this Supreme Oneness which alone is real, since there is nothing else but the Self. Verily, there remains no other independent entity in the state of realization of the highest Truth.

Vivekachudamani 226
The Holy Mother

Pravrajika Muktiprana

In recent times many religious movements have sprung up in India, the foremost of which is called the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement, after Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa of Dakshineswar and his great disciple, Swami Vivekananda. This movement, which has had far-reaching influence and has spread throughout the world is most suited to the needs of modern India. It is rooted in the past and faithfully represents our ancient religious spirit, yet it is universal and broad in its outlook.

With this movement is connected another name, which still remains hidden, and not well known except to the devotees, though it is not less important. We are speaking of Sri Sarada Devi, the spiritual consort of Sri Ramakrishna. To people who believe in the theory of incarnation, Sri Sarada Devi appears as the Shakti, the Power of Sri Ramakrishna. But it is doubtful if all are conscious of her greatness or the significance of her advent.

In India, incarnations are always associated with Shaktis, also known as Prakriti or Maya. So we have Sita-Rama, Radha-Krishna, Yashodhara-Gautama and Vishnupriya-Chaitanya. These incarnations came to teach the highest ideal to mankind, both to householders and to those who renounce the world. Even those who do not accept the theory of incarnation have to accept the incarnations as world-teachers. Shankaracharya is called an incarnation of knowledge as he came to spread the Jnana-kanda, the knowledge portion of the Vedas, but he is not included among those generally accepted as incarnations.

Sita, Radha, Yashodhara, and Vishnupriya are immortal. They are remembered and revered even today due to their purity, forbearance, compassion, self-abnegation, and above all their spiritual attainments; but their lives are more or less merged in those great world-teachers, and are not thought of independently. Sri Sarada Devi’s life, however, gives a different picture. Her role in the reawakening of the spiritual life of the people of this country is unique. She led an apparently simple life, almost an ordinary life. We do not know whether she was conscious, from the beginning, of her mission and

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the role she was to play in the future. What we know is that her childhood was passed in a poor Brahmin family, helping her mother in household work and looking after her young brothers.

Relationship with Sri Ramakrishna

At the age of five she was married to the greatest sage of the times, but it does not seem that she realized the full significance of such a unique marriage. At the age of eighteen she went to stay with her husband, Sri Ramakrishna, who lived in the village of Dakshineswar near Calcutta. Her heart was full of love and, as was quite common for all married girls at that age, her sole purpose was to dedicate herself completely to the service of her husband and find fulfilment in that. With this idea, Sarada, the young wife, came to Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna, of course, welcomed her as if, at the end of his austere spiritual practices, he was waiting for her. Once a doubt came to his mind: had she come to drag him down in the mire of worldly life? Sarada’s prompt reply was, ‘No’; she had come to help him in his spiritual path. In India, the wife is called a sahadharmin, a partner in religious life, as in the injunction of the Shastras, which says ‘sa-strika dharma namacharet’, a man should perform the religious rites with a wife by his side.

Had Sarada any idea that helping her husband in spiritual life meant complete renunciation of the worldly life? We do not know anything about her studying the Shastras, or hearing about the ideal of renunciation. But it seems she was already established in that ideal, and so, easily and confidently, she followed Sri Ramakrishna.

Awakening of Universal Motherhood

The unique incident of the Shodashi Puja, which he performed at dead of night on the occasion of the Phalaharini Kali Puja, is of great significance. It was the tradition in those days that wives adored and worshipped their husbands. Though in many families husbands paid due respect to their wives, no man thought of actually worshipping his wife. On this occasion Sri Ramakrishna worshipped his nineteen-year-old wife, Sarada Devi, as Tripura Sundari, one of the aspects of the Divine Mother who is looked upon as the root of the whole of creation and is the power of Brahman. It was as if Sri Ramakrishna awakened the Divine Mother in her to make her the embodiment of the Universal Mother. Sri Ramakrishna’s spiritual practices came to their conclusion after offering his japa-mala at the feet of Sarada that night.
As long as Sri Ramakrishna was in this world, Sarada Devi’s main purpose was to take care of his body. She also had to serve her aged mother-in-law and, in later days, the devotees who came to Sri Ramakrishna. Her life at that time was a life of service, of continuous prayer, and complete self-abnegation. So we may say that her spiritual role in the movement started only after Sri Ramakrishna passed away. We see her then as a spiritual teacher, as the head of a spiritual order. Though officially she was not the head of the Ramakrishna Order, spiritual giants like Swami Vivekananda and Swami Brahmananda bowed down to her as such, and she guided the destiny of the Order for about three and a half decades.

About herself, she said that Sri Ramakrishna had left her to establish in the world the ideal of motherhood. In India this ideal of motherhood is always considered the highest ideal in society and is more or less inborn in women. Girls used to be addressed as ‘Mother’ and this idea naturally developed in them as they grew up. In Sarada’s case its expression was wonderful, as there was no worldly limitation. All those who came to her, whether monastic members or a man like Amjad, a Muslim dacoit; whether Gopaler Ma, the saint, or an ordinary woman, all felt blessed by her love. About her motherly love many accounts have been recorded, hence we need not repeat them here.

Sister Nivedita somehow caught this spirit of love which was unlike any kind of worldly love. She wrote in a letter:

‘Dear Mother! You are full of love! And it is not a flushed and violent love, like ours, and like the world's but a gentle breeze that brings good to everyone and wishes ill to none. It is a golden radiance, full of play.’

In the West, sitting in a church, Nivedita suddenly became aware of the presence of Mother Sarada, about which she gives a vivid description in the same letter. She also wrote in her diary: ‘Her presence will sanctify. Sri Ramakrishna wishes us to become like her.’

A Guiding Force

In her comportment the Holy Mother was very modest and orthodox, always keen to follow the customs and traditions of society with due respect. After Sri Ramakrishna left the world, she led the life of a Brahmin widow but in her attitude and understanding she was most modern and liberal. It is a wonder how she could appreciate the ideal of renunciation and service on which Swami Vivekananda
founded the monastic order. It was certainly different from the traditional monastic institutions in many ways. Naturally, it was not appreciated by all at that time. There were many criticisms. But Sarada Devi strongly supported it. She encouraged those young educated boys who came to her with vairagya to lead lives of renunciation. She herself gave them gerua cloth and asked them to join the Order. At the same time, like a loving mother, it was she who prayed to Sri Ramakrishna that his children should have proper shelter and food, and not go out wandering and begging. She was not like worldly mothers who are always keen to keep their sons and daughters in worldly bondage. This attitude of hers was not liked by her nieces and other relations. She encouraged Sudhira and some other girls to remain unmarried and dedicate themselves to serving the cause of education. The ideal of service or Karma Yoga introduced by Swami Vivekananda was also fully supported by her. Once a monk told her that people did not like the relief work, office work and such which the Ramakrishna Mission monks did; that these kinds of work were not proper for sadhus. The Holy Mother replied in strong words: 'The Math will be run in this way. Those who will not be able to adjust to it should leave the Order.' During her stay in Varanasi she was so pleased to visit the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service that not only did she highly praise its activities but she also donated some money as a token of her approval.

Sri Ramakrishna had taught: God alone is real, all else is unreal. The goal of human life is to realize God. Living in solitude, keeping holy company, singing the glories of God, discriminating between what is real and unreal, and yearning for God, these are the ways to realize the goal. This teaching was for all men and women—for the whole of mankind. With the help of different stories, anecdotes and illustrative references from scriptures, she tried to make people conscious of the existence of God and to help them to realize Him. In the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna we get a long list of persons coming to him from all classes of society and, except for a few young men and women who afterwards renounced the world, all were householder devotees, and for all of them he had the same message. 'Sir, have we to renounce the world to realize God?' This question would often be asked by devotees, and at once he would reply: 'No. Why should you renounce the world? It is better to fight from within a fort. Truly speaking, there is no harm living in the world.'
But is it easy to remain in the world and not get involved in it? Sri Ramakrishna was married and allowed his wife to stay with him, he took care of his own mother, but we know he was never involved in worldly affairs. At the age of nineteen, he left his village home in Kamarpukur and went to Calcutta, and from the time the Kali Temple was founded in Dakshineswar by Rani Rasmani, he stayed there, but he never took any interest in worldly life.

