

tendencies get the proper direction and one's senses come under control. Engage yourself in spiritual practices with all earnestness. Struggle, struggle my son; call on Him with all sincerity. His name has in it all the requisite powers in a latent form.'<sup>8</sup>

The secret of tiding over all spiritual problems is unfailing spiritual practice and constant vigilance. Sri Ramakrishna speaks of the hereditary cultivator who never gives up his work in the field whether it rains or it does not. The aspirant who seeks to reach the goal of spiritual life must be like

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 243.

the hereditary cultivator. At every stage of spiritual life, the aspirant must be awake. The *Dhammapada*, the famous Buddhist scripture, says:

'A mendicant who delights in vigilance, who looks with fear on thoughtlessness, moves about like a fire consuming every bond, small or large.'<sup>9</sup>

Against the background of the above discussion we shall be in a better position to understand the uses of the obstacles to spiritual life and the methods of overcoming them.

<sup>9</sup> II. 31.

## SWAMI VIVEKANANDA IN MADRAS: 1892-93

### SOME NEW FINDINGS

SRI SANKARI PRASAD BASU

#### I

On 31 May 1893 Swami Vivekananda first started for America from Bombay. Prior to that he had travelled mostly incognito in different parts of India. What he wanted was to acquire 'power' and then he could 'burst on society like a bomb'. An early fame, he knew, would be a hindrance to the fulfilment of his mission. He changed his name frequently, and from that fact we can see the extent of his aversion to fame.

But it was not really possible for a Vivekananda to hide himself! People would surely recognize him, not necessarily by a particular name but from his dazzling presence. In subsequent years people writing their reminiscences of him in his *parivrājaka* [wandering-monk] days have inevitably given vent to feelings of awe and wonder at the brilliance emanating from the unknown Sannyasin. One such person was

no other than Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the eminent nationalist and distinguished scholar in oriental studies.

It can hardly be expected that contemporary newspapers would publish anything on Vivekananda who, during his wanderings, was so keen on hiding his identity. Journalism in India was not then sufficiently alert or inquisitive. Even so, we find an indirect and yet clear reference to him in a journal of those days. To be more accurate, we got it not from the journal itself but from a pamphlet—quoting the journal—belonging to Haramohan Mitra. Writing on Sri Ramakrishna in the September 1891 issue of *The Hindu Magazine* published from Calcutta, the Editor, Amritlal Ray, refers evidently to Swamiji (Vivekananda) at the end of his comments:

'He [Ramakrishna] was a man of highly developed Consciousness whose conversation bristled with truths that

would go home to the hearts of his hearers, among whom used to be some of the most intellectual men of his day, such as Babu Keshub Chunder Sen and Pratap Chunder Mazoomdar and others. Among the disciples of this mad man, who have given up every desire and hope in this world on the strength of his teachings, are some graduates and other educated men, *one of whom is known to the writer, is a person of remarkable learning in the philosophies of both the East and West.* (Italics author's)

About the writer Amritalal Ray, this much can be said that in those days he was well known in Bengal as an erudite and thoughtful writer whose journal *The Hope* earned him a good deal of reputation.

In the same pamphlet of Haramohan's we came across a bit of news about 'Sannyasin Sachchidananda' (one of Swamiji's names in the *parivrājaka* days) quoted from *The Theosophist* of Madras. This journal was the mouthpiece of the Theosophical Society. Naturally we were eager to see the news from the journal itself, particularly so because newspaper [or magazine] accounts of Swamiji during his wandering days in India were very scanty.

In October 1971 we started on an extensive research tour in India, sponsored by the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, to collect news about Swamiji from contemporary newspapers and other sources. Fortunately we were able to obtain on this tour the much desired news item from *The Theosophist* which reported thus in its March 1893 issue.

Supplement to  
THE THEOSOPHIST

March—1893  
Headquarters

'During the absence of the President-Founder and Mr. Edge, the monotony of routine work has been agreeably broken by several gatherings of Theosophists and friends upon various occa-

sions. The arrival of Sannyasi Sachchidananda Swami in Madras, and his subsequent visits to the Head-quarters of the T. S. has been the cause of much local interest. The Sannyasi is possessed of great versatility, a thorough knowledge of Pali, Sanskrit, English, French, and Hebrew being among his many accomplishments. He is also an M.A. of the Calcutta University. To these Nature has added a fine stalwart physique and dignified presence. He has travelled a great deal and, among other places, has visited Lhasa and other cities in Thibet. In his teaching he follows Sri Sankaracharya. But what sets him off from all others of his Holy Order, is the fact that he travels far and wide, mixing freely with the people, holding public meetings and discussions upon religious philosophy. The Sannyasi has had audiences from among the highest intellects in Madras, and has shown himself to be equally facile with arguments from Western philosophy and well versed in modern science.

