

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



June 2020

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THE ROAD TO WISDOM

Swami Vivekananda on Steps to Enlightenment II

Everyone without exception, everyone of us, can attain to this culmination of Yoga. But it is a terrible task. If a person wants to attain to this truth, he will have to do something more than to listen to lectures and take a few breathing exercises. Everything lies in the preparation. How long does it take to strike a light? Only a second; but how long it takes to make the candle! How long does it take to eat a dinner? Perhaps half an hour. But hours to prepare the food! We want to strike the light in a second, but we forget that the making of the candle is the chief thing. But though it is so hard to reach the goal, yet even our smallest attempts are not in vain. We know that nothing is lost. Breathing, posturing, etc. are no doubt helps in Yoga; but they are merely physical. The great preparations are mental. The first thing necessary is a quiet and peaceable life. If you want to be a Yogi, you must be free, and place yourself in circumstances where you are alone and free from all anxiety. He who desires a comfortable and nice life and at the same time wants to realise the Self is like the fool who, wanting to cross the river, caught hold of a crocodile, mistaking it for a log of wood (*Vivekachudamani*, 84). 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and everything shall be added unto you.' This is the one great duty, this is renunciation. Live for an ideal, and leave no place in the mind for anything else. Let us put forth all



our energies to acquire that which never fails—our spiritual perfection. If we have true yearning for realisation, we must struggle, and through struggle growth will come. The greatest help to spiritual life is meditation (Dhyana). In meditation we divest ourselves of all material conditions and feel our divine nature. We do not depend upon any external help in meditation. The touch of the soul can paint the brightest colour even in the dingiest places; it can cast a fragrance over the vilest thing; it can make the wicked divine—and all enmity, all selfishness is effaced. The less the thought of the body, the better. For it is the body that drags us down. It is attachment, identification, which makes us miserable. That is the secret: To think that I am the spirit and not the body, and that the whole of this universe with all its relations, with all its good and all its evil, is but as a series of paintings—scenes on a canvas—of which I am the witness.

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*,
(Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2016), 2.35-7.

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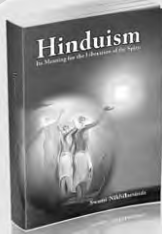
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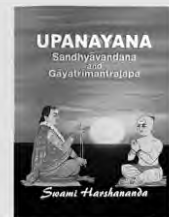
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This booklet by Swami Harshananda, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, expounds in a simple language the philosophy behind the puja or worship and its significance. Also, a simple but practical procedure of a typical puja is given in the appendix as a model. This booklet will help readers understand the philosophy and the rationale behind the puja.

Upanayana Swami Harshananda

This booklet by Swami Harshananda, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, explains the meaning, significance and procedure of Upanayana, Sandhyavandana and Gayatri mantra japa. This booklet provides the basic knowledge of the Upanayana and will enlighten both the parents who perform this ceremony and the boys who undergo this sacrament.



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The Concept of Tapas in Valmiki Ramayana Anna N. Subramanian

This book, authored by Sri Anna N. Subramanian, a well-known writer and translator, explains the concept and the different kinds of tapas as described in the Valmiki Ramayana. This book will help the readers understand the idea of tapas as embodied in the lives of great Avatars, and help them to incorporate it in their own lives.



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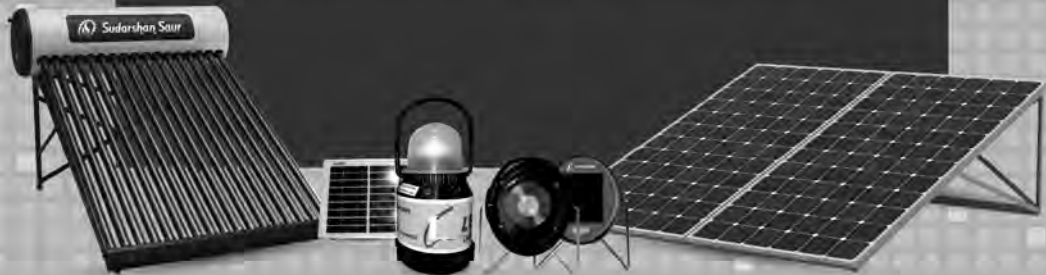
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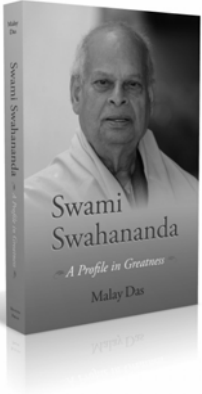
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SWAMI SWAHANANDA *A Profile in Greatness*

by Dr. Malay Das

The spiritual head of the Vedanta Society of Southern California for thirty-six years, Swami Swahananda, a direct disciple of Swami Vijnanananda, worked ceaselessly to spread Sri Ramakrishna's message. He established seventeen centers and sub-centers throughout the United States and has left the Ramakrishna movement in the West a rich legacy.

In this intimate, loving portrait, Dr. Malay Das presents Swami Swahananda as he knew him during the last seventeen years of the swami's life. We witness the guru's compassionate care for devotees and disciples, his ability to love with detachment, and his dignity and grace during his final illness.

Written in a simple, lucid and entertaining style, this spiritual biography will inspire sincere spiritual seekers from all traditions and offer them a glimpse into the wonderful life and work of this great monk and spiritual leader.



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Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

June 2020
Vol. 125, No. 6

Maitrayaniya Upanishad

मैत्रायणीयोपनिषत्

तस्माद्वा एतस्मादात्मनि सर्वे प्राणाः सर्वे लोकाः सर्वे वेदाः सर्वे देवाः सर्वाणि च भूतान्युच्चरन्ति तस्योपनिषत्सत्यस्य सत्यमिति । अथ यथाद्रौंघाग्नेरभ्याहितस्य पृथग्धूमा निश्चरन्त्येवं वा एतस्य महतो भूतस्य निश्चसितमेतद्यद्वेदो यजुर्वेदः सामवेदोऽथर्वाङ्गिरसा इतिहासः पुराणं विद्या उपनिषदः श्लोकाः सूत्राण्यनुव्याख्यानानि व्याख्यानान्यस्यैवैतानि विश्वा भूतानि ।

॥ ६.३२ ॥

Tasmad va etasmad-atmani sarve pranah sarve lokah sarve vedah sarve devah sarvani cha bhutany-uchcharanti tasyopanishat-satyasya satyamiti. Atha yathardraidha-agner-abhyahitasya prithagdhuma nishcharantyevam va etasya mahato bhutasya nishvasitam-etad-yad-rigvedo yajurvedah samavedo'tharvangirasa itihasa puranam vidya upanishadah sblokah sutranany-anuvyakhyanani vyakhyananysyaivaivaitani vishva bhutani. (6.32)

Indeed, from the one who is in the self come forth all prana, all worlds, all the Vedas, all the gods, and all living beings. Its explanation is that it is the truth of all truth. As when fire made from damp wood is kindled, smoke comes out separately, similarly, indeed from this great being has been breathed forth that which is the Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda, the Atharva Veda, the mantras visualised by Sage Angirasa, epics, Puranas, sciences, Upanishads, verses, aphorisms, explanations, and commentaries. Indeed, from it all these things come forth. (6.32)

THIS MONTH

CONTEMPLATION AND READING have always helped bring sanity of mind. Books are not just great companions but reflections of the history of human wisdom. Books are also different personalities. The need for and the role of books is explained in **Talking with Books**.

Subhasis Chattopadhyay, theologian, psychoanalyst, and assistant professor of English in the postgraduate department of Narasinha Dutt College, Howrah, draws up a reading list for the present troubled times in **Contrarian Reading During COVID-19: A Reading List**.

Swami Narasimhananda, editor, *Prabuddha Bharata*, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Uttarakhand, discusses the various methods of purifying the mind as detailed in the Bhagavadgita in the third and final instalment of **The Psychology of the Gita**.

Human beings are content to live a life drifting aimlessly in the stream of time as long as life lasts: be born, receive education, get a job, get married, and die. Surely, nature had some purpose in mind when she brought the human being into existence in the course of evolution. There is a frustrated psychological vacuum, an aberration of the mind, and lack of peace. Physically, one is deprived of health and invaded by an ever growing number of fatal diseases with no remedy immediately in sight. People in general understand the need to work hard upon improving the quality of life, especially of women and children, to ensure a better workplace to live in; but that is not taking place. Swami Satyapriyananda,

a former editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*, Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math, explains how India welcomes the spirit of inquiry in the sixth instalment of **Advaita Vedanta: Swami Vivekananda and the Global Context**.

The young have wonderful insights on various issues. In *Young Eyes*, such insights are brought to the readers every month. This month Aadrika Chattopadhyay, who is ten years old and is studying in class five, Apeejay School, Salt Lake, Kolkata, talks about **Coronavirus COVID-19**.

Many wonderful nuggets of wisdom contained in ancient scriptures are difficult to understand. In *Balabodha*, such ancient wisdom is made easy. This month's topic is **Svarga**. Understanding this popular word is necessary to understand its meaning.

Following the instructions of one's teacher or guru proves to be beneficial for both the student and the preceptor. This is shown in the story **Sage Sutikshna**. This story is this month's *Traditional Tales* and has been translated from the Tamil book *Anmika Kathaigal*.

Simon Brodbeck was educated at the universities of Cambridge and London. He has worked at the universities of Edinburgh, London, and Cardiff (the latter since 2008), and also for the Clay Sanskrit Library. His research career has focused on the Sanskrit Mahabharata and its component parts, using philological, philosophical, and gender-studies approaches. He has edited and translated the book **Krishna's Lineage: The Harivamsha of Vyasa's Mahabharata**. From this book, we bring you this month's *Manana*.

EDITORIAL

Talking with Books

WHEN YOU WALK BY the rows of books in a library, you feel that the wisdom of the world across ages is looking down upon you. It could be a well-classified library. The collection might start with encyclopaedias, dictionaries, and other collations of knowledge. Looking at these massive tomes one realises that there is so much to know. One realises that the known is not even a drop from the ocean of knowledge. Things, objects, events, and persons from the human past invite you to a conversation with them. When you respond to this invitation, you start talking with books.

You have heard many truisms, proverbs, and sayings about how books are the best companions. To understand the drift of this message, you need to drown in a volume of such creations of human intellect. Indeed, books are the best companions. And as one does with a good companion, one needs to give time to them. Often, books are like the irritant catalyst introduced into the mother of pearl. Books bring irritant, disturbing, enlightening, informing, confusing, agitating, clarifying, catalyst of human knowledge. They create the pearl of wisdom within the reader. The humaneness of a human being is brought out by the pathos of a well-written story. Particularly, if the story touches on the myriad facets of human emotions. A biography, autobiography, or memoir immerses the reader's heart in a grand vision of a great person. It inspires the reader to follow suit.

From the philosophy shelves, many thinkers look at the visitor to the library. They expect an illuminating and scintillating conversation. The

Sophists want to engage in polemical debates. Acharya Shankara tells that this world in its manifold names and forms is unreal. He reminds us that we are fools in not trying to understand the Reality. Gautama Buddha shares his wisdom of the path to freedom from suffering. Swami Vivekananda gives the clarion call to everyone to realise their innate

**Books are not a collection of ink and paper.
They are different personalities.**

divinity. His guru Sri Ramakrishna taught him this. It is better to celebrate the birthdays of these thinkers by talking with them through books.

Roman history teaches us that even great empires fall. Indian Freedom Movement's history tells the tale of many unsung heroes. In the French Revolution lies the lessons of mass awakening. Human beings' evolution shows how recent they are. Information technology's marvels fascinate us. Stories of galaxies intrigue us. Kalidasa and Shakespeare sing their captivating lyrics. The struggles of discoverers and inventors baffle us. Before visiting a library, you never knew that some subjects existed. Rocks have histories. Snakes have disciplines of research. There are birds and bees and the wisdom about them. There are even books about reading books! There are books about increasing your reading speed. There are books telling you the uselessness of books. There are books about making books.

We are living in uncertain times. The pandemic coronavirus disease COVID-19 has given us a jolting shock. It has made us question the basic

presumptions of our life and being. How dependent are we on other human beings? How dependent are we on technology? There are endless debates on the wisdom of lockdowns and physical distancing. Yes, it is better to call it that than 'social distancing'. Social media has already brought social distancing. There are endless discussions on the effect on economy. But, very few seem to speak on the need for some soul-searching and contemplation. This is the time to reflect upon the human past. This is the time to ponder upon the understanding, struggles, and wisdom of our ancestors. This is a great time to get immersed in books.

One might object that reading distances from reality and makes you impractical. Reading books without interaction with people could make one like that. A person who works with people gets much better in dealing with them with the wisdom of people who lived before. With the knowledge of the failures of previous leaders, an administrator becomes better. A bad administrator does not learn lessons from history. The adage 'history repeats itself' is quite true. That is why it is important that we study and learn from history. That way we can avoid many mistakes.

A book is a journey. When one talks with a book she or he sets on a journey with that book. Like every journey, the journey of talking with a book has stops for refreshment. It has bumps, obstacles, reversing, full speed, slow speed, and traffic lights! Every book wants to tell something to the reader. Listening to that something and getting the crux of it is the secret of talking with books. It is an art to let one's obsessions and identities melt away into the words of the book. It is a talent to let the book unfold its story. It is a greater skill to listen to that story without disturbing it. The reading should be without inserting one's biases or leanings. It should be without interpreting the book in any particular manner. Listening to a book speak is listening to human past.

Every book tells us about its inspirations. One book inspires another. Follow the inspiration from one book to the other. Then, you would traverse the criss-cross of human knowledge. A book elaborates a thought. It gives the link from one thought to another. Thus, it creates a sequence of thought-images in your mind. This leads to a collage of human understanding. Talking with books makes us go into the depths of the nature surrounding us. It enables us to dive deep into the nature of our fellow human beings. And that is the reason why we need to talk with books: to understand other people.

You enjoy the company of a work of fiction when it plays scene after scene in front of the eyes of your mind. You enjoy the company of a book on science when it unravels mysteries after mysteries of nature. You enjoy a philosopher's writing when it brings in new perspectives to your mind. You sit in a cosy spot inside your house or outside in a natural setting. You sip a choice beverage and pore through pages of dead wood. That gives a pleasurable knowledge. It is an experience unparalleled by any other human endeavour. Conversations with a book do not end. They can start over and again. A book that you finished a decade ago gives you a different light when read today.

We deny ourselves a great facet of the human world when we see a book only as number of pages bound between covers. Books are not a collection of ink and paper. They are not a combination of words. They are different personalities. Often, they are a cross section of human beings. They display a cross section of human understanding. Books are people and need appropriate treatment. Conversing with books makes us better human beings. Talking with books makes us rooted in humaneness. Why wait? Start a conversation with a book right now! You never know what you will listen. ☯

Reading Slant During COVID-19: A Contrarian List

Subhasis Chattopadhyay

WE LIVE IN TIMES of which we have only read of in Hindu, Buddhist, and Hebrew apocalypses. In these contrarian times, I have made a reading list for whoever is interested in reading. Happy reading. The books are arranged in no particular order, and no book is more or less important than the other.

If one reads Cormac McCarthy's (b. 1933) *Blood Meridian: or The Evening Redness in the West* (1985), then one would have tasted William Faulkner's (1897–1962) gothic fiction. Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and *Light in August* (1932) both echo in McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* and in his *Border Trilogy* (1992–8). Each book of the *Trilogy* is worth reading for its sheer poetry: *All the Pretty Horses* (1992), *The Crossing* (1994), and *Cities of the Plain* (1998). McCarthy's novels derive from Herman Melville's (1819–91) *Moby Dick* (1851) whose beginning has ricocheted through the centuries: 'Call me Ishmael'. Where would Melville be without his mentor, Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–64) whose tale of hypocrisy, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) is only matched by Arthur Miller's (1915–2005) *The Crucible* (1953)?

Wallace Stegner (1909–93) presents a very different look at America's West in his 1971 novel, *Angle of Repose*. And nobody ain't read about how the West was won unless they have read James A Michener's (1907–97) *Texas* (1985) and Larry McMurtry's (b. 1936) *Lonesome Dove* (1985). Those who want to study how

the American West was actually won can read Richard Slotkin's (b. 1942) *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-century America* (1992). A novel from the American Deep South that one can never forget is Carson McCullers's (1917–67) *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* (1940). Faulkner, McCullers, and McCarthy are equalled by Flannery O'Connor's (1925–64) *Wise Blood* (1952). The mellower great American novel is John Updike's (1932–2009) *In the Beauty of the Lilies* (1996). To truly understand American literature, two literary-critics suffice: Mark Van Doren (1894–1972) and Leslie Fiedler (1917–2003). The rest build their careers on Van Doren and Fiedler. Criticism is literature too, you ken.

Haruki Murakami's (b. 1949) *Norwegian Wood* (1987) is all about emotions and music. His more recent *1Q84* (2011) is a fantasy-fiction which details cultic brainwashing and yes, speaks volumes about music again. In fact, Murakami has published an interview on music; *Absolutely on Music* (2016). Music soothes the soul. Read Murakami for understanding how Japanese society has become already lonely and gasps for human connections. Every book by Murakami is a gem. A supplement to Murakami's musical impulse is Sir Roger Scruton's (1944–2020) *Understanding Music: Philosophy and Interpretation* (2009).

Remains of the Day (1989) by Kazuo Ishiguro (b. 1954) cannot be surpassed in its quiet splendour. The way the inner life of a butler is probed

is only worthy of that much-maligned writer, Jane Austen (1775–1817). While reading *Remains of the Day* do read *Emma* (1815) by Austen. Ishiguro's *When we were Orphans* (2000) is equally, if not more powerful than *Remains of the Day*.

It is not for nothing that Graham Greene's (1904–91) works were banned as corrupting by the Roman Catholic Church. Greene, who converted to Roman Catholicism, knew only too well that all human feet are clay: *A Burnt-Out Case* (1960) and *The Power and the Glory* (1940) are must-reads to understand that all of us are only human. It is this chink in our armours that later Umberto Eco (1932–2016) will portray in his *The Name of the Rose* (1980). While on the topic of human frailty, lest we judge ourselves too strictly, we should read *Black Narcissus* (1939) by Rumer Godden (1907–98) and of course, her *In this House of Brede* (1969). A J Cronin's (1896–1981) *The Keys of the Kingdom* (1941) combined with Willa Cather's (1873–1947) *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927) should lead us to Brian Moore's (1921–99) *Catholics* (1972). The blurring of good and evil is also found in *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1963) and *The Constant Gardener* (2001) by John le Carré (b. 1931). *The Bell* (1951) written by the philosopher, Iris Murdoch (1919–99) sets a new tone in English letters. If one has the time, then one should read all of Murdoch's novels. Murdoch is unique in the last century. *Christ Stopped at Eboli* (1945) by Carlo Levi (1902–75) will then take you to a territory not far from Greene and Murdoch.