The Holy Mother, on the contrary, lived all along in the family, apparently taking full interest in it. She did all her duties with love and patience. In her later life, we see her with her relations, amongst whom her niece, Radhu, was not only brought up by her but was looked upon as her own daughter, and it seemed she was very much attached to her. While she was staying in the Udbodhan Office in Calcutta, there were many sadhus living downstairs, and all the time devotees were coming and going. Sometimes women devotees spent whole days with her, with Golap Ma managing the kitchen department, taking care of the devotees, and sometimes losing her temper, and Radhu behaving most eccentrically. Mother, however, was always calm, performing her duties, the chief of which was the worship of Sri Ramakrishna. She met the devotees and spent her leisure hours either in hearing recitations from holy books or in doing japa. At the same time, she gave spiritual guidance to all. From outside it appeared as if she was completely involved in the work, taking full interest in all, but actually she never got attached to anything. Thus she gave a clear demonstration of how one should live in this world. This aspect of her life endears her most to us. She unhesitatingly accepted the western disciples of Swami Vivekananda. She shared her room with Sister Nivedita, and that was really strange, because at that time orthodox women never approved of close contact with foreigners.

Significance of Mother’s Life

Once, referring to the Holy Mother, Sri Ramakrishna said: ‘She is Sarada, Saraswati, the giver of knowledge; she is Shakti, my Power.’ This reference is like an aphorism which was later explained by Swamiji. In 1894 very few were aware of the existence of the Mother, except the monastic disciples and some close devotees. She sometimes lived at Kamarpukur and Jayrambati, sometimes went on pilgrimages and, at intervals, lived in Calcutta. Swamiji wrote at that time to Swami Shivananda, one of his brother disciples, ‘You have
Sri Sarada Devi
not yet understood the wonderful significance of Mother's life—none of you. But gradually you will know. Without Shakti, there is no regeneration for the world. . . . Mother has been born to revive that wonderful Shakti in India; and making her the nucleus, once more will Gargis and Maitreyis be born into the world. . . . Hence, it is her Math that I want first.'

He also said: 'With the Holy Mother as the centre of inspiration, a Math is to be established on the eastern bank of the Ganga. As Brahmacharins and Sadhus will be trained in this Math (Belur Math) so in the other Math also, Brahmacharinis and Sadhvis will be trained.'

In December 1954, this idea was fulfilled when Sri Sarada Math came into existence. We know that in ancient India, there were many Brahmavadinis or realized souls among women. Afterwards, during the Buddhist period, we come across many Bhikshunis or Baudhika nuns who had attained enlightenment. It is strange, though, that they always had to be under the Bhikshus, monks of the Order. Now it is for the first time in the history of the world that a completely independent monastic order for women has been started in the name of a woman whose unique life and character are drawing many aspirants to spiritual life from all parts of India and also inspiring women in the West. In India, there is already a spiritual awakening among women of all classes, and even the most modern women who have come to know of her want to follow her in their day-to-day life. And this is just the beginning. Sarada Devi was not declared a saint after she passed away. Though she led a very ordinary and simple life, and though her motherly love was felt by everyone who came in contact with her, the real significance of her life was realized only by Swami Vivekananda and his brother disciples.

In the nineteenth century we had to face a crisis of values. Even then, the women staying in the inner apartments preserved their dharma in daily life. But today, the society has completely changed. East and West have come very close. The glamorous material civilization of the western world is spreading its influence on our lives. In Swamiji's words, 'Nectar is coming, and along with it, also poison; good is coming, as well as evil.' Is it possible to resist it? Going back to our old life style is neither practicable nor desirable. In this age of tremendous changes in values when there are apparent conflicts in ideals between East and West, between old and new and between science and religion, we need one ideal character who will
teach us to remain calm and self-composed, who is established in the idea of the East and at the same time extends hands towards the West to receive without hesitation what is good; one who can accept everyone, whether a monastic or a householder.

We should be brave enough to open our doors to receive all available light from outside, as Swamiji says:

‘Let rays of light come in, in sharp-driving showers from the four quarters of the earth; let the intense flood of light flow in from the West—what of that? Whatever is weak and corrupt is liable to die—what are we to do with it? If it goes, let it go, what harm does it do to us? What is strong and invigorating is immortal. Who can destroy that?’

Swamiji believed that India’s role in the greater world is to awaken spirituality while she has to learn science and technology from the other nations. He had firm faith that this spirituality can never be destroyed, and in bringing about this spiritual awakening women are also to play a great role.

‘To me it has always appeared that she is Sri Ramakrishna’s final word as to the ideal of Indian womanhood. But is she the last of an old order, or the beginning of a new?’ writes Sister Nivedita. To us it seems she is both. She is the true representative of ancient India. Whatever is good, auspicious, sweet, meditative, quiet, all that we find in her. In her are purity, dignity and honour, and at the same time, a mind broad enough and a heart deep enough to accept the progressive evolution of the future. Let us all cultivate that love which brings peace to all and wishes ill to none.

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Man's Image of Himself
A. S. Narayana Pillai

Man's image of himself is an interesting study. How has he thought of himself—as a child of God?—as the object of a special Providence?—as the real centre of the universe with everything made for him and for his convenience?—as one among the many created things of the world with no special distinction, or with just the special distinction of being more evolved (whatever that means in the ultimate analysis)? Has he thought of himself as just a reed to be tossed about by the passing winds? Just a reed, and yet, as Pascal reminds us, a thinking reed, knowing that he is a reed, knowing that he knows.

We can look at any civilization as basically a set of ideas by which man lives. These ideas are embodied in rules of social and political living, in cultural and economic institutions. They give human life its unity and meaning. An important set of ideas relates to man's image of himself. These relate to his place in the scheme of things, his significance in the universe, his destiny as an individual. It is true that they may not be clearly in focus throughout; but there they are, in the background of his thinking, his living, his working, giving meaning to his existence.

Growth of the Western Image of Man

Let us take an example. Let us take the early Middle Ages in Europe. There is no doubt that the medieval European civilization was based on a group of ideas of which the central idea was that of man as born for salvation and as a member at once of the natural and the supernatural orders. There is no need to elaborate this and perhaps this sounds too summary a treatment of a whole epoch. Nevertheless, this sums up the real human predicament in Europe at that time.

Then, what happened? During the late Middle Ages this idea of man about himself underwent a change, due to several historical and social factors. Man began to think of himself not merely as a creature to be saved but as one who should make the best of life in this world. Life on this earth was worth while in itself. He was a

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participator in this life. The result was the Renaissance and the Reformation, and so was born western man’s image of himself as a maker of this world, a scientifically, technologically, humanistically oriented world. Then life began to centre round factories, banks, rapid transport, and anything else that seemed to make this world a better place in which to live.

The Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Industrial Revolution, founded on this basic shift in the thinking of western man, gave us the wonders which are the commonplaces of today—radio, television, the all-knowing computer, atomic power. Our sights are now lifted from the land and the sea to the moon and the planets.

