

INSTITUTE BOOKLETS: 28

THE MEETING OF EAST AND WEST
IN
SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

By

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA



THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION
INSTITUTE OF CULTURE
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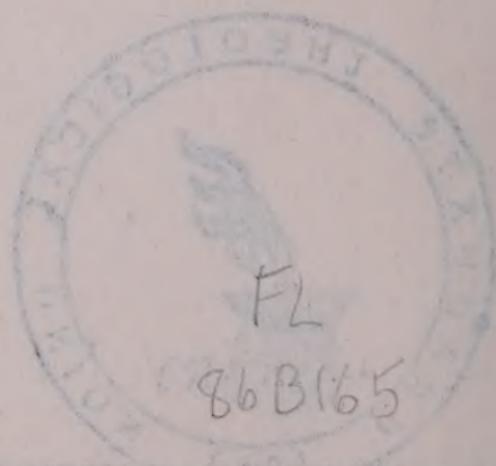
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The Meeting of East and West in Swami Vivekananda is based on a public lecture given by Swami Ranganathananda, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order and till recently Secretary of this Institute of Culture, at the Vivekananda Hall of this Institute as a special lecture on 9 January 1962. Earlier, he had delivered this lecture at the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, London, on 23 April 1961. This lecture was later brought out in the November and December 1967 issues of the monthly *Bulletin* of this Institute. It is now being separately brought out in our Institute Booklets series in the interest of a wider circulation.

THE MEETING OF EAST AND WEST IN SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

I AM glad to be called to address this distinguished audience on the subject of this evening's talk, 'The Meeting of East and West in Swami Vivekananda'. It is a great theme, a theme which can keep us engaged for days and days together. What Swami Vivekananda gave to humanity during his short life of thirty-nine years, five months, and twenty-two days, of which only a bare nine years formed the period of his public ministry, will take humanity centuries to understand and assimilate. He was a spiritual and intellectual genius of a rare order with a compelling message to modern man. That is why, perhaps, the organizers of this meeting chose this theme, a theme which is dear to the hearts of men and women both in East and West.

EAST VERSUS WEST

The words East and West are here used

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to signify the Orient and the Occident and not in their contemporary cold-war contexts. During the last few centuries, these two halves of humanity had been brought together through the technological, commercial, and colonial expansion of the Occident; now that the colonial aspect of this relationship is fast coming to an end, the problem of the spiritual and human integration of the two halves is assuming special significance. The meeting of East and West is no more a theoretical question today. It was after the First World War that this problem first came to the fore and assumed importance; and the League of Nations had a department added to it charged with this mission—the Committee for Intellectual Cooperation. That did some good work in its own way, and now, since the end of the Second World War, the problem has assumed greater urgency and importance in the wake of the liberation of many Afro-Asian nations from the Western colonial yoke. There is need to energetically initiate steps to bridge the gulf between man and man, between culture and culture; and this is being done today on a world scale by the

U.N.O. through its general and specialized agencies, and more especially through its UNESCO, which is one of the finest international organizations ever set up by man, with high objectives and constructive programmes. The UNESCO, in my opinion, has done more creditable work than the other wings of the U.N.O. in cementing human unity.

VIVEKANANDA AND THE MODERN WORLD

This great ideal of human unity is informing and sustaining several movements and institutions in the East as well as in the West. The modern world owes a deep debt of gratitude to Swami Vivekananda for having voiced, more than sixty years ago, powerfully and effectively, this deep hankering of the human heart.

After referring, in his lecture on 'Vedānta and Its Application to Indian Life' delivered in Madras, on his return from the West, in 1897, to the first blessing which the ancient Upaniṣads of India convey to modern man in their message of strength and fearlessness, Vivekananda said (*The*

Complete Works, Vol. III, Eighth Edition, pp. 240-41):

‘The second great idea which the world is waiting to receive from our Upaniṣads is the solidarity of this universe. The old lines of demarcation and differentiation are vanishing rapidly. Electricity and steam-power are placing the different parts of the world in inter-communication with each other, and, as a result, we Hindus no longer say that every country beyond our own land is peopled with demons and hobgoblins, nor do the people of Christian countries say that India is only peopled by cannibals and savages. When we go out of our country, we find the same brother-man, with the same strong hand to help, with the same lips to say godspeed; and sometimes they are better than in the country in which we are born. . . . Our Upaniṣads say that the cause of all misery is ignorance; and that is perfectly true when applied to every state of life, either social or spiritual. It is ignorance that makes us hate each other, it is through ignorance that we do not know and do not love each other. As soon as we come to know each other, love

comes, must come, for are we not one? Thus we find solidarity coming in spite of itself. Even in politics and 'sociology, problems that were only national twenty years ago can no more be solved on national grounds only. They are assuming huge proportions, gigantic shapes. They can only be solved when looked at in the broader light of international grounds. International organizations, international combinations, international laws are the cry of the day. That shows the solidarity.'

Vivekananda not merely voiced these international aspirations, but also lived a life of that synthesis between East and West. His personality, his outlook, and his sympathies were international and human. And the way he developed into such a personality is a fascinating and rewarding study for all those who pay homage to this ideal and vision. To have the guidance of a great leader of the stature of Vivekananda, who had no provincial limits to his sympathies, whose heart embraced the whole of humanity, and who had the power, intellectual as well as spiritual, to impress himself upon the thought and culture of

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the modern age, is a rich and unique experience for the modern world. Nations, today, are in need of leaders of vision, of broad sympathy, and of great energy. India has been very fortunate in this field in this age of her tremendous transition. When she was entering into the modern age of her history, when she was passing through a momentous and critical period of transition, she was immensely fortunate to have had the guidance of a few great leaders who can be classed among the great leaders of mankind in virtue of their stature and attainments.

THE MODERN RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

In the nineteenth century, India started writing the first pages of what we may call her modern history. This was made possible by her contact with the West through the United Kingdom. In the beginning of this contact, India experienced a period of bewilderment and confusion. But as years passed, the western leaven began to enter into the body and soul of India stirring it to its depths. It created a ferment which soon issued forth as a national renaissance,

gentle and halting in the beginning, but, gathering momentum and force as the century rolled on, became a mighty flood in the last decade of the century. In the process, it threw up two gigantic personalities, Raja Ram Mohun Roy, the initiator, and Swami Vivekananda, the consummator.

Raja Ram Mohun Roy's contribution to the birth and development of this renaissance and to making it flow into constructive channels is immense. He was a remarkable man. The whole of India today and also the West are indebted to this great personality for having voiced the aspirations of the twentieth-century man even in the early nineteenth century. He was a great man in every sense. He was born in 1774 and passed away in 1833. He hailed from Bengal, which was the first among all the regions of India to experience the impact of western culture in a massive way, and which as a consequence became the pioneer of this renaissance. Ram Mohun Roy represented the synthesis of East and West in himself. He was intellectually alert and spiritually sensitive, intensely human, with vast sympathies for the freedom and happi-

ness of man everywhere, utterly unprovincial and universal in outlook. He was an outstanding scholar, journalist, and writer with command of several languages, including English, Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, and his own Bengali. This modern Indian renaissance, which bids fair to affect the culture and thought not only of India but also of the modern world in a profound way, could not have had a more worthy pioneer than this manysided genius. He can be considered to be the morning star of this great renaissance. He was in the United Kingdom during the last year of his life to represent the interests of the then Moghul Emperor of India before the Committee of the British Parliament, when he met several distinguished leaders of thought in the U.K.; and he passed away, while still on his mission, in Bristol in 1833.

There was nothing narrow, parochial, or small about this great man. He was big in every sense; and he imparted that bigness to his country's renaissance. *But he came a bit too early.* Neither India nor the West was then prepared to understand or to accept the implications of his message

which spoke in terms of man as man and not in terms of a section thereof, and which upheld the great ideal of equality between nations and cultures and the synthesis of the material and the spiritual.

RAMAKRISHNA AND THE INDIAN
RENAISSANCE

But he came, lit up the torch of human freedom, fraternity, and equality, and passed it on to his worthy successors who were also great, though not so outstanding. Five decades rolled on; the torch burned brighter and brighter until it became a mighty blaze at the end of the century in the personalities of Sri Ramakrishna (1836-86) and Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), in whom were gathered up and fused the rich cultural and spiritual inheritances of East and West. We can never understand the true stature of these two master minds of modern India except in this world context. They were not just little saints or little leaders of thought who give out a message of salvation and throw up a sect or a creed in a particular corner of the world. They were men endowed with the deepest vision and

the widest sympathy, and they lived and worked for the fulfilment of human hopes and aspirations everywhere. In Sri Ramakrishna, we find the fullest expression of the eternal spirit of India. As Romain Rolland expresses it in his *Life of Ramakrishna* (1947 Edition, p. 14):

‘The man whose image I here evoke was the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people. Although he has been dead forty years, his soul animates modern India. He was no hero of action like Gandhi, no genius in art or thought like Goethe or Tagore. He was a little village Brahmin of Bengal, whose outer life was set in a limited frame without striking incident, outside the political and social activities of his time. But his inner life embraced the whole multiplicity of men and Gods.’

In him, India’s hoary spiritual legacy became alive and vital. And this legacy had always upheld the values of the universal and human, emphasized the spiritual growth of man, and actively promoted the principle of toleration and universal acceptance; Sri Ramakrishna represented an India which

remembers herself in her ancient Vedas and Upaniṣads, in Buddha and Śaṅkara, and which continues to exist as a beacon of spiritual hope for man everywhere. She has ever paid homage to the highest and best in man and endeavoured to unite man with man through the indwelling Divine. It was that India, ever-aging but never old, that found its form and voice in our age in Sri Ramakrishna. His advent was a great event in the history of modern India; for in him, she rediscovered herself and re-authenticated for herself the fundamentals of her culture and religion. He strengthened the tree of Indian culture by nourishing and watering its roots and thus made a lasting contribution to the energizing and flowering of that renaissance.

We find as a running theme of Indian history the struggle to realize the meaning of human existence, to clear up the mystery of man and God. This is the meaning of religion according to Indian thought—the struggle of the human mind to peer through the mystery of existence and come face to face with truth. India did not subscribe to the idea of religion as a

matter merely of creed, dogma, or conformity. Religion is the passion of the human heart to *experience* God. In matters spiritual, India has never been lukewarm. This passion and this earnestness pervade her ancient literature—the Upaniṣads. And these Upaniṣads put their stamp on all the subsequent philosophical, religious, and cultural developments of India. In this line of the Upaniṣadic tradition came Kṛṣṇa, the teacher of the *Gītā*, Buddha, Śaṅkara, the saints of medieval India and, in our time, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. These teachers taught in unison that divinity, purity, and perfection are inherent in the human soul and that the goal of life is to manifest this divine within. Thus defining the scope of religion and the goal of human existence, these great teachers and the movements proceeding from them had educated the Indian mind in the spiritual basis of human existence. India had responded to their message and held fast to the spiritual ideal in prosperity and adversity alike. This had given her an amazing vitality which explains the arresting continuity of her culture and life. Five

thousand years do not mean much in the context of evolution, even of human evolution; but in the context of the history and career of the various cultures that have come and played their part on the stage of the world, India's record is impressive both as to length and to quality. When all other cultures have played their parts and disappeared, India's culture has continued to exist, getting richer and stronger through her remarkable capacity for new assimilations and adjustments in every epoch of her history.

This arresting phenomenon is happening once again in our own time. The modern renaissance in India, which arose in the wake of her contact with the West, is infusing a new youthful vigour into her body and soul, and achieving two national purposes: Firstly, the assimilation of the spirit of the dynamic culture of the modern West, the reassessment of her own ancient heritage in the light of the total human legacy, the synthesis of the ancient and the modern in the world's heritage, and the ensuring thus of a dynamic national life and the thread of historic national continuity. Secondly, she

is also re-entering, after a few centuries of immobilization, into the main stream of international life and thought and pouring out her quota of light and wisdom in the service of the rest of the world. It was these two purposes that she achieved through Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

Sri Ramakrishna's life span was barely fifty years. But it was an intense life devoted to the search for spiritual truth, in the first part, and its dissemination among eager seekers, in the second. Such an intense life which re-lives the spiritual life of a whole people is the most dynamic force in history. It ceases to be just an individual life and becomes a world-moving force. Human history is the product of forces partly arising from external nature and partly from man himself. The ratio of this combination will vary according to the stage of cultural development reached by a society. The higher the stage of development the more the human contribution. And among such human contributions there is one that is dynamic and significant. That comes from the hero, the specially gifted individual in society. He fuses in himself the values,

aspirations, and wills of his people, and marches onward carrying other members of the society with him, immediately or in due course. And the most dynamic among such heroes are the God-men, men ablaze with divinity. Indian history has felt the impact of several such heroes who became her history's epoch-makers; and the most outstanding of them all were spiritual men, men of God. Each one of them represented in varying degrees a gathering up of the past national heritage, a fusing of the historical and the contemporary urges and aspirations in themselves, and the setting in motion of a dynamic force for human betterment. Indian cultural history, in contrast to her political history, owes much to these epoch-makers. The first of such, of the pre-historic period, is Śrī Kṛṣṇa, whose great thought and energy are palpable even today. His is the most pervasive influence on Indian culture and thought; next come Buddha and Śaṅkara, in the historic period.

