

must mingle. Science is blind without spirituality. Spirituality enables us to have a clear vision of the future and fills us with hope, courage, and a spirit of adventure. In the perspective of modern thought, we have in Swami Vivekananda the embodiment of a wisdom imparted by India's ancient sages and saints and an embodiment of a sanity of outlook and wisdom of life without which man loses his hold over the supreme human values. Swami Vivekananda may be looked upon as an immortal bridge between the West and the East, between the ancient and the modern, between the internal and the external, and between the good, the true and the beautiful. Furthermore, in Swami Vivekananda, we find the corrective to the mere pragmatism and humanism of the West which would seem to wither away, unless their roots strike deep into the spiritual life of man, that is, unless they are rooted in the vivid realization of an ultimate Reality which India is fond of naming Brahman. A James and a Dewey, a Russell and a Whitehead, a Bradley and a Bergson find a supplementa-

tion here in the Neo-Vedānta of Swami Vivekananda which is imminently needed to round off the jagged edges of their philosophies.

These hundred years that have elapsed since the birth of Swami Vivekananda have been eventful years in the history of India and the rest of the world. India has become politically free, but has yet to make great leeway in economic and social progress. She has to struggle on with internal disorder and external aggression the latter of which has unfortunately been thrust on her. But her soul is unconquerable and invincible due to the guidance of master spirits like Swami Vivekananda and other philosophers. As was pointed out by one of the Swami's disciples: 'Swami Vivekananda was an epitome of all that was great and good in the India of the past, and all that is also potentially great and good in her. With Śaṅkara's intellect he combined Buddha's heart, Christ's renunciation and the Prophet of Arabia's spirit of equality, and the result of this holy confluence will, in time, flood the whole world.'

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AT VARANASI

BY SWAMI BHASWARANANDA

After the consolidation of the monastic order of Sri Ramakrishna Deva at Baranagore, Swami Vivekananda felt an urge to set out on a pilgrimage to the northern *tīrthas*. His first visit was to Varanasi, traditionally sacred to the Hindus, situated on the western bank of the holy Gaṅgā. This is the place where Sri Ramakrishna had the vision of Lord Śiva and Mother Annapūrṇā and it was here that Buddha, Śaṅkara, and Caitanya meditated and preached. The city was made holy by numerous men and women of the past who realized spiritual perfection. All these were undoubtedly very attractive to him.

During his visits to Varanasi at different times, a few interesting and educative incidents took place. In his first visit, Swamiji stayed at the Ashrama of Dwarkadas who introduced Swamiji to the well-known Pandit and Bengali writer Sri Bhudev Chandra Mukhopadhyaya. Both of them held long discussion and conversation. When they dispersed, the Panditji remarked: 'Wonderful! Such vast experience and insight at such an early age! I am sure he will be a great man.' He also visited the famous saint Trailanga Swami who used to remain absorbed in profound meditation. He also met Swami Bha-

skarananda, a celebrated ascetic of great learning. Both of them discussed the question of the conquest of lust and gold. Swamiji referred to the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna laying emphasis on the renunciation of lust and gold as the indispensable condition for the realization of God. Bhaskaranandaji contradicted: 'No one can completely renounce lust and gold.' Swamiji replied boldly: 'There have been many saints who have done so, and I myself have seen one (meaning Sri Ramakrishna) who had completely overcome lust and gold.' Swami Bhaskarananda did not agree with him, and at this, Swamiji left the place in a mood of dissatisfaction.

For the second time, Swamiji visited Varanasi and met Babu Pramadadas Mitra, the great Sanskrit scholar. It was through Swami Akhandananda that he came to know of Swamiji. Swamiji and Pramadadas Babu became close friends. Swamiji had a lot of correspondence with him in order to be thoroughly acquainted with the solutions of intricate problems of Hindu Śāstras.

In 1888, when Swamiji returned to the Baranagore Math after his pilgrimage to the north, he made arrangements for the study of Vedānta literature by the inmates of the Math. As the Math was too poor to buy books, Swamiji borrowed some Vedānta literature from Babu Pramadadas Mitra together with a copy of Pāṇini's grammar for the *gurubhāis* so that they would acquire a fair knowledge of Sanskrit to study the Vedas.