A Disturbed and Anxious Being

What is western man’s image of himself now? There are two strands in his estimate of himself. One, he has a high estimate of himself and of his ability to master the forces of nature, his environment, his unbounded technological skill. He feels several inches taller. Two, along with this he knows that individually, in isolation, he is not much. He can be overpowered by the forces of the world. He must pool his resources with other men. They must all put together their knowledge, their insights, their resources, their skills. He realizes the tremendous force of co-operative operations. His image of himself is still as a weak unit in nature individually, but as a strong force in co-operative partnership. He has to discover a new individuality, paradoxically in a co-operatively structured society. He is heir to a new world whose characteristics need emphasis along these lines. Man is significant, powerful, only in a co-operatively scientific society. His strength has increased. His belief in united purposive action has opened up new pathways.

Yet he is not too sure of himself. As he enters this new world of space-stations and interplanetary travel, his doubts have not disappeared. These doubts have been with him for quite some time now, during all these decades of scientific advancement. More spectacular achievements are not likely to dispel these doubts. Man is still disturbed and anxious. He has physical power, scientific knowledge, and, where he has exploited the wealth of the world, wealth. But he is helplessly struggling with the pressing intellectual and moral problems of life, and sees social groups and governments contending with these with little success.

Sometimes he just avoids them, but this can help no one. He has to face them sooner or later. He may even at times deny that
these problems exist. But then he knows that he is cheating only himself when he does that. He knows that it is possible to have great power without insight. He knows that there are other areas—social and ethical—where there is widespread confusion and possibly disintegration. Norman Cousins is right when he says, 'We have been living half a life. We have been developing our appetites—but we have been starving our purposes'.

Man's present image of himself, we may say, is as a disturbed and anxious being. He is uncertain about the meaning of life, the real nature of the world in which he lives, and the kind of life he wants to live with his fellows.

Can he outgrow this? He can, but not by merely adding to his stock of knowledge, increasing the items of information at his disposal. These are good in themselves but they do not solve his problem. Nor can he seek a solution in distractions. Distractions have always been there with us. But, as Aldous Huxley pointed out, today we have made them the core of life. Neither increased information nor distractions can help man to outgrow his disturbed and anxious state. What is needed is a restructuring of his set of values.

Let us take an example. For a long time his advertised goal was 'produce or perish'. That was the slogan. This made him busy as a bee and restless as an ant. They were the model. Now comes the natural corollary, 'consume or perish'. This is the new slogan, the advertised goal. After all, the things produced must be consumed. So we are asked to turn ourselves into a consumer-oriented society. We are dressing up for the part and no doubt will play it well.

If man will pause for a brief moment even and consider things calmly and deeply, he will see in these goals and values an emptiness the remedy for which all the teachers of the world's religions have pointed out in the clearest terms.

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Muktabai

SHARAYU BAL

Like Bengal, Maharashtra can be rightfully proud of its saints, for they were of the highest order. Men like Jnaneshwara, Namadeva, Tukarama, Ramadasa and many others have kept their immortal philosophy and exemplary lives before us for the last ten centuries; and not only men, for some notable women saints have also contributed considerably to the spiritual life of this province. Muktabai, Janabai, Bahinabai, Venabai, Kanhopatra and some others have composed beautiful abhangas* which are still popular in all the devotional cults in this area. These women devotees lived the lives of yoginis and did all the essential sadhana, spiritual practice, to experience the highest Reality. Here we introduce the reader to the life and philosophy of Muktabai, a thirteenth century saint.

Lineage

The most striking fact about Muktabai’s family history is that she received a unique spiritual heritage from her great-grandfather, her grandfather, and her father. They were all known for their intense devotion, spiritual sadhana and detachment. Muktabai’s grandfather, Govindapant, was initiated by the famous illumined teacher, Gahin Natha of the Natha sect. Vitthalpant, Muktabai’s father, was born at a very late stage in the married life of Govindapant and his wife, Nirabai.

From the worldly point of view, Vitthalpant’s life was a tale of sorrows and suffering. But this very fact made his spiritual life a great success. Vitthalpant studied all the Vedas and Shastras and, according to the custom of his time, started on a long pilgrimage. After visiting Dwarka, Pindaraka, Bhaluka and some other places, he went to Saptashringa in Nasik. On his way to Pandharpur he went to Alandi. There he was destined to get married to Rakhumabai, the daughter of Sri Siddhopant Kulkarni. After his marriage, Vitthalpant visited Pandharpur with his wife and in-laws, and then went to

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*Abhanga* is a composition in which the metre follows no limit of a particular number of letters or syllabic feet. It has a rule of rhyme and does not exceed six to eight lines.

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Abegaon to meet his parents. By nature, Vitthalpant was disinterested in worldly life and they had no children for some years.

One day Vitthalpant asked his wife’s permission to go to the Ganga for a religious bath. Inattentively, she gave her consent and Vitthalpant straightaway went to Varanasi and took sannyasa from his spiritual guru. Some years later, Vitthalpant’s guru went to Alandi and there he happened to see Rakhumabai circumambulating a suvarna ashwattha tree. Rakhumabai bowed down before the sannyasin and he spontaneously blessed her, saying: ‘Putravati bhava’. ‘May you have a son.’ She told him her tragic story, from which the sannyasin could make out that Rakhumabai’s husband must be Vitthalpant and nobody else. He immediately went back to Varanasi with Rakhumabai and her parents. In the presence of all, the sannyasin ordered Vitthalpant to enter the grihastha ashrama, the householder’s life, again, and he blessed the couple that they would have children who would be perfect yogis, spending their lives in the spiritual uplift of society.

Vitthalpant obeyed his guru and went back to Alandi with his wife. In the course of the next ten years he had three sons and a daughter, Nivruttinatha, Jnanadeva, Sopana and Muktabai. As their names suggest, they were the incarnations of detachment, of knowledge, of the ladder to knowledge, and of salvation. When he was hardly ten years old, Nivruttinatha was initiated into spiritual training by Gahininatha, and he became the guru of his two brothers and Muktabai.

There is some difference of opinion among the historians about the birth dates of the children. According to one tradition, Muktabai was born in 1279, and according to the other, given by Janabai,* Muktabai was born in 1277.⁴

### Social Ostracism

The Brahmins of the twelfth century were supreme rulers in the religious life of this state, keeping all other communities from studying the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Shastras written in Sanskrit. The effect of this narrow and selfish attitude of the Brahmins kept all the lower castes completely ignorant about the teachings of these books. Vitthalpant, though he was a learned Brahmin, had committed

* नवाण्‌वान्य साति मुःसारे रेविन्ति ।

{} जनी नूणे केती भात त्वान्तिः
what was considered the unpardonable sin of "becoming a family man again after taking sannyasa."  

He was therefore treated as an outcaste and had to face great difficulties even in meeting the daily needs of the family. For seven long years Muktabai's parents struggled hard in their household life and practised penance to attain mukti. The children raised in this atmosphere naturally learnt detachment towards worldly life.

Muktabai lost her parents when she was hardly two or three years old. In one very touching abhanga Saint Namadeva expresses the overwhelming feelings of Muktabai as follows:

† 'O God Pandurangai! When our parents left us, and shortly afterwards they left this world too, we were all small children. Nivratti and Jnanadeva used to go out asking for koranna, a morsel of food, and Sopana used to look after me.'

As a punishment for his so-called sin, Vitthalpant and his wife went to Varanasi and threw themselves into the waters of the Ganga, hoping that the sacrifice of their lives would at least bring better days for their children. But the Brahmins of Abegao and Alandi remained adamant in their orthodoxy, and refused to allow Muktabai and her brothers to settle down and live a peaceful life.