And in our own time, there appeared Sri Ramakrishna. The mass of spiritual energy which he manifested in his lifetime did not vanish with the death of his body. Its

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power of impact has continued and will continue for centuries to come. Physical death has no significance in the case of personalities such as Sri Ramakrishna; they hardly lived in the physical plane even when they were alive. Each one of them is like a cyclotron which generates and holds immense energies within itself, the range and quality of which cannot be explained in terms of the size of the machine itself. Sri Ramakrishna's body was frail; but within that frail body was contained enormous energy—energy which was released by his penetration into the spiritual depths of his being. It was a mass of spiritual energy consisting of wisdom and purity, love and compassion. Sri Ramakrishna was ablaze with divinity. It was the play of this tremendous divine energy that was witnessed in a little room in the temple of Dakshineswar, near Calcutta, away from the rush and turmoil of the modern civilization which was centred in that city, the then capital of India. And yet, the energies released in the precincts of that temple had their powerful impact, first, on Calcutta, and, later, on other parts of India and

abroad. This diffusion was accomplished by his foremost disciple, Swami Vivekananda, whose training and outlook were the opposite of his master's, and yet complementary to his, for which reason the master chose him as his effective conduit. In the words of Romain Rolland (*Life of Vivekananda*, 1947 Edition, p. 3):

‘The great disciple whose task it was to take up the spiritual heritage of Ramakrishna and disseminate the grain of his thought throughout the world was both physically and morally his direct antithesis.’

THE PROFILE OF NARENDRA

Vivekananda's pre-monastic name was Narendranath Dutta, Narendranath or Naren, for short. Unlike Ramakrishna, whose wisdom and enlightenment owed nothing to institutional education, traditional or modern, Vivekananda was a full-fledged modern youth in education and upbringing when he first met Ramakrishna towards the end of 1881. In his views and outlook, he represented young India in transition. India had, by then, been exposed to the powerful influence of modern western culture for

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over half a century through the new education introduced by the British Government, which was avidly sought after by the Indian youths. Modern science, Greco-Roman history, English literature, modern western history, and modern socio-political thought opened the mind of India to the rich cultural heritage of the western peoples and roused in it a mood of questioning, self-criticism, and a general spirit of restlessness. Narendra drank freely of this education; he was a keen student of western thought with its scientific spirit and its philosophy of rationalism and humanism. This philosophy had already dominated the western mind for nearly a hundred years, and now it found a fertile soil in India also. At college, Narendra was a handsome youth, intelligent, vivacious, and energetic. He was a keen physical culturist, a devotee of music, a student of science, and a lover of philosophy. He opened himself up to the influences of all the best elements in the western heritage and became a dynamic representative of that heritage. He was a picture of strength and manliness; he possessed the Promethean spirit. And yet, this

education and achievement did not satisfy his heart; it was restless with a nameless spiritual thirst and a yearning to realize truth. It was to quench this thirst that he went to Sri Ramakrishna.

His English and Indian professors as well as his fellow-students were impressed by his intellectual brilliance. His English Principal, William Hastie, a great scholar, said of him (*The Life of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern and Western Disciples*, Fourth Edition, p. 26):

‘Narendranath is really a genius. I have travelled far and wide, but I have never yet come across a lad of his talents and possibilities even in German Universities amongst philosophical students. He is bound to make his mark in life.’

In spite of the intellectual agnosticism which modern education bred in him, he held fast to the ideals of purity and renunciation, which he had imbibed from his childhood days. He was a past master in meditation; and his passion for spiritual life grew with the years.

It was from a chance remark of Principal Hastie during a lesson on Wordsworth’s

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poem, *The Excursion*, that Narendra heard the name of his future master for the first time. Explaining the poet's reference to trance, Principal Hastie had said that such religious ecstasies were the result of purity and concentration, that it was a rare phenomenon in modern times, and that he had known only one person who had experienced that blessed state and that person was Ramakrishna of Dakshineswar.

NARENDRA'S SEARCH FOR TRUTH

Narendra soon realized the inadequacies of modern rationalism and humanism. Religion may have its faults; it may have blundered into dogmatism and intolerance; but it has a spiritual core which mankind cannot ignore without making itself poorer, said he to himself. The endeavours and conclusions of the sense-bound intellect cannot be the last word in man's search for truth. An intellectual approach to truth will end only in agnosticism; and often even in cynicism. But the whole being of man seeks to *experience* truth, to *realize* it. And he found that modern thought had no message to give to man on this theme.

This rising above rationalism to direct experience and realization, this growth of man from the sensate to the super-sensual dimension, is the special message of the Indian spiritual tradition; and Ramakrishna embodied it in himself in its fullness.

Man may sharpen his reason and intellect; he may have the best of wealth and power; he may enjoy the delights of art and literature; yet his heart will continue to be a vacuum, and a prey to tension and sorrow, till he discovers his own spiritual dimension, till he realizes God. This is the testament of Indian thought. Says the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (VI, 19):

*Yadā carmavdākāśam
veṣṭayīṣyanti mānavāḥ;
Tadā devam aviññāya
duḥkhasyānto bhaviṣyati—*

‘Even if men (through their technical efficiency) will roll up the sky like a piece of leather, they will not experience the end of sorrow without realizing God.’

Vivekananda felt the pang of this vacuum as a university student. That made him restless; he could have silenced his heart’s

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craving for truth, learnt to live with his intellectual agnosticism, and made the best of the world with his undoubted talents. But he was made of a different stuff, and meant for a different role. His passion for truth would not allow him to compromise with a humdrum life. So like a 'hart that panteth after the water-brooks', in the words of the Psalm, his heart became restless for truth, and in this mood he went from place to place, from teacher to teacher, until an inexorable destiny took him to Sri Ramakrishna. 'Is there a God?' And, if there is, 'Have you seen Him?' were the questions that this young seeker put to every teacher. The history of religion tells us that when this question has been seriously put by any seeker, he has received a positive answer. The very soul of religion lies in the yearning behind this question. None of the teachers gave him satisfactory replies; none, except one; and that was Sri Ramakrishna.

THE PROFILE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

At the suggestion of a friend that he might get a satisfactory answer from Sri

Ramakrishna, Vivekananda wended his way to the Dakshineswar temple on the left bank of the Gaṅgā, where lived Sri Ramakrishna in a small room facing the holy river. He was a strange person. He had passed through a stormy period of hankering and search for God and had realized Him, first through one path, then through another, until he traversed not only all the recognized paths of the Hindu religion, but also of Christianity and Islam. He had realized that it is the same God that is worshipped in all the religions and that 'the paths are many, but the goal is one'. This realization had made him universal in outlook and sympathy with a deep love for man everywhere. He saw man in a new light; for he saw God in the hearts of all men. He saw God both with eyes closed and with eyes open. He was God-intoxicated and yet intensely human; with a smile on his face, he greeted every visitor and enfolded him in his pure love; and hundreds visited him—men and woman, rich and poor, university students and pious householders, philosophers and artists, agnostics and holy men. He also, on his part, sought out the great and

the holy. He conversed with all with infinite tenderness and sympathy. In the midst of serious conversations on God and the spiritual life, a chance divine suggestion would send him into divine ecstasy. Coming down from that state, he would become simple and playful like a child, and enjoy much fun and frolic with his listeners, especially the youthful ones. This combination of the divine and the human in him fascinated all who went to him, and his words held them in thrall. His room was 'a mart of joy', in the words of 'M', the author of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. 'When the lotus opens', Sri Ramakrishna used to tell his young listeners, giving a parable to illustrate the magnetic influence of a man of God, 'bees come to it from all quarters on their own accord to seek its honey; it has not to send out an invitation.' This was literally true in his own case. He had prayed to the Divine Mother: 'Mother, don't get any creeds expounded through my mouth.' They are, as Jesus had expressed it, as *stones* to a hungry man. What he gave to all seekers without distinction was the *bread* of spirit-

uality. The main theme of his conversations was man growing spiritually through the manifestation of the Divine within. A procession of seekers, which included such distinguished men as the great religious leader of the Brahma Samaj, Keshab Chandra Sen, went to him from Calcutta and nearby villages ; it began as a trickle in 1875 and became a flood by the time he passed away in 1886. We get an arresting account of this pilgrimage of spiritually hungry souls to this unique teacher in that great book above referred to, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* by Mahendranath Gupta, the highly gifted and intimate householder disciple of the Master, who was the Headmaster of a Calcutta school, and who hides his personality under the pseudonym 'M'.

Referring to this book and its author in his foreword to the English edition of the book, Aldous Huxley says:

‘Making good use of his natural gifts and of the circumstances in which he found himself, “M” produced a book unique, so far as my knowledge goes, in the literature of hagiography. No other saint has had so able and indefatigable a Boswell. Never

have the small events of a contemplative's daily life been described with such a wealth of intimate detail. Never have the casual and unstudied utterances of a great religious teacher been set down with so minute a fidelity.'

NARENDRA AT THE FEET OF
SRI RAMAKRISHNA

The Master gave freely of his realizations to all who came to him; each received according to his or her need and capacity; the central theme of all his talks was spirituality and the way to achieve it; the same teaching was not given to any two seekers. No creed was expounded; no belief was criticized; but the spiritual life of the seeker was stimulated and deepened, and his vision and sympathy broadened. Thus he poured out a stream of truth and wisdom almost eighteen hours of the twenty-four. And to him went Narendra, his steps guided by a divine destiny, and asked the question which was agitating his heart for years and for which he could not get any satisfactory answer from any teacher till then: 'Sir, have you seen God?' 'Yes, my boy, I

have seen Him', replied the Master with calm and loving assurance and added: 'I see Him more intensely than I see you here; and you can also see Him.'

This was new language indeed! It is difficult to express the powerful impact which these simple words made on the mind and heart of Narendra. He felt in the depth of his being that these words came from the depths of the Master's realization; and he decided to learn more of him and from him; every day brought him to a clearer awareness of the profound spirituality of the Master and the significance of his life and realizations.

Narendra grew into full spiritual maturity under the loving guidance of Sri Ramakrishna. Unlike other disciples, Narendra tested every word of the teachings of his Master by his keen intellect and critical reason, and literally fought every inch of his way to spiritual truth and conviction. The Master on his part encouraged his gifted disciple in this. 'Test me as the money changers test their coins', the Master used to tell Narendra.

Narendra was to allude to this fact later

when, as Swami Vivekananda, he had to deal with his own highly gifted but sceptical and rebellious disciple, Miss Margaret Noble, who later became famous in East and West as Sister Nivedita. Says she in her *The Master as I Saw Him* (Sixth Edition, pp. 12-13):

‘Referring to this scepticism of mine, which was well known at the time to the rest of the class, a more fortunate disciple, long afterwards, was teasing me, in the Swami’s presence, and claiming that she had been able to accept every statement she had ever heard him make. The Swami paid little or no attention to the conversation at the time, but afterwards he took a quiet moment to say, “Let none regret that they were difficult to convince! I fought my Master for six long years, with the result that I know every inch of the way! Every inch of the way!”’

This training of Narendra at the hands of Sri Ramakrishna, by which the young dynamic intellectual became a man of God, one who saw God in himself and in all beings, one who became, like his Master, universal in his sympathy for man in the

East and the West, is a momentous chapter in modern history, fraught with great consequences for the future. Vivekananda sitting at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna is an arresting phenomenon. No two people could have been more opposite in temperament, up-bringing, and mental make-up than these two; and yet no two people have been so intimate and attuned to each other as these. One was the complement of the other; the Master continuing his being in the disciple and the disciple fulfilling the life-work and mission of the Master. Before he passed away on 16 August 1886, Sri Ramakrishna banded the handful of his young disciples, fifteen in number, into a monastic order under Narendras's leadership. In due course, they assumed monastic names, he taking the name Vivekananda, meaning the 'bliss of discrimination', before his departure to the West in 1893.

THE MEETING OF TWO MASTER-MINDS

Ramakrishna represented the eternal soul of India, calm and majestic, 'with a unifying, pacifying love for all living things',

in the words of Will Durant. In his foreword to the *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, (Sixth Edition), Mahatma Gandhi writes:

‘The story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa’s life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face. None can read the story of his life without being convinced that God alone is real and that all else is an illusion. Ramakrishna was a living embodiment of godliness. . . . His love knew no limits, geographical or otherwise. May his divine love be an inspiration to all who read the following pages.’

Vivekananda, on the other hand, represented the modern spirit of freedom and equality, manliness and energy of action. The intimate communion of the Master and the disciple demonstrated the basic unity of godliness and manliness. True godliness is the very consummation of manliness; true manliness, similarly, is an expression of godliness. As held in Indian spiritual thought, Nārāyaṇa (God) is the *sakhā* (friend) of Nara (man). As held in Christian spiritual thought, the Son of God is also the Son of man. This close communion between the ancient Indian legacy

of godliness and the modern western legacy of manliness in Ramakrishna and Vivekananda is what I have taken as the theme of tonight's lecture: *The Meeting of East and West in Swami Vivekananda*.

Ramakrishna gave himself to the world in Vivekananda. The coming together of any two gifted souls as teacher and student has always been an event of creative significance of varying measure in world history. In this case the two souls were not merely gifted but uniquely outstanding and creatively original; each was a complement to the other, and both together represented the totality of human outlooks and aspirations, tastes and temperaments. The creative significance of such a confluence is bound to be deep, abiding, and world-wide. In the words of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (II. 7):

*Āścaryo vaktā kuśalosya labdhā
āścaryo jñātā kuśalānuśiṣṭaḥ—*

‘Wonderful the teacher and very competent the disciple; wonderful becomes the seeker of knowledge when taught by a competent teacher.’

This confluence witnessed the emergence

of a glorious vision of truth, of a more perfect excellence of character than achieved hitherto in East or West, and the striving for universal human happiness and welfare. Knowledge is a powerful force. Love is another powerful force. The more universal and pure the knowledge and love, the more dynamic they become. In Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, knowledge and love shed all their limitations and became a mighty force—pure, positive, and dynamic.

This supreme consummation cannot and will not remain confined to an individual like Vivekananda. Modern world conditions and the urges and needs of modern man make its achievement in some measure, by every man and woman in the present age, a desirable ideal and an imperative necessity. Modern education needs to be shaped to that end. Education should convey the heritage of the whole world to every man and woman, so that unlimited character-efficiency may be achieved, and a global outlook may be realized, to complement the global physical unity achieved by modern technology. Here is the world significance of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda,

and the movement initiated by them. They have set in motion a powerful energy of spiritual vision dedicated to the forging of human unity through God—God dwelling in the heart of man, the God in man beckoning him to continue his evolution by going beyond his sense-bound personality to realize his divine dimension and his spiritual solidarity with all existence. It is a vision backed by the intellectual and moral vigour of Vedānta and fulfilling the urges and aspirations of modern scientific and social thought.