While at the Math, Swamiji was very often anxious to go to Varanasi and spend the time in the sacred city of Lord Viśvanātha. The presence of Pramadadas there was an added attraction.

In the last part of December 1889, Swamiji left for Vaidyanath on his way to Varanasi. 'My idea', wrote Swamiji from Vaidyanath, 'is to remain there for some time and to watch how Viśvanātha and Annapūrṇā deal it out to my lot. And my resolve is something like either to lay down my life or realize my ideal—so help me, Lord of Kāśī.'

So, from Vaidyanath, Swamiji went to Varanasi and stayed with his friend Pramadadas Mitra. He spent hours with him in discussion of spiritual and cultural topics. Swamiji, however, became very eager to see the snow-capped Himalayas and so he could not prolong his stay at Varanasi. As he was taking leave of Pramadadas Babu, he said: 'When I shall return here next time, I shall burst upon society like a bomb-shell and it will follow me like a dog.' He did not return to this sacred city until he had stirred up the world to the enlightening message of unity and divinity of human soul realized by the Indian sages of the past.

In 1890, the Ramakrishna Order, which was in the making at Baranagore Math, was in great financial difficulties. At this time, Swamiji was much perturbed by the thought that something should be done to perpetuate the memory of Sri Ramakrishna in Bengal, the land of his birth. The erection of a suitable temple in his name on the bank of Gaṅgā was the idea. In this connection, Swamiji wrote a letter to Pramadadas Babu of Varanasi on 26th May 1890 from which a few extracts given below reveal Swamiji's affection for his *guru* and *gurubhāis*.

Swamiji appealed to Pramadadas Babu to raise subscription from his friends there at Varanasi and thus help in the erection of the memorial. 'I am', the letter says, 'Sri Ramakrishna's servant and am willing even to steal and rob, if by doing so, I can perpetuate his name in the land of his birth and *sādhanā* and help a little his disciples to practise his great ideals of renunciation and service. It would be the greatest pity if the memorial shrine could not be raised on the land of his birth and *sādhanā*! The condition of Bengal is pitiable. The people here are unable even to understand what renunciation truly means—only luxury, sensuality, and selfishness are eating into the vitals of the race. May God infuse the spirit of renunciation and selflessness into this land!'

On one occasion, Swamiji wrote to Swami

Abhedananda to come to Varanasi for a change and requested Pramadadas Babu to look after him. The protracted illness of Swami Abhedananda compelled him at last to go to Varanasi. In order to satisfy his inner desire for *tapasyā*, Swamiji hurried to Varanasi as the guest of Pramadadas Babu. After making every arrangement for the care of Swami Abhedananda, he settled himself in Pramadadas Babu's garden and devoted his entire time to the practice of austerities. At this time, he received the heart-rending news of the passing away of Balaram Bose who was one of the beloved disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Swamiji was shocked at this sorrowful news. Pramadadas Babu was surprised to see a monk so upset by the news of death. But Swamiji said: 'We are not dry monks. What! Do you think that because a man is a *sannyāsin*, he has no heart?' With the intention of bringing solace to the bereaved family of Balaram Babu, he left Varanasi for Calcutta.

His last visit to Varanasi came about in February 1902 when he was accorded a very grand reception by the citizens. He was guest at the house of Raja Kalikrishna Thakur. Swamiji was accompanied by Mr. Okakura of Japan, who had come to invite Swamiji to attend a Parliament of Religions to be held in his country. Swamis Bodhananda, Nirbhayananda, Niranjanananda, and Shivananda had already arrived earlier at Varanasi for making preparations for Swami Vivekananda's reception. A host of distinguished persons including *mahantas* (heads of monasteries) and orthodox *panditas* came to Swamiji and discussed with him many social problems and appreciated his solutions for them and his ideas of reformation of Hindu culture. Here Swamiji, in a spirit of archaeological research, said about Varanasi that even the oldest records had proved it as the great place of Siva worship.