The flavour of a bygone India can be found in John Masters's (1914–83) *Bhowani Junction* (1954). This India, which is no more, is revived by I Allan Sealy (b. 1951) in his *The Everest Hotel: A Calendar* (1998). Sealy's book is set in the Himalayas. After reading Sealy, one should then read Salman Rushdie's (b. 1947) *The Enchantress*

of Florence (2008). This is not the same Rushdie of *Midnight's Children* (1981) but a more mature writer who has studied the past as much as he could. *A Suitable Boy* (1993) by Vikram Seth (b. 1952) will seem now, in late April 2020, while Indians are within the COVID-19 lockdown, unrecognisable for most Indians who will read this list of books decades hence. There was once a time when Indians were not socially distant. A brilliant remake of Shakespeare's (1564–1616) *King Lear* (1608) is *We That Are Young* (2017) by Preti Taneja. Seth and Taneja's mammoth books are worth every second of our attention. Between them, they preserve for us an India that will never be found again. Two other Indian authors should be read; though both are to be found in translations. Jainendra Kumar's (1905–88) *The Resignation: Tyagpatra* (in English in 2012) and O V Vijayan's (1930–2005) revolutionary *The Legends of Khasak* (in English in 1994). While we are speaking of revolutions, we might as well read Fyodor Dostoyevsky's (1821–81) *Demons* (1871–2). This panoramic novel is as much neglected as Thomas Mann's (1875–1955) *Buddenbrooks* (1901) and Boris Pasternak's (1890–1960) *Doctor Zhivago* (1957). All these books are available in excellent English translations. While we are talking of essential contrarian readings, I must urge you to read Herman Hesse's (1877–1962) *Narcissus and Goldmund* (1930). Hesse's book will prepare you to read the earlier *The Sin of Abbé Mouret* (1875) by Émile Zola (1840–1902). Before leaving French literature, do read *Cousin Bette* (1846) by Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850). Balzac's study of rage and jealousy remains unsurpassed to date.

Two Latin American books which tend to be overlooked, but once they are read, they change us forever, are *The War of the End of the World* (1981) by Mario Vargas Llosa (b. 1936) and *Inez*

(2001) by Carlos Fuentes (1928–2012). When you are through with Vargas Llosa and Fuentes, do read *Alone in Berlin* (1947) by Hans Fallada (1893–1947). Fallada's book bristles with the demonic laughter of the Nazis. An excellent book on the Nazis remains *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (1996) by Daniel Goldhagen (b. 1959).

Charles Dickens (1812–70) is immensely popular, but reading his *Bleak House* (1852–3), one wonders why it feels so eerie to read it. Such long novels have their own inner beauty and logic. In these times of COVID-19, we must read Stephen King's (b. 1947) *The Stand* (1978) to see for ourselves, how prescient horror novels are; and while reading King, also check out his *Salem's Lot* (1975) and *The Shining* (1977).

While these books are well known, King's multi-volume *Gunslinger* series of multiverse-Westerns too shows the powers of horror and science-fiction. A book that should not be missed is *The Crow Girl* (2016) by Erik Axl Sund (pseudonym of Jerker Eriksson and Håkan Axlander Sundquist); this gave me the shivers when I read it in 2018. Jack Ketchum's (1946–2018) reworking of a true story, *The Girl Next Door* (1989) is surreally visceral. And then there is Bret Easton Ellis's (b. 1964) *American Psycho* (1991). *The Terror* (2007) by Dan Simmons (b. 1948) should be read alongside these treats. John Ajvide Lindqvist's (b. 1968) novel about kid-vampires, *Let the Right One in* (2004) and the supernatural, *Harbour* (2008) are often neglected. Natsuhiko Kyogoku's (b. 1963) *The Summer of the Ubuime* (1994) is not so well known but is equally, if not more, worth reading than Ryū Murakami's (b. 1952) *Audition* (1997).

The horror of going insane are captured in *Girl, Interrupted* (1993) by Susanna Kaysen (b. 1948) and in Dennis Lehane's (b. 1965) *Shutter Island* (2003). *The Alienist* (1994) by Caleb Carr

(b. 1955) can be read after reading John Kerr's (1950–2016) *A Most Dangerous Method: The Story of Jung, Freud, and Sabina Spielrein* (1993).

Patricia Highsmith's (1921–95) Ripley series of novels too create a moral haze, of which, *The Talented Mr Ripley* (1955) is one of my favourite books about murderous conmen. While you finish Highsmith, get on to reading Donna Tartt's (b. 1963) dreamy murder mystery, *The Secret History* (1992). To round all of this, go back in time and savour *The Laughing Policeman* (1968) by Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö. Much nearer to our own times is Peter Høeg's (b. 1957) sci-fi, *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow* (1992). Høeg's is also a scathing commentary on the racism found in contemporary Denmark. Turn to Phil Rickman (b. 1950) for a whole new experience of the supernatural in the British Isles.

For thinking deeply from a Christian viewpoint about the travails of the human soul, I would recommend *The Seven Storey Mountain* (1948) and the *Journals* of Thomas Merton (1915–68). *An Infinity of Little Hours* (2005) by Nancy Klein Maguire is one of the best books written on the Carthusians by anyone ever. *The Long Loneliness* (1952), the autobiography of Dorothy Day (1897–1980) has remained etched in my mind as also Paul Glynn's (b. 1928) *A Song for Nagasaki* (1988). Day's and Glynn's prose lift our souls. Seamus Heaney's (1965–2013) *Beowulf* is the most beautiful translation into English to date, of the only extant Anglo-Saxon epic. In Heaney's hands, it becomes an epic replete with Christian metaphors. Of poets, begin with the neglected Banjo Patterson (1864–1941).

While on the subject of spirituality, study Sri Utpaladeva's (circa 900–50) philosophy of recognition. The most accessible translation is by the late Swami Lakshmanjoo (1907–91). Boris Marjanovic's translation of Sri Abhinavagupta's (circa 950–1016) commentary on the Kashmiri

recension of the Bhagavadgita is a brilliant contrarian approach. To understand the depth of Sanatana Dharma, study the works of Mark S G Dyczkowski (b. 1951). Swami Hariharananda Aranya's (1869–1947) corpus is essential reading within both yoga and Sankhya. Georg Feuerstein (1947–2012) remains the best Western commentator on contrarian or antinomian Hinduism to date. Begin with his *The Psychology of Yoga: Integrating Eastern and Western Approaches for Understanding the Mind*, and then proceed to his other books. Feuerstein remains Sir Arthur Avalon's (1865–1936) true heir. Read Sir Avalon's books after having finished Feuerstein's vast corpus that includes encyclopaedias. Take off from here to read the two books by Christopher D Wallis. Wallis's works will now make Sri Utpaladeva's philosophy more attractive to the reader. Now, enter the world of Buddhism through Red Pine's (b. 1943) translation and commentary of *The Lankāvatāra Sūtra. The Buddha before Buddhism: Wisdom from the Early Teachings* (2016) by Gil Fronsdal (b. 1954) is the one book you need to read to get ready to delve into the myriad branches of Buddhism. Having read these authors, be still and savour the works of the medieval Hindu philosopher Vijnanabhikshu. Without knowing Vijnanabhikshu's works, how can one even begin to understand the need for the contemplative life, or, the *vita contemplativa*? Of Upanishads, read the sannyasa Upanishads translated variously by Patrick Olivelle and by Swami Atmapriyananda. Among the major Upanishads, a contrarian beginning would be the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*. And when you have read so much then start with Kisari Mohan Ganguli's English translation of the Mahabharata. If you have not read Ganguli's *Mahabharata*, you have not read the best book in the world!

If you want canonical lists of books, then

look first at Professor John Senior's (1923–99) list mentioned in Father Francis Bethel's book, *John Senior and the Restoration of Realism*. More importantly, Father Bethel's book itself is the most neglected book on books published in this century. It is another matter that the late Harold Bloom (1930–2019) stole Professor John Senior's ideas on reading and published his own list in his *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (1994). Yet Bloom's *The Visionary Company* (1961) read with Peter Gay's (1923–2015) *Why the Romantics Matter* (2015), between them, will challenge your conceptions of literature. Is not all modernist and postmodernist literature, an unending howl in the wilderness echoing that Romantic agony mapped by Mario Praz (1896–1982) in *The Romantic Agony* (1933)? Decide for yourselves. Romanticism in literature has repercussions in these times of COVID-19. Only the Romantics can help us stave off the inhuman, which threatens to obliterate Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1889–1951) insights to be found in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921). The taciturn Wittgenstein was a mystic and we need to discover this mysticism today during lockdown silence all over the world. We don't need the Nazi, Martin Heidegger's (1917–76) philosophical chicanery. Instead, read Edith Stein's (1891–1942) *On the Problem of Empathy* (trans. 1989).

In the greatest, most hilarious and yet the most moving novel of the last century, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) by John Fowles (1926–2005); Fowles observes that the sorrowful 'read far more fiction, and far more poetry, those two sanctuaries of the lonely, than most'. While on the subject of sorrow, read Shakespeare's comedies and behold the sorrows and the existential loneliness of the Fools in his plays. To be lonely, is to be wise and human. Read on.



The Psychology of the Gita

Swami Narasimhananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

PRACTISING THE AUSTERITY of knowledge means having some kind of a content monitoring system in the brain. There should be some kind of content filter in the brain. Once the thoughts in the mind are filtered, one can avoid many problems. We need to have a refinery of thoughts much like we have a refinery for oil. We should purify our thoughts to such an extent that after some practice, no impure thoughts would arise in the mind. At that stage whatever we think would be only pure.

In the Indian tradition, it is believed that if one practises complete purity and aligning of the thoughts, words, and actions for twelve years, whatever that person would say would become true. How does that happen? If one continues practising the purity and alignment of thoughts, words, and actions, whatever one would think or say would be true in the first place. And that person would have put in place a mechanism that allows only pure thoughts to arise in the mind.

What is pure? Anything which is true and unselfish is pure. Now, this has to be practised. It is not enough if one feels it to be necessary and talks about it. One has to feel the necessity for such practice, talk about such practice, but more importantly, also practise it, do it. One could hear about it in a talk or read about it, but it has to be practised. This practice cannot be done by someone else for us. The Bhagavadgita says: 'One should save oneself by oneself; one should not lower oneself. For oneself is indeed one's own friend; oneself is indeed one's own enemy.'¹

You are your own friend and your own enemy. It is just like doing pull ups. You pull yourself up using your own strength and then you let yourself go slack, and again you repeat the process. You are the person who can bring yourself up and you are the person who can let yourself down. That is why one has to be careful. There is no other person who is responsible for your growth or fall. One should never blame any person for what happens in one's life.

Some people spend their entire lives blaming others. They say: 'But for you, my life would have been much better.' Many novels and movie screenplays are written on these lines. However, one should not blame anything or anyone other than oneself for one's suffering.

When one gets angry, it is because one *wants* to get angry. When one suffers, it is because one *wants* to suffer. This might sound crazy, but this is both the philosophy and psychology of human life. One suffers because one *wants* to suffer. One cries because one *wants* to cry. Some people shed tears so often and so naturally that it is almost as if they have a water pipeline fitted to their eyes. In short, all this happens because one has *wants* or desires.

The Path of Controlling the Mind

This is what the Gita tells us. First it tells us that we generally do not want to even address our problems and we underperform as a result. Gita then shows us our problems, mainly the problem of the uncontrolled mind and then it gives us the

solution to these problems. Who has to act upon the solutions? You have to do it. We have to do it.

How do you go about implementing the solutions offered by the Gita? First, one has to have a strong resolve, not like the resolutions one takes during the dawn of a new calendar year! The Gita says: 'By completely giving up all desires which arise from thoughts, and restraining with the mind itself all the organs from every side, one should gradually withdraw with a steady intellect. Fixing the mind on the Self, one should not think of anything else whatsoever. One should bring the mind under the control of the Self itself, by restraining it from all those causes, whatever they might be, due to which the restless, unsteady mind wanders away' (6.24-6).

Once you have a strong resolve, how do you proceed further? It is not that you sit for meditation and in one hour flat, you achieve illumination. It does not happen like that; it always takes time. There is a funny story about being slow and steady. A person was advised to be active and brisk. That person asked the reason for this advice and was told that by being so, he would live long and be happy. That person replied: 'No, I follow the tortoise model.' Tortoise is slow but it has a very long lifespan. That does not mean that if one wants to live long, one should lay all day on a bed!

It is probable that Swamiji's message, 'Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached,'² has been misunderstood by Indians. Studies reveal that India is one of the most sleep-deprived nations in the world!³ When Swamiji gave the clarion call to arise and awake, he definitely was not asking Indians to not sleep!

It is necessary for a person to have a good night's sleep. Eight hours of sleep is necessary to remain healthy. Many young Indians have fallen ill or even died because of problems in their heart that was caused because of a lack of

adequate sleep. Some people believe that four to five hours of sleep is enough. That is not true. One needs at least seven hours of sleep every day.⁴ Sleep is a great stress buster. One would not get stressed if one sleeps properly.

After having a strong resolve to control the mind, one needs to slowly and steadily proceed with the controlling of the mind. Then, the progress would be also steady. One should not get distracted; the mind should not waver. However, it is the nature of the mind to waver and get distracted. The moment the mind is asked to not do something, that is exactly what the mind would do. If you say to the mind, 'Do not do this,' it will do exactly that. Parents should never tell their children not to do something because then they will do exactly the thing that was prohibited.

What to do when the mind does exactly the opposite when it is asked not to do something. What to do when the mind wavers or gets distracted? The mind behaves better when it has a goal. That is why goalsetting is very important in our lives, more so, in spiritual life. While we make blueprints and plans for constructing buildings, we seldom have any plan or goals for building our lives.

The mind wavers more, gets distracted more, without a goal. Hence, one should set a goal. After setting a goal, and after slowly and steadily trying to fix the mind on the goal, when the mind is deflected from the goal, one should bring it back and fix it on the goal.

Swamiji in his *Karma Yoga* talks about a ghost, who did whatever his master asked him to do. Every work the master gave it, it completed within seconds. The condition was that the ghost would kill the master if it did not get any work. Unable to give any more work to the ghost, the master gave him a dog's curly tail and asked him to straighten it. The ghost tried to do that and finally gave up and let the master have

all possessions that it had given and assured him that no harm would be done to him.⁵

The mind is almost like the dog's curly tail. Every time one tries to fix it on something, it runs away. The mind is a monkey. It keeps on jumping from one thing to the other. One has to bring the mind back again and again and fix it on the goal. And if this is done in a sustained manner, in time, one can control the mind.

It is like handling our mobile phones. Often the mobile phone makes us restless. However, there is a way out of this problem. When one becomes desperate to use the mobile phone, one should switch it off and do something else. When one does this regularly, one understands that one's existence does not depend on that mobile phone or the SIM card. Even a fifteen-minute break helps one see that switching off the mobile phone or not using it for some time does not create any problem, nothing changes, and it does not matter. Before the advent of mobile phones, did not people live and work happily?

Indians are passionate about mobile phones because they are passionate about talking. Indians are obsessed with talking. Most of their time is spent in talking. The time they spend in talking is wasted, hardly accomplishing anything. All the mobile phone companies and the mobile service providers of the world invest in India because they know that Indians love to talk and they will have huge profits. Indians love to talk, which might not be the same as communicating.

The Gita describes the restless nature of the mind: 'Arjuna said: "For, O Krishna, the mind is unsteady, turbulent, strong and obstinate. I consider its control to be as greatly difficult as of the wind." The Blessed Lord said: "O mighty-armed one, undoubtedly the mind is difficult to control and restless. But, O son of Kunti, it is brought under control through practice and detachment."⁶

Arjuna says that this mind is so restless, it is not resting in peace but resting in pieces and it is as difficult to control this mind as it is difficult to control the wind. How can you control the wind? Is it even possible to control? No, it is not. So, what do we do?

We have been given all this wisdom about controlling the mind. You might say: 'All this wisdom is good but when I do not want to think about a pizza, that is exactly what my mind would be thinking! Though I now know that I should bring back my mind to the object of my concentration, that is not quite simple.' So how to control the mind?

Sri Krishna gives the answer. He uses two key words: *abhyasa*, practice and *vairagya*, dispassion. Sri Krishna says: 'Yes, there is no doubt that the mind is restless and difficult to control.' Controlling the mind is not as simple as writing a few lines of programming code and creating a content filter. It is very difficult. However, through practice and dispassion the mind can be controlled.

An interesting incident happened in the life of Swami Bhuteshananda, who was the twelfth president of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. He used to live in a centre of the Ramakrishna Math in Kolkata and used to go on morning walks every day. One day when he was having his regular morning walk, he saw a boy, probably in his teens, coming from the opposite side on a bicycle, throwing rolled newspapers to various houses. Swami Bhuteshananda was intrigued to see that the boy deftly threw the newspapers, sometimes to a balcony, sometimes to the second floor of a building, sometimes to a veranda, and every time the newspaper landed on the intended spot. This the boy was doing all the while riding the bicycle. This is a common sight in the morning in India.

When the boy came near him, Swami Bhuteshananda asked the boy the secret of his skilful

throwing of the newspapers. The boy did not get down from his bicycle and passing by Swami Bhuteshananda, said in Sanskrit: '*Abhyasena tu kaunteya*'. Spirituality lives in India. This is proven by this incident. That boy also knew that the secret of controlling the mind is practice. Even if some so-called intellectual says that spirituality does not exist amongst the Indian masses, one should not believe that.

Swamiji said: 'This, our motherland, has religion and religion alone for its basis, for its backbone, for the bed-rock upon which the whole building of its life has been based. ... Do you want that the Ganga should go back to its icy bed and begin a new course? Even if that were possible, it would be impossible for this country to give up her characteristic course of religious life and take up for herself a new career of politics or something else.'⁷

All politicians know that religion is the backbone of India and they use it to their advantage. But they do not tell this to the public. Religion being the backbone of India can be seen every now and then in India. Some years ago, on 21 September 1995, an idol of Lord Ganesha in south Delhi started drinking milk and within a few hours, Ganesha idols around the world started drinking milk.⁸

In India, one generally finds that a truck driver, usually drunk from the previous night when he had probably indulged in much sense pleasure and spent the night in a roadside motel, comes to his truck the next morning, burns some incense sticks and waves them in front of the steering wheel when even the stench of his liquor has not yet gone. Even while having a glass of alcohol, some Indians first sprinkle some drops as an offering to some invisible god. That is the extent of religious practice in India. Religion truly lives in India. Therefore, it is quite normal for a newspaper boy to quote the Gita. By



Swami Bhuteshananda (1901–98)

practice one can achieve things that are seemingly difficult.

Gita's Purification System

The Gita presents the following systems of purification or tapasya, austerity: 'The worship of gods, twice-borns, venerable persons and the wise; purity, straightforwardness, celibacy, and non-injury are said to be bodily austerities. Speech that causes no pain, which is true, agreeable and beneficial; as well as the practice of study of the scriptures are said to be austerities of speech. Peace of mind, gentleness, reticence, withdrawal of the mind, purity of heart—these are called mental austerities.'⁹

There are certain moral or values systems which are good to follow. It is like an antivirus software for your computer. If you have a good antivirus software installed on your computer, your computer is safe. The first thing that one does when one buys a new computer is to install an antivirus software and get it updated. Then one can use the computer.