Meeting the Challenge

After spending thus a couple of years in Alandi, Muktabai's brothers decided to go to Paithana, which was then considered the Varanasi of Maharashtra, to meet the Brahmins there. They all walked from Alandi to Paithana and presented themselves before a meeting of scholars. Jnanadeva proved his scholarship and superiority in yoga vidya by which the assembly was convinced that Muktabai and her brothers were superior to all the Brahmins present there. After this visit to Paithana, people began to respect the children. For the remaining brief periods of their lives (about ten to twelve years) they stayed at Alandi and nearby places.

Muktabai lived for about eighteen years. Owing to the stigma of being the children of sannyasin, Muktabai and her brothers could not think of marriage and ordinary family life. Besides, they were so...
much absorbed in the practice of yoga and interested in the spiritual uplift of the people that they could never have had any interest in worldly life.

The Poet-Saint

Today Muktabai is known in Maharashtra as a great poet-saint. Her abhanga compositions are not be judged by their number, but the rich philosophy of life they contain. These abhangas also bring out Muktabai’s unmistakable mystical experience and how she enjoyed the life of union with Paramatman, the Supreme Self, which is beyond the visible and the invisible. For example, in the following abhanga she tells us:

* ‘Various kinds of lamps are one as they all remove darkness and give light, so saguna and nirguna are one. I have seen Vitthalaraaja (Lord Panduranga) of Pandhapur in the courtyard of Bhakta Pundalika. By vijnana we know about chaitanya, atman; by satijnana we come to know the nature of the whole universe which is nothing but Brahman. Nivrittinatha has given me this true knowledge that God Vitthala (the same as Paramatman) is both saguna and nirguna.*

Muktabai looked upon her brother Nivrittinatha as a guru and declared:

† ‘Nivrittiraja made Muktai aware that there is only one real thing, that is, love for Hari.’

And again:

† ‘Muktai was taught about Sri Hari by Nivritti. For us there is no worldly life in the future.’

She was a jnani-bhakta and therefore she could be an ideal bhakta even though she could also experience the nirguna Reality. The following abhanga shows how she enjoyed the love of God even in the state of liberation:

* प्रकृति निर्गुण प्रकृति सगुण। धीरे धीरे पूर्ण एकतर्के॥
बैठिकरे ते माये पंक्री पद्धति। पुरुषिको वंगमी विशुद्धराज॥
विज्ञानसीतेज सजानेती निष्ठा। निर्गुणसीती भोज केले तये॥
मुक्ताईं तारक सत्यक विश्वः। निर्गुणिनी शोधाय दायासितः॥
† मुक्ताईं साधन करी निर्गुणिराज। हरिएते उत्तर एकतर्के॥
† मुक्ताईं बीहरि उन्नेती निर्गुणः। संतार पुत्री नाही प्राणः॥
Because I constantly repeat God’s name, even though I live bodily I have become a realized soul. The name of Hari has developed peace and forgiveness in my mind. Have kindness and compassion for all and, for yourself, have only the desire to see the form of Hari. Recite the names of Madhava, Mukunda and Hari and you can get mukti. Muktaï’s only property is the name, Hari, and she has become free from all worldly ties only by taking Hari’s name."

Muktabai’s abhangas known as Tatiche-Abhanga are extremely popular in Maharashtra for the beautiful appeal Muktabai makes to her yogi-brother, Jnanadeva, through them. Once Jnanadeva was angry and upset with the people around them, because they always taunted him, his brothers and Muktabai as the children of a sannyasin, and if anyone saw their faces it was considered a bad omen. One morning, hearing such criticism, Jnanadeva returned home in disgust and closed the door of the hut from inside. Muktabai came, peeped in and saw Jnanadeva sitting in one corner. She composed some abhangas to console him, saying:

† ‘The mind of a yogi is so pure that he can tolerate any wrong done to him by others. Even if the whole world becomes hot like fire with anger, a saint should become water (to extinguish it). A word hurts like a weapon, but a saint should take it as a piece of advice. This whole world is like a cloth interwoven by the threads of Brahman. Please, therefore, O Jnanadeva, (set aside your anger and) open the door.’

She again and again tells her brother: ‘Be free yourself and help others to be free.’

I have given only one abhanga here as an example. There are five in all. Each one surpasses the other in style, flight of imagination, beautiful similes and other poetic qualities. There is some difference of opinion amongst scholars regarding the authorship of these abhangas.

* नामबंदे देवी प्रसोनिया मुक्त || शान्ति शान्त बिच मुक्ति हरिभवसी ||
शान धरा बिची सबे भूली कहुणा || निरंतर वासना हरिभवसी ||
शारवुंडुद हरिभवसी बिची || सबे मुक्ति नामाड़े ||
भुताकावे धर हरिभवस उपासक || प्रवावि संसार मुक्ति केला ||
† धोमी पांवन मनाचा || ताहें धारार्यां जनाचा ||
विष्णुर्मे भाले बनाते || संती दुखे बहुते पानी ||
हव्हाव भाले केले || संती मानाषा उपदेश ||
विष्णुर्मे बहु दोरा || तादीं उपदा भानेचंरा ||
L. R. Pangarkar in his *Marathi Vangmayacha Itihasa* narrates the story of another occasion when Muktabai composed ten *ovi*. In Namadeva’s house Jnanadeva, his brothers, Muktabai, Janabai and some other devotees were conversing. Janabai and Muktabai were sitting on a swing in the same room. Janabai suggested, ‘Let us sing some *ovi*.’ Muktabai composed and sang ten *ovi* in which she says:

‘I peeped inwards and came to know myself (that I am the Atman and not the body). When I looked into my mind, I found that it was lying at the feet of God. My sat-guru, Nivruttinatha, led me to *sayujya mukti*. After this I progressed further and experienced the nirguna state too. What a yogi gives to a yogi nobody else can understand.’

A. N. Deshpande gives us fourteen more *ovi* from Muktabai. In these *ovi* Muktabai describes the whole yogic meditation process starting from body consciousness up to the highest experience of oneness with *Nitya-Niranjana*, the One Eternal-Absolute. As the mind turns inwards, it first concentrates on the earth-element (*prithvi*) which is the source of action. From there one goes up to the water-element (*apa*) which represents the power of knowledge. Here the stage of faith is passed and the actual experience begins. When the aspirant reaches the third stage, he comes to the fire-element (*tejas*) in which God Shiva is pleased with him and is at his service. Then comes the last two stages of the wind-element (*vayu*) and the air-element (*akasha*) in which he first sees the *linga-rupa* (which is like a small grain). These primordial elements are seen in the forms of the colours red, white and yellow. Finally he reaches the stage of mystical experience of one Reality (which Muktabai calls *Nitya-Niranjana*).

Muktabai wrote two *abhangas* known as *Kuta-abhanga*. *Kuta* means a puzzle. The followers of the Natha sect often use symbolic language to explain philosophical concepts. See for instance the following idea:

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*Ovi* is one of the old forms of Marathi poetry, popular in all strata of society. It has four lines, three of which are of equal length and the last one is a short line. Alliteration at the end of the first three lines is another peculiarity of an *ovi*. Folk-songs were composed in *ovi* and learned saints like Jnanadeva adopted this form while commenting on the *Gita*.