The education of Vivekananda in this universal vision and sympathy at the hands of his great master is a fascinating theme for all students of education and religion. There are two landmarks in this education which I would like specially to refer to. The first relates to the acceptance, by Vivekananda, after much struggle, of the truth of Śakti, the immanent aspect of Reality, the personal aspect of the impersonal Brahman; and the second relates to his acceptance of its positivistic corollary, namely, 'seeing God with eyes open', in the words of Sri Ramakrishna.

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NARENDRA'S INNER CONFLICTS

When he came to his master, Narendra was a votary of the personal but formless God as presented in the Brahma Samaj, of which he was then a member. He did not relish the idea of God either as the impersonal Absolute or as the personal Śakti, the one source of all forms and of their energies. These two represented the age-old conflict between the two schools of *jñāna* (the path of the impersonal God) and *bhakti* (the path of the personal God), with the God of the Brahma Samaj partaking of the abstractions of both. The first is the path of negation, while the second is the path of affirmation, which latter, in its full and robust forms, involves also the path of *karma* or action. The differences in approach between these cannot and should not annul the unity of their common goal. But this was what happened in India in later ages, weakening both the paths and narrowing the minds of their followers. This had meant in effect that there were two Gods—one that of the *jñāni*, and the other that of the *bhakta*. The *jñāni* dismissed the world as *māyā*, the God of the *bhakta* as a product of this *māyā*,

and the *bhakta* himself as a weak sentimentalist. The *bhakta*, on his part, dismissed the transcendent God of the *jñānī* as a pure nothingness and the *jñānī* himself as a dry, intellectual. The modern votaries of secular rationalism and scientific humanism, on the other hand, to whom the world itself is their god and reality, dismissed both the *jñānī* and the *bhakta* as vain dreamers and their gods as products of a pious wish-fulfilment.

Into this murky atmosphere of contemporary thought came the luminous vision of Sri Ramakrishna, who realized the fundamental unity of the God of the *jñānī* and the God of the *bhakta*, and the complementary character of the two paths of affirmation and negation. Romain Rolland opens his preface entitled 'To My Eastern Readers' to his *Life of Ramakrishna* with the following utterance of Sri Ramakrishna suffused with his unifying vision:

“Greeting to the feet of the *jñānī* ! Greeting to the feet of the *bhakta*! Greeting to the devout who believe in the formless God! Greeting to those who believe in God with form! Greeting to the men of

old who knew Brahman! Greeting to the modern knowers of Truth. . . ." (Ramakrishna, October 28, 1882).'

Sri Ramakrishna gently educated Narendra in this unifying vision during the six years of his discipleship. In the early stages, Narendra reacted violently to the concept of the impersonal and formless Brahman, as he had all along reacted to that of the personal God with form. To him and to many seekers of the personal God like him, the impersonal meant something inert and abstract, equivalent to the physicist's primordial nature, and the personal meant crude anthropomorphism and superstition. Sri Ramakrishna slowly made him understand the *spiritual* character of the impersonal Absolute through a convincing presentation of the philosophy of the path of negation. Brahman as the Self of all beings cannot be impersonal in the sense in which scientists present nature, or the cosmic dust, or the cosmic background material. Neither can Brahman, the One behind the many, be a person to be designated either as masculine or feminine; hence the preference of the neuter term 'It' to describe Brahman.

The path to It is the path of negation, the path of *neti, neti*; by negating all objects and entities, all predicates and concepts, and even the ego, as belonging to the world of *māyā*, the seeker approaches Brahman as the transcendental Absolute, the Unconditioned, 'from which all speech and thought recoil, not being able to grasp It', the experience of which is best expressed only through silence. Sri Ramakrishna had earlier followed this path under the guidance of his *guru*, Totapuri and attained its consummation in the experience of *nirvikalpa samādhi*.

NARENDRA AND THE CRITICAL SPIRIT IN RELIGION

Narendra soon became fascinated with this path of the 'abysmal God'. He became eager to experience *nirvikalpa samādhi*. And he had it with the gracious help of his *guru*. But when he desired to pursue this path and its bliss of the unconditioned Brahman exclusively, Sri Ramakrishna reproved him and pointed out to him the path and goal of a comprehensive spirituality, in which the paths of affirmation and negation merge, and which he was to follow, and of which

he was to be the teacher and exemplar to millions of people in the modern age.

Before meeting Narendra, Sri Ramakrishna had been heard to pray: 'O Mother, send me some one who will doubt my realizations.' Narendra's arrival at Dakshineswar signified the granting of this prayer; he was unlike all his other disciples. A staunch follower of the Brahmo Samaj cult of the personal God without form, he could not tolerate the worship of the personal God through various forms upheld in the Hindu religion and practised by his own master, Sri Ramakrishna. He used to criticize even Sri Ramakrishna's visions of divine forms and his worship of Kālī, the Divine Mother, before whom Narendra not only refused to bow down himself, but also criticized other fellow disciples for doing so. Sri Ramakrishna's reaction to this critical and even hostile attitude and conduct of his disciple was unusual and refreshingly modern. He told Narendra: 'Do not accept anything because I say so. Test everything for yourself.' Further, as mentioned earlier, the Master told him: 'Test me as the money changers test their coins.' This unique

relationship is revealed in the following passage of the *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (Sixth Edition, p. 345):

‘The liberty which Narendranath enjoyed in his association with Sri Ramakrishna was unusual, as will be gathered from the following incident. He often argued with the Master against image-worship. One day, when the latter could not convince him, he said: “Why do you come here if you won’t acknowledge my Mother?” Narendra replied: “Must I accept Her simply because I come here?” “All right”, said the Master, “ere long you shall not only acknowledge my blessed Mother, but weep in Her name.” Then addressing the other devotees he said, “This boy has no faith in the forms of God and tells me that my supersensuous experiences are hallucinations, but he is a very fine boy, of pure instincts. He does not believe in anything unless he gets direct proof. He has studied much, and is possessed of great judgement and discrimination”.’

KALI, THE DIVINE MOTHER

What did Sri Ramakrishna mean when

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he referred to Kālī as my 'Divine Mother'? What did he mean when he spoke about the worship of God with form? Why did he desire that Narendra should accept his Divine Mother?

To the unthinking observer, Kālī worshipped in the temple of Dakshinewar may be nothing more than an idol, like several other idols of gods and goddesses, 'superstitiously' worshipped by ignorant devotees. When such an unthinking observer becomes a thinking seeker, he will begin to discover meaning and significance behind all such worship, he will learn to pierce the outer crust and reach the inner truth visualized by the outer symbol. He will also understand that what a seeker seeks is *spiritual growth* and *realization* and not mere intellectual formulation.

A FELLOW STUDENT'S ESTIMATE OF NARENDRA

One of Vivekananda's own fellow students in college, the distinguished intellectual and scholar, Dr. Brajendra Nath Seal, felt at first scandalized when he saw Narendra, the rationalist and iconoclast, fallen under the

influence of an idolatrous teacher. Says he in a penetrating article published in *Prabuddha Bharata* five years after Vivekananda's death in 1902 (*The Life of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern and Western Disciples*, pp. 81-82):

'I watched with intense interest the transformation that went on under my eyes. The attitude of a rampant Vedāntist-cum-Hegelian-cum-revolutionary like myself towards the cult of religious ecstasy and Kālī-worship may be easily imagined; and the spectacle of a born iconoclast and free-thinker like Vivekananda, a creative and dominating intelligence, a tamer of souls, himself caught in the meshes of what appeared to me as uncouth, supernatural mysticism was a riddle which my philosophy of the Pure Reason could scarcely read at the time. But Vivekananda, "the loved and lost" was loved, and mourned most in what I could not but then regard as his defection; and it was personal feeling, after all, the hated pathological element of individual preference and individual relationship, which most impelled me, when at last I went on what to a home-keeping recluse

like myself was an adventurous journey to Dakshineswar, to see and hear Vivekananda's Master, and spent the greater part of a long summer day in the shady and peaceful solitudes of the temple-garden, returning as the sun set amidst the whirl and rush and roar and the awful gloom of a blinding thunder-storm, with a sense of bewilderment as well moral as physical, and a lurking perception of the truth that the majesty of Law orders the apparently irregular and grotesque, that there may be self-mastery in apparent self-alienation, that sense even in its errors is only insipient Reason, and that faith in a Saving Power *ab extra* is but the dim reflex of an original act of self-determination. And a significant confirmation of all this came in the subsequent life-history of Vivekananda, who, after he had found the firm assurance he sought in the saving Grace and Power of his Master, went about preaching and teaching the creed of the Universal Man, and the absolute and inalienable sovereignty of the Self.'

SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S DIVINE MOTHER

The image of Kālī worshipped by Sri

Ramakrishna as *Bhavatārīṇī*, the Saviour of the Universe, is made of basalt and stands on the chest of a white marble image of the prostrate body of Her divine consort, Śiva, the symbol of the Absolute. She wears a golden garland of severed human heads, and a girdle of human arms. She has four hands. The lower left hand holds a severed human head and the upper one grips a blood-stained sword. One right hand offers boons to Her children; the other offers them protection from fear. The majesty of Her posture combines the terror of destruction with the tender assurance of motherly love. She is the primordial cosmic Power, the totality of all existence, the glorious harmony of the pairs of opposites. She creates, preserves, and destroys. She has three eyes, the third, on the forehead, being the symbol of divine wisdom. She is Nature, *aparā* as well as *parā*, physical as well as spiritual, cosmic as well as divine; the Universal Mother, who reveals Herself to Her children under diverse aspects and under different divine incarnations; the visible God who leads the seeker to the heart of the divine Mystery; the gracious

Mother who, if it so pleases Her, takes away the last trace of the finite ego from a seeker and merges it in the infinite and absolute consciousness of Brahman, the impersonal and formless God.

Idolatry is religion that *starts* and *ends* with the worship of an idol. An idol is a form of God visible and tangible to the senses. If such an idol inspires the worshipper to go beyond the sense-bound world and realize the primordial divine spiritual energy behind the universe, it becomes the essential first lesson in the grand book of spiritual knowledge and experience. This is the Hindu approach to image worship; and Sri Ramakrishna re-explored this path from the starting point to the goal, from the base to the summit. His worship *started* with the image of Kālī; but it *did not end* there. It soon penetrated the outer crust of reality revealed to the senses as an idol, as a sensual form, the *mṛṇmayī mūrti*, and reached the heart of reality, the *cinmayī śakti*, the supreme energy of Consciousness behind the whole universe of man and nature. Sri Ramakrishna called this Reality by the sweet name of 'My Divine Mother',

whom he approached through the path of affirmation, and who, he held, is the Śakti or primordial divine Energy of that Brahman, the Absolute of stillness and quiescence, which is the goal of the path of negation and which he had later attained through his *nirvikalpa samādhi* experience.

The Old Testament also sings in its Psalms the glory of this impersonal-personal God (Psalm 139, 7-10):

‘Whither shall I go from Thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence?

If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there.

If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;

Even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me.’

The nature of Kālī or Śakti realized by Sri Ramakrishna shines through his several expositions on the subject, as can be gleaned from the following passages of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (New York Edition, p. 106):

To explain the nature of Kālī to the scholar Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Sri

Ramakrishna sang the following song of poet-saint Rāmprasād:

Who is there who can understand what
Mother Kālī is?

Even the six *darśanas* (Indian philosophical systems) are powerless to reveal Her.
It is She, the scriptures say, that is the
inner Self

Of the *yogi*, who in Self discovers all his
joy;

She that, of Her own sweet will, inhabits
every living thing.

The macrocosm and microcosm rest in the
Mother's womb;

Now do you see how vast it is? In the
mūlādhāra (sacral plexus)

The *yogi* meditates on Her, and in the
sahasrāra (the brain):

Who but Śiva has beheld Her as She
really is?

Within the lotus wilderness (heart) She
sports besides Her mate, the Swan (Śiva,
the Absolute).

When man aspires to *understand* Her,
Rāmprasād must smile!

To think of knowing Her, he says, is
quite as laughable

As to imagine one can swim across the boundless sea.

But while my mind has understood, alas! my heart has not;

Though but a dwarf, it still would strive to make a captive of the moon.

UNITY OF BRAHMAN AND SAKTI

Explaining to the Bramho Samaj leader, Keshab Chandra Sen, the difference in approaches between the paths of negation, *jñāna*, and affirmation, *bhakti*, Sri Rama-krishna says (*ibid.*, p. 134):

‘The *jñānis*, who adhere to the non-dualistic philosophy of Vedānta, say that the acts of creation, preservation, and destruction, the universe itself and all its living beings, are the manifestations of Śakti, the divine Power (known also as *Māyā*). If you reason it out, you will realize that all these are as illusory as a dream. Brahman alone is the Reality, and all else is unreal. Even this very Śakti is insubstantial, like a dream.

‘But though you reason all your life, unless you are established in *samādhi*, you cannot go beyond the jurisdiction of Śakti.

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Even when you say, "I am meditating", or "I am contemplating", still you are moving in the realm of Śakti, within Its power.

'Thus Brahman and Śakti are identical. If you accept the one, you must accept the other. It is like fire and its power to burn. If you see the fire, you must recognize its power to burn also. You cannot think of fire without its power to burn, nor can you think of the power to burn without fire. You cannot conceive of the sun's rays without the sun, nor can you conceive of the sun without its rays. ...

'Thus one cannot think of Brahman without Śakti, or of Śakti without Brahman. One cannot think of the Absolute without the Relative, or of the Relative without the Absolute.'