Similarly, one needs to have some kind of control at the three levels of the body, speech, and the mind. What are these controls? One needs to worship or respect gods and wise and knowledgeable people, and one's teachers. One has to maintain cleanliness, be straightforward, be pure in thought, words, and actions, and not injure any one.

This is what the Gita tells us. This is simple psychology. The moment we have these teachings clearly in our mind, automatically many problems are avoided. You do not speak in such a way that would create trouble and you speak the truth.

One has to speak the truth that is pleasant to hear and never speak the truth that is unpleasant. However, one should never say something that is pleasant if it is untrue. One should not polish or sugar coat one's words. Sri Sarada Devi said: 'Should one speak such words as would hurt the feelings of another? Even if it is truth, it should not be told in an unpleasant manner. Finally, you will end up with that kind of nature. If one's sensitivity is lost, then nothing would control one's speech. The Master used to say, "If you have to ask a lame man how he became lame, you must only say: How did your leg get bent this way?"'¹⁰

You do not call a person fat, but call them healthy. One should not insult a person by telling them their evident shortcomings. At the same time if a person is doing something wrong, you need to tell it to that person's face.

Thus, one should continue to learn till the last breath and continue to practise the control of the mind and the senses. That is the austerity at the level of speech. One should be always cheerful. According to Swamiji, the 'first sign that you are becoming religious is that you are becoming cheerful'.¹¹

One has to also practise silence. It does not mean that one should not speak when it is required. It only means that one should not

become garrulous or turn into a chatterbox. One should also have the purity of intention and sincerity of purpose. We all commit mistakes, but the biggest mistake is to have a wrong intention.

It is not sufficient to be disciplined; one should also have good intentions. We have many examples of highly disciplined people having bad intentions in Hindu mythology. Ravana also performed austerities as did his brother Kumbhakarna. But their intentions were bad.

One should worship or respect gods and the twice-born. The word *dvija* or twice-born is used for the brahmanas. Why? Because they are first born out of their mother's womb and then they are born again when they are invested with the sacred thread.

The Gita gives us the remarkable method of withdrawing our senses from the sense objects: 'And when this person fully withdraws the senses from the objects of the senses, as a tortoise wholly withdraws the limbs, then this person's wisdom remains established.'¹²

We have briefly seen how the mind has been analysed in the Gita. Only select verses were discussed here. However, the Gita is full of such verses. We saw how the Gita explains the entire workings of the mind in just two verses in the second chapter and describes the chain of events that lead to one's destruction. So, what does the Gita want us to be?

In this verse, the Gita gives us a very graphic imagery. It asks us to take things as they come. One should not sit in value judgement of things. One should have a firewall protection just like one has in a computer. You should not allow any unwanted data packet to enter into your system. The firewall would see what is entering your system. It would be like a tortoise, which withdraws its limbs when it senses danger. A common experience we have is that of someone constantly talking to you irritably over the phone without

listening to what you have to say. When all attempts at trying to calm that person fails, we sometimes keep the phone aside and then pick it up after say five minutes only to find the person still going on with their annoying chatter!

This shows that when we withdraw ourselves from a situation, we get much peace, much serenity. This cracks the whole of the psychology of the human mind. Starting with the two verses in the second chapter and ending with the above mentioned verse with the imagery of the tortoise, the Gita gives us a complete manual on how to deal with the mind. Now, whether we would actually do it entirely depends on us.

The manuals of life like the Gita help us differentiate the good from the bad. Whenever one does something good, one gets an ennobling feeling and a feeling of tremendous strength. Swamiji said: ‘Anything that makes you weak physically, intellectually, and spiritually, reject as poison.’¹³

These manuals of life tell you that you should speak the truth and that you should not speak a lie. Nowadays, everyone around you, including your parents, would encourage you to speak lies. They would ask: ‘What is the harm if you speak some lies?’ They would have the same line of argument for accepting bribes, being corrupt, and other immoral practices. Their logic is that everyone is doing such things, so why should you also not do that?

The children of such parents would say: ‘We have deposited a lump sum amount with the old age home. Please go there. We will regularly send you the monthly maintenance charges.’ And the parents would ask: ‘Why do you say such things?’ To which the children would reply: ‘Because you were telling us that since everyone is doing such things we should also do them. Everyone is sending their parents to old age homes and that is why we are also doing that!’



Therefore, though your parents, family, teachers, or friends might not be telling you what is right, you can know what is right from these manuals of life and you can know what you have to do in a particular situation. And the test would be whether such action gives you strength.

Another thing that one might feel confused about is whether to help a person who is seeking help from you. This confusion has been cleared by Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. Once the monk in charge of the Ramakrishna Math at Jayrambati asked her: “Mother, in our free dispensary those who are fairly well off also come to take medicines. But our dispensary is meant for the poor only. Is it right that such people are served?” The Mother thought for a minute and said: “My dear, in these parts all are poor. Yet, knowing all the details, if they still come to wait for free medicine, you will of course serve them if you can. Anyone who comes begging may be considered poor.”¹⁴ Sri Sarada Devi said that if somebody asks you for something, then that person is in need and has to be helped.

Of course, you have the freedom of choice to help or not help. However, we should not judge that person. Usually, we do not want to

help someone, but yet want to maintain a good relationship with them and so do not give them a clear and straightforward answer. This should not be done. One has to politely tell that person that one cannot help.

Often, it is asked whether it is possible to work in an unattached manner. Yes, it is definitely possible. Strong desire could be distracting but a strong resolve or a clear purpose is good. Desire and resolve are two different things. Desire will bring attachment; resolve need not always bring attachment.

Medical associations across the world consider it unethical for medical practitioners or doctors to treat their kith and kin. For example, if a surgeon were to operate a family member, that person's hands would shake and tremble because the surgeon is directly connected with the result of the surgery. Surgery requires much precision. And if the surgeon's hands shake or the surgeon is otherwise agitated, it would be difficult to do the surgery.

This is what happened to Arjuna in the beginning of the war. When a surgeon is operating on one's relatives, there is a desire that the surgery should go well, there is attachment. However, when the surgeon is operating some other person, there is purpose, but no strong desire or attachment. The surgeon does the operation with complete involvement but if the patient dies, the surgeon is not as affected as when it is a relative. But when the surgeon is emotionally attached to the patient and wants that the patient should survive at any cost, there would be poor judgement.

This is a strong desire as opposed to a strong resolve. Even when the patient is unrelated, the surgeon operates with the intention to save the patient. That is a strong resolve but not a strong desire or attachment.

Another problem that one often faces is handling dejection or depression. First, one has to find

out the cause of dejection or depression. Then, one has to think about the worst possible thing that could happen because of that cause. Prepare your mind for that and also remember that it is the worst possible outcome that you are preparing yourself for which might never happen.

Also, you should have an idea about yourself. Who are you? Are you merely this body and the mind or something else, something higher? Most of the time, we worry about things that are temporary, that do not matter much in the larger scheme of things. If you consider yourself to be temporary and think you are affected because of losing temporary things, you would have a nightmarish life. That is why one should understand that we are not temporary and that we are the Atman, which is beyond all these temporary names and forms.

With a limited idea of oneself, people make foolish decisions. For example, a person commits suicide just because their email account was hacked. In the fairy tales of olden days, we find that a person's life-force was stored in the heart of a parrot or split into several parts and stored in various places. Similarly, nowadays, our life-force seems to be stored in our mobile phone, email, social networking profiles, and such things. That is why, when something goes wrong with these things, we try to end our lives.

The question one needs to ask is: 'Is this my real existence?' This is one of the questions that Arjuna asks in the Gita: 'Now then, O scion of the Vrishni dynasty, impelled by what does a person commit mistakes even against one's wish, being constrained by force, as it were?'¹⁵

Arjuna says that he does not want to commit mistakes but somehow someone is forcing him to do mistakes. Sri Krishna replies: 'This desire, this anger, born of the quality of rajas, is a great devourer, a great sinner. Know this to be the enemy here' (3.37).

Sri Krishna says that it is desire and the accumulated impressions of the actions that we have done in the past that propel us to do what we do. In the Hindu tradition, it is believed that a person is born and reborn across many lifetimes till one gets moksha. All the actions of this life and previous lives have their impressions on the mind. These impressions or samskaras determine a person's character.

That is why the Gita says that one should be dispassionate and should accept things as they come. Often, the amount of things that we accumulate create attachment and stress. Sometimes, all that we need for living could be contained in a backpack.

That is what is shown in the English movie *Up in the Air*. In the movie, the main character played by George Clooney, is a downsizing expert, who goes from company to company, firing people. He gets an intern, who eventually takes his job. On her first trip, the intern finds it difficult to move her big bags and Clooney shows her that most things she was carrying were not necessary and that a small backpack is all that she needs.

Of course, the above mentioned verse of the Gita should not be interpreted to mean that we do not have any control over our lives. Everything is in our control. We see this universe in a particular manner because of our ignorance. The associations that we have with objects and persons are very much in our control.

All these temptations, desires, and tendencies are within us. For example, a naked person is seen differently by an infant, by that person's child, by that person's spouse, and by that person's friend. If the problem was outside you, why are there these differences; all of them should have seen the person in the same manner. Definitely, the problem is not in the external object or person, but in the subject.

We need to have a strong resolve to achieve

a goal, not strong attachment. However, we are not trained for facing failures; we are always trained for succeeding. But, what would happen if you do not succeed? One should have various plans, plan A, plan B, plan C, till plan Z.

Failure brings dejection and sorrow, and success brings pleasure. But instead of being carried away by these temporary sorrows and pleasures, one should have a definite purpose. One should have a vision and be passionate about that vision. However, one should not be dejected on failure and also not be elated on success. That is the lesson of non-attachment that the Gita teaches us. ❧

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Advaita Vedanta: Swami Vivekananda and the Global Context

Swami Satyapriyananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

Alvars: The Devotees of Vishnu or Sri Krishna

WHO WERE THE Alvars? ‘Ālvār is a Tamil word which means “he who rules the world by his love of and devotion to God”¹ The Alvars played a crucial part in the bhakti movement in Tamil Nadu through their hymns, which have been compiled in the four thousand verses of *Divya Prabandham*. The Alvars were from all castes and occupations and could resonate with the masses.

Nayanars: The Devotees of Shiva

The word ‘Nayanar’ means a teacher of Shiva. Nayanars were sixty-three saints who were worshippers of Shiva. They had a great influence on the bhakti movement in Tamil Nadu with the Alvars.

The Tamil saint Sundarar, himself a Nayanar, first made a list of Nayanars in his poem ‘Tiruthonda Thogai’. The poem of just eleven verses lists the Nayanars till Karaikkal Ammaiyar and Sundarar calls himself ‘the servant of servants’. In the tenth century CE, the king Raja Raja Chola the first, compiled Nayanar hymns as *Tevaram*. The king’s priest also compiled a multi-volume of hymns called *Tirumurai*. The twelfth-century saint Sekkizhar wrote the twelfth volume of *Tirumurai* called *Periya Puranam*.

Sri Ramakrishna

Several thinkers have assessed and appreciated

Sri Ramakrishna, his life and teachings, and these observations show how relevant Sri Ramakrishna is and how much appeal he carries with the thinking people all over the world even to this day.

Even during his lifetime, his gurus Bhairavi Brahmani and Tota Puri, and many intellectuals and advanced spiritual aspirants of that period like Pandit Vaishnavacharan, Pandit Gauri, Pandit Narayan Shastri, Pandit Padmalochan, and Pandit Shashadar Tarkachudamani had met him and declared him to be an incarnation of God. Swami Saradananda writes:

[Bhairavi] Brahmani described the Master’s [Sri Ramakrishna’s] state as she saw it with her own eyes and as she had heard about it from people around. And comparing the Master’s present state with those recorded in the scriptures as experiences of the ancient teachers of the devotional path, she gave her opinion that his was the same state as theirs. ... Vaishnavacharan remarked with amazement that all the signs of the nineteen kinds of spiritual moods, the co-existence of which has been called in the devotional scriptures as the ‘Mahabhava’, the great mood, and observed only in the lives of Sri Radha, the embodiment of spiritual moods, and in Sri Chaitanya—were seen manifested in the Master.²

Tota Puri was amazed and deeply impressed by Sri Ramakrishna’s realisation of Vedanta in samadhi in just three days, which took him forty

long years to achieve. About Sri Ramakrishna, Arnold J Toynbee wrote:

Sri Ramakrishna's message was unique in being expressed in action. The message itself was the perennial message of Hinduism. ... In the Hindu view, each of the higher religions is a true vision and a right way, and all of them alike are indispensable to mankind, because each gives a different glimpse of the same truth, and each leads by a different route to the same goal of human endeavours. Each, therefore, has a special spiritual value of its own which is not to be found in any of the others.³

C Rajagopalachari pays the following tribute:

It is no exaggeration to call Sri Ramakrishna's teachings an Upanishad. A sage like the *ṛsis* of old was born in our age. ... Sri Ramakrishna was a *mahātmā* who saw God in his heart and in all things in the world outside. He saw Him in all things with the same certainty and strength of feeling with which we see each other. ... There is a peculiar power in the words of those who lead a godly life. They have a force which the exhortations of merely learned and intellectual men do not have. When a *maharṣi* talks, it is his whole life that speaks through him, not mere intellect (15).

Mahatma Gandhi wrote in his 'Foreword' to the *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* published from Advaita Ashrama in 1924:

The story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa's life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face. No one 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 sayings are not those of a mere learned man but they are pages from the Book of Life. They are revelations of his own experiences. They, therefore, leave on the reader an impression which he cannot resist. In this age of scepticism Ramakrishna presents an example of a bright and living faith which

gives solace to thousands of men and women who would otherwise have remained without spiritual light.⁴

Romain Rolland wrote:

I am bringing to Europe, as yet unaware of it, the fruit of a new autumn, a new message of the Soul, the symphony of India, bearing the name of Ramakrishna. It can be shown (and we shall not fail to point out) that this symphony, like those of our classical masters, is built up of a hundred different musical elements emanating from the past. But the sovereign personality concentrating in himself the diversity of these elements and fashioning them into a royal harmony, is always the one who gives his name to the work, though it contains within itself the labour of generations. And with his victorious sign he marks a new era. 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.⁵

Sarat Chandra Bose observed:

This great teacher [Sri Ramakrishna] was Bengal's contribution to the world in the last century. ... We and the rest of the world came under the influence of his teachings during his early pilgrimage and even more so, after he had completed his journey. ... To my mind, Sri Ramakrishna's mode of approach to different systems of worship inculcated in the different religions of the world is his special contribution to the history of the progress of religions in the present age. ... Sri Ramakrishna's teachings did not disturb a single religion of the world. ... He left no new religion as his legacy unto us. He did not ask anybody to change his religion with a view to realizing God. ... His teachings prove that each religion gives ample scope and opportunity to realize God. That was the distinctive peculiarity of his teachings (54-5).

Satish Chandra Chattopadhyaya wrote:

Sri Ramakrishna lived a life of manifold spiritual realization. He approached Reality along numerous paths and had very varied experiences of it. ... This is a sort of experimental verification of the truth that while Reality is one and is formless and nameless in one aspect, it may have many forms and faces in another. On the strength of such indubitable spiritual experiences and firm convictions, Sri Ramakrishna taught many truths for the good of mankind. He lived in an age in which the world was torn by conflicts of creeds and cultures, dogmas and doctrines, theologies and philosophies, and the relation between any two religious sects or communities was embittered by intolerance, jealousy and contempt of each other. It was the mission of his life to end these conflicts and bring about a reconciliation. ... In Sri Ramakrishna's teachings we have a solution of the vexed problem of God and the Absolute, which is more satisfying than any to be found elsewhere. ... Sri Ramakrishna not only preached the harmony of all religions, but his life itself was a harmony of all religions. He taught it and demonstrated it in his life by following many different religions and realizing the same God through each of them. ... He taught that all religions from crude image-worship to contemplation of the pure, formless Brahman are true and that they are all capable of leading their followers to the highest end of the religious life, namely, God (56–7).

Will Durant wrote:

[Ramakrishna] taught his followers [that] each [religion] is a way to God or a stage on the way adapted to the heart of the seeker. To be converted from one religion to another is foolishness; one need only continue on his own way, and reach to the essence of his own faith. [He said,] 'All rivers flow to the ocean. Flow, and let others flow, too!' He tolerated sympathetically the polytheism of the people, and accepted humbly the monism of the philosophers, but in his own living faith, God was a spirit incarnated

in all men, and the only true worship of God was the loving service of mankind.⁶

We live in a world in which society is vitiated by lust and lucre, running after name and fame, a mad seeking for power and position, utter selfishness, cruel competition, scams, frauds, terrorism, fake and black money, corruption at every level, utter lack of sympathy and fellow-feeling on the worldly plane, especially towards women; and with it there is the doubt about the very existence of God and the possibility of realising him, hollow preaching without a mandate from God, disbelief in the possibility of transmitting spirituality by a look, a glance, a wish, a touch, a movement of the palm over the chest or the spine, a transmission of spiritual experience through an intermediary. We doubt whether anyone could mould the mind of a person like one moulds a lump of clay. We doubt whether it is at all feasible for a person to move to another place at the same time and witness what is happening there. All such doubts were laid to rest for ever by Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples.

Religion was relegated to the background as being 'the opium of the people' on the one side and there is no idea, even now, of any meaningful purpose of one's life. Human beings are content to live a life drifting aimlessly in the stream of time as long as life lasts: be born, receive education, get a job, get married, and die. Surely, nature had some purpose in mind when she brought the human being into existence in the course of evolution. There is a frustrated psychological vacuum, an aberration of the mind, and lack of peace. Physically, one is deprived of health and invaded by an ever growing number of fatal diseases with no remedy immediately in sight. People in general understand the need to work hard upon improving the quality of life, especially of women and children, to ensure a better workplace to live in; but that is not taking place.

The Questioning Spirit Welcomed in India

Swami Ranganathananda used to refer to a book by Richard Dawkins (b. 1941) bearing the title *The Selfish Gene*. The gene *is* selfish; but wherein other than in the Atman does unselfishness reside? Academic studies have proved to be useless in removing sorrow from the heart as evident in the life of sage Narada.⁷ In the vast ocean of knowledge which is confronting us, we do not ask that fundamental question: ‘What is that, O Bhagavan, which being known, all this becomes known?’⁸ And we do not understand that reply: ‘There are two sorts of knowledge to be acquired. So say those who know Brahman, *para* (the higher) and *apara* (the lower)’ (I.I.4). Further, ‘all knowledge other than that by which one knows the Divine are lower knowledge; that by which the Imperishable is realised alone is the higher knowledge’ (I.I.5).