† The Vishishtadvaita and Dvaita schools believe that the realized souls who enter into the Lord enjoy *sayujya mukti* when they enjoy the same pleasures as the Lord, though not in the same degree, and experience nothing but bliss.
"Mungi, the ant, which represents avidya, ignorance, is so minute in the beginning that it soars high up to heaven and devours the sun of vidya, knowledge. Avidya spreads over the whole world and envelops the true knowledge of ultimate Reality. This fact gives rise to such a wonder as that of a barren woman giving birth to a son. The scorpion of ahamkara, the strong ego, even goes to patala, hell, and the serpent, Shesha, who is supporting the universe on his head for the good of the world, bows down before it; that is to say, ego dominates all other good qualities. The mind, which is like a tiny fly, gives birth to a kite. This means that the mind wanders about in the sky with its wings of creative imagination like a kite (flying aimlessly in the sky). Having realized and experienced the one Reality herself, Muktabai laughs at this illusory play of avidya."\(^{14}\)

From the abhängas and ovis quoted above, one can see that all the poetic compositions of Muktabai are permeated with nothing other than the fragrance of the mystical experience of Reality. The reader can imagine the height of spiritual sadhana she reached at the age of only fifteen or sixteen, and what mastery she had over the Prakrita language to express her mystical experience. The world of her abhàngas is full of her detachment from worldly life; her intense devotion; her direct experience of the ultimate Reality; her proficiency in yoga sadhana; her high regard for her guru, Nivruttinatha; and her affection for those desirous of liberation, like Changadeva.

Changadeva and Namadeva

Muktabai’s authority in yoga vidya can be better understood if we consider how she became the guru of the old yogi Changadeva, and how she made Bhakta Namadeva realize the importance of a guru for all-sided spiritual development.

On the banks of the river Tapi the great yogi Changadeva lived for many years with his disciples. When he heard about the yogic miracles of young Jnanadeva, he wanted to meet him. He thought of writing a letter to Jnanadeva but could not decide how to address him. At last he sent a blank piece of paper to Jnanadeva. When Jnanadeva got it Muktabai was sitting by his side. She humorously remarked:

* मुंगी उदासी चाराधी तिने मिलिसे उद्वासी ||
  नोर नवजान खाला || बांधे पूजा प्रत्यक्ष ||
  विदू गातासारी जाय || लेक मासा बंदी शाव ||
  गामी बाली चार खाली देवोनि मुक्ताई हासल ||
'Even after practising yoga for such a long time, Changadeva has remained blank like this sheet of paper as far as real spiritual attainment is concerned'.

In reply Jnanadeva wrote sixty-five abhangas and sent them to Changadeva. The old yogi at last came to meet Jnanadeva and surrendered completely at the feet of these four youngsters. What is surprising is that the teen-aged Muktabai became his guru and showed him the way to the knowledge of ultimate Reality.

In the abhanga compositions of Changadeva he refers to her as his saviour and guru:

* 'Muktai has given (a fruitful spiritual) life to Changadeva.'
† 'By opening his eye of knowledge Muktai brought peace to his life.'

In the abhanga compositions known as Changadeva-Muktabai Samvada, it seems that some abhangas are from the pen of Changadeva and some from Muktabai. She assumed the role of a mother in his life. She nursed him with the knowledge of Paramatman and taught him how to live the life of a liberated person, as the following abhanga reveals:

‡ 'A cradle is tied to the branch of nirguna and Muktai's son (that is, Changadeva) has slept in it. This is neither sleep nor the state of awakening, but is beyond both, a high state of mind known as "unmani" (when the mind soars high in the sky of reality and becomes one with it).'

Again she says:

§ 'The indestructible cradle is woven with the threads of the invisible (that Reality which cannot be seen with the human eye). Yogiraja is sleeping in it. (She tells him): 'Have that kind of sleep, my son, in which your mind will be one with the highest Reality.'

Thus Changadeva became a liberated soul only after he came to Muktabai and her brothers. Changadeva died in 1306, that is to say, some ten years after the death of Muktabai and her brothers. He
therefore could very well claim with pride that he was the culmination of the spiritual knowledge of Nivruttinatha, Jnanadeva, Sopana and Muktabai.  

Another contemporary saint and poet, Namadeva, was staying in Pandharpur. He used to see the God Panduranga and even talk to him. God was pleased with his devotion, but day by day Namadeva became more and more proud of his friendship with God and never thought of going to any guru for formal initiation or sadhana and made no effort for Self-realization. Once, Muktabai and many other renowned devotees met at Pandharpur. After a brief acquaintance, Muktabai could see Namadeva's egoism. She frankly criticized Namadeva and labelled him as an 'unbaked earthen pot'. Gorobakkaka, another elderly saint, also confirmed Muktabai's verdict. Namadeva was very upset and told all this to the God Panduranga. God consoled him but corroborated what they had said and advised Namadeva to go to Visoba Khechar and request him to be his guru and undergo sadhana for Self-realization. After this incident, Namadeva became a great friend and admirer of Muktabai and her brothers. He composed hundreds of abhangas on the life and philosophy of Nivruttinatha, Jnanadeva, Sopana and Muktabai.

Jnanadeva voluntarily entered samadhi at Alandi at the age of twenty-one, after writing his immortal commentary on the Bhagavad-Gita and Amritanubhava. He also wrote many miscellaneous abhangas on bhakti, on the importance of Nama-samkirtana, kirtana and other such topics. In only eight months' time after Jnanadeva's samadhi, the remaining two brothers and Muktabai also left the world. According to one historical record, Muktabai breathed her last in 1294. Another date given by some scholars is 1296. Her samadhi is at Edalabad. A story is told that Muktabai passed away in a flash of lightning while performing a kirtana.

From this account of Muktabai's life and philosophy, it will be clear to the reader that Nivruttinatha, Jnanadeva, Sopana and Muktabai were born muktas, liberated souls. Their message to posterity is that all those who want to be mukta should leave aside sensuous pleasures and desires, love God, spend each and every moment of this precious birth in God's company. Muktabai warns us not to enter into fruitless intellectual discussions about God, but experience Reality for ourselves. She tells us again and again, 'Do not be led away by this transient world, turn Godwards, see Him everywhere, be mukta yourself and make others free.'
References

1. In Santa Kavayitri, Piroj Anandakar gives her maiden name as Minakshi. In Maharashtra Santa Kavayitri, J. R. Ajagaokar gives her name as Rukmini. In Mysticism in Maharashtra, R. D. Ranade gives her name as Rakhumabai. In Sartha Jnaneshwari, S.V. Dandekar mentions both the names Rukmini and Rukhumabai.

2. ibid., 450.276.
4. ibid., 200.1175.
5. N. M. Sakhare, op. cit., gives only forty-two abhangas from Muktabai's pen. A. N. Deshpande in Prachin Marathi Vangamyacha Itihasa (1932) Part 1, mentions twenty-four ovis; Tatische Abharga and Changadeva - Muktabai Samvada has eighteen abhangas.

6. N. M. Sakhare, ibid., 164.3.
7. ibid., 166.19.
8. ibid., 166.29.
10. ibid., 45.1.

11. A. N. Deshpande, in his book, op. cit., says 'According to L. R. Pangarkar and W. L. Bhave, these abhangas must have been by Muktabai and nobody else. But J. R. Ajagaokar, op. cit., maintains that abhangas are not from Muktabai's pen because here she refers to her name as Muktabai which she has not done anywhere else. In all abhangas she refers to herself as Muktai and not Muktabai.

14. N. M. Sakhare, op. cit., 168.42.
15. ibid., 167.3.
16. ibid., 168.7.
17. ibid., 168.8.
18. ibid., 169.10.

19. The original abhanga of Changadeva to this effect is quoted by R. D. Ranade in his 'Mysticism in Maharashtra,' in the History of Indian Philosophy, 1933, Vol. VII.46.
Religious and Cultural Life in Ancient Kashmir

L. N. DHAR

KASHMIR IS the only state in India to possess an authentic account of its history from earliest times. Accounts of the valley of Kashmir have been written exhaustively, yet critically, by the great sons of its soil. Kashmirian literature is very rich in information about Kashmir.