THE UNITY OF THE IMPERSONAL AND THE PERSONAL

Instructing the Brahmo Samaj leader, Vijay Krishna Goswami, in the dual nature of God as with form and without form, Sri Ramakrishna says (*ibid.*, p. 634):

'That which is Brahman is also Kālī, the Mother, the primal Energy. When in-

active, It is called Brahman. Again, when creating, preserving, and destroying, It is called Śakti. Still water is an illustration of Brahman. The same water, moving in waves, may be compared to Śakti, Kālī. What is the meaning of Kālī? She who communes with Mahākāla, the Absolute, is Kālī. She is formless, and, again, She has forms. If you believe in the formless aspect, then meditate on Kālī as that. If you meditate on any aspect of Her with firm conviction, She will let you know Her true nature. Then you will realize that not merely does God exist, but He will come near you and talk to you as I am talking to you. Have faith and you will achieve everything. Remember this, too. If you believe that God is formless, then stick to that belief with firm conviction. But don't be dogmatic: never say emphatically about God that He can be only this and not that. You may say: "I believe that God is formless. But He can be many things more. He alone knows what else He can be. I do not know; I do not understand." How can man with his one ounce of intelligence know the real nature of God?

Can you put four *seers* of milk in a one-*seer* jar? If God, through His grace, ever reveals Himself to His devotee and makes him understand, then he will know; but not otherwise.'

NARENDRA'S EDUCATION IN THE VISION
OF THE IMPERSONAL GOD

Sri Ramakrishna led Narendra slowly and steadily to this truly Advaitic (non-dual) vision of the impersonal-personal God. Apart from instruction and discourse, his powerful spiritual influence helped to soften the hold of one or two obstinate dogmas over Narendra's mind and make it a free and untrammelled instrument for the vision of Truth and his mission to humanity. At the very commencement of his discipleship, during his second visit to Sri Ramakrishna, Narendra, then about nineteen, received a glimpse of the impersonal God in *nirvikalpa samādhi* through the touch of the Master. Narendra's reaction to this unexpected and unprepared-for experience puzzled Sri Ramakrishna. In the words of Narendra himself (*Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 333-34):

'I found him sitting alone on the small

bedstead. He was glad to see me and, calling me affectionately to his side, made me sit beside him on the bed. But the next moment I found him overcome with a sort of emotion. Muttering something to himself, with his eyes fixed on me, he slowly drew near me. I thought he might do something queer as on the preceding occasion. But in the twinkling of an eye he placed his right foot on my body. The touch at once gave rise to a novel experience within me. With my eyes open I saw that the walls, and everything in the room, whirled rapidly and vanished into nought, and the whole universe, together with my individuality, was about to merge in an all-encompassing mysterious void! I was terribly frightened and thought that I was facing death, for the loss of individuality meant nothing short of that. Unable to control myself, I cried out: "What is this that you are doing to me? I have my parents at home!" He laughed aloud at this and stroking my chest said: "All right; let it rest now. Everything will come in time!" The wonder of it was that no sooner had he said this than that strange

experience of mine vanished. I was myself again and found everything within and without the room as it had been before.

‘All this happened in less time than it takes me to narrate it, but it revolutionized my mind. Amazed, I thought what it could possibly be. It came and went at the mere wish of this wonderful man! I began to question if it were mesmerism or hypnotism. But that was not likely, for these acted only on weak minds, and I prided myself on being just the reverse. I had not surrendered myself to the stronger personality of the man. Rather I had taken him to be a monomaniac. So what might this sudden transformation of mine be due to? I could not come to any conclusion. It was an enigma, I thought, which I had better not attempt to solve. I was determined, however, to be on my guard and not to give him another chance to exert a similar influence on me.

‘... My rationalistic mind received an unpleasant rebuff at this failure in judging the true state of things. But I was resolved to fathom the mystery somehow.’

Sri Ramakrishna knew in his heart of

hearts that Narendra would eventually grasp the truth of the unconditioned Brahman. He made him read books like *Aṣṭāvakra Samhitā* on the subject. To Narendra's mind, trained in the theology of the Brahmo Samaj, these writings appeared to be heretical. He would often rebel saying: 'It is blasphemy, for there is no difference between such philosophy and atheism. There is no greater sin in the world than to think of oneself as identical with the Creator. I am God, you are God, these created things are God—what can be more absurd than this? The sages who wrote such things must have been insane.' Sri Ramakrishna, amused at the bluntness of his disciple but desiring to lead him to a more comprehensive spiritual vision, would gently admonish: 'You may not accept the views of these seers. But how can you abuse them or limit God's infinitude? Go on praying to the God of truth and believe in that aspect of His which He reveals to you.'

NARENDRAS EXPERIENCE OF THE
NIRVIKALPA SAMADHI

One day the Master tried to bring home

to Narendra the identity of Ātman, the Self of man with Brahman, the Self of the universe, but could not convince him. Narendra went out of the room and discussed the topic with Hazra, another devotee of Sri Ramakrishna; and amidst derisive laughter, both dismissed the teaching as preposterous. Hearing the remark and laughter, Sri Ramakrishna came out of his room in a semiconscious state and, touching Narendra, went into *samādhi*. That holy touch revolutionized Narendra's mind, which began to see and realize that there was nothing but God in the universe. In the words of Narendra, closing his narration of the incident (*ibid.*, pp. 344-45):

‘This state of things continued for some days. When I became normal again, I realized that I must have had a glimpse of the Advaita state. Then it struck me that the words of the scriptures were not false. Thenceforth I could not deny the conclusions of the Advaita philosophy.’

Up till now, Narendra had achieved the experience of Brahman through the grace of his Master, unsought and unprepared. But while to the earlier two experiences he

had reacted, first, with fear and, then, with hostility, he reacted to the third experience with understanding and appreciation. And, during the last year of Sri Ramakrishna's life, we find Narendra consumed with a raging spiritual passion and seeking with restless yearning for this very experience of Brahman from the Master. In the words of the author of *The Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (p. 588):

‘ We have seen Narendranath's aspirations for the highest truth and his struggle to attain it. Yet, one evening, as he was meditating, it came to him quite unexpectedly. At first he felt as if a light had been placed behind his head. Then he passed beyond all relativity and was lost in the Absolute. He had attained the *nirvikalpa samādhi*! When he gained a little consciousness of the world, he found only his head, but not his body. He cried out: “Ah, where is my body?” Hearing his voice, Gopal Senior came into the room. Narendra repeated the query. “Here it is, Naren”, answered Gopal. When that failed to convince Narendra, Gopal was terrified and hastened to inform the Master. The latter

only said: "Let him stay in that state for a while! He has teased me long enough for it!"'

'YOU HAVE MOTHER'S WORK TO DO'

Romain Rolland narrates the same incident quoting from a letter written to him by Swami Sivananda, a fellow disciple of Narendra, on 7 December 1927 (*Life of Ramakrishna*, p. 268):

'One day, Swami Sivananda 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 henceforward 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

samādhi. 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 the poor".'

NARENDRA'S EXPERIENCE OF THE PERSONAL GOD

'You have the Mother's work to do', said Ramakrishna. We had seen earlier that Narendra had a poor opinion of his Master's worship of Kālī and of his various spiritual visions and experiences. But his seeking for *nirvikalpa samādhi* from the Master, referred to above, had been preceded by his understanding and acceptance of Sri Ramakrishna's vision of the truth of Kālī. This transformation, though coming on

gently and steadily, was registered by an important event which occurred less than two years earlier, when Narendra experienced the delight of pure *bhakti* centred in the personal God.

In 1884, Narendra's prodigal father died suddenly of heart failure throwing the family into utter financial ruin. Being the eldest son, the burden of earning for the family of six or seven fell on Narendra. This introduced him for the first time to life's alter-face of sorrow and misery, and violently upset his erstwhile convictions as to the existence and truth of the benign personal God of monotheism. His biography by his Eastern and Western disciples contains, in its chapter entitled 'Trials and Hardships', a vivid account, much of it in his own words, of his intimate contact with the tragic element in human life and of the tremendous reactions it produced in him. Facile philosophies and shallow convictions become shattered under its impact leaving man, in ordinary circumstances, cynical and sour, with heart dried up and mind empty, and in extraordinary circumstances, dynamic and cheerful, with

heart warmed up with love and compassion and mind steady and pure. Such circumstances refer not to the presence or absence of intellect or wealth or power, but to the presence or absence of inward spiritual resources, to the presence or absence of the spiritual capacity to *digest* all experience. Narendra had the inner resources in abundance—he had zealously cultivated them even in the midst of intellectual storms and stresses—and he had the additional advantage of a supremely powerful resource outside of himself in the person of his extraordinary Master.

When he was in the very midst of this trial and hardship, Narendra had a transforming vision which brought him instant peace of heart and mind. To give it in his own words (*The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, pp. 93-94):

‘The summer was over, and the rains set in. The search for a job still went on. One evening, after a whole day’s fast and exposure to rain, I was returning home with tired limbs and a jaded mind ; over-powered with exhaustion and unable to move a step forward, I sank down on the outer plinth

of a house on the roadside. I can't say whether I was insensible for a time or not. Various thoughts crowded in on my mind, and I was too weak to drive them off and fix my attention on a particular thing. Suddenly I felt as if by some divine power the coverings of my soul were removed one after another. All my former doubts regarding the co-existence of divine justice and mercy, and the presence of misery in the creation of a blissful Providence, were automatically solved. By a deep introspection I found the meaning of it all, and was satisfied. As I proceeded homewards I found there was no trace of fatigue in the body, and the mind was refreshed with wonderful strength and peace. The night was well nigh over.

'Henceforth I became deaf to the praise and blame of worldly people. I was convinced that I was not born like humdrum people to earn money and maintain my family, much less to strive for sense-pleasure.'

Unable to earn enough to keep his family above starvation, rebuffed everywhere, Narendra turned his mind to Sri Ramakrishna's blissful Mother and decided to ask him to

intercede with Her on behalf of his starving family. To quote Narendra again (*ibid.*, p. 95):

‘One day the idea struck me that God listened to Sri Ramakrishna’s prayers ; so why should I not ask him to pray for me for the removal of my pecuniary wants—a favour the Master would never deny me? I hurried to Dakshineswar and insisted on his making the appeal on behalf of my starving family. He said: “My boy, I can’t make such demands. But why don’t you go and ask the Mother yourself? All your sufferings are due to your disregard of Her.” I said: “I do not know the Mother ; you please speak to Her on my behalf. You must.” He replied tenderly: “My dear boy, I have done so again and again. But *you* do not accept Her ; so She does not grant my prayer. All right, it is Tuesday—go to the Kālī temple tonight, prostrate yourself before the Mother, and ask Her any boon you like. It *shall be* granted. She is Knowledge Absolute, the Inscrutable Power of Brahman, and by Her mere will has given birth to this world. Everything is in Her power to give.”’

Narendra waited for the night. At about nine, he walked across the courtyard and reached the temple. To continue the narration in his own words (*ibid.*):

‘As I went I was filled with a divine intoxication. My feet were unsteady. My heart was leaping in anticipation of the joy of beholding the living Goddess and hearing Her words. . . . Reaching the temple, as I cast my eyes upon the image, I actually found that the Divine Mother was living and conscious, the perennial fountain of Divine Love and Beauty. I was caught in a surging wave of devotion and love. In an ecstasy of joy I prostrated myself again and again before the Mother and prayed: “Mother, give me discrimination! Give me renunciation! Give unto me knowledge and devotion! Grant that I may have an uninterrupted vision of Thee!” A serene peace reigned in my soul. The world was forgotten. Only the Divine Mother shone within my heart.’

He returned to Sri Ramakrishna’s room. The Master asked him whether he had prayed for the removal of his worldly wants.

No, Sir, I forgot all about it. But is there

any remedy now?' The Master asked him to go again. He went; but at the very sight of the Mother he again forgot his mission and prayed only for love and devotion. The Master sent him a third time with the reprimand: 'How thoughtless! Couldn't you restrain yourself enough to say those few words?' He went again: but, on entering the temple, a terrible feeling of shame overpowered him when he thought: 'What a trifle I have come to pray to the Mother about! It is like asking a gracious king for a few vegetables! What a fool I am!' He prostrated again and again and prayed for knowledge and devotion. He reported everything to Sri Ramakrishna and requested him to grant the boon himself. The Master replied: 'Such a prayer never comes from my lips. I asked you to pray for yourself. But you couldn't do it. It appears that you are not destined to enjoy worldly happiness. Well, I can't help it.' When Narendra insisted, the Master said in an exalted mood: 'All right, your people at home will never be in want of plain food and clothing.'

A heavy burden was lifted from Narendra's

heart ; subsequent events proved the truth of the Master's blessing with respect to his family. Sri Ramakrishna was in a state of ecstasy that night, for his beloved disciple had accepted his Divine Mother. Narendra also spent the night in an ecstasy of devotion and joy singing the song on the divine Mother glorifying Her omnipresence, and beginning with the lines: *Mā tvam hi tārā* —‘Mother, Thou art verily the Redeemer’, which the Master had just then taught him at his request. From that day onwards the disciple became one in spirit with the Master who, on his part, had always treated him as non-separate from himself.

The rational mind of Narendra grasped the truth of Nature in a new dimension that night; it is not only energy—*śakti*; but also spiritual energy—*cit śakti*, of which all other energies are but manifestations. The Divine Mother of Sri Ramakrishna is this *cit śakti*. Long after, in a talk recorded by Sister Nivedita, Vivekananda confided to her his conviction in the profundity of the truth of Kālī, the Divine Mother, whose image he viewed as the symbol of the book of experience which the soul turns page

after page, and in whose name men and women will find strength to sound many experiences to their depths. (*The Master as I Saw Him*, p. 170):

‘You see, I cannot but believe that there is somewhere a great Power that thinks of Herself as feminine, and called Kālī, and Mother. . . . And I believe in Brahman, too.’

Goethe expresses a similar conviction when he ends his *Faust* with the words:

‘The Eternal Feminine leads us on and on.’

In a few touching lines, Walt Whitman sings the invocation of the Divine Mother (*Leaves of Grass*, Everyman’s Library Edition, 1927, p. 279):

Dark Mother, always gliding near with soft feet,

Have none chanted for Thee a chant of fullest welcome?