It was during this visit in 1902 that Udai Pratap Singh, the philanthropic and pious Raja of Bhinga met Swamiji. The Raja was

living in his garden at Durgakund as a monk (*grha-sannyāsin*) with a vow never to move from the garden. When he came to know of Swamiji's arrival in the city, he was very anxious to meet him. Despite his vow, he desired to leave the place and come to Swamiji's place. In the meantime, Swamiji came to know of it from another Swami, a messenger from the Raja. Next day, Swamiji himself paid a visit to the Raja. The Raja was highly pleased and a conversation on various topics took place. The Raja requested Swamiji to start some sort of activity in this holy place, and he offered a sum of Rs. 500 for the purpose. Swamiji later on instructed Swami Shivanandaji to start some work for the spread of Vedāntism. This was how the Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama of Varanasi originated.

In regard to this visit of Swamiji, Swami Sadashivananda wrote in his reminiscences: 'The Gopal Lal Villa where Swami Vivekananda was residing while at Varanasi in 1902 was five miles away from the Sevashrama where we lived. We went to see the Swami daily and occasionally spent the night there. One day, in my absence, Swami Shivananda requested the Swami to give us initiation to which he consented, but fixed no date for it. One day Swamiji asked us to stay for the night as the next day was fixed for initiation.

'In the morning we took our bath, prepared ourselves for the occasion, and waited in front of his room. The doors opened even before our expectation and Swamiji appeared there with a face illumined with divine fire, and with peculiar accent asked us to come one by one. As soon as I went near him, he remarked: "Oh! you have come first! well, well, come along with me, my boy." There we moved on to another small room where there were two small carnets on the floor. He took his seat on one and I was on the other. Within a few minutes, Swamiji entered into deep *samādhi*. After a while, descending to normal consciousness, he asked me to think of him: and as I did so, he said:

“Now think of Sri Ramakrishna and transform me into him and then him into Ganeśa. Ganeśa is the ideal of *sannyāsins*.” I stood there initiated and the Swami asked me to send the next aspirant. I went out and sent Charu Babu (Shubhananda) who was initiated in the same way, and next, Sri Haridas Chatterjee.

‘Amongst us there was a young worker, very lean and thin, who attracted the Swami’s notice. How kind he was to us can best be illustrated by the instance of this boy. He was very sickly. One day he went to see the Swami who enquired about him and asked him to dine daily with him: “My lad, you are not very strong and you have to work in the Sevashrama—you must eat well. You must come daily to dine with me—at least you must take your noon-day meal here with me.”’

During this time, the old and venerable Mahantaji of Kedarnath Temple invited Swamiji to accept *bhikṣā* along with his followers. Swamiji accepted his invitation. Next morning, at about ten o’clock, Swamiji, Swami Shivananda, and others went to the Math of the Mahanta. The Mahanta Maharaj then treated Swamiji and others to a sumptuous feast. Then, he got an ochre robe and wrapped it around Swamiji’s loins over his ‘*gerua*’ cloth and a similar cloth over his body. The Mahanta, being very happy, remarked: ‘Today, I have fed a true “*dandī*” *sannyāsīn* (Vedāntist). You are Śiva incarnate. You have come for the salvation of mankind.’ At the request of Mahantaji, Swamiji and others went inside the temple of Sri Kedarnath. In honour of Swamiji, *ārati* of Sri Kedarnath was performed, although it was not the usual hour for it. Swamiji was in a profound spiritual mood. Everyone else there seemed to be overpowered by his divine presence. All came out of the temple and Swamiji gradually came to himself and returned to the house of Kalikrishna Thakur.

Swamiji, whose health was not good at the time, was under the treatment of a physician.

This physician used to come to Swamiji very often and talked with him on a particular system of theology newly evolved in the country. He was one day speaking dogmatically of its founder and its service to our country. Swamiji listened on without any comment or contradiction. Finding him going beyond the limit, Swamiji became serious and said in a resounding voice: ‘The foreigners are the teachers in every way of this country. Only religion remained. But you want to give them precedence even in this. You have made Europe your *guru* and have become their hypnotized slaves. Do you think India has fallen so low that you must import even religious practices for her? Is it a thing to be proud of or should you be ashamed to own them? I have not come here to make ovations and give lectures. I am ill and I want quiet and rest. If I wish, this very night I can bring the founder of your pet sect and all Benares (Varanasi) at my feet, but I do not want to use the Divine power in this way unnecessarily and so I have not done it.’ The doctor who, a little while ago, did not place Swamiji spiritually above the ordinary level was then sincerely sorry and changed his topic. Swamiji resumed his calmness in a moment.