'Sachchidananda expressed himself pleased with some experiments in "localization" and "impression-reading" conducted at Head-quarters....

W. R. Old'

Two factual errors occur in the above brief but fascinating report about Swamiji's personality and scholarship. Swamiji was not an M.A. but a B.A. of the Calcutta University and he did not go to Tibet. His two brother disciples, Swami Akhandananda and Swami Trigunatitananda went there.<sup>1</sup>

High praise and admiration for the Sannyasin Sachchidananda, which found expression in abundance in *The Theosophist*, shows clearly how much curiosity was roused about him among the authorities of the Theosophical Society. From the news

<sup>1</sup> Other factual errors may include: (a) Swamiji's acquaintance with Pali cannot at all be described as 'thorough'; and with French (in 1893) and Hebrew it was minimal. (b) The concluding paragraph seems to be an attempt by the reporter to get the stamp of Swamiji's approval for the spiritualistic preoccupations of Theosophy.—Ed.

quoted above it seems that he did not then meet the 'Founder-President' (i.e., Colonel Olcott). It is however known that they met some time afterwards. In his lecture *My Plan of Campaign* delivered in Madras in February 1897 (after his return from the West), Swamiji said that before starting for America he called on the leader of the Theosophical Society and wanted a letter of introduction from him, because the leader was an American and a lover of India; but Col. Olcott did not agree to give him the letter because Swamiji was not a member of the Theosophical Society.

## II

The discourses and lectures of Swamiji including the discoveries of Mrs. Marie Louise Burke, most of which we find in the current editions of *The Complete Works* [of Swami Vivekananda], are all of a period later than May 1893. Swamiji's first appearance 'on a public platform' was (as he himself said) at the Parliament of Religions doubtless; but that was not his first speech before an audience. Mrs. Burke has shown how, before appearing at the Parliament, he created enthusiasm by addressing many a privately organized meeting in America, and how the local newspapers published reports of his lectures with due prominence. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* by his Eastern and Western Disciples further mentions at least two of his speeches delivered before he went to America. One was in his school career when on the occasion of a farewell accorded to a teacher, the boy Naren spoke so nicely for half an hour that he was highly praised by (Sir) Surendra Nath Banerjee, the great orator and political leader, who was presiding over the meeting. It is taken for granted that newspapers would not take any notice of a schoolboy's lecture; but it does seem strange that Swamiji's speech on 'My Mission to the West' delivered at the Maha-

boob College grounds in Hyderabad, 13 February 1893—in the presence of 'more than one thousand persons'—did not come out in newspapers or magazines. Nevertheless, if it did, we have not yet been able to trace it. Regarding this lecture *The Life* states, 'The Swami's command over the English language, his learning, his power of expression and his eloquence were a revelation to all.'

Even earlier—towards the end of 1892 in the Deccan Club of Poona—the Swami had given another speech, about which Lokamanya Tilak has stated in his reminiscences:

'That evening (at the Deccan Club) the late Kashinath Govind Nath made a fine speech on a philosophical subject. No one had to say anything. But the Swami rose and spoke in fluent English presenting the other aspect of the subject very lucidly. Everyone there was thus convinced of his high abilities.'

But obviously Swamiji had not considered this presentation in a limited circle to be a 'public speech'. Shortly after, when he was in Trivandrum, Prof. K. Sundarama Iyer requested him to deliver a 'public lecture'. At this 'the Swami said that he had never before spoken in public and would surely prove a lamentable failure'. The Professor then asked, if this were true how he could face the august assembly of the Parliament of Religions. The Professor had come to know from Swamiji, that the Maharaja of Mysore had requested him to join the Chicago Parliament of Religions. In reply Swamiji said that if it was the Will of the Supreme that he should be made His mouthpiece He surely would endow him with the gift and qualities needed for it. Swamiji's answer seemed then to the Professor 'decidedly evasive', but he admitted later, 'I had not so much of a practical realization of those verities as would enable me to perceive the truth underlying a statement like the one made by the Swami.'