Sri Ramakrishna, it may be recalled, rebuked ‘M.’ sharply saying: ‘And *you* are a man of knowledge!’⁹ This meant that to know God alone is knowledge and not to know God is ignorance. In the midst of hectic pursuit of information from books, we should not lose sight of this important distinction. The approach of the ancients was to ask questions with humility and with a keen desire to know. The question arose:

When there is duality, as it were, then one smells something, one sees something, one hears something, one speaks something, one thinks something, one knows something. But when to the knower of Brahman everything has become the Self, then what should one smell and through what, what should one see and through what, what should one hear and through what, what should one speak and through what, what should one think and through what, what should one know and through what? Through what should one know that owing to which all this is known—through what, O Maitreyi, should one know the knower?¹⁰



Dr S Radhakrishnan with Swami Ranganathananda

We pride over our knowledge unlike Sir Isaac Newton who had said at the end of his voluminous research, ‘a little before he died: “I don’t know what I may seem to the world, but, as to myself, I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the sea shore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay undiscovered before me.”’¹¹ But face it, do we know the knower behind this knowledge?

How Did This Creation Come About?

The Upanishads state that from the Atman successively come *akasha*, space; *vayu*, air; *agni*, fire; *apah*, water; and *prithvi*, earth. These are called the *sukshma tanmatras*, the subtle elements. From these subtle elements are produced the subtle bodies and the gross elements. The subtle bodies are the five organs of perception, mind, intellect, five organs of action, and the five vital forces. (1) The five organs of perception are produced from the sattva particles of the subtle elements. (2) The mind and intellect as also memory and ego are produced from

the combination of the sattva particles of the subtle elements. (3) The organs of action are produced from the rajas particles of the subtle elements. (4) The five vital forces are produced from a combination of the rajas particles of the subtle elements.

The gross elements are all compounded. By a process of *panchikarana* or quintuplication, we get the *sthula tanmatras* or gross elements bearing the same names, formed by a combination of fifty per cent of an element with fifty per cent from the rest four, being 12.5 per cent of each. There is also the concept of *trivritkarana* parallel to this which considers only fire, water, and earth as the subtle elements and the combination is of fifty per cent of an element with fifty per cent of the other two elements taking twenty-five per cent from each.

The gross element space manifests sound; air manifests sound and touch; fire manifests sound, touch, and form; water manifests sound, touch, form, and taste; earth manifests sound, touch, form, taste, and smell. From these gross elements are formed the fourteen planes of the world; four kinds of gross bodies born from womb, egg, moisture, or soil; four kinds of food and drink that are swallowed, chewed, licked, or sucked.¹² Thus the gross elements find an important place in the Vedantic theory of creation.

Upanishadic View of the World

Consider fire burning in the fireplace; its red portion corresponds to the fire element; its white portion corresponds to the water element; its black portion corresponds to the earth element. After this kind of analysis, it is only the elements that are there and the fire in the fireplace vanishes!

Unless presented in modern terminology, it may be difficult to grasp this idea. Let us say that we go to a shop and buy cornflakes. We look at

the box and go through the contents. It is those chemicals we eat including the calories and no longer the cornflakes, which has given way to whatever is listed under the contents. In the case of some foodstuff, we may find an item 'emulsifier' which may be of vegetarian or non-vegetarian origin; if it is of non-vegetarian origin, Muslims will want to be assured that it is *not* of pig fat origin and Hindus will want to be assured that it is *not* of beef origin. If it is of vegetable origin, it is okay for both. So we do not eat foodstuff but we consume permissible chemicals and are conscious of potassium, fat, trans fat, sugar, protein content, and also of the calories involved. This is what we eat for breakfast, lunch, and dinner as well as during celebrations! Thus, it is justifiable to look at this world as consisting of the gross elements and not as several objects.

Eddington's Two Views of a Table: 1927 Gifford Lectures

The world is as we *like* to view it! A scientist like Sir Arthur Stanley Eddington (1882–1944), looks at an ordinary table from two standpoints. He writes:

We cannot touch bedrock immediately; we must scratch a bit at the surface of things first. And whenever I begin to scratch the first thing I strike is—my two tables. One of them has been familiar to me from earliest years. It is a commonplace object of that environment which I call the world. How shall I describe it? It has extension; it is comparatively permanent; it is coloured; above all it is *substantial*. By substantial I do not merely mean that it does not collapse when I lean upon it; I mean that it is constituted of 'substance' and by that word I am trying to convey to you some conception of its intrinsic nature. It is a *thing*; not like space, which is a mere negation; nor like time, which is—Heaven knows what! But that will not help you to my meaning because it is

the distinctive characteristic of a 'thing' to have this substantiality, and I do not think substantiality can be described better than by saying that it is the kind of nature exemplified by an ordinary table. ...

Table No. 2 is my scientific table. It is a more recent acquaintance and I do not feel so familiar with it. It does not belong to the world previously mentioned—that world which spontaneously appears around me when I open my eyes, though how much of it is objective and how much subjective I do not here consider. It is part of a world which in more devious ways has forced itself on my attention. My scientific table is mostly emptiness. Sparsely scattered in that emptiness are numerous electric charges rushing about with great speed; but their combined bulk amounts to less than a billionth of the bulk of the table itself. Notwithstanding its strange construction it turns out to be an entirely efficient table. It supports my writing paper as satisfactorily as table No. 1; for when I lay the paper on it the little electric particles with their headlong speed keep on hitting the underside, so that the paper is maintained in shuttlecock fashion at a nearly steady level. If I lean upon this table I shall not go through; or, to be strictly accurate, the chance of my scientific elbow going through my scientific table is so excessively small that it can be neglected in practical life. Reviewing their properties one by one, there seems to be nothing to choose between the two tables for ordinary purposes; but when abnormal circumstances befall, then my scientific table shows to advantage. If the house catches fire my scientific table will dissolve quite naturally into scientific smoke, whereas my familiar table undergoes a metamorphosis of its substantial nature which I can only regard as miraculous.

There is nothing *substantial* about my second table. It is nearly all empty space—space pervaded, it is true, by fields of force, but these are assigned to the category of 'influences', not of 'things'. Even in the minute part which is not empty we must not transfer the old notion

of substance. In dissecting matter into electric charges we have travelled far from that picture of it which first gave rise to the conception of substance, and the meaning of that conception—if it ever had any—has been lost by the way. The whole trend of modern scientific views is to break down the separate categories of 'things', 'influences', 'forms', etc., and to substitute a common background of all experience.¹³

When we hear the sound of drums, of veena, or of conch shells, it is a collective sound that we get and *not* the notes separately. This example we get from the Upanishads. Sri Ramakrishna says that as one approaches the ocean, one hears a great tumult and exclaims: 'What is going on?' On nearing the ocean, one sees that the sound is coming from the dashing waves and the commotion on the shore is made by the people there.

There is another Upanishadic way to understand this world. What is a gold necklace really? It is gold that contributes to the major part of the cost and the name 'necklace' and the form 'of necklace'. The purpose is also involved, that it is to be worn around the neck. When one gives a gold necklace to a goldsmith and wants him to make gold bangles out of it, he obliges by charging a certain amount. The customer argues with the goldsmith: 'I gave you a gold necklace and wanted you to make gold bangles. I see that the gold is intact. But where have you hidden the *form of the necklace*? And many thanks for giving me the *form of the bangles*.' Neither the form of the necklace nor of the bangles has an existence separate from the gold. Thus, *all* objects made of gold are only gold. And when one knows the properties of gold, one also knows the properties of all objects made of gold. Thus, gold alone is real in the galaxy of golden ornaments one can think of.

So it is for objects made from iron or clay say the Upanishads! A clay pot and a clay lamp are

both only clay and that alone is real; the pot is used for storing water so that it becomes cool and slakes one's thirst when it is hot during summer. The lamp has oil poured into it and a wick attached to it so that on being lighted it gives light all around. No one uses the pot to light a lamp, nor a lamp to keep water cool. This world is thus *Brahman alone* with name-form-purpose idea superimposed on it by maya. Once Brahman is known, everything is known. That is the idea behind 'knowing which, everything is known'. Brahman associated with different functions assumes different names; associated with seeing it is called the eye; with hearing the ear; with breathing the prana, and so on.

The Fact of Death

One fears death not because it is unknown but because it is very much known! According to the *Katha Upanishad*, a young boy Nachiketa set out at the command of his father to the god of death, Yama. After waiting for three days and nights without food and drink, Yama granted him three boons as compensation. The boy asked for the following three boons: The first was that his father should not get frightened on his return thinking him to be a ghost and should be rid of his anger; the second was a boon for all humanity that he may learn that sacrifice by the performance of which people on the earth can go to heaven where there is neither death nor hunger but only joy as long as such a stay lasts; the third boon was to know what happens after death—some say one is reborn and some others say that it all ends with death.

Yama who knows the answer to this subtle matter is the most competent teacher on this topic and there is no boon equal to this boon prayed for, and so Nachiketa rejects in one sweep all covetable things offered by Yama to dissuade him from the boon sought, saying that all these

objects of enjoyments exist for the day and are gone the next day; these only decay the vigour of the senses; importantly, such a person as the god of death will not certainly let him return without parting gifts; and so Nachiketa insisted on getting the knowledge of what transpires after death. That is the make-up of an enquiring mind.

In the Bhagavata, we have the story of King Parikshit who was unfortunately cursed by a young boy that he would die in a week from the burning sensation of the poisonous sting of a venomous serpent. What was he to do when death stared at him in the face? His teacher advised him to surrender to Shuka, the son of Vyasa. When Parikshit put this question to Shuka, 'What one who has just a week before death should do?', Shuka said that Parikshit who had only the welfare of all in mind put this question apparently for his own impending death but it was meant for all because in truth all are standing at the gate of death. Shuka then advised Parikshit on the cultivation of love for God as Sri Krishna and to merge his mind at the feet of God at the time of departure from this mortal world.

In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, we have the case of Maitreyi, one of the two wives of the great rishi Yajnavalkya; the other wife being Katyayani. When Yajnavalkya wanted to renounce and therefore distribute his wealth and property between his two wives, Maitreyi asked whether that wealth would make her immortal. When Yajnavalkya said that it would only make her wealthy, Maitreyi rejected the offer and wanted only that knowledge which made one immortal, if indeed Yajnavalkya knew it!

The fact of death has not changed and yet how differently do human beings react to it in public life. Running after progeny, wealth, status, and all transitory things, knowing well their transitory nature, one dies eventually

without enjoying any bit of it. This is called 'being unfortunate' for a human being sufficiently equipped to probe through the veil that covers Truth in existence.

Debates and the Spirit of Enquiry in Upanishadic Times

The *Kena Upanishad* has one theme, *kena* or 'by what'? It addresses every action with the question, 'impelled or directed by what' do these things happen. Such a spirit of enquiry and debate was encouraged in the Upanishadic times. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* discusses some such episodes. Once Yajnavalkya went to the court of King Janaka, who asked him whether he had come for a debate on Vedanta or for cows for the pupils in his ashrama. Yajnavalkya said in reply, 'Both'!

Another time King Janaka, the emperor of Videha, performed a sacrifice in which gifts were freely distributed among the priests. Brahmana scholars from the countries of Kuru and Panchala had assembled there. Emperor Janaka wished to know which of those brahmanas was the most erudite Vedic scholar. So he confined a thousand cows in a pen and fastened on the horns of each ten *padas* of gold. He then said to them: 'Venerable brahmanas, let him among you who is the best Vedic scholar drive these cows home.' None of the brahmanas dared to claim the position of being the best. Then Yajnavalkya said to one of his pupils: 'Dear Samsrava, drive these cows home.' Taking the command from his guru, Samsrava drove the cows away. The brahmanas were furious and challenged Yajnavalkya for a debate relating to the knowledge of Vedas. Many illustrious sages like Ashvala, the priest of Janaka, Arthabhaga, Bhujyu, Ushasta, and Uddalaka challenged him, and Yajnavalkya answered all their questions and defeated them in

the debate. Among them was the women sage Gargi, the daughter of Vachaknu, who was wise and well-versed in the Vedas. Gargi put several questions to Yajnavalkya. At long last, Gargi gave her certificate: 'Venerable brahmanas, you may consider yourselves fortunate if you can get off from him through bowing to him. None of you, I believe, will defeat him in arguments about Brahman.' Thus, Yajnavalkya came out as the victor.

The price of a loss in debate could be disastrous for the loser; all was not fun. A story goes that once Ashtavakra's father lost in argument to a scholar Vandin in the court of King Janaka and as a result he was drowned in the waters of the ocean. When Ashtavakra, just a young boy, came to know of it, he proceeded to the court of King Janaka and defeated Vandin in arguments thereby requiring Vandin to also drown in the waters of the ocean. The idea behind the drowning was to send to the plane of Varuna eminent pandits for a yajna to be performed there and all who were drowned came back safely after the yajna. One version has it that Ashtavakra did not intend using a *shastra* or scripture as a *shastra* or weapon of destruction and released Vandin from disastrous drowning.

The case of Kumarila Bhatta comes to my mind. Kumarila went to study Buddhism at the Nalanda University with the aim of refuting Buddhist doctrine so as to favour the Vedic religion. He was expelled from Nalanda when he protested against his teacher, who was ridiculing the Vedic rituals. He settled down in Prayag. To prevent the downfall of Vedic culture, Kumarila defeated many Buddhist scholars. Later in life, he felt bad for cheating the Buddhist teachers at Nalanda to learn Buddhism as a result of which he could defeat Buddhist scholars in debate. He therefore decided to end his mortal life by burning himself on a pile of peanut shells, which is

said to be the most torturous death, to free himself from the sin of cheating.

Acharya Shankara came to Kumarila, while he was in the fire of self-immolation, to hold a debate with him but Kumarila directed him to argue with his student Mandana Mishra. The argument took place and interestingly the wife of Mandana was the judge who asked both Mandana and Acharya Shankara to wear a garland of flowers, declaring that the one whose garland faded first due to the heat generated would be the loser! Mandana lost, but his wife who was the judge claimed that Acharya Shankara should defeat her too because she was a partner to her husband in dharma. She asked Acharya Shankara questions on sexual topics which were alien to a sannyasin, so the Acharya sought some time to learn all that and later defeated the wife of Mandana! Then the two, husband and wife, became disciples of Acharya Shankara.

That is the Indian tradition. It does not silence the listener into blind acceptance of dogmas. It encourages one to accept in part or in full a philosophical point of view or to make substantial changes and form a new mould of thought. Each thought-system had its adherents, who believed in that philosophical approach. It was never the case of one book, one dogma, or one saviour as found in some religions, which curtail the freedom of enquiry and investigation. One recalls to mind an incident from the Western world that we read about in the *Life of Swami Vivekananda*:

Of all stories there were two which he [Swamiji] relished most and which sent him into fits of laughter: one was of a new Christian missionary to a cannibal tribe, and the other of the 'darky' clergyman, preaching on 'Creation'. As to the former: There was once a Christian missionary newly arrived in a far-off island inhabited by cannibals. He proceeded

to the chief of the place and asked him, 'Well, how did you like my predecessor?' The reply was, 'He was de-li-cious'. And as for the 'darky' preacher: He was shouting out, 'Yo' see, God was makin' Adam, and he was makin' 'im out o' mud. And when he got 'im made, he stuck 'im up agin a fence to dry. An' then...' 'Hold on dere, preacher,' suddenly cried out a learned listener. 'What about dat dere fence? Who make dat fence?' The preacher replied sharply, 'Now you listen 'ere, Sam Jones, don' you be gwine to ask dem questions. Youse'll smash up all theology.'¹⁴



(To be continued)

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YOUNG EYES

Coronavirus COVID-19

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The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has been killing people in large numbers all over the globe. One of the scariest aspects of this disease is that in some cases people live only for three to four days and then pass away because of multiorgan failure. Not only is this disease affecting our physical health but it is also affecting our mental health. This is because almost everybody is quarantined at the moment. Since we are all inside our houses, most of us are also leading sedentary lives.

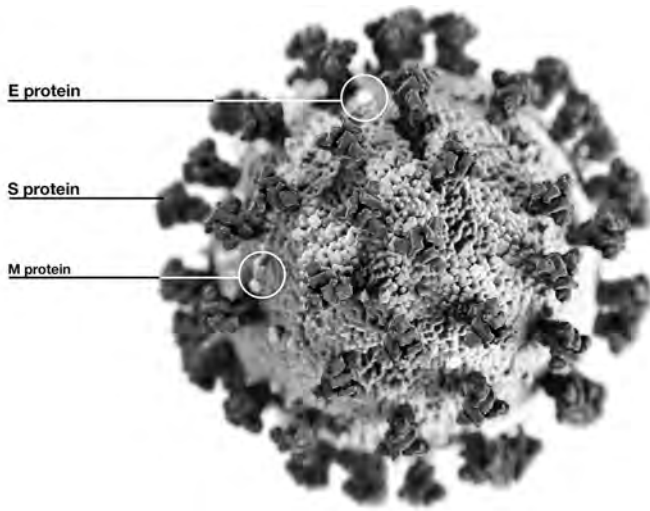
We will have to find a way to stay active and exercise inside the house. Otherwise, it may lead to severe health problems in the long run. It might be hard for many people to motivate themselves to actually exercise inside the house.

Many people who live in crowded or small houses will find it incredibly hard to stay inside all the time. Also, since the virus is airborne, it is unsafe to open windows, verandas, and doors. So there will be no ventilation inside the house and people with claustrophobia or those who don't have air conditioners in their houses will find it very hot and unbearable.

If we let coronavirus get to stage three of community transmission in India then millions of people will die and that will also pave the way for many people to become homeless orphans. Many children may not be able to go to school after this pandemic gets better and when all those children grow up they might be without education. During these disastrous times, all the

children are not able to go to school anyway and so many will fall behind in their studies, and even though many schools have arranged online classes, not all children have access to technology. Even people who were supposed to take career entrance exams or board exams have no idea when they will be able to take those exams or how they are supposed to study. However, there is a possibility that many people's lives and careers will be ruined since many people may have to rethink their career options and some may

Illustration of the Ultrastructure of the Covid-19 Coronavirus by CDC, USA



not even be able to sit for those entrance exams.

Since many factories and farmers may have closed their businesses because of this pandemic, many people might starve to death or they might have to attack other humans for food. People who do have some food in their houses won't know how long their food will last. Not only food businesses


may have to wrap up but many other businesses might wrap up too. If that happens then hundreds of people will become jobless and that will also mean that many other people won't be able to provide food for their family and will have to go hungry. Even after the intensity of this crisis decreases, many businesses like tourism, malls, and restaurants might come to a halt because almost everyone will be panic-stricken and scared because the virus may return. Because of this some countries will become poor, since their earnings come from tourism.

Even schooling systems might change drastically and homeschooling might be the new way to educate a person because teachers and parents will be scared that the students may start getting the virus. However, homeschooling will be much harder than the previous schooling system because it is easier to study with many other children than to study all alone and it will be difficult to study for hours when you know you are just at home. Many children may start feeling lonely because they will not have anyone to play with and even if they will be able to stay in touch with their friends online, it will become much harder to stay friends when you will not be able to meet them. Children who will just start school may never learn how to mix with others



A Coronavirus Patient being Treated in an Hospital

or how to make friends because they will not be meeting kids who are of their own age.