Mr. Kelkar, the well-known patriot was in Varanasi at that time. One evening he came to meet Swamiji who lay on a bed as he was ill. Mr. Kelkar paid respect to Swamiji as one would do to his own *guru* and took his seat on a carpet. Their conversation went on in English on the topics of India and her distress; politics, social reforms, and many other things were discussed. Swamiji, deeply distressed at heart, said: ‘What is the good of India being in this degeneration and extreme poverty any longer? Every moment she is suffering a hell; no food and no clothes; dishonour and distress is her lot; she breathes—that is all the sign of life she has got. It is veritably a hellish fire in which she is being consumed slowly and certainly. Was it not far better that she was extinct from the face

of the earth?' At the end he told Mr. Kelkar that mere copying of foreign countries would not bear much fruit nor the heartless foreign politics of other countries would help us. Only a spontaneous development from inside, following the ancient traditions, could lift India. Mr. Kelkar was much impressed with what he had heard and with folded hands in respect, he took leave of Swamiji that night.

Inspired by the teachings of Swamiji some young men of Varanasi gathered together and discussed how to put the teachings of Swamiji into practice. One of them one day found an old woman lying in the street, helpless and crying for help. He approached the sick woman, picked her up and gave shelter in the terrace of a house nearby. One gentleman came and offered a four anna piece for a little milk to be given to the patient. Being little bit refreshed, she was sent to a Government Hospital where she recovered. Then the young man, having tasted of the pure joy of selfless service, invited other friends to continue this kind of service to other destitute and helpless men and women of the city. Thus they rented a small room to accommodate and serve patients. This spirit of humanitarian service attracted the attention of the generous public. These young men formed a Poor Men's Relief Association and organized permanent relief to the sufferings of local people and the pilgrims in general. Of these young men, Jamini, Charu Chandra (later Swami Shubhananda), and Kedarnath (later Swami Achalananda) took the leading part. As the work grew, a small house was rented in 1900 at Jangambari. Later on, the work had to be shifted to a more commodious house at Ramapura in 1901. In February 1902, when Swamiji visited Varanasi, this group of young men approached Swamiji for advice and instruction. He addressed them thus: 'Who are you to render relief? Nothing beyond service is within your scope. Removing all egoism, relinquishing all desire, follow the path of truth and love,

serve man as God. Work in this spirit and you will reach the goal. Not only will you thus make the best use of life, but you will also do immense good to your society and country. My sons, name your Association "The Home of Service". Regard every pice collected for the poor as your life-blood. Such noble work can be carried on properly and permanently by those only who have renounced selfish desires.'

Swamiji was so much impressed by the sincerity and earnestness of these young men and with the future scope of the good work started by them that he himself dictated an appeal for the Home of Service and this appeal had the desired effect. The Home grew rapidly with the sincere co-operation of the generous public. Now, it is a full-fledged hospital, having an indoor department of 103 free beds and an out-patient department catering to the medical and surgical needs of about 900 patients daily. Attached to it, there are two invalid homes for men and women.

Swami Vivekananda did not return to Varanasi again in his mortal frame. This eternal city of Lord Śiva is intimately connected with his life. 'Varanasi has for me a special attraction', he once said. It was here that, at the temple of Vīreśvara, prayers were offered for Swami Vivekananda's advent, it was here that he came again and again for *tapasyā* and quietude, and it was here that he came on his last pilgrimage. About this holy city, Swami Vivekananda wrote: 'In other sacred places, people go to purify themselves from sin, and their connection with these places is casual and of a few days' duration. In this, the most ancient and living centre of Aryan religious activity, there come men and women, and as a rule old and decrepit, waiting to pass unto Eternal Freedom, through the greatest of all sanctifications, death under the shadow of temple of the Lord of the universe.'