We can take it for granted that Swamiji

was gradually becoming conscious at this time of his divine mission of 'revealing himself' on the world stage as a messenger of truth. After Trivandrum and his visit to Kanyakumari, he went to Madras; and it was there that he revealed himself, and this revelation culminated in his journey to the West. The speech at Hyderabad was delivered on a special visit to that city during his stay at Madras.

That Swamiji really revealed himself in full splendour in Madras is borne out by two reports published in contemporary journals—neither of them given in *The Life*. One is the account in *The Theosophist* quoted earlier. We were already aware of the existence of another and even more important account. While searching the files of the *Indian Social Reformer* from 1894-1902, we had found it stated in an article dated 13 July 1902 that news about Swamiji had appeared in that paper 'in late 1892' [?]. Unfortunately we could not get this item from the journal itself, as the files for 1892-3 were not available; but in the article of 13 July 1902 we found the following:

'We were among the small company which gathered at the Triplicane Literary Society ten years ago to meet Swami Vivekananda, then an obscure and unknown wanderer in Southern India. The incidents of the memorable evening will be found recorded in the pages of the *Reformer*.'

Readers will realize the importance of the said item in the *Social Reformer*. If it contains an account of Swamiji's conversation, then it will be the only original, contemporaneously published record of his views in his *parivrājaka* days, as we know of no other similar report of his ideas during this period. Yet fortunately we obtained a major portion of this news from another source. In Madura, during our research tour, we got access to the files of the *Madura Mail*, and in them we found the precious news! On 28 January 1893 the *Mail* quot-

ed extensively the views of 'A Bengali Sadhu' from the *Indian Social Reformer*.<sup>2</sup> Following is the news:

### A BENGALI SADHU ON HINDU RELIGION AND SOCIOLOGY

A young Bengalee Sanyashi of about thirty-two years of age, and a Master of Arts of the Calcutta University was last week interviewed at the Triplicane Literary Society by about a hundred educated Indians among whom was Dewan Bahadur Raghunatha Rao. A summary of what was stated by the *Sadhu* is published by the *Indian Social Reformer*, from which we make the following extracts:—

#### *The Vedic Religion*

The perfect religion is the Vedic religion. The Vedas have two parts, mandatory and optional. The mandatory injunctions are eternally binding on us. They constitute the Hindu religion. The optional ones are not so. These have been changing and been changed by Rishis to suit the times. The Brahmins at one time ate beef and married Sudras. [A] calf was killed to please a guest. Sudras cooked for Brahmins. The food cooked by a male Brahmin was regarded as polluted food. But we have changed our habits to suit the present *yug[a]*. Although our caste rules have so far changed from the time of Manu, still if he should come to us now, he would still call us Hindus. Caste is a social organization and not a religious one. It was the outcome of the natural evolution of our society. It was found necessary and convenient at one time. It has served its purpose. But for it, we would long ago have become Mahomedans. It is useless now. It may be dispensed with.

<sup>2</sup> Though this extract does not mention Vivekananda by name, and again refers to his non-existent 'M.A.', while suggesting an age 2 years beyond the actual—still there is indubitable internal evidence that the Bengali Sadhu was Swamiji. Further, the date coincides accurately with his stay in Madras and the back-reference by the same Journal ten years later is strong confirmation.—*Ed.*

Hindu religion no longer requires the prop of the caste system. A Brahmin may inter-dine with anybody, even a Pariah. He won't thereby lose his spirituality. A degree of spirituality that is destroyed by the touch of a Pariah, is a very poor quantity. It is almost at the zero point. Spirituality of a Brahmin must overflow, blaze and burn [so] as to warm into spiritual life not one Pariah but thousands of Pariahs who may touch him. The old Rishis observed no distinctions or restrictions as regards food. A man who feels that his own spirituality is so flimsy that the sight of a low caste man annihilates it need not approach a Pariah and must keep his precious little to himself.

#### *The Hindu Ideal of Life*

The Hindu Ideal of life is 'Nivarti' [Nivritti]<sup>3</sup>. Nivarti means subjugation and conquest of evil passions, of *Tamasa* nature of lust, revenge and avarice. It does not mean conquest of all desire. It means only the annihilation of gross desires. Every man is bound to love and sympathize with his fellow-creatures. [A] Sanyasi is one who has vanquished all his selfish passions and vowed to devote his life for the good of others. He loves all. 'Pravirti' [Pravritti] means love of God and all his creatures. Sanyasis ought to be fed. They are not like the Christian bishops and Archbishops who must be paid to do their work with thousands of pounds per annum; all whose earnings are spent upon their own luxury—their wife and children. [The] Sanyasi wants only a morsel of food, and then he places all his knowledge and services at the disposal of the public. He is a wandering missionary. Individuals and society have to work themselves up from 'brute through man, into divine'. Even the lowest of the Hindus, the Pariah, has less of the brute