Then I chant it for Thee, I glorify Thee above all,

I bring Thee a song that when Thou must indeed come, come unfalteringly.

‘ BY THEIR FRUITS YE SHALL KNOW THEM ’

The philosophic and spiritual vision which Ramakrishna imparted to Vivekananda had a profound impact on the subsequent career of the latter and the history of modern India. For it soon began to translate itself into action with a pervasive sweep unprecedented in the five thousand year history of India. As it unifies the divergent approaches of affirmation and negation, of Śakti and Brahman, it also synthesizes the diverse paths of action and contemplation, work and worship, the secular and the sacred in a comprehensive spirituality. In it, the God-ward passion pours out also as a man-ward love and service. ‘By their fruits ye shall know them’, said Jesus about the truth or otherwise of man’s ideological convictions. Such convictions have produced, as history has shown, in religious, political, and other fields of human life, character-fruits of diverse quality, from the sweetest to the bitterest, with any number of strands in between. Apathetic withdrawal or energetic action, pessimistic resignation or optimistic struggle, egoistic self-assertion or spiritual self-denial, intolerance or universal

acceptance, violence and aggressiveness or non-violence and gentleness, universal love or blind hatred, selfishness and exploitation or renunciation and service—all these are the character-fruits of man's philosophies, well-thought out or ill.

Sri Ramakrishna has coined a new term for this comprehensive vision, namely, *vijñāna*. The fruit of this *vijñāna* in a character signifies the rare synthesis of the virtues and graces of the cultures of the East and the West. *This was the extraordinary achievement in the character and personality of Swami Vivekananda. This explains the unprecedented sweep and range of its energy resources. This alone explains also its tremendous intensity and the explosive impact of its brief ten-year ministry.* Vivekananda was the supreme example of what Herbert Spencer characterized as the combination of philanthropic energy and philosophic calm which, in the Vedāntic terminology, means the union of Śakti and Śiva, or Kālī and Brahman.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA: THE MAN
AND THE POWER

Romain Rolland, among several other

sensitive thinkers, sensed the impact of these two dynamic spiritual leaders of modern India in a profound way. Says he in his preface, entitled 'To My Western Readers', to his *Life of Ramakrishna* (p. 8):

'For a century in new India, Unity has been the target for the arrows of all archers. Fiery personalities throughout this century have sprung from her sacred earth, a veritable Ganges of peoples and thought. Whatever may be the differences between them, their goal is ever the same—human unity through God. And through all the changes of workmen, Unity itself has expanded and gained in precision. . . .

'From this magnificent procession of spiritual heroes whom we shall survey later I have chosen two men, who have won my regard because with incomparable charm and power they have realized this splendid symphony of the universal Soul. They are, if one may say so, its Mozart and its Beethoven—*Pater Seraphicus* and Jove the Thunderer—Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.'

The modern West is specially noted for its power of organization, with the help of which it has developed a dynamic and

progressive society. It has imbibed this power from the philosophy of man developed in the Greco-Roman tradition, which had tested and verified its philosophy in its socio-political fields of endeavour. It was later amplified by Christianity passing through, first, the Greco-Roman and, next, West European experiences. The capacity for organization is the fruit of character, which itself is the fruit of a disciplined man-ward awareness. This awareness gets its sustenance from a philosophy of man which treats him essentially as a member of a community or society, and which upholds the significance of that inter-acting social *milieu* for man's education, for his full growth and development.

This may be termed the *political* view of man as different from the *religious* view of him which inspired eastern cultures generally, arising from a different philosophy of man. This philosophy, which arose out of the several world religions, all of which had their birth in the East, viewed man primarily in his relation to God, and only secondarily in his relation to brother man. These religions also view man as possessing

a higher dimension over and above his physical and sensate dimension; they also relate him to an eternal order over and above the time order. The mystical aspects of the world religions emphasize this transcendental view of man. All these elements in religion tend to put increasing stress on man as an individual in search of his other-worldly aspirations and goals and correspondingly decreasing emphasis on his man-ward awareness in a collective *milieu*. If the path of the latter is action in the world of time, in the world of other fellow human beings and in co-operation with them, which is the essential field of character training, the path of the former is contemplation and the 'flight of the alone to the Alone', which is the mother of all the gentler virtues and graces.

The impact of the mystical element in religion has been most pronounced on India. When it had for its base a strong man-ward awareness and social feeling, India remained strong and healthy. When that base was weakened, especially during the past thousand years, she became the prey to successive foreign invasions through inter-

nal divisions and the neglect and oppression of the common man. *The philosophic and spiritual vision of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda is dedicated to the strengthening of this social base through the effective organization of the nation's moral and spiritual resources with a view to enhancing the one supreme quest of the Indian mind, namely, spirituality.*

Sri Ramakrishna exhorted his disciples to avoid being one-sided and develop an all-round character in which contemplation and action stand harmoniously reconciled. And he held before them the example of Vivekananda as the perfection of such reconciliation. One-sidedness has been the most serious drawback of the Indian character proceeding from the limitations of the prevailing religious outlook of her people. Ramakrishna showed the way to the removal of this limitation and the weakness of character resulting from it. Centuries earlier, the *Gītā* had shown the way, but the people had failed even to grasp it properly, and, even more, to implement it effectively.

When engaged in the world of action, unlike in the world of contemplation, we

have to reckon with other persons. A man with a purely mystical attitude becomes a failure in the field of action; he does not develop character-efficiency; for he has no place for the objective in his subjective vision; this limitation is highlighted by Sri Ramakrishna in one of his parables:

A *guru* taught his young disciples the truth that God is in all beings. One day, when the disciples were in the forest gathering fuel, a mad elephant came their way. Hearing the shout of the driver on the elephant asking all to run away for safety, all the disciples ran away for safety, except one who, remembering the *guru's* teaching of the presence of God in all, recognized His presence in the elephant and began to sing hymns of praise to the 'God in the elephant'. The elephant rushed at the youth and, taking him by its trunk, threw him aside and went its way. His fellow disciples came in search of him and found him bruised and unconscious. They restored him to consciousness and brought him before the *guru*. When asked by the *guru* why he, like his fellow disciples, did not run for safety, the disciple replied that, following

his teaching that God is in all beings, he tried to see God in the elephant. The *guru*, on hearing this, exclaimed: What a fool you are! God is certainly in the elephant; but is He not also in the driver of the elephant? And why did you not listen to 'the driver God' when he asked you to run for safety?

Sri Ramakrishna the man passed away in 1886. But Sri Ramakrishna the power, all-beneficent and luminous, continued, and still continues, to affect in a fundamental way the life and destiny of man in increasing numbers in East and West. Before he passed away, he felt the need for an organization, which would be an effective channel for the flow of his unifying vision to fertilize human life everywhere. And he set up such an organization, a *saṅgha*, with Vivekananda at its head. His deep concern to see that the organization remained intact is evident in his exhortation, a few days before his passing away, to Vivekananda to see that his young disciples were held together in a common dedication to the vision that he had imparted to them. To quote the biography of Vivekananda by his

Eastern and Western disciples (*The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, p. 147):

‘It so happened that Naren had been called to the side of the Master some days earlier, when he was suffering intensely and could scarcely speak. The Master wrote on a piece of paper: “Narendra will teach others”. Naren hesitated and said: “I won’t do that”. But the Master replied: “You shall have to do it”. . . .

‘Now that the last days were approaching, the Master set himself with greater energy than ever to mould, in a calm and silent way, the spiritual life of these boys, particularly that of Naren. Every evening he would call Naren to his room and for two or three hours at a time would impart final instructions to him on various spiritual subjects and advise him to keep his brother disciples together, how to guide and train them so that they would be able to live the life of renunciation.’

Referring to what Ramakrishna himself gained by coming into contact with the Brahmo Samaj and its leaders, Romain Rolland says (*The Life of Ramakrishna*, p. 186):

‘It is easy to see what India gained from the meeting of Ramakrishna and the Brahmo Samaj. His own gain is less obvious, but no less definite. For the first time he found himself brought into personal contact with the educated middle class of his country, and through them with the pioneers of progress and western ideas. . . .

‘He was not a man to react like a strict and narrow devotee, who hastens to put up the shutters of his cell. On the contrary, he flung them wide open. He was too human, too insatiably curious, too greedy for the fruit of the tree of life not to taste these new fruits to the full. His long searching glance insinuated itself, like a creeper through the chinks of the house, and studied all the different habitations of the same Host, and studied all the different spirits dwelling therein, and in order to understand them better, he identified himself with them. He grasped their limitations (as well as their significance), and proportioned to each nature its own vision of life and individual duty. He never dreamt of imposing either vision or action alien to his proper nature on any man. He, to whom

renunciation both then and always, so far as he was personally concerned, was the first and last word of truth, discovered that most men would have none of it, and he was neither astonished nor saddened by the discovery.'

Pointing out the truth of the utility of organization discovered by Ramakrishna through his contact with the westernized Brahmo Samaj, Romain Rolland says (*ibid.*, p. 188):

'The ascendancy he exercised over some of the best minds in India revealed the weakness and needs of these intellectuals, their unsatisfied aspirations, the inadequacy of the answers they gained from science, and the necessity for his intervention. The Brahmo Samaj showed him what strength of organization, what beauty existed in a spiritual group uniting young souls round an elder brother, so that they tendered a basket of love as a joint offering to their Beloved, the Mother.

'The immediate result was that his mission, hitherto undefined, became crystallized; it concentrated first in a glowing nucleus of conscious thought wherein decision was

centred, and then passed into action.'

VIVEKANANDA: THE MAN AND THE POWER

Vivekananda was extraordinarily gifted with the powers of both vision and action. In his Master and within himself, apart from the philosophy he had imbibed, he had seen and experienced the greatness and glory of man. But within a short time after his Master's passing away, he saw at close quarters the tragedy of man in India when he wandered over the length and breadth of his beloved motherland mixing with its princes and peasants, intellectuals and un-touchables. On the eve of this great and unique pilgrimage, he declared at Banaras in 1890: 'I am going away; but I shall never come back until I have burst on society like a bomb, and make it follow me like a dog.' And within three years of this utterance, he had burst upon the attention of the international world through his speeches at the Chicago Parliament of Religions, followed by whirlwind lecture tours in U.S.A. and U.K., and in another four years, on the horizon of modern India through his famous speeches, later collected

in the book *Lectures from Colombo to Almora*. About the impact of his speeches and utterances, Romain Rolland writes (*The Life of Vivekananda*, p. 162):

‘His words are great music, phrases in the style of Beethoven, stirring rhythms like the march of Handel Choruses. I cannot touch these sayings of his, scattered as they are through the pages of books at thirty years’ distance, without receiving a thrill through my body like an electric shock. And what shocks, what transports must have been produced when in burning words they issued from the lips of the hero.’

VIVEKANANDA: A SOCIAL REVOLUTIONARY

Upholding the supremacy of the Indian ideal of spirituality in his life and teaching, Vivekananda was yet appalled to see the poverty and degradation of masses of his countrymen; and he proclaimed in anguish: ‘I do not believe in a religion which cannot wipe the widow’s tears or stop the orphan’s wails’; and he quoted his Master’s pungent words: ‘Religion is not for empty bellies.’ And for the first time in her long history, India got in him an outstanding spiritual

leader tackling vigorously the pressing problems of the *secular* life of man, and pleading for what he terms a 'toned down' *materialism* for his country. He traced the downfall of India to the forcing down the throats of one and all the mystical heights of religion with its neglect of social feeling and action and emphasis on renunciation and contemplation. Says he (*The Complete Works*, Vol. III, pp. 149-50):

'Yet, perhaps, some sort of materialism, toned down to our own requirements, would be a blessing to many of our brothers who are not yet ripe for the highest truths. This is the mistake made in every country and in every society, and it is a greatly regrettable thing that in India, where it was always understood, the same mistake of forcing the highest truths on people who are not ready for them, has been made of late. ... There has been ample provision made for them in our Books; but unfortunately, in later times, there has been a tendency to bind every one down by the same laws as those by which the *sannyāsin* (monk) is bound, and that is a great mistake. But for that, a good deal of the poverty and the

misery that you see in India need not have been.'

Vivekananda was not a 'revivalist', but a social revolutionary. Reporting an important conversation with him during his second voyage to the West, Sister Nivedita records (*The Master as I Saw Him*, pp. 201-202):

"I disagree with all those", he said, "who are giving their superstitions back to my people. Like the Egyptologist's interest in Egypt, it is easy to feel an interest in India that is purely selfish. One may desire to see again the India of one's books, one's studies, one's dreams. My hope is to see again the strong points of that India, reinforced by the strong points of this age, only in a natural way. The new state of things must be a *growth* from within.

"So I preach only the Upaniṣads. . . . And of the Upaniṣads, it is only that one idea of *strength*. The quintessence of Vedas and Vedānta and all lies in that one word. . . .

"But you may ask—what is the place of Ramakrishna in this scheme?

"He is the method, that wonderful unconscious method! . . .

“Hitherto the great fault of our Indian religion has lain in its knowing only two words—renunciation and *mukti* (spiritual emancipation). Only *mukti* here! Nothing for the householder!

“But these are the very people whom I want to help. For are not all souls of the same quality? Is not the goal of all the same?

“And so strength must come to the nation through education.”

‘I thought at the time, and I think increasingly, as I consider it, that this one talk of my Master had been well worth the whole voyage, to have heard.’

VIVEKANANDA: A PRACTICAL VISIONARY

Cornelia Conger, who had intimate association with Vivekananda during her childhood when her grandmother, Mrs. John B. Lyon of Chicago, had played host to him on behalf of the World Parliament of Religions, narrates an interesting incident in her memories of him, which brings out his keen desire to help the Indian people imbibe the western talent for organization

(*Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda*, 1961, p. 138):

‘Once he said to my grandmother that he had had the greatest temptation of his life in America. She liked to tease him a bit and said, “Who is she, Swami?” He burst out laughing and said, “Oh, it is not a lady; it is *organization!*” He explained how the followers of Ramakrishna had all gone out alone and when they reached a village, would just quietly sit under a tree and wait for those in trouble to come to consult them. But in the States he saw how much could be accomplished by organizing work. Yet he was doubtful about just what type of organization would be acceptable to the Indian character, and he gave a great deal of thought and study how to adapt what seemed good to him in our Western World to the best advantage of his own people.’