In these crucial times where we can still stop COVID-19 from reaching stage three, it is very important that we stay home and if we don't stay at home it will be our fault that millions of people will die. And if it does reach stage three after a while, it might even mutate into something worse than the previous virus. After this disease finally goes away, the world we know might completely change. Even rich countries might become poverty stricken, without education and jobs. But, there is still much hope. Even now we can save the world from thousands of dead bodies and much destruction. The only way out of this is to stay at home. It is only right to think of the doctors, nurses, and media people who are risking their lives to save others and are also not being able to meet their children or other family members because they are not allowed to travel back to their houses because their family members might get ill. And if doctors get affected then it will become a bigger disaster than it already is because more people will die in a world without doctors than in a world with doctors. So, if doctors can make such a big sacrifice then we too can stay at home and find a way to be happy and productive inside our houses. 

BALABODHA

Ancient Wisdom Made Easy

Svarga

THE WORD 'SVARGA' IS A commonly used Sanskrit word. It is used by people, who do not even know Sanskrit, as it is present in almost every Indian language. The widely used meaning of the word 'svarga' is heaven. However, it is necessary to see the other meanings and the origins of this Sanskrit word. Sanskrit is a classical language like Greek, Latin, and Persian. And in Sanskrit, as in most classical languages, most words are derived from a stem or root.

The word 'svarga' is derived from the root word *svar* by adding the suffixes *gai*, *rija* and *ghai*. The root word *svar* means the sun; sunshine; light; lustre; bright space or sky; heaven; paradise; abode of the gods; the space above the sun or between the sun and the polar star; the region of the planets and constellations; the third of the three *vyabritis* of *bhur*, *bhuvah*, and *svabh*; pronounced after 'Om' and before Gayatri by a brahmana before beginning the daily prayers; water; and a name of Lord Shiva. The word 'svarga' means heaven, Indra's paradise, the residence of deified mortals and inferior gods, going to or leading to or being in light or heaven, heavenly, celestial, the abode of light and gods, heavenly bliss, the paradise to which the souls of virtuous mortals are transferred until the time comes for their re-entering earthly bodies, the temporary heaven that is the only heaven of orthodox Hindu Brahmanism, an abode situated on top of Mount Sumeru, name of a son of Rudra Bhima, a son of Jami and Dharma, father of Nandi, a son of Bhima, seven gates to heaven,

spiritual austerities, the abode attained by King Yayati and his four grandsons, and the place for the worship of Agastya.

Svarga is attained by someone who deserves it and has made oneself worthy of it. Svarga cannot be attained if one has doubts about one's ability to attain it. Sage Jaimini gives a wonderful description of svarga: 'Svarga has various divine modes of entertainment. It has beautiful gardens that are sacred and fulfil all desires in an auspicious manner. There in svarga stand all desired trees with their wonderful fruits. There are divine carriers and beautiful damsels. Everywhere in svarga are diverse kinds of avenues of pleasure and aesthetics. One remains ever young, with a bright complexion, and with unlimited wealth in svarga. The light in svarga is always the white and bright light of the moon and the beds are all golden. In svarga, one is endowed with the complete fulfilment of all desires and is free from attachment to happiness and misery. There human beings, who have done good deeds in their mortal lives, move about as they please. There atheists, thieves, and people with uncontrolled senses cannot go. Neither can cruel, calumnious, ungrateful, or proud people reach svarga. Only those who are established in the austerities of the mind and the sense organs, brave, merciful, forgiving, persevering, and charitable can reach svarga. There is no disease, old age, death, cold, heat, or suffering in svarga. There one does not experience hunger, thirst, or guilt.'



TRADITIONAL TALES

Sage Sutikshna

SAGE AGASTYA ANGRILY SAID: ‘Get away from my sight! Come here only when you can bring my Narayana!’ Hearing these words, the young boy Sutikshna, with a wrenching heart and eyes brimming with tears, bowed down and prostrated before his guru and left. His legs shook but his heart was resolute. He vowed: ‘Yes, I will follow my guru’s orders. Even if it takes many years, if I continue to breathe, I will return only with Narayana.’

Sutikshna was quite sharp just like his name. His guru loved him. But there was no end to his plays and mischiefs. Some days ago, his guru Sage Agastya set out on a pilgrimage. Before leaving, he called Sutikshna and giving him his puja box and the best *salagrama* stone, said: ‘Take these. Keep the puja box and the *salagrama* safely. Do the worship daily with care.’ However, Sutikshna did not take these words seriously.

One day, Sutikshna brought the pure water of the nearby lake and bathed the *salagrama*. The next day, however, he felt lethargic. He got an idea: ‘What if I take the puja box to the lake?’ There are flowers and the jamun tree. I could finish the bathing of the *salagrama*, *archana*, and food offering there itself.’ He did so. He took the puja box to the bank of the lake. It was summer. The jamun berries were ripe and glistening. They appeared almost as big as mangoes. The sons of rishis were pelting stones at the jamun tree and eating the berries. Sutikshna was just a boy and he forgot all about the puja and was interested in playing. He threw stones at the tree and joyfully ate the berries.



Metal Image of Sage Agastya

It was then that the sons of rishis noticed the huge bunch of jamun berries between two branches of the tree. They entered into a match about who will bring down that huge bunch of berries. All the boys started throwing stones at the bunch. But Sutikshna could not find a stone. He was overpowered by the desire to eat the berries. He threw at the bunch of berries the *salagrama* stone given by his guru Sage Agastya. The berries fell straight into his stretched hands and he could eat unsoiled berries. But alas! The *salagrama* stone was stuck between the branches of



Sage Agastya's Temple near Agastya Falls in Papanasam, Tirunelveli District, Tamil Nadu

the tree. Everybody knew that a snake was living in a tree hole near those branches. Nobody dared to climb the tree.

Sutikshna's heart fluttered in fear at the thought that the *salagrama* stone was stuck in the tree. What would he tell his guru? His boyish mind came up with an idea. The jamun berry from that tree was almost the size of the *salagrama* stone. So, Sutikshna applied a sandal-paste mark to a jamun berry and kept it in the puja box.

As luck would have it, Sutikshna's guru returned that very evening. The next morning, Sage Agastya opened his puja box and took what he thought was the *salagrama* stone and finding it to be soft, he looked at it carefully and angrily

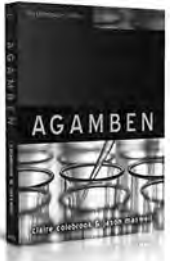
asked Sutikshna: 'What is this?' Sutikshna hesitantly replied: 'Daily bathing might have made it soft.' Terribly angered, Agastya drove out Sutikshna.

Thus driven out, Sutikshna performed austerities for a long time in the forest named Dandakaranya. Eventually, because of these austerities, Sutikshna became the Sage Sutikshna, worthy of worship. When Sri Ramachandra went into exile to the forest for fourteen years, Sutikshna not only had his darshan himself, but also took Sri Ramachandra to Sage Agastya so that he could also have the darshan. Thus, Sutikshna followed his guru's instructions and returned only with Lord Narayana.

PB

REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



Agamben

Claire Colebrook and Jason
Maxwell

Polity Press, 350 Main Street, Malden,
MA 02148, USA. Website: <https://politybooks.com>. 2016. 227 pp. \$24.95. PB.
ISBN 9780745653112.

John Keats' (1795–1821) *Ode on a Grecian Urn* (1819) which is not based on any real urn but refers intertextually to Sir Thomas Browne's (1605–82) *Urn Burial* (1658) and anticipates Walter Pater's (1839–94) works, which are imperfect urns, as it were, are all poetry. How so? Giorgio Agamben's (b. 1942) dazzling answer is his definition of poetry in *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (trans. Patricia Dailey, 2005, henceforth *TR*):

The poem is therefore an organism or a temporal machine that, from the very start, strains towards its end. A kind of eschatology occurs within the poem itself. But for the more or less brief time that the poem lasts, it has a specific and unmistakable temporality, it has its own *time*. ... By now you will have perfectly understood the hypothesis I am about to put forth, which should be taken more as an epistemological paradigm rather than as an historical-genealogical hypothesis: that rhyme issues from Christian poetry as a metrical-linguistic transcodification of messianic time (198) (*TR*: 79, 85, quoted by Colebrook and Maxwell).

The value of the book under review lies in Colebrook and Maxwell's precise understanding of Agamben as an astute philosopher and theologian. It is another matter that this book was written before Agamben published his *Karman* (2017) which has been correctly critiqued for its misunderstandings by many Indologists. Otherwise, the pre-*Karman* Agamben has been well researched

and correctly represented as he is in this book.

To return to Agamben's definition of poetry quoted above, we now see why Keats's odes, Browne's and Pater's prose are all poetry since all of them effect eschatologies bound within messianic time. In all three cases, the great code, to quote Northrop Frye (1912–91), is as Agamben indicates, the Bible. The Bible refers continually to the potentiality of Greek philosophy and potentiality is a very important trope in the works of Agamben. There is a continual distinction between the Greek *dynamis*, potentiality and *energeia* or actuality within Agamben's works (188).

The authors of this book emphasise Agamben's moorings within the archaeology of Aristotle's metaphysics, or Aristotle's lack of metaphysics. Here is Colebrook and Maxwell commenting on Agamben's debt to Aristotle:

Going back to Aristotle, ontology had always been theorized as 'first philosophy', and Aristotle is frequently cited by Agamben as the key corpus that frames later political and theological questions. ... To ask questions of ontology, which has been philosophy's and theology's main task, is to ask about what it is for something to be, and what truly and ultimately is. ... For Agamben, following [Martin] Heidegger, asking questions of ontology—or asking about what truly and ultimately is, or what remains present—can only occur if we forget or fail to ask about how beings emerge, or how beings come into being. That is, the question of presence—or that which remains the same—has covered over the question of how being comes into presence; for Heidegger, this forgotten dimension was that of time and appearing. For Agamben, the 'threshold' of the dimension that gets covered over by onto-theology is not quite time and appearing (phenomenology), but something even more elusive, which is the potentiality for appearing and not appearing (188).

This search for the foundations of being is what the *Isha Upanishad* is all about; though Colebrook and Maxwell can be excused for not pointing that out since Agamben had yet not shown his Indic interests in 2015, when Colebrook and Maxwell wrote this book. The *Isha Upanishad* too searches for ‘this forgotten dimension ... that gets covered over by onto-theology’. For an accessible version of the *Isha Upanishad*, see Swami Paramananda’s reprint edition of the *Four Upanishads* published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai in 2012. This lucid edition was first serially published in America during 1913–4. Colebrook and Maxwell miss the Indic foundation of Agamben, Heidegger and even, Aristotle. To connect all three thinkers with Indic thoughts is beyond the scope of this review.

Another reason why this book is indispensable to historians of ideas is that it clearly shows the limitations of Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), Gilles Deleuze (1925–95), and Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) while locating precisely the disjuncture between postmodernism and Agamben’s inauguration of posthumanism, which struts about now as the ironically named robot, Sophia. Colebrook and Maxwell do not see Agamben’s work in 2015, to no discredit of theirs, as posthuman:

Both Heidegger and the late twentieth-century thinkers who responded to his work accepted the Heideggerian criticism of presence. ... For most French thinkers after Heidegger there was a problem of this privilege of *Da-sein*. ... Derrida and Deleuze, for example, in different ways begin from *différance*—the difference from which relations and distinctions emerge rather than some being or substance prior to differentiation. In this vein, neither Derrida’s *différance* nor Deleuze’s ‘time in its pure state’ or differentiation remain the sole terms through which they think the potential from which determined differences emerge ... By contrast, rather than gesture toward some difference that is always other than differentiated being, Agamben presents his own work as a path toward the experience of the threshold (194–5).

It is precisely in Agamben’s stress on the potentiality of the threshold, or, ‘scission’ (3), which should not be misconstrued as any sort of liminality but Agamben’s continuous ‘politicisation of ontology’ which is ‘a deeper rupture of negativity’ (1), that

Agamben’s value as an apophatic thinker or theologian lies. And unlike Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), language’s relationship with the world in the here and the now, is not arbitrary but is problematically sovereign for Agamben. Agamben understands language as being ‘itself something like a movement or bringing into being of relations’ (3); that is, language is foundational and thus, structurally inscrutable. In passing we might note that this understanding of language as foundational and non-arbitrary is rooted within Hindu tantras and agamas. These latter canonical works see language as non-arbitrary and the linguistic system itself as sacred and foundational to the ontic ‘Da-sein’.

Further, it is Agamben, as noted in this book’s ‘Introduction’ (1–33), begins the contemporary focus within the humanities on animals and their interior lives: in his *The Open: Man and Animal* (trans. Kevin Attell, 2003), Agamben points out that ‘The messianic end of history or the completion of the divine oikonomia of salvation defines a critical threshold, at which the difference between animal and human, which is so decisive for our culture’ (5) is terrifyingly annihilated. It is this insight of Agamben into the silent life of the ‘Da-sein’ to be found everywhere, as mentioned in the *Isha Upanishad* that makes Agamben necessary for studying Thomas Hardy’s (1840–1928) animals, the horses, and the wolves in Cormac McCarthy’s (b. 1933) *Border Trilogy* (1992–8) and most memorably in William Golding’s (1931–2018) gesturing Neanderthals in Golding’s *The Inheritors* (1955).

This silent economy of Agamben’s animal-world is a result of Agamben’s rejection of St Thomas Aquinas’s (1225–74) ‘theology of essence and existence’ displaced by Agamben’s theology of ‘existence without essence—a pure taking place’ (98). Agamben’s *The Coming Community* (trans. Michael Hardt, 1993), which our authors go on to quote is useful in understanding the recurrent motif of the face both in Western and Hindu theologies: ‘God or the good ... does not take place, but is the taking-place of the entities, their innermost exteriority. The being-worm of the worm, the being-stone of the stone is divine. That the world is, that something can appear and have a face, that there is exteriority and non-latency as

the determination and the limit of every thing: this is the good' (98).

The *Isha Upanishad* too gestures to the veiled face of God. Agamben does not acknowledge this Upanishad in his works till date. Had a Hindu theologian from a developing world made this elision, then she or he would be called a plagiarist. Colebrook and Maxwell also do not credit Vedanta while studying Agamben. Yet, all the while Agamben is moving towards his *Karman* (2017) which is very Hindu in tone and quotes the Shaiva agamas. Thus Agamben's refusal to acknowledge Hinduism in his earlier works is especially jarring while Claire Colebrook and Jason Maxwell may be too entrenched in white academia to bother with a religion from a poorer nation rendered poor by the aggression of their ancestors.

Nonetheless, the ingenuity of Agamben lies in his disjuncture from the works of materialists like Michael Hardt (b. 1960) and Antonio Negri (b. 1933) whose 'Spinozist Marxist project' stresses on immaterial labour ... [now] subjected to external technologies of production. New communicative systems have enabled the possibility of a new self-forming humanity [unlike Stephen Greenblatt's concept of 'self-fashioning' during the European Renaissance]. Sovereign power has now been rendered immanent. ... But Agamben has quite a different conception of Spinozist immanence that is not about the sovereign split between 'power to ...' and 'power over' becoming humanity's own. Whereas Marxism generally regards the world as that which is negated or labored upon in order for humanity to become conscious of itself, and whereas Hardt and Negri [in their book *Empire*] see the process of global immaterial labor as one in which humanity produces itself through itself (by communally affecting itself in a mode of positive expression and creation), Agamben's Spinozism is far more passive and ... is a surrender to *not* owning one self, and an openness to one immanent life that is not subject to the sovereign mode of recognizing a properly human political being at the expense of an abandoned bare life (144).

Claire Colebrook and Jason Maxwell's book is timely but in the final analysis, is a heresy of paraphrase so feared by Cleanth Brooks (1906–94)

in his *The Well-Wrought Urn* (1947). Agamben's poetry in the sense of poetry so defined by Agamben himself and quoted at the beginning of this review, should remain veiled since Agamben's is a literature of replenishment, to quote the American novelist, John Barth (b. 1930).

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Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks, Volume 9: Journals NB26–NB30

Søren Kierkegaard
Edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Alastair Hannay, Bruce H Kirmmse, David D Possen, Joel D S Rasmussen, and Vanessa Rumble

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Kierkegaard's *Journals* are endlessly entertaining and illuminating. Volume 9's value lies in insights that are precisely worth our time since they are unsettling.

Kierkegaard's observations about the press now appear to be so true that one needs to quote him at some length:

I [Kierkegaard] have shown that the view of the 'daily press' that has prevailed up until now entirely misses the point. The press has been understood as follows: the major premise is that the daily press is good; the minor premise is that it sometimes causes injury by being misused to propagate lies and evil, etc. What I am aiming at, however, is this: the daily press is evil, especially with respect to minor matters, simply and solely on the basis of the power of dissemination. In minor matters it is an entirely disproportionate means of communication, and in this respect it is a kind of lunacy that tends to turn society into a madhouse, just

as, e.g., laying a railroad track back and forth, up and down, over a terrain the size of a square mile would be a kind of madness and, far from benefiting people, would confuse everything. No, dissemination is an evil in and of itself. ... Very few people could bear the monstrous publicity engendered by the sort of dissemination that is at the disposal of the press, and certainly least of all when the press is used to point things out in this way. ... Even the most thick-skinned man would need superhuman powers to be capable of bearing the press directed at him like this for a long period of time, infiltrating the smallest details of his life. Such dissemination is an evil in and of itself (432–3).

Today's press is no longer a press dominated by newspapers and journals. We read news through apps and more often than not, through good old gossip on social media. The distinction between news, edited and worthy of reflection, and slander are erased now. All news has become now the proverbial 'bad news'. News has become the lowest common denominator of the dissemination of ideas precisely because what goes by the textual register 'news' is a very ephemeral, topical unidimensional claptrap about nothing which really matters in the long run. This leads to what Kierkegaard sees as insane and inane anarchy for if one knows God, then one knows that the medium is not the message; cannot ever be any message. The medium through which God speaks is rooted in the ethical. It is this ethical which will later occupy Emmanuel Levinas (1906–95) and even, Alasdair McIntyre (b. 1929):

The medium, the sole medium, through which God communicates with 'humanity', the only thing he will talk about with humanity, is: the ethical. But in order to speak ethically of the ethical (and if one does not speak of it ethically, it is not the ethical—and on the other hand, God must, after all, surely be assumed to be the master of speaking ethically of the ethical) it is necessary that everything else be absolutely relegated to the level of infinite unimportance. Stick to the point, stick to the point, is the watchword, stick to the point—that is, stick to the ethical. If the people who are being addressed call an apple a pear—well, who cares? There is really no time to waste time by informing them, bien, the ethicist also calls an apple a pear, for he is just as able to speak

of what occupies him infinitely: the ethical (187).