The State of Jammu and Kashmir covers an area of 86,024 square miles including the portion held by Pakistan (roughly thirty thousand square miles) and extends from 32.17° to 36.58° N and from 73.27° to 80.72° E. In very remote times, the valley was originally a lake and its waters were blocked near Varahmulla (Baramulla). In the words of Sir Francis Younghusband, the lake must have been:

‘...twice the length and three times the width of the Lake of Geneva, and completely encircled by snowy mountains as high and higher than Mount Blanc; while in the immediately following glacial period mighty glaciers came winding down the Sind, Lidar, and other valleys, even to the very edge of the water.’

In the words of Sir Walter Lawrence:

‘...the valley is an emerald set in pearls, a land of lakes, clear streams, green turf, magnificent trees and mighty mountains—where the air is cool and the water sweet...’

Kashmir's greatest historian, Kalhana, the author of Rajatarangini describes his native land as:

‘It is a country where the sun shines gently, for his father [Kashyapa], created the place [Kashmir] as if for his own glory. Big and ever bigger houses of considerable height; learning; saffron; icy cool water; and grapes which are rare even in heaven; all these are common here...Kailash is the best place in the three worlds, the Himalayas are the best part of Kailash, and Kashmir is the best place in the Himalayas.’

The Vedic Aryans, after settling in the Sapta-Sindhu region of Aryavarta, moved throughout India. Waves of such migrations must have been attracted by the charming Himalayas. From Himachal

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Pradesh many Aryans moved towards the north-eastern side and entered the valley of Kashmir via Kashtwat (Kashtiwari), Ramju (Ramban), Chandra-Bhaga basin, Vanshalla (Banihal) and Uttarsu (Uma Nagri). This ancient route is followed even today by the people of Kashtiwari and Bhadarwah. But some great shrines of the hoary past are all located towards the southern side. The holy cave of Sri Amarnath, the Nila-nag spring (Verinag), Ashoka’s ancient temple at Sukhlethar (Vethavatur) (now existing no more), the holy Martand tirtha, the mighty Martand temple dedicated to the Sun God by Emperor Lalitaditya, Rudra Sandya, Tri Sandya and Pawan Sandya are all located toward the Southern side of the valley.

Home of Culture and Learning

In course of time Vedic culture and Sanskrit learning became very popular and grew strong roots in the valley. Not hundreds but thousands of great Kashmiri scholars in ancient times enriched Indian thought and culture.

‘For upwards of two thousand years,’ writes Grierson, the famous linguist, ‘Kashmir has been a home of Sanskrit learning, and from this small valley have issued masterpieces of history, poetry, romance, fable, and philosophy. Kashmiris are proud, and justly proud, of the literary glories of their land. ... Shaivism has found some of its most eloquent teachers on the banks of the Vitasta [Jhelum].’

Hence Kashmir has been one of the most important centres of Indian philosophy and culture. In ancient times the valley was known as the Sharda Pitha, the abode of Saraswati, Goddess of wisdom and learning. It clearly demonstrates that Kashmir was the home of scholars, seers and sages, who were greatly devoted to the cause of higher learning. There is hardly any branch of learning which the scholars of the valley had not studied and to which they did not make their own original contribution. In the fields of philosophy, religion, medicine, astronomy, architecture, sculpture, music and painting, the achievements of the people of the valley in ancient times were quite astonishing.

In the realm of philosophy, Kashmir’s achievement lies in the contribution of Trika Darshan, the Shaiva philosophy known the world over as a very precious heritage of Indian thought. It is known as the Trika Shasta because it pertains to three matters of vital importance, namely, man, his universe, and the fundamental principle which keeps on restoring order, equilibrium and harmony in a
universe disturbed by constant change. This philosophy is especially interested in man and his individual personality, and deems complete freedom (swatantra) the ultimate goal of human existence.

'Shiva, the Lord, is another name for independence. The only reality of the universe is Shiva, who is infinite consciousness and unrestricted independence. He has many other features like omnipresence, immortality and formlessness, and freedom is his nature. Shiva is the subject as well as the object, the experience as well as the experienced.'

The philosophic system of Trika Darshan was founded by Vasugupta in the eighth century A.D. He composed the Spanda Karika which contains the essence of this school of thought. He was followed by Kallata Bhatta in the ninth century. Subsequently other great thinkers came, such as Somananda, Utpala Dev, Abhinavagupta, Kshemendra, Kshemaraja and Yogaraja. Hundreds of other Kashmiri thinkers and intellectuals wrote masterpieces in this philosophy in the subsequent periods of history, enriching perennially and substantially the thought of the Bhagavad-Gita and the Upanishads and recalling at once the rationality and beauty of the truths which Indian sagas discovered in the quiet forest retreats of the Himalayas ages ago. There is no doubt that the contribution of Kashmiri scholars to Sanskrit literature and Hindu religious philosophy has been tremendous and outstanding.

The Spread of Buddhism

There is yet another aspect of the intellectual activity of the worthy sons of the valley of Kashmir, which is no less significant. All that is best and noblest in Indian civilization and culture was spread beyond the borders of India by great missionaries from Kashmir. To a great extent, the credit of spreading Buddhism in Tibet, China and Central Asia, goes to the scholars of Kashmir.

The land of Kashmir proved fertile for Buddhism. This must have happened early, perhaps even in the first century A.D., because Kanishka held the Third Buddhist Council in Kashmir under the chairmanship of Vasumitra, a Kashmiri scholar and seer. The other luminaries who participated in the conference were Ashvaghosha, Nagarjuna and Parshva. There were two important results of this Council. One was the writing, in book form, of exhaustive commentaries on the Buddhist sacred texts. These known as Mahavibhasha, were regarded as an encyclopaedia of Buddhism. The other important result was the division of the Buddhist Church into two sects—
Hinayana and Mahayana. There is every reason to think that the *Upadesha Shastra* and *Vibhasha Shastra* were the works of Kashmiri scholars. Buddhism continued to flourish in the valley, for Huien-Tsang, who visited Kashmir in A.D. 631, found over a hundred Buddhist monasteries which enjoyed popular favour and respect.

Hence Kashmir had become a strong base for the advancement of Indian culture in Central Asia. The literary finds from Central Asia, and from Tibetan and Chinese sites, and the investigations carried out by Sir Aurel Stein, Grundwedel, Pelliot, and others show clearly that many regions in these countries were thoroughly Indianized, with the Kharoshthi script in use and with Sanskrit studies popular. Kashmiri scholars translated innumerable Sanskrit books into the popular spoken languages of the people living in these countries. In fact, the career of the great Kumarajiva, one of the greatest *acharyas* of the entire country, shows how close was Kashmir’s connection with the cultural expansion of India into China. Kumarajiva was mainly responsible for organizing one of the most remarkable movements of intellectual transmission in history, by which the great literature of Mahayana Buddhism in all its aspects was translated into Chinese.

For Mahayana and Sanskrit Buddhism* one has to turn to Kashmir and its great intellectuals. Besides Kumarajiva, Buddhayasas and Gunavarman also did a lot in translating Sanskrit texts into Chinese and in spreading Buddhism in far-off places. Similarly, many great men of Kashmir did commendable work in Tibet. Some of these great men are Sambhota, Sarvajnanadeva, and Sakya Shribhadra. Huien Tsang had to confess centuries later that Kashmir had been from remote times distinguished for learning and they (Kashmiris) were fond of learning, both orthodox (Buddhism) and heterodox (Hinduism).

**Architecture**

No description of the religious life of ancient Kashmir would be complete without specific mention of the monuments of the valley. The *Rajatarangini* of Kalhana has recorded in great detail the construction of temples, *maths*, *viharas* and other religious edifices built by the Hindu and Buddhist monarchs and noblemen. In the words of a western art critic:

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*By ‘Sanskrit Buddhism’ is meant the Buddhist literature written in the Sanskrit language.*
Ancient India has nothing more worthy of its early civilization than the grand remains of Kashmir; the massive, the grotesque and the elegant in architecture may be admired in many parts of India, but nowhere are to be seen the counterparts of the classically graceful, yet symmetrically massive edifices of Kashmir, and in beauty and position as immensely superior.