In a letter written from Massachusetts, U.S.A., on 20 August 1893, to a disciple in India, after visiting a modern women’s prison, the Swami poured out his agony at the condition and treatment of human beings in India (*The Complete Works*, Vol.

V, Seventh Edition, pp. 13-14):

‘They don’t call it prison but reformatory here. It is the grandest thing I have seen in America. How the inmates are benevolently treated, how they are reformed and sent back as useful members of society. . . . And, oh, how my heart ached to think of what we think of the poor, the low in India. They have no chance, no escape, no way to climb up. . . . Religion is not at fault. On the other hand, your religion teaches you that every being is only your own self multiplied. But it was the want of practical application, the want of sympathy—the want of heart.’

It was to provide this practical application, this sympathy, this heart, that he felt the need for the Indian people to cut out a new channel of practical efficiency from their national reservoir of spirituality, to strive to achieve character, and learn the secret of organized action. In a letter written from U.S.A., on 11 July 1894, to a young disciple in India, he says:

‘Go to work, my boys; the fire will come to you! The faculty of organization is entirely absent in our nature, but this has

to be infused. The great secret is absence of jealousy. Be always ready to concede to the opinions of your brethren, and try always to conciliate. That is the whole secret.'

Speaking on the 'Future of India' in Madras on his return from the West in 1897, he says (*ibid.*, Vol. III, Eighth Edition, pp. 299-300):

'Why is it that organizations are so powerful? Do not say organization is material. Why is it, to take a case in point, that forty millions of Englishmen rule three hundred millions of people here? What is the psychological explanation? These forty millions put their wills together and that means infinite power, and you three hundred millions have a will each separate from the other. Therefore to make a great future India, the whole secret lies in organization, accumulation of power, co-ordination of wills.

'Already before my mind rises one of the marvellous verses of the *Atharva-Veda Samhitā* which says: "Be thou all of one mind, be thou all of one thought; for in the days of yore, the gods being of one

mind were enabled to receive oblations. That the gods can be worshipped by men is because they are of one mind." Being of one mind is the secret of society. . . . And the more you go on fighting and quarrelling about all trivialities . . . the further you are off from that accumulation of energy and power which is going to make the future of India. For, mark you, the future India depends entirely on that. That is the secret—accumulation of will-power, co-ordination, bringing them all, as it were, into one focus.'

Writing to the Prime Minister of an Indian princely state from Chicago in November 1894, he says (*ibid.*, Vol. VIII, Third Edition, p. 328):

'The secret of success of the Westerners is the power of organization and combination. That is only possible with mutual trust and co-operation.'

The Swami knew that over-organization was as bad as no organization. He felt that the West had inclined the former way where even religion had become overwhelmed, with ninety per cent energy spent on church organization and only ten per cent left for spiritual striving. Yet, he keenly felt the

need for this faculty in the Indian context.

Writing to Mrs. Ole Bull of U.S.A. on 21 March 1895 from New York, he says (*ibid.*, Vol. VI, Sixth Edition, p. 303):

‘Organization has its faults, no doubt, but without that nothing can be done.’

The Swami exhorted his countrymen to learn from the English people their capacity for obedience with self-respect, which is the secret of collective action. Writing to his brother disciple, Swami Akhandananda, from London in 1895, he says (*ibid.*, pp. 322-23):

‘Your idea is grand but our nation is totally lacking in the faculty of organization. It is this one drawback which produces all sorts of evil. We are altogether averse in making a common cause for anything. The first requisite for organization is obedience. I do a little bit of work when I feel so disposed, and then let it go to the dogs—this kind of work is of no avail. We must have plodding industry and perseverance.’

Again, writing to the same on 13 November 1895, he says (*ibid.*, pp. 350-51):

‘It is not at all in our nature to do a work conjointly. It is to this that our miserable condition is due. He who knows

how to obey, knows how to command. Learn obedience first. Among these western nations, with such a high spirit of independence, the spirit of obedience is equally strong. We are all of us self-important which never produces any work. Great enterprise, boundless courage, tremendous energy, and above all, perfect obedience—these are the only traits that lead to individual and national regeneration. These traits are altogether lacking in us.’

The modern western Promethean spirit of energy and progress finds shining expression in the letter he wrote from Chicago on 24 January 1894 to the group of young disciples in Madras, in which he expounds his mission (*ibid.*, Vol. V, pp. 29-30):

‘Caste or no caste, creed or no creed, any man, or class, or caste, or nation, or institution which bars the power of free thought and action of an individual—even so long as that power does not injure others—is devilish and must go down.

‘My whole ambition in life is to set in motion a machinery which will bring noble ideas to the door of everybody and then let men and women settle their own fate. Let

them know what our forefathers as well as other nations have thought on the most momentous questions of life. Let them see specially what others are doing now, and then decide. We are to put the chemicals together, the crystallization will be done by nature according to her laws. Work hard, be steady, and have faith in the Lord. Set to work; I am coming sooner or later. Keep the motto before you—"Elevation of the masses without injuring their religion."

'Remember the nation lives in the cottage. But, alas! nobody ever did anything for them. . . . Can you raise them? Can you give them back their lost individuality? Can you become an occidental of occidentals in your spirit of equality, freedom, work, and energy, and at the same time a Hindu to the very backbone in religious culture and instincts? This is to be done and *we will do it*. You are all *born to do it*. Have faith in yourselves, great convictions are the mothers of great deeds. Onward for ever! Sympathy for the poor, the downtrodden, even unto death—this is our motto. Onward, brave lads!'

Referring to the synthesis of East and

West sought to be achieved for his country by Swami Vivekananda, Sister Nivedita, his Western disciple, says (*The Master as I Saw Him*, p. 45):

‘His view was penetrative as well as comprehensive. He had analyzed the elements of the development to be brought about. India must learn a new ideal of obedience. . . . The energy which had hitherto gone into the mortification of the body, might rightly, in his opinion, under modern conditions, be directed to the training of the muscles.

‘To the Western mind, it might well seem that nothing in the Swami’s life had been more admirable than this. Long ago, he had defined the mission of the Order of Ramakrishna as that of realizing and exchanging the highest ideals of the East and of the West.’

It is specially in his ideas and programmes relating to the education of the Indian people that Vivekananda reveals his spiritual kinship with the finest in the traditions of East and West. His utterances on this vital subject, scattered in the eight volumes of his *Complete Works*, are available in a small

book entitled *Education*, which carries the following brief Foreword from Mahatma Gandhi:

‘Surely Swami Vivekananda’s writings need no introduction from anybody. They make their own irresistible appeal.’

The Swami defines education ‘as the manifestation of the perfection already in man’. Viewing the prevailing educational system against the background of the pressing problems of his nation, he said (*Education*, p. 7):

‘Getting by heart the thoughts of others in a foreign language and stuffing your brain with them and taking some university degrees, you consider yourself educated. Is this education? . . . Open your eyes and see what a piteous cry for food is rising in the land of Bhārata, proverbial for its food. Will your education fulfil this want? The education that does not help the common mass of people to equip themselves for the struggle for life, which does not bring out strength of character, a spirit of philanthropy, and the courage of a lion—is it worth the name?’

‘We want that education by which char-

acter is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's own feet. What we need is to study, independent of foreign control, different branches of the knowledge that is our own, and with it the English language and western science; we need technical education and all else that will develop industries, so that men instead of seeking for service may earn enough to provide for themselves and save against a rainy day.

'The end of all education, all training should be man-making. The end and aim of all training is to make the man grow. The training by which the current and expression of will are brought under control, and become fruitful, is called education.'

The Swami defines religion almost exactly as he defines education. Religion, to him, 'is the manifestation of the divinity already in man'. So defined, religion ceases to be a formal subscription to a creed or a dogma, or end up in the membership of a church or a congregation; it becomes an educative process; it becomes continued education.

Tracing the downfall of India to the continued sapping of the faith of the Indian

people in themselves through a wrong understanding of religion, and to the sad neglect by them of their physical selves, he said (*ibid.*, pp. 42-44):

‘The old religions said that he was an atheist who did not believe in God. The new religion says that he is an atheist who does not believe in himself. But it is not selfish faith. It means faith in all because you are all. Love for yourself means love for all, love for animals, love for everything, for you are all one. . . . If the ideal of faith in ourselves had been more extensively taught and practised, I am sure a very large portion of the evils and miseries that we have would have vanished. Throughout the history of mankind if any motive power has been more potent than another in the lives of great men and women, it is that faith in themselves. Born with the consciousness that they were to be great, they became great. . . .

‘Physical weakness is the cause of at least one-third of our miseries. We are lazy; we cannot combine. We speak of many things parrot-like, but never do them. Speaking and not doing has become a habit with us.

What is the cause? Physical weakness. This sort of weak brain is not able to do anything. We must strengthen it. First of all, our young men must be strong. Religion will come afterwards. Be strong, my young friends, that is my advice to you. You will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of the *Gītā*. You will understand the *Gītā* better with your biceps, your muscles a little stronger. You will understand the mighty genius and the mighty strength of Kṛṣṇa better with a little strong blood in you. You will understand the Upaniṣads better and the glory of the Ātman, when your body stands firm upon your feet, and you feel yourselves as men.'

Vivekananda is the first monk and outstanding spiritual teacher in all history to uphold without any reservation the cause of women and the common people. 'In India there are two evils', he said, 'trampling on the women and grinding the poor through caste restrictions.' Revealing his resolve to undo this injustice, Sister Nivedita writes (*The Master as I Saw Him*, pp. 287-88):

'Our Master, at any rate, regarded the Order to which he belonged as one whose

lot was cast for all time with the cause of Woman and the People. . . . It was the one thought, too, with which he would turn to the disciple at his side, whenever he felt himself nearer than usual to death, in a foreign country, alone, "Never forget!" he would then say, "the word is 'Woman and the People!'"

His far-seeing mind grasped the significance of the modern age in the sure awakening of the suppressed millions everywhere. He called the present age the age of the Śūdra, the age of the proletariat.

Stirring the conscience of his countrymen, he said about their proletariat fellow-countrymen (*Education*, pp. 73-74):

'Engrossed in the struggle for existence, they had not the opportunity for the awakening of knowledge. They have worked so long like machines and the clever educated section have taken the substantial parts of the fruits of their labour. But times have changed. The lower classes are gradually awakening to this fact, and making a united front against this. The upper classes will no longer be able to repress the lower, try they ever so much. The well-being of the

higher classes now lies in helping the lower to get their legitimate rights. Therefore I say: Set yourself to the task of spreading education among the masses. Tell them and make them understand, "You are our brothers, a part and parcel of our bodies". If they receive this sympathy from you, their enthusiasm for work will be increased a hundredfold.'

Even while detesting the British subjugation of India, Vivekananda, in his creative role as the prophet of acceptance, as Tagore said of him, saw in it an opportunity to rescue India from its centuries-long stagnation, and utilized it accordingly. In one of his famous essays on 'Modern India', contributed to his Bengali monthly *Udbodhan* in 1899, Vivekananda said (*The Complete Works*, Vol. IV, Eighth Edition, pp. 472-73):

'The present government of India has certain evils attendant on it, and there are some very great and good parts in it as well. Of highest good is this, that after the fall of the Pāṭalīputra (Maurya) Empire till now, India was never under the guidance of such a powerful machinery of government

as the British, wielding the sceptre throughout the length and breadth of the land. And under this Vaiśya (commercial) supremacy . . . the ideas and thoughts of different countries are forcing their way into the very bone and marrow of India. Of these ideas and thoughts, some are really most beneficial to her, some are harmful, while others disclose the ignorance and inability of the foreigners to determine what is truly good for the inhabitants of this country.

‘But piercing through the mass of whatever good or evil there may be, is seen rising the sure emblem of India’s future prosperity—that as the result of the action and reaction between her own old national ideals, on the one hand, and the newly-introduced strange ideals of foreign nations, on the other, she is slowly and gently awakening from her long deep sleep. Mistakes she will make; let her; there is no harm in that; in all our actions, errors and mistakes are our only teachers. Who commits mistakes, the path of truth is attainable by him only. Trees never make mistakes, nor do stones fall into error; animals are hardly seen to transgress the fixed laws of nature; but man

is prone to err, and it is man who becomes God-on-earth.'

And in an inspiring poem entitled 'To the Awakened India', contributed to his English monthly, *Prabuddha Bhārata*, for its first issue after its transfer from Madras to its new home in the Himalayas, Vivekananda summoned India to wake up from her long sleep and resume her march for the welfare and happiness of all humanity (*The Complete Works*, Vol. IV, p. 387):

Once more awake!

For sleep it was, not death, to bring thee
life

Anew, and rest to lotus-eyes, for visions
Daring yet. The world in need awaits,
O Truth!

Resume thy march,

With gentle feet that would not break
the

Peaceful rest, even of the roadside dust
That lies so low. Yet strong and steady,
Blissful, bold, and free. Awakener, ever
Forward! Speak thy stirring words.

Inviting the attention of the West to the new India that is rising on the horizon of the modern world out of the energy of

Vivekananda's vision, Romain Rolland says (*Life of Vivekananda*, p. 316):

'So India was hauled out of the shifting sands of barren speculation wherein she had been engulfed for centuries, by the hand of one of her own *sannyāsins*; and the result was that the whole reservoir of mysticism, sleeping beneath, broke its bounds, and spread by a series of great ripples into action. The West ought to be aware of the tremendous energies liberated by these means.'