The dystopic situation that Kierkegaard wrote of is more relevant today when we do not want to pause and think for ourselves but would rather be excited by paid news. We do not want to philosophise and engage with the hard questions of philosophy, but rather we want to be endlessly entertained. It is easier this way. Unlike self-proclaimed puritans and other censor-mongers, Kierkegaard throughout his works stresses the need for the freedom of the press as earlier John Milton (1608–74) did in his polemical tract *Areopagitica* (1644). Kierkegaard's theories about communication and the press should find place in all Media Studies's courses.

With this volume under review and other volumes in this series published by the Princeton University Press and the Søren Kierkegaard Research Center at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark, we have enough material in English which can be used for fashioning morally responsible journalism which is once again marked by ethical concerns. Most extant theories of mass communication are amoral and therefore, need the foundational morality that is to be found within the works of Kierkegaard. The editors and translators of these *Journals* have done something impossible—they have written volumes which will eventually open up Kierkegaard studies as an independent domain in its own right. The quoted passage above makes a strong case against kangaroo trials by social media trolls.

A[ugustine] indeed did incalculable damage. The entirety of Christian doctrine has, over the centuries, sought support in him—and he has confused the concept of 'faith'.

A[ugustine] quite simply revived the Platonic-Aristotelian understanding, the whole Greek, pagan, philosophical understanding of faith—and this has been his contribution to Xnty [Christianity], in roughly the same way as Saxo Grammaticus, according to Peer Degen's explanation, enriched the Latin language by introducing, for example, such formulations as 'a dun-colored horse', equus blakkatus (437). Then Kierkegaard goes on to point out the following about Augustine:

Nor is it true, as is so often said, that Augustine was a thinker 'who feared no [logical]

consequences'. For example, it is reported that, as a consequence of assuming the necessity of baptism for salvation, he argued for the eternal damnation of small children.

Yes, but let us pause and look more closely. Augustine says: they go to hell—but to the mildest hell. Great God, and this is supposed to be a thinker, a thinker of eminent and fearless consistency, yet one who makes use of such nonsensical categories: the *mildest* hell. This is indeed rubbish, and it is rather proof that A[ugustine] was in no way a thinker, or at least not a thinker in the Greek sense, in the Socratic sense (438).

While it is generally believed that Western Christian civilisation is founded on St Paul of Tarsus (c. 5–67 CE) on the one hand and on St Augustine of Hippo (345–430 CE) on the other; Kierkegaard sees through Augustine's speculations which have been mistaken for eternal verities. St Augustine did not think of himself as infallible; for he practised theology. He indeed wrote for the masses. Kierkegaard thus has this scathing remark about Augustine and his acolytes:

Mediocrity likely became infatuated with this nonsensical category, and it is also as if made for mediocrity, for being admired by the mediocre (438).

It is with this observation on mediocrity in mind that we must assess the obsessive nature of Hannah Arendt's (1906–75) devotion to Augustine and later of Jean Francois Lyotard's (1924–98) involvement with St Augustine of Hippo. Arendt and Lyotard then should be seen as strictly theological modernists and not as philosophers who inaugurated postmodernism in the human sciences. John D Caputo (b. 1940) too comes under scrutiny if we are to read Caputo's edited anthology of essays in *Augustine and Postmodernism: Confessions and Circumfession* (2005). Kierkegaard on Augustine challenges everyone from Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) to Jacques Derrida (1930–2004). Now we know why Martin Heidegger's (1889–1976) veneer as a gentleman-philosopher cannot be sustained even though Heidegger wrote a lot. After all, Heidegger is mediocrity personified being another hero-worshipping acolyte of Augustine. Kierkegaard on respectability will further clarify why we should be weary of those who conform; in this case of those who approach

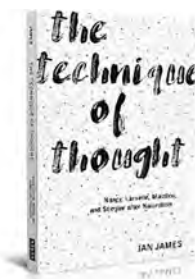
Augustine's writings without circumspection:

For to be a respectable man in an evil world in such a way that the evil world regards him as a respectable man is eo ipso to be disrespectable in one way or another. And to conceal oneself as best one can in order to be permitted to live well in an evil world is to be an accomplice and to evade service to the good (321–2).

After reading volume 9 of these *Journals*, one wonders whether the great names in Western philosophy in the last century deserved to be called great since they philosophised too historically and left out the eternal from their futile tosses and turns in their world-famous philosophy departments. While unbeknownst to all, once upon a time in Denmark an anonymous man saw through our goat-feet dance on the antic hay.

While St Augustine focussed on Christ; we now focus on Augustine. Let this not befall Kierkegaard's corpus. Kierkegaard writes in all his works of God and God's love (68–71). It will be doing injustice to Kierkegaard for he lived for Christ alone, if we focus too much on his writings. It is like studying the works of Acharya Totaka (8th century CE) without understanding his devotion to his guru, Acharya Shankara. Without referring to Acharya Totaka's guru Acharya Shankara, all learned tomes on the deeds and writings of Acharya Totaka will be insufficient exegeses. Similarly, without studying Jesus Christ, all studies of Kierkegaard will be incomplete. Perhaps, Kierkegaard did not study St Augustine as he should have. Then perchance he would not have railed against St Augustine. In the final analysis; Kierkegaard on Augustine as found in the volume under review is somewhat immature.

Subhasis Chattopadhyay



**The Technique of Thought:
Nancy, Laruelle, Malabou,
and Stiegler after Naturalism**
Ian James

University of Minnesota Press, 111
Third Avenue South, Suite 290, Min-
neapolis, MN 55401-2520, USA.
Website: <https://www.upress.umn.edu>. 2019. xii + 250 pp. \$28. PB. ISBN
9781517904302.

Closely reading and interpreting arguments from the philosophical works of four thinkers—Jean-Luc Nancy, François Laruelle, Catherine Malabou, and Bernard Stiegler—the author of this book, Ian James brings to Anglophone readers of naturalism, science, or philosophy, some striking contemporary thoughts that looks at a syncretism of scientific realism and a novel naturalism. In doing so, James revisits the question of what philosophy itself is and takes this question as the guidepost for the course of the entire book. He brings out the continuity between philosophy and science by analysing the works of many thinkers. Through a deft interpretive reading of texts, James reminds us of the major questions posed by philosophy, non-philosophy, and science. He concludes that philosophy is a pluralist technique and stresses that the plural real needs to be understood in conjunction with continental naturalism. A first step towards reading the continuum of science and naturalism, this book is a thought-provoking read for all philosophy students.

Swami Narasimhananda
Editor, *Prabuddha Bharata*



**Cultivating Virtue:
Perspectives from
Philosophy, Theology, and
Psychology**

Edited by Nancy E Snow

Oxford University Press, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP, UK. Website: <https://global.oup.com>. 2015. 368 pp. £94. HB. ISBN 9780199967421.

Nancy E Snow has brought together essays which will be remembered in social sciences' departments as an interdisciplinary tour de force on the concept of virtue in domains ranging from Asian Studies to Islamic Studies to continental philosophy. In this review, we will concentrate on the trope of empathy which unifies this book. In its emphasis on children's welfare, this book itself is a work of *caritas* and supplements the works of countless thinkers who wanted to bring solace to little hearts. It is not sufficient to say that children are our future; we must think how we can serve

our children so that they feel less peer pressure and are brought up ethically without puritanical floggings. It is not for nothing that Charles Dickens (1812–70) wrote hundreds of pages on the plight of children. Snow and her writers in this book under review, show this same concern for children.

Note 4, in page 82, to 'The Roots of Empathy' (65–86) by Michael Slote illustrates the ambiguity and problems in loving children. It is not a given that all children are loved by their parents neither are all children who are not orphans cared for. Before quoting this endnote, we must turn briefly to instances where children with parents are not loved by their parents. These illustrations are needed to foreground the necessity of both the book under review and Slote's note. In Graham Greene's (1904–91) *The Power and the Glory* (1940), we have two children destroyed by their parents. Coral Fellows is destroyed by her parent's marital frigidity. And the unnamed Roman Catholic priest's daughter looks at her fugitive father with a demonic cold look of hatred. The priest's illegitimate daughter, to use contemporary terms, is bullied by her peers for no fault of her own. It is another matter that both Coral and the alcoholic priest's daughter are victims of abandonment in ways reminiscent of Christ's abandonment by his Father, yet the reality is that these two children like thousands of other lonely children cannot cry out '*Eli Eli Lama Sabachthani*; my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Matthew 27:45–6). *The Crow Girl* (2010), by the duo Erik Axl Sund, is a blood-curdling account of what parents, including mothers, can inflict on their own children. It is keeping the instances of Dickens, Greene, and Erik Axl Sund that we now quote fully note 4:

Though, as Jane Statlander-Slote has pointed out to me [Michael Slote], the unpleasant recognition of and sense of frustration at *our inability to ensure* that parents will love their children and not abuse them may also help to explain why moral educationists tend to avoid discussing abusive/unloving parents and what they do to their children. Let me also point out that the presumed fact that certain kinds of abuse can contribute to making some people/children incapable of developing moral motives and sentiments implies that a person's status or character as a moral being can depend on factors of luck. Various traditions (e.g.,

Confucianism and Kantian ethics) that stress the importance of moral self-cultivation or self-improvement play down such factors of luck, play down (in a way that Aristotle, in fact, did not) the typically crucial role that *other people* play in someone's moral education/development. But although it would be nice to think that people can or do (successfully) take their moral development into their own hands, I believe that there are fewer realistic possibilities for or instances of this than advocates of moral self-cultivation have thought. I hope to take up this issue for fuller treatment in a future publication (82).

Michael Slote's readings of Confucianism and Kantian ethics are taken up by other contributors (See Adam Cureton and Thomas E Hill, *Kant on Virtue and the Virtues*, 87–109) to this volume of essays.

Finally, we turn to one of the most interesting chapters, 'It Takes a Metaphysics: Raising Virtuous Buddhists' (171–95) by Owen Flanagan:

Buddhist children are raised into the Buddhist form of life in all the usual ways, by direct instruction in do's and don'ts, and in the norms and values that one would expect in socio-moral ecologies we think of as Buddhist. The methods of developing as a good Buddhist person are all the familiar ones, including Aristotelian virtue education. The reason to think this is that Aristotle did not put forward his theory of moral learning as a theory only about how Greek youth develop but also about how all youth develop. If Aristotle's theory is true, then it is also true of Buddhist youth. That said, Buddhist moral education calls attention to the multifarious ways that a life form is passed on in addition to habituation or practice in virtue (183).

As has been pointed out at the beginning of this review, Snow's team of writers rightly and always veer towards the ethical upbringing of children in the here and the now. This practical turn to philosophy makes this book an indispensable sourcebook for studying virtue. Generally, virtue formation, whether Aristotelian, Kantian, or Buddhist cannot happen in adults. Adults are far gone into the ways of the world and our opinions are rigid, being formed often during our childhood. Thus, this book's emphasis on the pedagogy of education is refreshing.

Cultivating Virtue should be read in conjunction with Swami Atmashraddhananda's edited volume on pedagogy, *Manifesting Inherent Perfection—Education for Complete Self-Development* published by Ramakrishna Math, Chennai. Further, it needs to be remarked that Owen Flanagan's understanding of Buddhism is one of the most lucid and thus, approachable discussions on Buddhist conceptions regarding emptiness (192).

Before we end this review, we must take heed of the research presented by the psychologist Darcia Narvaez. Often parents, guardians, and teachers believe that sparing the rod spoils a child. The disastrous effects of corporal punishment, which is a form of child-abuse, are highlighted by Narvaez in her chapter, 'The Co-Construction of Virtue: Epigenetics, Development and Culture' (251–77). She writes:

How do TET [Triune Ethics Theory] mindsets relate to the EDN [Evolved Developmental Niche]? In a study of over 400 adults, a 10-item adult self-report measure of EDN history was correlated with ethical orientation. Items were about childhood experience in terms of breastfeeding length, responsivity (combination of happiness, support, responsiveness to needs), touch (affection, corporal punishment), play (adult-organized, free inside, free outside), and social support (family togetherness). Those who reported less play and family togetherness activities were more likely to have a safety ethical orientation (either aggressive or withdrawing). A withdrawing moral orientation was also correlated with less reported affectionate touch. Both engagement ethic and communal imagination ethics were related to longer breastfeeding, heightened responsivity, less corporal punishment, greater inside and outside play, and more family togetherness. Engagement was also related to greater affectionate touch. In an examination of mental health, poor mental health was related to more self-concerned moral orientations. That is, anxiety and depression were positively correlated with Safety ethics and negatively correlated with Engagement and Imagination (262).

Without debating and empirically rethinking Kantian punishment models (107), how can we ready our children for self-actualising? This

emphasis on childhood and the virtue praxes during childhood is so timely, that one has to praise the wisdom of the editor and the writers anthologised here. Once the formative years are past, it is very difficult to orient oneself to virtue. In old age, the psychic apparatus has ossified and even learning noble things may not be useful in achieving a virtuous telos. Thus, once when Acharya Shankara came across an old man struggling with the subtleties of Sanskrit grammar, the Acharya sung: 'Worship God, worship the Lord, O dull-witted. When the appointed time (death) comes, the grammar-rules surely will not save you' (*Bhaja-govindam Stotram*).

The book under review, therefore, should be compulsory reading in departments where educational pedagogy is taught. It does not need saying that it should also be available to students of philosophy, theology, and psychology. It is never too late to learn new things and neuroplasticity does occur. Though, to quote W B Yeats, soul might 'clap its hands' with soul (W B Yeats, *Sailing to Byzantium*); yet it is often too late to become holy. Holiness is the telos of human life and holiness is the subject of this book. Thus, the philosophers, theologians, and psychologists in this book write so much on children. They realise that holiness, or the sustained practice of virtue, has little to do with the intellect. Holiness has to be acquired even at the cost of intellectual chicanery. It is rarely the case that learned tomes help one to become holy. *Cultivating Virtue* is one of those rare books. It is meant for scholars but in its scope and ideological positions, it is a manual for becoming saintly or virtuous.

Subhasis Chattopadhyay



**Divine Plays of Lord Siva:
Tiruvilaiyadal Puranam**

Sri Paranjyothi Munivar

Translated by Dr T N

Ramachandran

Edited by Dr N Mahalingam

Sri Ramakrishna Math, 31, Rama-
krishna Math Road, Mylapore,
Chennai 600004. Website:
<http://www.chennai.math.org>.
2013. 412 pp. ₹400. HB. ISBN
9788178236629.

The book under review is a translation of one of the famous Shaivite puranas of Tamil Nadu called *Tiruvilaiyadal Puranam* by sage Paranjyothi Munivar who lived in seventeenth or eighteenth century. The work consisting of sixty-four episodes of Lord Shiva bestowing grace on his devotees is a scripture intended to arouse and cultivate faith and devotion.

The stories mainly speak of the Pandya kings, who were devotees of Lord Shiva and their capital city Madurai, where their chosen deity was enshrined. How their Lord protected them during various difficulties and calamities form the major part of the work. It is interesting to note how in the absence of a male child, the Pandya king Malaya Dvaja enthroned his daughter Thatathaka, who proved to be an able administrator and a great conqueror. The divine plays of the Lord find full expression when God takes human form as the king Sundarapandya and exemplifies an ideal king.

The story of Bhushanapandya is significant to understand the importance of Vedic knowledge. Even though the king was religious, he ignored the Vedic brahmanas, who left his kingdom and it lost its splendour. So the Lord appeared in his dream to advise him on the importance of cultivating Vedic knowledge and asked him to respect the Vedic brahmanas. We find that in the modern age, Swami Vivekananda stressed on the study of Vedas, especially the Upanishads that form the knowledge-portion of the Vedas, and also to cultivate Sanskrit learning so that we shall be able to get first-hand knowledge of Sanskrit scriptures. Bhagavadgita, which is the most renowned Hindu scripture, consists of the essence of the Upanishads and one will be surprised to find many shlokas of the Gita resembling the mantras of the Upanishads.

All living beings are children of God, whose mercy flows to all creatures. This is proved by the story of Sukala and Sukalan, whose children became piglets by the curse of deva-guru. It is said that Lord Shiva took the form of a female pig and suckled these piglets. Later on by his grace they regained human forms. Hence, it is said that God is father, mother, teacher, friend—one's all in all.

This book, though a Shaiva scripture, can well be enjoyed by all devotees. As Sri Ramakrishna

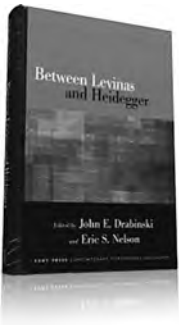
says, one God appears in various forms according to the attitude of the devotees. The same God is the sat-chit-ananda Shiva of the Shaivas and the sat-chit-ananda Vishnu of the Vaishnavas, and also the sat-chit-ananda Kali of the Shaktas. Once this idea becomes clear, then one can see one's chosen deity in all the forms of God and be free from fanaticism that makes one narrow and petty-minded.

Even a good work has scope for improvement. Some of the Sanskrit words have not been spelt in the usual way, like 'Brihaspati' is spelt as 'Brahhaspati', 'Kadamba' as 'Katampa', 'tirtha' as 'tirta', 'Dhananjaya' as 'Dananjaya'; this may be due to following the Tamil pronunciation. Few words have been variously spelt in different places, like the word 'Visvarupa' is also spelt as 'Viswarupa'; 'Vruttrasura' as 'Vrutrasura', and 'Vruttra' as 'Vrutra'. Also, there are some typos.

The presentation is in the form of a pictorial storybook and the translation is simple and lucid, hence it can be enjoyed by the young and the old alike. Before every story there is a small note mentioning the important points of the story and after the story there is a rendering in verses—both add devotional charm. The artwork including line drawings and paintings have added beauty and elegance to the volume.

Swami Shantachittananda

Associate Editor, *Prabuddha Bharata*



Between Levinas and Heidegger

Edited by John E Drabinski
and Eric S Nelson

State University of New York
(SUNY) Press, 353 Broadway, State
University Plaza, Albany, NY
12246-0001, USA. Website: [https://
www.sunypress.edu](https://www.sunypress.edu). 2014. 276 pp.
\$90. HB. ISBN 9781438452579.

This book begins with the questions: 'Who is Heidegger to Levinas? Who is Levinas to Heidegger?' (1). The answers to these questions are the essays collected in the book under review. It is, according to the editors, and actually so, a critique of the 'fairly standard narrative' (2) of Levinas's journey to Freiburg during 1928–29, to that 'city of phenomenology' where Levinas 'fell under

the spell of Heidegger's critique of Husserl' (2). *Between Levinas and Heidegger* negotiates Levinas's readings of Heidegger's transcendent 'ecstatic structure of subjectivity' (2) to 'what [eventually] becomes a language of alterity' (2). Drabinski and Nelson correctly point out Levinas's dismissal of Heidegger post the latter's *Being and Time*. Perhaps they judge Levinas too harshly when they write of the 'polemical intensity' (3) of Levinas against the latter Heidegger; the Heidegger who colluded with the Nazis and, did not do anything to stop the gassing of Edith Stein (1891–1942) at Auschwitz.