The great Indian antiquarian Sir Alexander Cunningham has observed that the superiority of the Kashmirian architecture over all other Indian buildings would appear to have been known to the Hindus themselves, for one of their names for the people of Kashmir is Shastra Shilpina or 'architects', a term which could have been applied to them on account of their well-known skill in building. Even now the Kashmiris are the most expert handicraftsmen of the East and it is not difficult to believe that the same people who at present excel all the other orientals as weavers, goldsmiths, and caligraphers, must have been the most eminent of Indian architects.

The grandeur and beauty of some of the monuments, in spite of the fact that they bore the brunt of political vicissitudes, strike wonder in the mind, even in their present dilapidated condition. The best preserved of these temples are to be found at Martand, Avantipur, Buniar and Wangat. The Martand temple of Emperor Lalitaditya (A.D. 724—61) is a superb specimen of the art of ancient Kashmir. It would be in the fitness of things to quote here the opinions of three western scholars about this temple. Writes Sir Aurel Stein:

'It is no longer possible to trace with certainty the cities and remains of all the towns and structures which owed their existence to Lalitaditya. But those among them which ... the king had constructed near the 'Tirtha' of the same name, are still the most striking objects of ancient Hindu architecture in the Valley. Even in their present state of decay they command admiration both by their imposing dimensions and by the beauty of their architectural design and decoration.'

Sir Francis Younghusband writes:

'... built on the most sublime site occupied by any building in the world,—finer far than the site of the Parthenon, or of the Taj, or of St. Peters, or of the Escorial,—we may take it as the representative, or rather the culmination of all the rest, and by it we must judge the people of Kashmir at their best.

'On a perfectly open and even plain, gently sloping away from a background of snowy mountains looking directly out on the entire
length both of the smiling Kashmir valley and of the snowy ranges which bound it—so situated, in fact, as to be encircled by, yet not overwhelmed by, snowy mountains—stand the ruins of a temple second only to the Egyptians’ in massiveness and strength and the Greeks’ in elegance and grace. . . . No one without an eye for natural beauty would have chosen that special site for the construction of a temple, and no one without an inclination to the ephemeral and transient would have built it on so massive and enduring a scale.”

Wrote a German art critic, H. Goetz:

‘The temple of Martand set the model for Kashmiri Hindu Art in all the following centuries. Thus Lalitaditya must be regarded as the founder not only of a short-lived empire, but also of six centuries of Kashmiri Hindu Art.’

Hindu rule in Kashmir ended in 1339, when the valley passed under the domination of a Muslim dynasty known as the Shah-miri dynasty. It was the end of an era, and also the beginning of a new one. It was Akbar who captured Kashmir in 1587. Moghul rule was followed by Afghan rule (1751—1819). Then came Sikh rule, under Maharaja Ranjit Singh, which lasted for only twenty-seven years. The present state of Jammu and Kashmir is the creation of Maharaja Gulab Singh (1846—57) the founder of the Hindu Dogra rule in Kashmir.

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3. I.41-3.
Kalidasa’s Concept of Dharma

KAMALA RATNAM

THE ENTRY of denominational faiths from outside India, and the rise of individually preached systems like Buddhism and Jainism, created confusion in the meaning of the word dharma. They have weakened its original connotation. Dharma stood for a way of life, culture, a set of values which helped an individual and the society to hold together and to function as a harmonious whole. Dharma is literally that by which one is held together (धिपते प्रज्वली द्वारे); it is his identity, his whole personality, the essence of his being and his natural and rightful function. Thus the dharma of the sun is to give light, fire to burn, water to wet, and so on. Similarly, in a mundane sense, the dharma of a knife is to cut, of medicine to heal. The way of living, culture and the set of ethical values derived from the universal concept of dharma give human society its worth and value, and distinguish it from the animal world. However, association with other systems and faiths have detracted from the original concept of dharma and have narrowed it down to mean only ‘religion’. Now, religion is concerned with man’s relationship with God, his concepts and beliefs about God, and as such it is a highly individual and personal affair. Dharma, on the other hand, is a universally applicable phenomenon. It does not change from person to person or from one society to another. It is the inexorable moral law which applies to all human beings in the same measure, everywhere and at all times. Dharma transcends individual differences, beliefs and disbeliefs.

Kalidasa’s concept of dharma is in this broader and wider sense of the word. For him it is duty more than anything else, the aim and very purpose for which a man is born. The purpose of man’s life is very clearly formulated by our elders. It is the four aims of life, dharma, artha, kama and moksha (धर्म आर्थक कमा मोक्ष). Dharma is to be followed or practised throughout life, whereas artha and kama, earning of money and enjoyment of worldly pleasures are to be achieved in the adult period when one leads the life of a grihastha, a householder. Moksha is the ultimate aim or object in life and one has to strive for

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it in the last two stages of life, vanaprastha and sannyasa, after more or less retiring from worldly pursuits.

Verses five to eight of Canto I of the Raghuvamsha summarize Kalidasa's concept of dharma. One must be pure in thought and deed from one's very birth; one must not leave unfinished a task which has been begun. The depth of the sea and the height of the sky must be the limit for one's ambition. And for this, one has to perform sacrifices regularly, give due consideration to the needs of others, never hesitate to deliver punishment where it is due and to be constantly vigilant, that is, be alert and wake up to danger before it is too late.*

As for artha and kama, Kalidasa says, wealth is to be accumulated so that it may be used for the needy. One should speak less in order to uphold the truth (advice little followed in modern times). One should have ambition to conquer for the glory of the Motherland; one should perform faithfully the prescribed duties of a householder and indulge in the charms of the opposite sex only with a view to having excellent progeny.

For this it is necessary to observe the four stages of life and strictly adhere to the programme chalked out for each stage. Study and acquisition of knowledge in the first twenty-five years, and then enjoyment of worldly life as a young householder are enjoined. In the period of waning youth, beyond the age of fifty, when physical powers are on the decline, one should follow the path of the munis or sages with the aim of giving up this body after having taken maximum service from it for the good of the people.

These four verses, written in masterly style, in their brevity of sound and sense reveal the poet's entire concept of dharma. The scope of each phase of life, brahmacharya, grihastha, vanaprastha and sannyasa, has been clearly defined, specified and explained with scores of examples from living men and women, gods and sages, fruits and flowers, birds and animals and even from insects like the bhramara, bee, in Shakuntalam, all of which people the world of Kalidasa and work with perfect consciousness and discipline.

* सोहङ्गाणांहुन्नानामेवसौधकार्यादम् । धार्मिकर्षीतिशासनानामोक्षयर्यादम् ॥
  कः निराधारायमानायां नित्याचाराय नित्याज्ञानायाम् ।
  साक्षात्संप्रायायं सत्य सत्यविद्याम् । यथा सदृशस्यस्य प्रज्ञय शरणात्मकायम् ॥
  चालिसावस्त्तविश्वाया गौरवभित्रविज्ञाय । सत्यनेत्र निन्दगुरे सत्यनेत्रविज्ञाय ॥
Dharma and Spiritual Development

A reference to Kalidasa's actual use of the word 'dharma' will help to further elucidate his ideas. In verse thirteen of Canto I of the Raghuvamsha, Kalidasa describes the physique of King Dilipa thus:

Dilipa was the very embodiment of the dharma of a Kshatriya, with a well-formed and strong chest, broad shoulders like those of a bull, long arms like the sturdy boughs of the Sal tree, and a body completely fit to carry out all tasks facing it. Strength and physical fitness are the special features for the tasks of a Kshatriya, indeed, as they are of all human beings, men and women alike.*

At another place, Kalidasa says that 'the children of Manu (or man) derive their protection from their own prowess' (स्ववीकर्षिता हि मनोः सानुविता). They do not need aid from outside sources for self-protection. Parvati, a young and beautiful woman, is performing tapas, penance, which seems far beyond her physical capacities. In Kumarasambhavam Shiva accosts her in the disguise of a student and asks her:

'Yong lady! Do you engage in austerities consistent with your strength? Because in the last analysis it is the body which is the means of realizing dharma.'† If you disregard the limits and capabilities of your body you will not achieve dharma, on the contrary you will harm yourself.