Rabindranath Tagore, himself a man of vision, recognized the depth and sweep of Vivekananda's vision and programme and its creative role in bringing out the best out of man. Pointing out the limitations of the message of the spinning wheel, which Gandhiji was then conveying to the Indian people, as a *bāhya kriyā*, 'external act', liable to be reduced in due course to a static *ācāra* or 'observance', 'which has been a recurring experience in India's past', and 'incapable, therefore, of rousing the spirit of man to full creative life and action', Tagore said (*Prabāsī*, Vol. 28, p. 286):

'In recent times in India, it was Viveka-

nanda alone who preached a great message which is not tied up with any do's and dont's. Addressing one and all in the nation, he said: In every one of you, there is the power of Brahman (God); the God in the poor desires you to serve (Him). This message has roused the heart of the youths in a pervasive way. That is why this message has borne fruit in the service of the nation in diverse ways and in diverse forms of renunciation. His message has, at one and the same time, imparted dignity and respect to man along with energy and power.'

Anyone reading the eight volumes of Vivekananda's published works and Sister Nivedita's masterly study of him in her *The Master as I Saw Him* cannot but be struck by the sweep of his thoughts and the depth of his convictions. The one running theme of all his utterances is man—his growth, his development, and his fulfilment. Referring to this theme, in his study of Vivekananda's speeches at the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago, Romain Rolland says (*The Life of Vivekananda*, pp. 42-43):

'Each time he repeated with new arguments but with the same force of conviction

his thesis of a universal religion without limit of time or space, uniting the whole *credo* of the human spirit, from the enslaved fetishism of the savage to the most liberal creative affirmations of modern science. He harmonized them into a magnificent synthesis, which, far from extinguishing the hope of a single one, helped all hopes to grow and flourish according to their own proper nature. There was to be no other dogma but the divinity inherent in man and his capacity for indefinite evolution.'

In his studies of the human cultural heritage, Vivekananda saw, what I had referred to earlier, two distinct approaches to the problem of human development, one as cultivated by the East and the other by the West. These can be broadly stated, using the language of biology, as stress on the *environment* in the West and that on the *organism* in the East. From Greco-Roman times, the West has been specializing in the manipulation of the physical and social environments of man for ensuring his growth and fulfilment. The whole gamut of ideas and processes arising from this

approach is conveyed to us by the rich modern words 'positivism' and 'humanism', which, in the wake of modern technological advances, are often qualified by the word 'scientific'. It is the conviction of positivism that human development is ensured by understanding, controlling, and manipulating the environment, natural and social, in which man's life is cast. Through technology and socio-political processes, man suitably disciplines and manipulates his environment, which is sometimes tractable, often intractable, with a view to ensuring his own self-expression. The product of such manipulation is civilization. There is in this a sense of a fight with an external enemy. Such a challenge calls forth from the spirit of man the qualities of courage, faith, and confidence in himself, and the capacity for co-operation and team work. It disciplines his senses and mind in precision of observation and communication. It helps to endow him with a zest for life and for action and achievement. All these constitute, for man, the school for the development of character and practical efficiency. Here is a distinct philosophy of man, which Vivekananda

called the philosophy of *manliness* and which he saw as the fundamental stimulus of the West from the Greco-Roman to modern times.

The Greek religion was an intergal part of its positivistic philosophy, and it was essentially this-worldly and pragmatic. Though Socrates and the Greek mystery religions rise above the positivistic level, they were not integrated with the distinctively Greek outlook and thought, being foreign to both. This explains the disowning of Socrates by the Greek State and his trial and death. Their own great dictum, 'Man, know thyself', was not pursued by the Greeks beyond his social personality; neither did the Greeks experience the urge to subject these religious mysteries to that rational scrutiny which they so diligently and passionately applied to social and political phenomena, and in which their contributions were to become unique and lasting.

But what the Greeks neglected became the one ruling passion of the East, and especially of India. This registers the other approach, which stresses the *organism* and comparatively neglects the external environment. This

is the approach of religion, specially in its higher mystical aspects; and all the higher religions of the world are eastern contributions to total human culture. It asks man to strengthen his 'within' and *bear* with the environment and, if strong enough, even to ignore it. It instils the virtues of patience and endurance in place of struggle and advance in the external world, enhances the capacity for renunciation and suffering in place of action and enjoyment, and generally upholds the line of least resistance in the external world. There is in this also a sense of fight with an enemy, but that enemy is within man and not outside of him. This approach gives man 'intimations of immortality'; it brings him into communion with a timeless order of existence within himself and in the world outside. This is also human fulfilment—but of a transcendental order. Its specific expression is found in the monastic life; and the mystical heights of all higher religions are monastic in mood and temper and approach. Herein is revealed another philosophy of man, the philosophy of *godliness* or *saintliness*, which Vivekananda recognized as the

distinct message of the East. Asia, generally, and India, particularly, have upheld this philosophy of man and sought to nourish their cultures and civilizations with it. It has profoundly affected western culture and civilization also, but has failed to become an integral part of it, just as the western philosophy of manliness has failed to become integral parts of most eastern cultures and civilizations. It uncovers a divine core in man, which makes him greater than all his external possessions and achievements; it reveals an inalienable spiritual focus within him, which proclaims his *intrinsic* value and dignity over and above his value for society. Herein is found the culmination of the Greek dictum: 'Man, know thyself.'

The dignity so revealed finds expression not only in the renunciation practised by spiritual seers and seekers, but also in the incidents of ordinary life; one such episode relating to one of his great elder contemporaries, Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, was a favourite with Vivekananda. After referring to his high regard for Vidyasagar as a hero of social reform, Sister Nivedita says in her charming book *Notes*

of *Some Wanderings with Swami Vivekananda* (Third Edition, pp. 35-36):

‘But his favourite story about him was of that day when he went home from the Legislative Council, pondering over the question of whether or not to adopt English dress on such occasions. Suddenly, some one came up to a fat Mogul (Muslim nobleman) who was proceeding homewards in leisurely and pompous fashion, in front of him, with the news, “Sir, your house is on fire!” The Mogul went neither faster nor slower for this information, and presently the messenger contrived to express a discreet astonishment, whereupon his master turned on him angrily, “Wretch!” he said, “Am I to abandon the gait of my ancestors, because a few sticks happen to be burning?” And Vidyasagar, walking behind, determined to stick to the *chudder*, *dhoti*, and sandals, not even adopting coat and slippers.’

As the Greeks and others specialized in the subject of man in society, man in lateral extension, India specialized in the subject of man in depth, man in vertical elevation. Each has its glory and grandeur; each also

has its limitations, which exactly render one the complement of the other.

In his own life, Vivekananda had plumb-ed the depths of both these philosophies; he had assimilated in his own personality the *manliness* of the West and the *saintliness* of the East. He saw clearly the excellences and limitations of each of these two human legacies which he embraced as two integral elements of a total human culture, and proclaimed the modern age as the era of their synthesis. In his philosophy of man, proceeding from Sri Ramakrishna's comprehensive spirituality of *vijñāna* referred to earlier, they cease to be contradictory and become complementary. He comprehended the western concept of manliness and the eastern concept of saintliness in a newly defined philosophy of manliness, which dares to study man from his physical periphery to his spiritual core and to plumb life from the surface to the depths.

History reveals the insufficiency of each of these philosophies taken by themselves. The bitter lessons of the eastern neglect of the *environment* are writ large in the arrested development of millions of its

human beings. Vivekananda demonstrated to the people of India the lesson of their history that to neglect the body and to concentrate on the soul is to court disaster for both soul and body. On the other hand, he demonstrated to the people of the West the lesson of their own history in the reverse. Positivism and humanism, even scientific humanism, are perfectly valid, he said, if they do not reduce the human soul to a mere function of the environment, if they do not lead to the swamping of the spirit of man by worldliness, by what one may call over-civilization. Man has an interior depth over and above his social personality, as he has a social personality over and above his individual egoistic self. The latter has to be surpassed and the former realized in each case, if he is to achieve fulfilment. 'In the last stages of life's journey', says Dr. Radhakrishnan, 'man walks in single file.' This surpassing of man constitutes both his death and resurrection. 'He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it', says Jesus (Matthew, 10.39). So long as this is not attempted

and achieved, physical death, which is inevitable, will appear to him an unpleasant enigma and an unwelcome intruder, to which he shall ever remain unreconciled. No philosophy can achieve depth without tackling the problem of death. This has been the main weakness of the western philosophy of man from Greco-Roman times to this day. This basic tragedy of western man is noticed by western thinkers themselves. We have Schopenhauer telling us a hundred years ago, in what sounds as an apt critique of the modern welfare state, that the end of a sense-bound life is boredom (*The World as Will and Idea*, Translated by Haldane and Kemp, Vol. I, p. 404):

‘Almost all men who are secure from want and care, now that at last they have thrown off all other burdens, become a burden to themselves.’

We have C. G. Jung discussing modern man in search of a soul. Making a distinction between worldly *achievement* and inner *culture*, and showing the undesirability of the modern pursuit of the first alone throughout life, he says (*Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, pp. 118-26):

‘Nature cares nothing whatsoever about a higher level of consciousness; quite the contrary. And then society does not value these feats of the psyche very highly; its prizes are always given for achievement and not for personality—the latter being rewarded, for the most part, posthumously. . . .

‘Achievement, usefulness, and so forth are the ideals which appear to guide us out of the confusion of crowding problems. They may be our loadstars in the adventure of extending and solidifying our psychic existences—they may help us in striking our roots in the world; but they cannot guide us in the development of that wider consciousness to which we give the name of culture. . . .

‘The nearer we approach to the middle of life, and the better we have succeeded in entrenching ourselves in our personal standpoints and social positions, the more it appears as if we had discovered the right course and the right ideals and principles of behaviour. For this reason, we suppose them to be eternally valid, and make a virtue of unchangeably clinging to them. We wholly overlook the essential fact that

the achievements which society rewards are won at the cost of the diminution of personality. Many—far too many—aspects of life which should also have been experienced lie in the lumber room among dusty memories. . . .

‘The afternoon of human life must also have a significance of its own, and cannot be merely a pitiful appendage to life’s morning. The significance of the morning undoubtedly lies in the development of the individual, our entrenchment in the outer world, the propagation of our kind, and the care of our children. This is the obvious purpose of nature. But when this purpose has been attained—even more than attained—shall the earning of money, the extension of conquests, and the expansion of life go steadily on beyond the bounds of all reason and sense? Whoever carries over into the afternoon the law of the morning—that is, the aim of nature—must pay for so doing with damage to his soul just as surely as a growing youth who tries to salvage his childish egoism must pay for this mistake with social failure. Money-making, social existence, family, and posterity are nothing

but plain nature—not culture. Culture lies beyond the purpose of nature. Could by any chance culture be the meaning and purpose of the second half of life?’

Treating this as the major drawback of Greek culture, which, it is being increasingly recognized, is also the major drawback of modern western culture, Lowes Dickinson says (*The Greek View of Life*, p. 68):

‘The more completely the Greek felt himself to be at home in the world, the more happily and freely he abandoned himself to the exercise of his powers, the more intensely and vividly he lived in action and in passion, the more alien, bitter, and incomprehensible did he find the phenomena of age and death. On this problem, so far as we can judge, he received from his religion but little light and still less consolation. The music of his brief life closed with a discord unresolved; and even before reason had brought her criticism to bear upon his creed, its deficiency was forced upon him by his feeling.’

In his Preface to the above book, E. M. Forster refers to Greece as the land which ‘encompassed within the tiny circuit of her

city states much that *affects* and *afflicts* the modern man in his relationship to society' (italics not the author's).

While welcoming the truly positive elements of modern positivism, Vivekananda protested against its exaggerations, its negative features, when he said to Sister Nivedita (*The Master as I Saw Him*, pp. 220-21):

'Remember! the message of India is always not the soul for nature, but nature for the soul.'

Vivekananda had noticed the western tragedy referred to by Lowes Dickinson. Comparing it with Indian experience, he said (*ibid.*, p. 116):

'Social life in the West is like a peal of laughter, but underneath it is a wail. It ends in a sob. The fun and frivolity are all on the surface; really, it is full of tragic intensity. Now, here, it is sad and gloomy on the outside, but underneath are carelessness and merriment.'

Nivedita refers to another such contrast expressed by the Swami 'with some exaggerations', but which 'is nevertheless essentially correct', as she puts it (*ibid.*, p. 110):

‘Nothing, said the Swami, better illustrated to his own mind the difference between eastern and western methods of thought than the European idea that a man could not live alone for twenty years and remain quite sane, taken side by side with the Indian notion that, till a man had been alone for twenty years, he could not be regarded as perfectly himself.’

Thus viewing man integrally in his physical, social, and trans-social dimensions, and with a view to ensuring his total fulfilment, Vivekananda expounds a philosophy of man in which man, whether eastern or western, can feel at home and find the inspiration to achieve total life fulfilment. That philosophy finds expression in a brief statement of his, in which even postivism and secularism become integral elements of a comprehensive spirituality (*The Complete Works*, Vol. I, p. 124):

‘Each soul is potentially divine.

‘The goal (of life) is to manifest this divine within by controlling nature, external (by science, technology, and socio-political processes) and internal (by ethics and religion).

‘Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy—by one, or more, or all of these, and BE FREE.

‘This is the whole of religion.

‘Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details.’

At the back of this comprehensive spirituality stands his Advaitic vision, the vision of the unity of Brahman and Śakti, of the Impersonal-Personal God, which I had dealt with earlier. Referring to this vision and its corollary, Sister Nivedita says (‘Introduction’ to *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. I, pp. xv-xvi) :

‘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 work, all modes of struggle, all modes of creation, which are paths of realization. No distinction, henceforth, between sacred and secular. To labour is to pray. To conquer is to renounce. Life is itself religion. To have

and to hold is as stern a trust as to quit and to avoid.