Though, this book is a comprehensive anthology of cutting edge-essays, not once do any of the philosophers including Simon Critchley (109–30) mention the foremost phenomenologist of the last century, Edith Stein. Stein's facticity is the missing link between Martin Heidegger and Emmanuel Levinas. What Peter E Gordon in his essay, 'Displaced: Phenomenology and Belonging' (209–25) accuses Martin Heidegger of, all the contributors to this volume are guilty of. Gordon locates through a reading of Jacques Derrida, the foundational yearnings of Heidegger, thus trapping Heideggerian philosophising within a prison of foundational 'ontotheological metaphysics' (221) which nonetheless assumes 'that the world is a domesticity' (219).

What Gordon misses in his otherwise excellent essay is that the triple-bind of Heidegger, Levinas, and Derrida traps all thinkers in the last century including Hannah Arendt, mentioned by Gordon in endnote 17 on page 225 of his essay, could be solved by applying Stein's conception or qualia of other minds. Once the problem of other minds is solved within Western metaphysics, we will see that the structure of being is in fact grasped by Heidegger without Heidegger being able to explicitly state this comprehension for a 'nihilistic ontology of Dasein commits Heidegger to the idealist model of entering a dialogue of the soul with itself' (Emilia Angelova, 'Time's Disquiet and Unrest: The Affinity between Heidegger and Levinas', 91).

Angelova's chapter (85–107) is essential reading for those interested not only in Heidegger and Levinas's oeuvres, but is also of interest to Judeo-Christian theologians working within the domain of Judeo-Christian eschatology. Angelova rightly understands both Heidegger and Levinas

as theologians primarily concerned with explicitly theistic religious time or ‘kairos’: ‘Faith is a self-relation that repeats itself as a meaning set out from the start—a meaning upon which life is based. But faith’s relationality is a repeating on the order of the linguisticity of Being. ... The kairological determination of time is at once the form of suddenness ... and a specific determination of existence as availability and vigilance’ (103).

‘Time’s Disquiet and Unrest’ is the most engaging essay in this volume. Angelova’s conclusions are the nearest to the truth claims of both Heidegger and Levinas. Her endnotes 7 and 8 in page 105 prove her clear grasping of difficult concepts within continental philosophy and theology: ‘7. *Eros* is distinguished from *agape*, the Good or God that turns-toward [wisely left unanswered by Angelova], which is in turn attributed, controversially, to the masculine, throughout Levinas’s work. 8. Since there is no generosity or fecundity to the *il’ya*, Levinas levels against Heidegger objections against the neutrality of the *es*, “it”—“*es gibt*” (105).

What Angelova locates as ‘a certain sense of metaphysics’ own exhaustion and completion’ (104) within the philosophies of the other in both Heidegger and Levinas; we find in her own essay in this volume. Her essay is not really, to borrow a term from John Barth; a literature of exhaustion but is, a literature of replenishment. Few have been able to explain *agape* and fecundity within twentieth century continental philosophy as well as Angelova. Angelova thus, is a feminist theologian in her own right. It is in passing that we note the superiority of theology to philosophy since the latter is merely speculative and heinously ratiocinative being reductive of the o/O-ther.

The book under review reveals ‘the call of conscience, later ... [known as] being. ... An inappropriable [revealing] ... the aporetic structure of responsibility, situating an impossible in its heart’ (François Raffoul, ‘The Question of Responsibility between Levinas and Heidegger’, 175–206; 201). Drabinski and Nelson in their selection of authors and their essays have shown a rare synoptic view of Heidegger and Levinas without ever underplaying the Janus nature of Heidegger. The book is wisely tempered with an engagement in the here and the now, and always shows the

differences between Heidegger’s reprehensible realpolitik and Levinas’s true sanctity.

Quoting Peter E Gordon again: ‘Alterity for Levinas is the unassimilable, the pure excess of a phenomena that forbids description and carries its own signification from an elsewhere essentially incommensurable ... because alterity is what escapes immanence, it can only be the supernatural ... [for] alterity [is] patterned after divine revelation ... [for] Heidegger it is ... the disruption of the references by which Dasein’s world is *a world at all*’ (223). In contrast to Heidegger’s ‘other’; Peter E Gordon sees Levinas’s ‘the Other’ as ‘perhaps’ God (223). Between Heidegger and Levinas, is the spectre of St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, aka Edith Stein.

And as yet, this reviewer did not even touch on the mystery of the act of naming Levinas before Heidegger in the title of this book. Let the constant reader, a favourite of such killjoys as Wolfgang Iser and of such literary giants like Stephen King, call forth the mystery of the naming of this book. You, my constant reader, ignore the late Harold Bloom when he ranted against Stephen King. This book is *a* theodicy to horror literature, and specifically to the ontology of King’s seemingly unending books with their connected multiverses. The point being that Drabinski and Nelson have created a new hermeneutics for even literature students. Those who think that horror literature is not high art need only read this book in which National Socialism’s drumbeats echo in every chapter for the book reverberates with ‘Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You’ (Sylvia Plath, ‘Daddy’). Does this book sort out Martin Buber’s ‘I/Thou’ and ‘I/It’ dyads/dichotomies? This reviewer can only reply through Plath’s lines from ‘Daddy’:

An engine, an engine

Chuffing me off like a Jew.

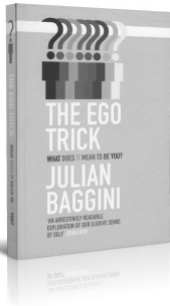
A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.

I began to talk like a Jew.

I think I may well be a Jew.

Reading this book is a terrifying experience that brings to mind Søren Kierkegaard’s fear and trembling. That is how we end; perhaps T S Eliot got it all wrong. The world does not end in a whimper but with the drumbeats of unknown future apocalypses.

Subhasis Chattopadhyay



The Ego Trick: What Does It Mean to be You?

Julian Baggini

Granta Publications, 12 Addison Avenue, London W11 4QR, United Kingdom. Website: <https://granta.com>. 2012. 272 pp. £9.99. PB. ISBN 9781847082732.

The clash of titans like religion and science has always been a spectacle going on for centuries, but still attracts attention with the advancement of scientific knowledge and human understanding in every age. The book under review is one such attempt where Julian Baggini investigates the nature of self. As he puts it in the introduction itself: ‘The central riddle I’ve set out to solve concerns the self-continuity in change: how can we remain the same people over time, even as we change, sometimes considerably?’ (3).

The book is divided into three parts: ‘Pearl Diving’, ‘Constructions’, and ‘Our Future Selves’, which are again divided into four, five, and three chapters respectively. Baggini tries to balance his arguments mainly on the shoulders of philosophers like David Hume, Berkeley, Locke, and with the help of neuroscience, psychology, and Buddhism’s theory of flux. In the first part, the author discusses the relationship between body and identity through gender dysphoria, identity of the brain from the standpoint of neuroscience, importance of memory in constructing ourselves and the world, and finally tries to prove that the souls are not necessary to explain both the existence of consciousness and the identities of persons.

He says: ‘There are other arguments for the existence of souls, of course. But if you’re looking for gold there has to come a point where you stop digging fruitlessly in one spot and move to another. ... In all my years of reading and thinking about soul and self, I’ve yet to come across a single argument that is left standing after a serious scrutiny. As an idea, the immaterial soul is dead, and it’s time we buried it, along with any other dreams we might have had about finding the pearl at the heart of our identity’ (72). And he does move to another spot and comes to the conclusion in the

second part of the book. ‘These are the three central facts about ourselves that we have to accept, if we believe that the Ego Trick has done its job and created individuals out of a bundle of mental, neural and physical activity. First, the unity of self is psychological. Second, we are no more than, but more than just, matter. And, third, our identity is not what matters’ (140–1).

To further support his arguments, Baggini takes the help of Buddhism: ‘In fact what the Buddha is pointing to is the notion of self as something like a project to be realised rather than something that inheres within you in some sort of transcendent way. So like a field to be cultivated, like an arrow to be fashioned, like a block of wood to be sculpted, so the person through their actions creates themselves. The Buddha’s idea of self therefore is something that we create’ (147–8). Before coming to the Buddhist idea of *Anatta* or absence of a permanent self, he does touch some points of *Atta* or Atman or Self as described in the Sanatana Dharma, which he calls the central idea of the Brahmanic tradition. The third part is an extension of the climax where the author, mixed with hope and frustration, concludes at last: ‘The pearl view has become so deep-rooted that we cannot see that it deserves to be cast before swine after all. Messy, complicated, amorphous bundles are more remarkable and more human than cold, hard gems’ (234).

It seems, in the beginning of the book that Baggini starts his investigation in an unbiased manner but we feel otherwise when we go just a little further. He tries to bring different approaches to arrive at his preconceived conclusions, but in trying as hard as he could to bring scientific approach mixed with religion wherever he found it to his convenience, he fails to bring anything new. The author conveniently chooses from the texts of philosophers and religious scholars just to prove his point. It appears that he is running a solo race. Arguments that seem quite scientific often look one-sided and lack depth. It really pains to see that not only the Eastern thinkers but many great Western thinkers as well have been avoided, who could have indeed added different perspectives to this age-old discussion.

Swami Gunananda
Vivekananda Ashrama, Shyamla Tal

MANANA

**Exploring thought-currents from around the world.
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Krishna's Lineage: The Harivamsha of Vyasa's Mahabharata

Trans. Simon Brodbeck

Oxford University Press, 198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, USA. Website: <https://www.oup.com>. 2019. 460 pp. £64. HB. ISBN 9780190279172.



THE SANSKRIT *HARIVAMSHA* ('Lineage of Hari') is a stunning compendium of Hindu mythology and a treasure house of stories about Krishna, an incarnation of the great god Vishnu. Many of these Krishna stories were developed and expanded in later Hindu and Jain texts, but the *Harivamsha* contains what are probably the earliest surviving versions.

The *Harivamsha* is set in an ancient Indian world of story, where kings inherit, found, and develop realms and protect the populations that support them. The kings are assisted by armies generally led by their close relatives, members of the kshatriya class of warrior-aristocrats, who have a monopoly on the use of physical force. The kings are also assisted by members of the brahmin class, who teach and advise them, and who officiate at the rituals in which the kings interact with their populations and their gods.

The business of the brahmins is contained in the Veda, a collection of texts associated with particular priestly functions and preserved by the lineages that discharged those functions. The Veda is said to be primordial, and to have been revealed piecemeal to individual seers. It contains verses, chants, formulae, and spells, associated respectively with the ritual offices of invocatory priest, chanting priest, operating

priest, and supervising priest. The Vedic collections in these genres are the oldest surviving Sanskrit texts—oldest of all is the *Rigveda* of the invocatory priest—and they were passed down precisely by the brahmins' oral tradition long before the development of writing. The rituals at which these texts were used included a variety of grand royal and more-or-less public ritual festivals, many of them calendrical, as well as other rituals sponsored or hosted by specific clans, guilds, or households, and also rituals that took place within households. These rituals, in their various forms, acted as social and economic glue. The basic form of the ritual involves a transaction with the gods, a hosting and a feeding of the gods with a sacrificial animal (vegetarian options are also available) in return for their favour and continued good jurisdiction in their various operative domains. This aspect of the ritual centres upon the ritual fire, the god Agni, who transports the various offerings aloft to the gods when they are cast into him accompanied by the correct utterances. But the ritual also involves feeding the human and, in particular, the brahmin guests, who must be carefully chosen. In economic terms, it is not just feeding but also funding, for no ritual is complete without the gifts given

at its conclusion to the officiating brahmins and to other attending brahmins. Thus the king, advised by his brahmin ministers, controls taxation and spending.

The king and his courtiers are the paragons of high culture. And what culture! The classical Indian model of the good life operates under three spheres of interest: propriety (*dharmā*), profit (*artha*), and pleasure (*kāma*). These are said to be mutually supportive, and each has its own surviving textbooks, respectively the texts on law and etiquette (the Dharmasūtras and Dharmashāstras, most famously the *Manusmṛiti*), the text on government and policy (the *Arthashāstra* of Kautilya), and the text on pleasure (the *Kāmasūtra* of Vātsyāyana). The *Kāmasūtra* focuses on sexual pleasure, but the remit of pleasure also includes the pleasure produced by any and all delectable consumables, including the dramatic and fine arts.

The texts on law and etiquette are referred to in the abstract as the Shāstras, and together with the Vedas they are the basic authorities on proper behaviour. The interest in propriety is in a special category because propriety affects the hereafter. By the time of the *Harivamsha*, the Indian theory of rebirth according to karma was in place, and so one's deeds and misdeeds, in a general moral sense and in relation to the paradigmatic functions of one's gender and social class, are taken to determine one's heavenly or infernal destination after death and also the circumstances of one's subsequent rebirth on earth. But in terms of its long-range power, the interest in propriety was dwarfed by a fourth and transcendental interest, the interest in release from the world of rebirth and suffering altogether (*moksha*). This interest is explored in the last layer of Vedic literature, the Upanishads, which (as well as discussing various mundane matters) treat of the relation between the immortal self, the cosmos, and the power behind

the cosmos. A range of other developments occurred in parallel with the Upanishadic texts, focused on release from rebirth. These included the sāṅkhya and yoga traditions—which are generally contained within the Vedic brahminical tradition along with their root texts the *Sāṅkhya Kārikā* of Īshvarakrishna and the *Yogasūtra* of Patanjali—as well as a panoply of non-Vedic traditions, including Buddhism and Jainism.

In the images of their respective founders, Shākyamuni the Buddha and Mahāvīra the Jina, both Buddhism and Jainism enshrined the image of the heroic male renouncer, who turns his back on society, family, and worldly power in the attempt to make this his last birth. This was as good as rejecting the Vedic brahminical tradition, whose interest had always been in maintaining and nurturing the world for the general mundane benefit of its inhabitants.

Within the Vedic tradition, two developments occurred in the face of this renunciatory critique. One was the idea of several separate life stages, so that a period of responsible and productive householdership would be followed by a retirement in which to concentrate on higher matters. The other, presented in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* of the *Mahābhārata* (and more relevant to kshatriyas, who might be killed in duty), was a method for maintaining and discharging one's proper function in the world and at the same time being spiritually detached and generating no further karma, facilitating the soul's release from further embodiment. Krishna is the teacher of this method in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* and also its paradigmatic exemplar, and his example is fleshed out in particular in the *Harivamsha*, which tells of his lineage, birth, and performance of great deeds for the benefit of the world and the gods, as a divine hero and as a family man. The story of Krishna can be seen as a response to the story of the Buddha.

REPORTS

Sri Ramakrishna's Birthday

THE ANNUAL PUBLIC CELEBRATION in connection with Sri Ramakrishna's birthday was held at Belur Math on Sunday, 1 March 2020. More than one lakh people visited Belur Math in the course of the day. Khichri prasada was served to about 43,000 persons.

Coronavirus Pandemic

In the wake of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the following preventive measures were adopted at Belur Math from 16 March: (i) the distribution of noon prasada to devotees was discontinued, (ii) devotees were not allowed to sit or gather in large numbers inside Sri Ramakrishna Temple during the Arati or at other times, (iii) the museum was closed, and (iv) the darshan of Revered President Maharaj for devotees was suspended. Subsequently, following the countrywide lockdown announced by the Government of India on 24 March to contain the virus, devotees and visitors were not allowed to even enter the campus from that day. The preventive measures will be in effect until further notice.

Sri Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, held a meeting of religious leaders on 30 March through videoconferencing to discuss measures to handle coronavirus situation. The General Secretary took part in the meeting on behalf of our organisation and gave an account of our response to the situation.

New Math Centre

Centro Ramakrishna Vedanta (Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre), Curitiba, Brazil, which was till now a sub-centre of our Sao Paulo Ashrama, Brazil, has been made a full-fledged branch

centre of the Ramakrishna Math. The address of the centre is 'Centro Ramakrishna Vedanta, Rua Professor Hostilio Araujo, 120-Pilarzinho, Curitiba-Parana, CEP 82110-130', phone number: 55-41-3027 2102, email id: <curitiba@rkmm.org> and website: <www.vedantacuritiba.org.br>.

New Mission Centre

The **Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of the Philippines, Manila** has been made a branch centre of the Ramakrishna Mission. The address of the centre is 'The Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of the Philippines, No. 25 St. Peter Street, Horseshoe Village, Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines 1112', phone number: 63-28-631-4114, and email id: <manila@rkmm.org>.

News of Branch Centres

Union Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, V Muraleedharan, inaugurated a solar power plant in the school of **Ramakrishna Ashrama, Thrissur** on 23 February.

A fibreglass statue of Swami Vivekananda was unveiled at the school of **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Kanpur** on 11 March.

Srimat Swami Shivamayanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated a multipurpose hall at **Ramakrishna Math, Koyilandy** on 12 March.

Seven students of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Narendrapur** and a student of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar** won Kishore Vaigyanik Protsahan Yojana (KVPY) Fellowship, 2019.

A student of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar** secured second rank in the contest conducted by Science Olympiad Foundation. He

was awarded a silver medal, a certificate, and a sum of 25,000 rupees. Another student stood first in the SilverZone Olympiad of Science and was given a trophy, a certificate, and a sum of 20,000 rupees.

Home Minister of Bangladesh, Asaduzzaman Khan and High Commissioner of India to Bangladesh, Riva Ganguly took part in Sri Ramakrishna's birthday celebration at **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka, Bangladesh** on 28 February. The centre held a homeopathy camp on 8 March in which 119 patients were treated.

Ramakrishna Mission, Jaipur conducted a medical camp at a village in Jaipur district on 1 March in which seven specialist doctors treated 232 patients.

Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Medinipur held a medical camp at Gopinathpur, a backward tribal area in Paschim Medinipur district, on 10 March in which 1,148 patients were treated.

Under the guidance of **Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysuru**, a fair to celebrate Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda was held at Ramakrishna Nagar, Mysuru, on 18 February in which 4,500 people took part.

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Salem conducted four medical camps in and around Salem from 16 February to 8 March in which 2,127 patients were treated.

Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, Kolkata conducted a day-long medical camp at Belur Math on 1 March, the day of the annual public celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary. A team of eight doctors, six nurses, and some paramedical staff treated 450 patients in the camp.

Values Education and Youth Programmes

Bagda Math held values education programmes at 6 rural schools in 3 blocks of Purulia district from 6 to 19 February. In all, 1,177 students and teachers attended these programmes.

Jalpaiguri centre conducted a two-day residential youth camp on 14 and 15 March in which 40 young men selected from 29 Bhava Prachar Parishad Ashramas participated.

Mysuru Ashrama held youths' conventions on 27 and 28 February in which 530 college students took part.

Rajkot Ashrama conducted a values education programme on 2 March, which was attended by 65 school students.

Thrissur Math held a workshop for students on overcoming examination fear on 28 February. About 700 students attended the workshop.

Bagerhat centre, Bangladesh conducted a values education programme on 2 March in which 110 students participated.

Batticaloa sub-centre of Colombo Ashrama, Sri Lanka held two youth camps on 3 and 15 February in which a total of 495 college students took part.