<sup>3</sup> *Nivritti* and *pravritti* are key-concepts in Hindu philosophy, and Swami Vivekananda has frequently interpreted and elaborated on them (e.g., see his *Karma-yoga*, Ch. VI) in their traditional connotations. But the interpretation of the terms here ascribed to him by the *Indian Social Reformer's* reporter does not accord with what Swamiji has said elsewhere.—*Ed.*

in him than a Briton in a similar social status. This is the result of an old and excellent religious civilization. This evolution to a higher spiritual state is possible only through discipline and education.

#### *The Sradh<sup>4</sup> Ceremony*

Every institution, caste, early marriage etc., that stands in the way of education, ought at once to be knocked on the head. Even 'Sradh' may be given up, if the performance of it involves waste of time which might be better used for self-education. But 'Sradh' should not be given up. The meaning of the Mantras is very edifying. The Mantras depict the suffering and care undergone by our parents on our behalf. The performance of it is an honour paid to the memory of the sum total of the spirit of our forefathers, whose virtues we inherit. Sradh has nothing to do with one's salvation. Yet no Hindu who loves his religion, his country and his past great men should give up Sradh. The outward formalities and the feeding of the Brahmins are not essential. We have no Brahmins in these days worthy of being fed on Sradh days. The Brahmins fed ought not to be professional eaters, but Brahmins who feed disciples *gratis*, and teach them true Vedic doctrines. In these days, Sradh may be performed mentally.

#### *Education of Women*

The jealous guardianship of our women shows that we Hindus have declined in our national virtues, that we reverted to the 'brutal state.' Every man must so discipline his mind as to bring himself to regard all women as his sisters or mothers. Women must have freedom to read, to receive as good an education as men. Individual development is impossible with ignorance and slavery.

#### *Emancipation of the Hindus*

Through the slavery of a thousand years, Hindus have at present degenerated. They have forgotten their own self-respect. Every English boy is taught to feel his importance, he thinks that he is

<sup>4</sup> *Sradh* (or *srāddha*): A religious ceremony in which food and drink are offered to deceased relatives or ancestors.—*Ed.*

a member of a great race, the conquerors of the Earth. The Hindu feels from his boyhood just the reverse that he is born to slave. We can't become a great nation unless we love our religion and try to respect ourselves, and respect our country men and society. The Hindus of modern times are generally hypocrites. They must rise, and combine the faith in the true Vedic religion, with a knowledge of the political and scientific truths of the Europeans. The evils of caste seem to be more prevalent in the South than in Bengal. In Bengal a Brahmin uses the water touched by the Sudras, but here the Sudra is kept at a great distance by the Brahmin. There are no Brahmins in [the] Kali Yug[a]. The Pariahs, our fellow-beings, ought to be educated by the higher castes, must [.....] truths of Hindu religion and be [.....] Brahmins. The first duty of a Brahmin is to love all. There must first be an amalgamation of the Brahmins, then of all the Dwijas,<sup>5</sup> and then of the Dwijas and Sudras.

The importance of the above report is self-evident. Those who want to make a systematic study of Swamiji's social ideas will find many interesting points therein. We do not want here to proceed on that line but only to put forward some explanatory notes with regard to the above report.

### III

The Triplicane Literary Society, in which Swamiji spoke, was in those days a noted cultural organization, and we came upon its name frequently when going through contemporary Madras newspapers. In February 1897 when Swamiji came back to Madras from the West, this Society accorded him an address of welcome in which it was mentioned with satisfaction 'that prior to Swami Vivekananda's going to Europe and America, it was in the hall of that

Society he was invited to make the acquaintance of the public of Madras who recognised on that occasion the worth and greatness of the Swami'. (*Madras Times*, Feb. 11, 1897).

In *The Life* we find that Swamiji visited the Triplicane Literary Society several times. That may be true, but the news quoted in the *Madras Times* mentions his one visit only.