‘This is the realization which makes Vivekananda the great preacher of *karma* (action) not as divorced from, but as expressing *jñāna* and *bhakti*. To him the workshop, the study, the farmyard, and the field are as true and fit scenes for the meeting of God with man as the cell of the monk or the door of the temple. To him, there is no distinction between service of man and worship of God, between manliness and faith, between true righteousness and spirituality. All his words, from one point of view, read as a commentary upon this central conviction. “Art, science, and religion”, he said once, “are but three different ways of expressing a single truth. But in order to understand this we must have the theory of Advaita.”’

It is this unifying vision that he imparted to India. As the most outstanding creator of modern India, he conceived of her as a mighty laboratory to test and verify his vision and programme of a comprehensive spirituality in the life of a seventh of the human race. He called it his ‘domestic

policy'; and he called the channelling of the energy of such an India in the spiritual service of the rest of the world his 'foreign policy'.

The India that has emerged during the last sixty years, since Vivekananda's passing away in 1902, bears the unmistakable impress of this great teacher. Within three years of his passing away, the first collective action of organized masses shook Bengal in the political field. The struggle for political freedom soon entered on a dynamic phase under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress, creating a tremendous political and social awakening in the nation and hastening the entering of India into the modern age. Political independence came in 1947. A constitution for a sovereign democratic republic was proclaimed in 1950. Since then, this process has been intensified; and vast energies, long dormant in the people, have been released, and are being increasingly released, which are having their impact in all fields of national endeavour. India is steadily learning from the West, as Vivekananda had taught, the capacity for organized work, and using that capacity to remove the poverty

and cultural backwardness of masses of her population. She is cultivating science and technology and modern socio-political processes in a big way. All these form part and parcel of Vivekananda's message of *Practical Vedānta*; they are part and parcel of his scheme of a 'toned-down materialism to suit our purposes', with a view to strengthening the age-old spiritual and cultural tradition of the nation.

In this mighty adventure, India, along with other Afro-Asian nations, is receiving all kinds of technical and other forms of assistance from the advanced nations of the East and the West. This was one of the aims which Vivekananda had cherished when he undertook his historic mission to the West in 1893. He had constantly emphasized, as I have mentioned earlier in this lecture, the international context and dimension of human problems and relationships in the modern age.

Vivekananda had assimilated the spirit of the West so thoroughly that any westerner would feel quite at home in his thought-horizon. But he represented within himself something more, namely, the resolution of

the ever-present inner contradictions obtaining within western culture and thought. This something more in him is the precious gift of his great Master, Sri Ramakrishna. Pointing to these dimensions of Vivekananda's personality in his penetrating study of his thought, Romain Rolland says (*Life of Vivekananda*, p. 192):

'I shall try to show how closely allied is the aspect of Vivekananda's thought to our own, with our special needs, torments, aspirations, and doubts, urging us ever forward, like a blind mole, by instinct upon the road leading to the light. Naturally, I hope to be able to make other westerners, who resemble me, feel the attraction that I feel for this elder brother, the son of the Ganges, who of all modern men achieved the highest equilibrium between the diverse forces of thought, and was one of the first to sign a treaty of peace between the two forces eternally warring within us: the forces of reason and faith.'

The work which Vivekananda started in the field of dissemination of Indian spiritual thought in the West, under his programme of international commerce of ideas, has

continued with increasing vigour since his passing away. The spiritual, cultural, and humanitarian movement which he had started in 1897 in the name of his Master, the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, upholding the twin ideals of renunciation and service, has grown and is flourishing in India and abroad as a meeting ground of the tested culture values of the East and the West. This is revealed even in the inspiring motto given to it by Vivekananda: *Ātmano mokṣārtham jagaddhitāya ca*—‘For one’s own spiritual liberation and for the welfare of the world.’

What, in short, the world sees in India today is the capturing of a new youthful vitality and dynamism by one of the most ancient living nations of the world, constituting about a seventh of the human race. Therein we witness the energy of the vision of Vivekananda, expressed in his first public lecture on the Indian soil at Ramnad, near Rameswaram, on his return from the West, in 1897, getting translated into national achievement (*The Complete Works*, Vol. III, pp. 145-46):

‘The longest night seems to be passing

away, the sorest trouble seems to be coming to an end at last, the seeming corpse appears to be awakening, . . . India, this motherland of ours . . . from her deep long sleep. None can resist her any more; never is she going to sleep any more; no outward powers can hold her back any more; for the infinite giant is rising to her feet.'

Opening his lecture on 'The Work before Us' delivered in Madras on his return from the West in 1897, Vivekananda referred to the divergent paths which two gifted peoples of the ancient world took—the one, the ancient Greek, who studied the outer world, and the other, the ancient Hindu, who studied the inner world. The first has influenced most of the subsequent developments of culture and thought in the West, and the other has done the same in the East. And drawing his countrymen's attention to the scope of the modern renaissance in India as the assimilation by Indian culture of the culture values of the West, with a view to correcting the imbalances in her own heritage, he said (*The Complete Works*, Vol. III, p. 271):

'Today the ancient Greek is meeting the

ancient Hindu on the soil of India. Thus slowly and silently the leaven has come; the broadening, the life-giving, and the revivalist movement that we see all around us has been worked out by these forces together. A broader and more generous conception of life is before us; and although at first we have been deluded a little and wanted to narrow things down, we are finding out today that these generous impulses which are at work, these broader conceptions of life, are the logical interpretation of what is in our ancient books. They are the carrying out, to the rigorously logical effect, of the primary conceptions of our own ancestors. To become broad, to go out, to amalgamate, to universalize, is the end of our aims. And all the time we have been making ourselves smaller and smaller, and dissociating ourselves, contrary to the plans laid down in our scriptures.'

In the same lecture, he declared his conviction that the undoubtedly rich western culture stands in urgent need of the spiritual message of Indian culture (*ibid.*, pp. 276-77):

'There have been conquering races in the

world. We also have been great conquerors. The story of our conquest has been described by that noble Emperor of India, Aśoka, as the conquest of religion and spirituality. . . . The best work that you ever did for yourselves was when you worked for others, trying to disseminate your ideas in foreign languages, beyond the seas, and this very meeting is proof how the attempt to enlighten other countries with your thoughts is helping your own country. . . . Ay, as has been declared on this soil first, love must conquer hatred, hatred cannot conquer itself. Materialism and all its miseries can never be conquered by materialism. Armies when they attempt to conquer armies only multiply and make brutes of humanity. Spirituality must conquer the West. Slowly they are finding out that what they want is spirituality to preserve them as nations. They are waiting for it; they are eager for it.'

Vivekananda exhorted the educated youth of India to imbibe the modern spirit and become dynamic agents of social change and fearlessly cut out and remove all the dead wood in their national heritage. At the same time, he drew their attention to the imperish-

able element in their national heritage, namely, a scientific spiritual tradition, free and fearless, amplified and reauthenticated in this age by his own illustrious Master, and to the modern world's hunger for the same (*The Complete Works*, Vol. V, Seventh Edition, p. 43):

‘The whole world requires Light. It is expectant! India alone has that Light, not in magic, mummeries, and charlatanism, but in the teaching of the glories of the spirit of real religion—of the highest spiritual truth. That is why the Lord has preserved the race through all its vicissitudes unto the present day. Now the time has come.’

Vivekananda's love for India was the product of his love for man. To awaken men and women everywhere to their divine birthright was his life's mission. He saw man in the light of his own vision, and the vision of the Indian sages, as the Ātman, ever pure and ever free and infinite, assuring the infinite possibility of his growth, development, and realization. Speaking on ‘The Mission of the Vedānta’ at Kumbakonam in 1897, he summoned humanity to

this spiritual adventure (*ibid.*, Vol III, p. 193):

‘Arise, awake! Awake from this hypnotism of weakness. *None* is *really* weak; the soul is infinite, omnipotent, and omniscient. Stand up, assert yourself, proclaim the God within you, do not deny Him! . . . Teach yourself, teach every one his real nature; call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come, when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.’

When pressed by his Indian disciples to return to India to serve the cause of his own people, he replied to them from New York on 9 August 1895 in these clear words embodying his glorious vision of human divinity and unity (*ibid.*, Vol. VIII, Third Edition, pp. 349-50):

‘Doubtless I do love India. But every day my sight grows clearer. What is India, or England, or America to us? We are the servants of that God who by the ignorant is called Man. He who pours water at the root, does he not water the whole tree?’

‘There is but one basis of well-being, social, political, or spiritual, to know that I and my brother are One. This is true for all countries and all people. And Westerners, let me say, will realize it more quickly than Orientals, who have almost exhausted themselves in formulating the idea and producing a few cases of individual realization.’

This vision of unity finds eloquent expression in a verse by the philosopher Gāuḍapāda of the seventh century A.D., in which he expounds the scope of Vedānta (*Māṇḍūkya Kārikā*, IV. 2):

*Asparśayogo vai nāma
sarvasattva sukho hitaḥ;
Avivādo aviruddhaśca
deśitastam namāmyaham—*

‘I salute this well-known philosophy which teaches the solidarity of all existence, which strives for the happiness and welfare of all beings, and which is free from strife and contradiction.’

VIVEKANANDA’S VISION OF THE FUTURE WORLD ORDER

In a luminous passage in his lecture on ‘My Master’, delivered in New York in

1896, Vivekananda refers to the limitations of each of the cultural types developed and conditioned by religion in the orient, and by the physical sciences and the positivistic outlook in the occident. He points out their complementarity and says that the modern age will witness the emergence of a culture, neither oriental, nor occidental, but human, through a healthy interaction and assimilation among cultures; and he presents Ramakrishna as the powerful initiator of such a process in India. Though a bit long, it bears reproduction in this context. (*The Complete Works*, Vol. IV. pp. 155-56):

‘Each of these types has its grandeur, each has its glory. The present adjustment will be the harmonizing, the mingling of these two ideals. To the Oriental, the world of spirit is as real as to the Occidental is the world of senses. In the spiritual, the Oriental finds everything he wants or hopes for; in it he finds all that makes life real to him. To the Occidental he is a dreamer; to the Oriental the Occidental is a dreamer playing with ephemeral toys, and he laughs to think that grown-up men and women should make so much of a handful of

matter which they will have to leave sooner or later. Each calls the other a dreamer. But the Oriental ideal is as necessary for the progress of the human race as is the Occidental, and I think it is more necessary. Machines never made mankind happy and never will make. He who is trying to make us believe this will claim that happiness is in the machine; but it is always in the mind. That man alone who is the lord of his mind can become happy, and none else. And what, after all, is this power of machinery? Why should a man who can send a current of electricity through a wire be called a very great man and a very intelligent man? Does not nature do a million times more than that every moment? Why not then fall down and worship nature? What avails it if you have power over the whole of the world, if you have mastered every atom of the universe? That will not make you happy unless you have the power of happiness in yourself, until you have conquered yourself. Man is born to conquer nature, it is true; but the Occidental means by "nature" only physical or external nature. It is true that external nature is majestic, with its moun-

tains, and oceans, and rivers, and with its infinite powers and varieties. Yet there is a more majestic internal nature of man, higher than the sun, moon, and stars, higher than this earth of ours, higher than the physical universe, transcending these little lives of ours; and it affords another field of study. There the Orientals excel, just as the Occidentals excel in the other. Therefore it is fitting that, whenever there is a spiritual adjustment, it should come from the Orient. It is also fitting that when the Oriental wants to learn about machine-making, he should sit at the feet of the Occidental and learn from him. When the Occident wants to learn about the spirit, about God, about the soul, about the meaning and mystery of this universe, he must sit at the feet of the Oriental to learn.

‘I am going to present before you the life of one man who has put in motion such a wave in India.’

Aldous Huxley calls the human products of the ancient civilizations ‘wise fools’, and of the modern civilization ‘intelligent fools’, and urges the need to produce intelligent wise men and women.

VIVEKANANDA: 'A HARMONY OF ALL
HUMAN ENERGY'

The philosophy and vision represented by Vivekananda is meant to produce such fully integrated men and women. He himself was a remarkable synthesis of diverse values—ancient and modern. In the words of Jawaharlal Nehru (*Discovery of India*, p. 400):

'Rooted in the past, and full of pride in India's heritage, Vivekananda was yet modern in his approach to life's problems; he was a kind of bridge between the past of India and her present.'

Rabindranath Tagore, himself a poet of international stature, said about Vivekananda to Romain Rolland once: 'If you want to understand India, study Vivekananda; in him everything is positive, nothing negative.' In his essays written in Bengali in 1909, and published in the new 15-Volume Bengali edition of his complete works under the general title 'Samaj', Tagore greeted Vivekananda as the meeting-point of East and West (*Rabindra Racanāvalī*, Vol. XIII, p. 55):

‘That great soul whose death occurred a few years ago in Bengal, that Vivekananda also rose keeping the East to his right and the West to his left and himself standing in between. The purpose of his life was not to contract India for all time to narrow thought-moulds by excluding the West from Indian history. To accept, to mingle, to create was, verily, his genius. He sacrificed his life to open up a communication line by which the achievements of India may be given to the West and the achievements of the West may be accepted in India.’

Let me refer to the glowing tribute of Romain Rolland in which he greets Vivekananda as the dynamic meeting point of East and West (*The Life of Vivekananda*, p. 310):

‘In the two words equilibrium and synthesis Vivekananda’s constructive genius may be summed up. He embraced all the paths of the spirit: the four *yogas* in their entirety, renunciation and service, art and science, religion and action from the most spiritual to the most practical. Each of the ways that he taught had its own limits, but he himself had been through them all, and

embraced them all. As in a quadriga, he held the reins of all four ways of truth, and he travelled towards unity along them all simultaneously. He was the personification of the harmony of all human Energy.'

Athens, it has been said, was the school of all Hellas or Greece; and Greece, on her part, is the school of all that is essentially modern in the modern West. India, similarly, was the school of much that was distinctive of the East. And blending, naturally and gracefully, Greece and India within himself, Vivekananda today shines forth as the school of all mankind. He will educate modern man, both in East and West, so as to rescue him out of his provincialism in outlook and one-sidedness in character, and confer on him the realization of his total human excellence.

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