Relief

Coronavirus Relief: Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) was first identified in China in December 2019. Within a few months, the disease spread globally, resulting in the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. In India, the outbreak of the disease occurred in March and, to contain the spread of this severely infectious disease, the Government of India declared a 21-day countrywide lockdown on 24 March. This and other safety measures caused severe disruption to the normal lives of millions of people—the poor and daily-wage workers bearing the brunt of the situation.

Responding to the sufferings of common people, the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission launched relief operations through their branch centres in India and a few other countries. The relief operations are mainly in the form of distribution of cooked food and groceries, and hygiene or protection kits with face masks and

hand sanitiser bottles, and health awareness campaigns. Details of relief operations conducted until March 2020 are given below.


India: (i) **Andhra Pradesh:** (a) **Kadapa centre** distributed 600 breakfast packets among beggars and differently-abled persons in Kadapa district from 29 to 31 March. (b) **Vijayawada centre** distributed 1,000 masks, 200 gloves, and ration kits (each kit containing 2.5 kg rice, 1 kg dal, 1 kg flour, 1 kg potatoes, 1 kg onions, 250 gram salt, and 100 gram spices) among 262 persons in Guntur district on 26 and 30 March. (ii) **Arunachal Pradesh:** **Aalo centre** conducted a health awareness camp on 30 March. (iii) **Assam:** (a) **Guwahati centre** distributed 172 kg rice, 35 kg dal, 69 kg potatoes, 44 kg salt, 44 hand sanitiser bottles, and 100 face masks among 44 families in Guwahati on 29 March. (b) **Karimganj centre** distributed ration kits (each kit containing 5 kg rice, 1 kg dal, 2 kg potatoes, 1 kg salt, 1 packet of biscuit, and 1 bar of soap) among 270 families in Karimganj district on 31 March. (iv) **Delhi: New Delhi centre** served 3,391 plates of cooked food to the poor and needy in Delhi from 26 to 31 March. (v) **Gujarat:** (a) **Limbdi centre** conducted an awareness campaign and distributed 100 face masks and ration kits (each kit containing 5 kg flour, 1 kg rice, 1 kg dal, 1 kg edible oil, 1 kg potatoes, 500 gram onions, 1 kg jaggery, 1 kg sugar, and 200 gram tea leaves) to 50 families, and food packets to 1,513 people from 28 to 30 March. (b) **Rajkot centre** distributed 900 kg rice, 540 kg flour, 180 kg dal, 180 litres edible oil, 360 kg potatoes, 360 kg onions, 180 kg sugar, 9 kg assorted spices, 45 kg tea leaves, 180 packets of biscuits, and 180 bars of soap among 180 families in Rajkot district on 30 March. (c) **Vadodara centre** distributed 200 food packets and 1,000 packets of snacks and biscuits on 31 March. (vi) **Jammu and Kashmir: Jammu centre** distributed ration kits (each kit containing 4 kg rice, 1 kg dal, 2 kg potatoes, and 1 kg salt) among 25 families on 30 March.

(vii) **Jharkhand:** (a) **Jamshedpur centre** distributed ration kits (each kit containing 5 kg rice, 1 kg dal, 2 kg potatoes, 500 gram salt, 1 bar of soap, and 1 packet of soap powder) among 100 families in Jamshedpur district on 31 March. (b) **Ranchi Morabadi centre** distributed 2,000 leaflets to spread awareness about the coronavirus on 25 March. (viii) **Karnataka:** (a) **Mangaluru centre** is coordinating with the City Corporation in conducting awareness drives about the coronavirus. (b) **Mysuru centre** served 1,000 plates of cooked food to the needy from 26 to 31 March. (c) **Ponnampet centre** served 440 plates of cooked food to poor people from 29 to 31 March. Further, the centre's hospital has set up two wards exclusively for coronavirus patients. (d) **Shivanahalli centre** is conducting awareness campaigns among the villagers and served 20,000 plates of cooked food to 2,500 local daily wagers from 27 to 30 March. (ix) **Kerala:** (a) **Haripad centre** distributed ration kits (each kit containing 5 kg rice, 1 kg dal, and 1 kg salt) among 275 families in Alappuzha district on 29 March. (b) **Kalady centre** distributed 1,400 kg rice, 278 kg dal, 85 kg potatoes, 85 kg onions, 50 kg salt, 34 kg assorted spices, 120 litres of edible oil, 100 bars of soap, 10 kg washing powder, and 10 litres of soap solution among affected people on 31 March. (c) **Kayamkulam centre** distributed ration kits (each kit containing 2 kg rice, 1 kg flour, 1 kg dal, 1 kg onions, and 1 kg of salt) among 250 families on 29 March. (d) **Koyilandy centre** distributed 200 kg rice, 40 kg flour, 80 kg dal, 4 kg spices, 10 kg tea leaves, and 40 kg sugar among 40 families on 31 March, and 150 gloves, 150 hand sanitiser bottles, and 150 face masks among police personnel. (e) **Kozhikode centre** is providing temporary board and lodging facilities to 21 stranded daily wagers from 26 March. (f) **Pala centre** distributed 60 bars of soap, 60 packets of detergent powder, 60 bottles of hair oil, 180 packets of biscuits, and 60 towels among 60 families of a Harijan colony

in Kottayam district on 30 March. (g) **Thiruvananthapuram centre** set up an outpatient clinic in its hospital for suspected cases. (x) **Maharashtra:** (a) **Mumbai centre** served 2,975 plates of cooked food and distributed 2,975 water bottles from 28 to 30 March. (b) **Pune centre** distributed ration kits (each kit containing 4 kg rice, 1 kg dal, 1.5 kg potatoes, 1 kg sugar, 500 gram edible oil, and 3 kg firewood) among 32 families in Pune from 24 to 26 March. The centre is also serving cooked food among 70 daily wagers in Kolhapur district from 29 March. (xi) **Meghalaya: Sohra (Cherrapunjee) centre** supplied ration kits (each kit containing 25 kg rice and 5 kg dal) to the doorsteps of 1,068 families living in distant places. The centre distributed 2,000 face masks, essential medicines to 852 patients, pamphlets, and banners, and arranged transportation of patients from villages to health centres from 25 to 30 March. (xii) **Odisha: Kothar centre** distributed 900 hand sanitiser bottles from 21 to 23 March. (xiii) **Tamil Nadu:** (a) **Chennai Math** served 1,500 plates of cooked food at Meyyur village from 27 to 31 March, distributed 1,000 face masks, 500 hand gloves, and 2,000 packets of biscuits among the sanitary workers of Chennai Corporation from 25 to 28 March and ration kits (each kit containing 5 kg rice, 1 kg dal, assorted spices, and 500 gram sugar) among 170 families in Thanjavur district from 27 to 31 March. (b) **Chennai Students' Home** distributed ration kits (each kit containing 1 kg rice, 2 kg semolina, 2 kg sugar, 4 kg dal, 1 litre edible oil, 1 kg salt, and 30 gram assorted spices) among 317 families of daily wagers; and 310 face masks, 3 litres of hand sanitiser, and 1 thermal scanner to a government hospital in Thiruvallur district on 30 and 31 March. (c) **Coimbatore Math** served 550 plates of cooked food to municipality workers from 27 to 30 March and tea and biscuits to police personnel in Coimbatore on 30 March. (d) **Coimbatore Mission centre** conducted awareness campaigns on health

and law and order in 4 panchayat areas on 25 March, distributed 1,075 kg rice and 215 kg dal among 215 families, and 320 food packets to roadside dwellers, in Coimbatore district on 31 March. (e) **Kanchipuram centre** distributed ration kits (each kit containing 5 kg rice, 500 gram flour, 500 gram semolina, 1.5 kg dal, 1 kg edible oil, 100 gram vermicelli, 850 gram assorted spices, 25 ml coconut oil, 1 bar of bathing soap, and 2 bars of washing soap) among 50 auto-rickshaw drivers on 28 March and provided noon meals to 80 patient attendees in a cancer hospital from 28 to 31 March. (f) **Nattarampalli centre** distributed 693 kg rice, 46 kg dal, 23 litres edible oil, 5 kg sambar powder, and 46 kg salt among 46 families on 24 March. (g) **Salem centre** distributed 1,400 hand gloves to sanitary workers on 28 and 29 March. The centre is also serving lunch to 100 municipality workers from 27 March. (xiv) **Tripura: Kailashahar centre** conducted health awareness campaigns among tea estate workers in Unakoti district and distributed 218 bars of soap and 218 bottles of liquid soap among them on 16 March. (xv) **Uttar Pradesh:** (a) **Lucknow centre** is distributing ration kits (each kit containing 5 kg flour, 5 kg rice, 2 kg dal, 2 kg potatoes, 1 litre edible oil, 1 kg salt, 50 gram coconut oil, and 2 bars of soap) among the poor and needy in Lucknow and Ayodhya from 25 March. (b) **Vrindaban centre** served 1,800 plates of cooked food to the poor and needy from 27 to 30 March. Further, the centre's hospital has set up a clinic for suspected cases. (xvi) **Uttarakhand:** (a) **Kankhal hospital** started a flu clinic following the outbreak. (b) **Rishikesh centre** distributed 1,800 packets of bread from 25 to 30 March. (xvii) **West Bengal:** (a) **Asansol centre** distributed 125 ration kits (each kit containing rice, flour, potatoes, dal, edible oil, packets of biscuits, and bars of soap) among 150 people at a leprosy colony in Burnpur on 30 March. (b) **Baghbazar centre** distributed ration kits (each kit containing 5 kg rice, 1 kg dal, 1

kg soybeans, 3 kg potatoes, and 500 gram milk powder) among 2,000 families in Baghbazar on 27 and 28 March. (c) **Bamunmura centre** distributed 1,100 kg rice, 240 kg dal, 200 kg potatoes, 7 kg soybeans, and 240 bars of soap among 247 families on 31 March. (d) **Bankura centre** served cooked food to 95 people and distributed 60 kg rice, 15 kg dal, 40 kg potatoes, 5 kg onions, 1 kg soybeans, 15 kg salt, 15 kg rice flakes (*chira*), 15 kg sugar, and 30 bars of soap among 65 persons in Bankura district from 27 to 30 March. (e) **Baranagar Mission centre** distributed 2,567 face masks, 2,414 bars of soap, and 153 hand sanitiser bottles among sanitary workers of the Baranagar and Kamarhati Municipalities in North 24 Parganas district on 28 and 29 March. (f) **Belgharia centre** distributed ration kits (each kit containing 5 kg rice, 1 kg flour, 1 kg dal, 5 kg potatoes, 2 kg onions, 1 litre edible oil, 1 packet of biscuits, 1 kg sugar, and 1 bar of soap) among 200 families in Belgharia on 31 March. (g) **Darjeeling centre** distributed 50 kg rice, assorted vegetables, and sanitary items among 5 families in Darjeeling district in March. (h) **Jhargram centre** conducted COVID-19 awareness camps on 14 and 15 March for school children and distributed ration kits (each kit containing 3 kg rice, 1 kg dal, 2 kg potatoes, 100 gram turmeric powder, 250 gram milk powder, and 2 packets of biscuits) among 1,134 families in Jhargram district from 23 to 31 March. (i) **Kasundia centre, Howrah**, distributed ration kits (each kit containing 5 kg rice, 3 kg potatoes, and 1 kg dal) among 350 families in Howrah from 28 to 31 March. (j) **Kathamrita Bhavan, Kolkata**, distributed 540 kg rice, 270 kg flour, 220 kg dal, 270 kg potatoes, and 44 kg soybeans among 270 families from 28 to 31 March. (k) **Malda centre** distributed 101 ration kits (each kit containing 5 kg rice, 1 kg flour, 1 kg dal, 500 gram soybeans, 1 kg salt, 1 litre edible oil, and 1 bar of soap), 101 shirts, 101 trousers, and 101 face masks among needy families on 30 March. (l)

Narendrapur centre distributed ration kits (each kit containing 5 kg rice, 2 kg dal, and 3 kg potatoes) among 1,200 families in neighbouring areas on 30 and 31 March. (m) **Ramharipur centre** is distributing 50 litres of milk among 200 poor children from 24 March onwards. (n) **Saradapitha** held a rally and campaigned to raise awareness about the coronavirus pandemic in and around Belur on 16 and 23 March. The centre also distributed 3,710 kg rice, 985 kg dal, 1,970 kg potatoes, 492 kg salt, 1,855 litres edible oil, 1,970 packets of biscuits, 4,091 bars of soap, 6,212 face masks, and 985 hand sanitiser bottles among 1,136 families in Howrah district from 23 to 31 March. (o) **Sargachhi centre** distributed 5,000 bars of soap among the inmates of Berhampur Correctional Home, 300 kg rice among 30 old persons, milk to 100 children, and face masks, handwash, and sanitiser bottles to the local government authorities from 25 to 29 March. **Bangladesh:** (a) **Bagerhat centre** conducted health awareness campaigns and distributed ration kits (each kit containing 2 kg rice, 1 kg dal, 500 gm salt, and edible oil), bars of soap, and face masks among 60 families in Bagerhat district on 28 and 29 March. (b) **Chandpur centre** distributed ration kits (each kit containing 5 kg rice, 3 kg potatoes, 1 kg dal, 1 kg salt, 500 ml edible oil, and 2 bars of soap) among 200 families in March. (c) **Mymensingh centre** conducted awareness campaigns and distributed face masks, handwash, and bars of soap in March. **South Africa: Durban centre** distributed 1,100 hygiene kits (each kit containing a hand sanitiser bottle, 3 bars of soap, a bottle of bleach, and a pamphlet on coronavirus) to the needy in March. **Sri Lanka: Colombo centre**, along with its sub-centre at **Batticaloa**, distributed 2,569 kg rice, 215 kg flour, 343 kg dal, 148 kg soybeans, 275 kg potatoes, 245 kg onions, 12 kg noodles, 248 kg salt, 29 kg spices, 6 kg milk powder, 343 kg sugar, and 483 packets of biscuits among 381 families from 27 to 31 March. 



SRI RAMAKRISHNA ADVAITA ASHRAMA



(A Branch of Ramakrishna Math, P.O.- Belur Math)
Ashrama Road, Kalady - 683 574, Ernakulam Dist., Kerala
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AN APPEAL

TO THE DEVOTEES AND WELL-WISHERS FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO BUILD MONKS' QUARTERS

Kalady is the Birthplace of great Sri Adi Shakanracarya. Sri Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama was started in 1936, by Swami Agamananda (a disciple of Swami Brahmananda) Later it was affiliated to Ramakrishna Math, Beur Math, Howrah in 1942.

Ashrama is one of the old Spritual, Cultural, Educational and Social service centre of Kerala. It has a School (Brahmanandodaym Schools) from Kindergarten to +2, Gurukulam Hostel for Boys, Computer and Typewriting centre for Scheduled Caste and economically backward classes. Ashrama conducts flood and disaster relief programmes in the State. Besides there are other services and rural activities. Ashrama has a temple with a marble statue of Sri Ramakrishna and an Auditorium to conduct worship, prayers, spiritual activities, retreats and discourses.



All the above services during these 83 long years are tendered by the tireless services of dedicated monks. Due to the paucity of funds, there is no dedicated building (Sadhu Nivas) for Monks. Monks are staying in the buildings which are more than 80-90 years old. They are made of clay mortar and have tiled roofs. The walls are feeble, rafters are weak, roof always leaks during monsoon. This has rendered the buildings uninhabitable.



Hence the construction of a suitable monks' quarters and a devotees dining hall is the urgent need of the hour. Project is estimated to **cost around 1.5 crores**.

We appeal to the benevolent people, devotees, corporate units to join hands in this noble project with generous financial help. We earnestly hope that this Appeal will receive the compassionate attention of you all.

Donations are eligible for tax exemptions under Sec. 80G of IT Act. Donations may be sent either by cheque or bank draft in favour of Sri Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama or by transfer through RTGS/NEFT to (i) A/c No. 2921101005444, Canara Bank, Kalady (IFSC: CNRB0002921) or (ii) A/c No. 10367019646, State Bank of India, Kalady (IFSC: SBIN0070717) and for foreign contributions, A/c No: 338602010005806, Union Bank of India, Kalady (IFSC: UBIN0533866, MICR Code: 682026047, Swift Code: UBININBBKCH).

Please provide PAN No. for payments of Rs.10,000/- and above. Kindly send an email to kalady@rkmm.org intimating us your name, address, phone nos. and the payment details.

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Swami Srividyananda
Adhyaksha



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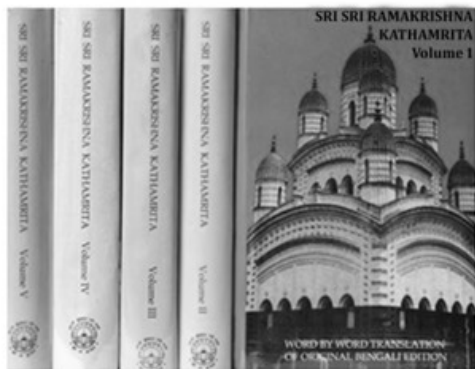
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A Day in the Life of Holy Mother at Udbodhan House 4

Many people came to the Mother at Udbodhan House for peace and consolation. Holy Mother was known for having extraordinary patience and compassion for those in distress. It was 30 September 1918, the second day of Durga Puja. Many devotees assembled in Udbodhan House to pay their respects to Holy Mother. It was the time of the noonday worship when a party of three men and three women from a distant part of the country came to pay their respects to Holy Mother. They were very poor, all their possessions consisting of one piece of cloth each. They had begged for their passage money to Calcutta. One of the party—a man was having a private talk with the Mother. There seemed to be no end to the conversation. The time for the noon food offering was passing, and the Mother was supposed to offer it. The Mother's attendants became annoyed. One of them said to the devotee in unmistakable



Devotees in front of Mother's room at Udbodhan

language, 'If you have anything more to say, you better go downstairs and talk to the monks.' But

the Mother said firmly, 'It does not matter if it gets late. I must hear what they have to say.' She continued to listen to him with great patience. In a whisper she gave him some instructions. Then she sent for his wife as well. We inferred that they must have experienced something in a dream. Later on we came to learn that they had received a sacred mantra in a dream. After about an hour they took Prasad and left. The



Holy Mother sitting in a Chair

Mother said, 'Alas, they are very poor! They have come here with great hardship.' Another incident took place. A young girl had just lost her baby girl in the morning. In extreme grief, she came to the Holy Mother. Holy Mother asked the girl to come near her, but when the girl extended her hand to touch the Mother's feet, the Mother said, 'How can you touch me? You are now in the period of mourning.' At this, the girl's sad face became even more gloomy. She drew back and felt helpless. Seeing her sorrowful face, the Mother exclaimed with great empathy, 'Ah, my child! You are grief-stricken and have come to me for solace, and I hurt you. Come, bow down and touch my feet.' Mother moved close to the girl, who then fell at the Mother's feet, crying. Holy Mother touched her head and blessed her.

In loving memory of Dr. Rina Bhar —Dr. Gopal Chandra Bhar



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