Dewan Bahadur Raghunath Rao, mentioned as among those present in the assembly of January 1893, was an eminent man of Madras who, it may be said, was a man of nation-wide celebrity. He was the author of many treatises including *Indian Penal Code, Hindu Law and Custom, Land Revenue System* etc., and was connected with progressive social movements. He lent his strong support to the *Age of Consent Bill* of 1889-90, when even a section of social reformers were hesitant and the conservatives were united against it. The readers of Vivekananda's *Life* are acquainted with Swamiji's strong feelings for the Bill and intense aversion towards those who opposed it. Dewan Bahadur Raghunath Rao was the General Secretary of the Hindu National Social Conference, and retained his position for many years.

About the journal the *Indian Social Reformer* it may be said that it was the mouth-piece of the social reform movement in Madras and Bombay. This weekly paper was started in 1890 'by the young men at the staff of the *Hindu*, whose sympathies for the Hindu reform were troubling the business interests of the *Hindu*'. Its life and soul was Kamakshi Natarajan, one of the most powerful journalist-writers of India.

The young social reformers were very much attracted by the intellect and progressive ideas of Swamiji even when he was an unknown wanderer. Hence, when Swamiji became famous and returned from the West

<sup>5</sup> Lit., 'twice-born'—applicable to the three higher castes in Hindu society by virtue of the investiture with the sacred thread, signifying spiritual second birth.—Ed.

to Madras, the reformers here offered felicitations to him—which, we may add, the reform organizations of Bengal could not think of doing. Steeped in sectarian bigotry they thought that the influence of Vivekananda might prove harmful to their interest. Further, it was surprising for any social reform society to accord a welcome to a Hindu monk; and for this they offered this explanation:

'As for the M.H.S.R. [Madras Hindu Social Reform] Association itself, there was no new departure from any of its principles in having joined in the welcome accorded to the *sanyasin*. The Association, we believe, is no enemy of Swamis. If no other Swami has yet received a similar token of honour and appreciation from the Association, it is because none other is known to have preached the same advanced and catholic views and set the same bold example as the Swami Vivekananda. Would that all our swamis had said as Vivekananda said to the interviewer of the *Madras Mail*, 'We do stand in need of Social Reform'.

'It is really a very promising sign that a Hindu *sanyasin* should, by his teachings and example enlist the appreciation of modern social reform associations.' (*Indian Social Reformer*, Feb. 14, 1897)

An extract of the 'appreciation' from the address of welcome may also be quoted:

'Working as the Association does for the ends represented by the social side of the Hindu revivalistic movement which you [Swami Vivekananda] so worthily lead, we heartily and thankfully appreciate the clearness and candour with which you have emphasised the necessity of removing whatever stands in the way of our nation regaining in [its?] virility of thought and freedom of action, and sincerely admire your own personal example which so faithfully and boldly illustrates your noble teachings.'

From the views of Swamiji published in the *Indian Social Reformer*, quoted earlier, we can very well understand why the social reformers took him as one of their own. Swamiji's utterances about Hindu society

were revolutionary in character, particularly as they were spoken in extremely conservative Madras and by a Hindu *sannyāsin*!

And yet let not anybody think that the Madras social reformers showered unmixed eulogies on him. When Swamiji in 1897 in Madras scolded them, they in their turn did not spare him. A large collection of their counter-attacks and criticisms is to be found in our book.<sup>6</sup>

Not only in 1897, but also in 1892-3, the 'unknown Bengali Sadhu' had pointed out many defects in the method followed by the social reformers. *The Life* says:

'The Swami held several conversations at the Literary Society of Triplicane...; many of its young members belonged to the social reform movement in Madras. But he saw that they were working from the wrong point of view, that of sweeping condemnation. In his repeated talks the Swami emphatically urged upon them the necessity of critically analysing foreign ideals... He said that they should invoke the aid of all that was great and glorious in the past, otherwise the very foundations of the national structure would be undermined. He told them that he was not an enemy of social reform; on the contrary he yearned for reforms, but they must come from within..., and must be constructive and not destructive.'

In spite of the fact that the reformers in Madras had a very high opinion of Swamiji, it was not possible for them to stomach all that he said about them in 1897, and they set up a hue and cry in protest. But at the same time Vivekananda brought about a deep-seated transformation in their angle of vision. This has been nicely dealt with by Charles H. Heimsath in his treatise on *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform* (1964), giving necessary facts and figures. Interested readers will do well to go through the book.

<sup>6</sup> S. P. Basu and Sunil Bihari Ghosh: *Vivekananda in Indian Newspapers, 1893-1902* (Basu, Bhattacharya & Co., Pvt. Ltd., 80/7 Grey St., Calcutta-6, 1969).