Kalidasa's view of dharma is also very catholic. Parvati has failed to win the affection of Shiva with her physical charms. Madana, the God of Love, accompanied by his friend, Vasanta, the Spring season in full bloom, came to help Parvati to attract the attention of Lord Shiva, who was practising austerities. All their attempts failed and in the process Madana himself was burnt by the third eye of Shiva. Then Parvati, finding Kamadeva reduced to ashes before her very eyes, lost all interest in her physical charms.‡ Her exquisite beauty is excellently praised by the poet in the First Canto of Kumarasambhavam: Like a beatifully painted picture, or a delicate lotus-bud opening to the warm rays of the sun, was her body so perfectly proportioned.§

* अयूर्वीरको वृत्तिक्रम: शास्त्रसूत्रहमाएँ। शास्त्रमित्रसंथि सेवै शानो धर्म हि धिता।
‡ धनि स्वस्वृवत्तु प्रवतिः प्रवत्ती। गर्भासांवर्गसाधनः। v.33
‡ तपस्यासारं शहु गतिपति विनाकिता: हर्मामोरोपया सतो।
‡ निनित्रण: कृत्यं इत्येव पापति प्रयत्नेऽप्रत्येकं सोभयं। हि सास्त्रः। v.1
§ उपनिषदेऽवित्तिजै मिष्य शुमनुमिलिन्तिविवाहिकित्रम्।
*वेश्वर तत्वावलिप्तस्मृतिः अयूर्वीरिः नवयोगे। v.1.32
Yet it failed to win the affection of the Lord. So Paravati, dejected and disappointed, lost respect for physical beauty and decided to engage herself in spiritual austerities.

Beauty can only be fulfilled when it succeeds in pleasing the beloved and can evoke a similar response in him. Hence in order to give meaning to her beauty and to become the recipient of the love and affection of a husband like Shiva, Parvati decides to perform tapas.*

Parvati has taken permission from her father and mother and has started penance in which she is so successful that sages and rishis from neighbouring ashramas come to see her. She has bathed and purified her body, she has offered oblations, and she has made adequate study (adhitinim). It has to be noted that the poet makes special mention of the fact that Parvati decided to disregard her special charms for the duration of the tapas. Her mind is now solely fixed on her spiritual advancement. And it is then that the neighbouring sages and scholars come (acheras, acharanas, those who practise knowledge, learning), age is no consideration.† A brilliant youth practising dharma receives respect and homage from his elders. This has again been emphasized by the poet when he says, 'Age is no consideration for brilliant people'. (देवस ग्नि न वद्यः श्रीमते).

From what has been said above, it would appear that by the practice of dharma (धर्मशास्त्र) Kalidasa meant a good and a full life, of self-contentment and self-fulfilment, lived with love and devotion for the welfare of the whole of mankind, leading to realization of the Supreme, or, in other words, moksha.

In all his works the main theme of Kalidasa is dharma or the path of duty. Nothing lasting can be obtained by mere physicality or self-indulgence. One has to sacrifice oneself before one can achieve anything. Total surrender or complete self-effacement is the means of fulfilment. The examples of Parvati and Shakuntala more than prove the point. Both succeed in their lives when they rise above body-consciousness and develop their spiritual capabilities. This journey in dharma has been painstakingly described by the poet in the

* देवस ग्नि न वद्यः श्रीमते
† देवस ग्नि न वद्यः श्रीमते

v.2

v.16
lives of individuals and gods as well as nations and dynasties. In his *magnum opus, Raghuvamsa*, Kalidasa describes the vicissitudes of the House of Raghu, how it expanded to its farthest geographical limits with the conquests of Raghu and how the hearts of the people of that great empire were won by Rama and the rule of law established, only to lose this glory and sink to the lowest depths because of the weaknesses of the twenty-fourth ruler of the dynasty, (beginning with Dilipa), Agnivarna, by name. Agnivarna is a debauch, totally given to the pleasures of the flesh, and he dies a premature death. But even in the lowest state of degradation, dharma does not die. The queen of Agnivarna is with child. This unborn child is the hidden seed of dharma which, in time, will sprout and dharma will be established again. Our poet never loses hope. He knows that dharma is not based on physicality; dharma is pure spirit and it will rise again. In the *Meghaduta* (Uttaramegha) the poet sings:

‘Whom does uninterrupted happiness attend or unending woe befall? Like the turning edge of the wheel, Fortune has its rise and fall.’

This same idea is propounded in the *Gita*, as well as symbolized in the *dharmachakra*.

**A Universal Ideal**

Kalidasa is a poet of life; he depicts life in its fullness and totality. Since dharma and *kama* occupy the most creative period of our lives, he dwells on these problems in detail. He delves deep into man-woman relationships and tells us that progress and prosperity can be attained only where such a relationship is consummated for the purpose of dharma and not for lust. In *Kumarasambhava* we read that Parvati, at the time of her marriage, is told:

With a full mind you have to practise dharma with your husband, Shiva.’

This is in complete contrast to the lustful marriage (*gandharva-vivaha*) of Shakuntala and Dushyanta. The marriage of these two succeeds only when both of them receive the blows of life and rise to a higher spiritual level. This is the reason why women must be

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* कर्मकालं सुशुक्कुपागं सुकृष्टमेकात्तरं । न नरिष्कमेच्युतर्व । दशा च दक्मेत्तर्गमेण॥ ४६
† विजेते तदाहं वह वर्षतिर्य कार्यं तया मृत्युंबिष्यषे । vii.83
respected. The poet handles his women characters with great care and deep respect. His ideal amongst the gods seems to be Parvati, and amongst humans, Sita and Shakuntala. Urvashi, Malavika and others seem to be colourless and failures. Dharma in the family cannot be achieved without the help and inspiration received from women:

'Good women are the sole cause of good and moral deeds.'*

Similarly, no nation or dynasty can prosper unless it educates, respects and honours its women. The decline of the House of Raghu began when King Dasharatha lost respect for women and married three wives, when Rama did an injustice to Sita, and when Agnivarna and his like began to treat women like dolls of flesh and reduced them to so many lumps of earth.

It is this practical and universal ideal of dharma, the moral law, the total flowering and flourishing of the spirit, which Kalidasa tries to elaborate in his works and upon which is based his metaphysical philosophy of Vedanta or the unity of the universe.

* किशांनां खलु धर्माष्ट्रां सतस्यो मुलकारंम् I vi.13

SRI SARADA MATH & RAMAKRISHNA SARADA MISSION

SRI SARADA MATH

As early as 1894, Swami Vivekananda expressed the desire that a Math or a monastic organization for women would be started for those who through the inspiration of Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother would dedicate their lives to the ideal of renunciation and service.

On 2 December 1954, with the completion of the centenary celebrations of the birth of the Holy Mother, a most auspicious moment when the world at large first became aware of the great power that was embodied in Sri Sarada Devi, the dream of Swami Vivekananda to start a Math for women was fulfilled. Swami Vivekananda had started the Math for men on the western bank of the Ganga, and his plan was to start a Math for women on the opposite side of the river. According to his plan, a plot of about six acres of land with some buildings on it was purchased on the eastern bank