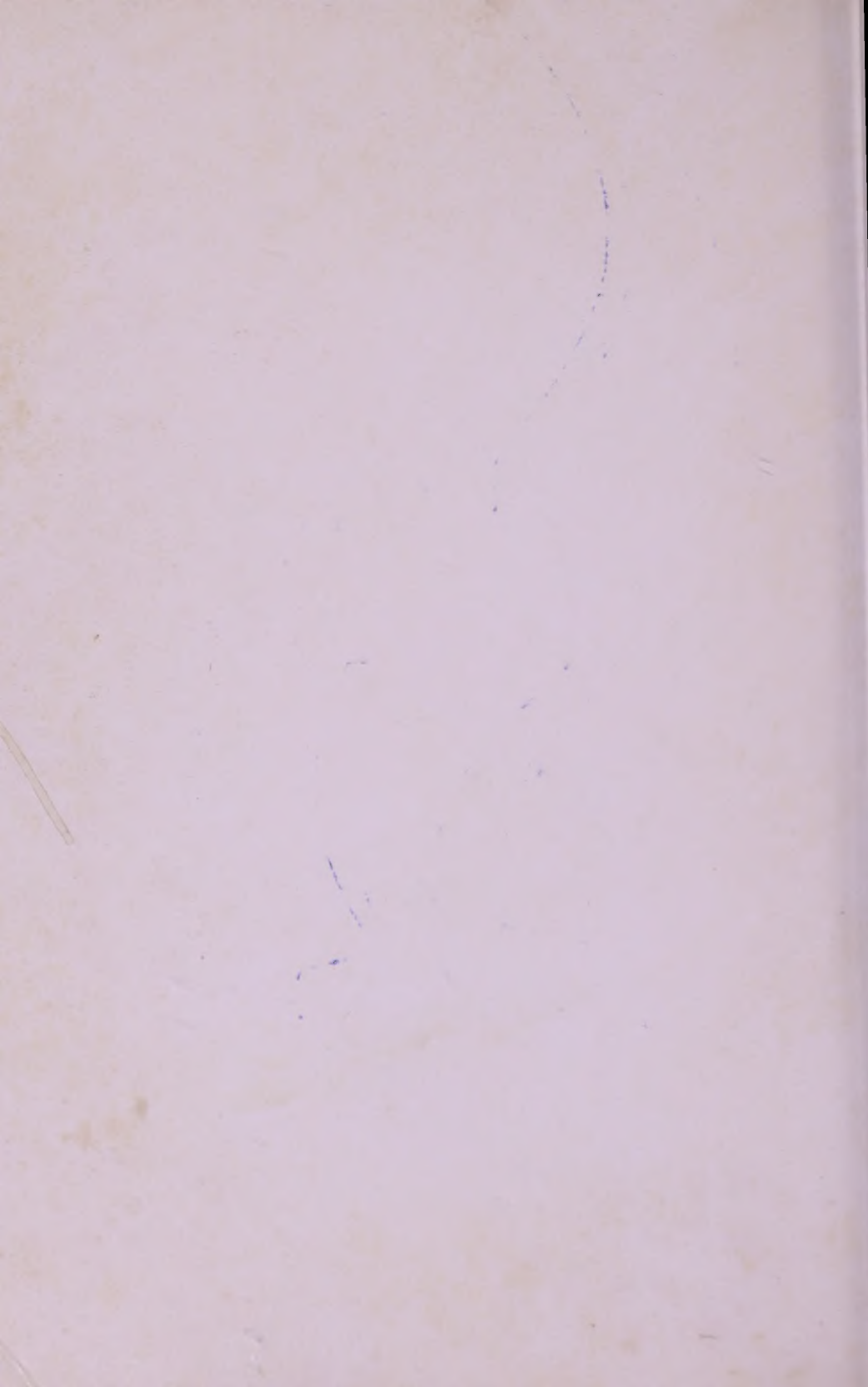




# SAINTS OF INDIA

ANNA



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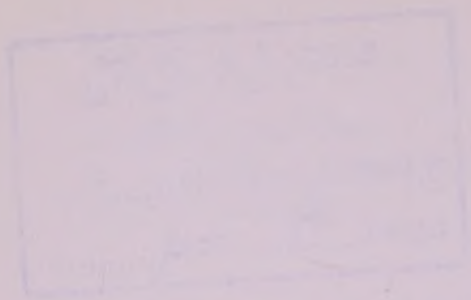
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*“Is God’s book finished? Or is it still a continuous revelation going on? It is a marvellous book—these spiritual revelations of the world. The Bible, the Vedas, the Koran, and all other sacred books are but so many pages, and an infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded. I would leave my heart open for all of them. We stand in the present, but open every window of the heart for all that will come in the future. Salutation to all the prophets of the past, to all the great ones of the present, and to all that are to come in the future”.*

—Swami Vivekananda.

# SAINTS OF INDIA

## GAUTAMA BUDDHA

VAISAKHA is a blessed month as it is associated with the advent of three great sons of Mother India—the Buddha, Sankara and Ramanuja. Like the spring season breathing new life into dry plants and trees, the very memory of these large-hearted souls brings peace and joy to a world sunk in misery.

Siddhartha Gautama Buddha was born on a Vaisakha Purnami, 560 years before Christ. At the foot of the Himalayas, on the borders of Nepal, there was a little kingdom with its capital at Kapilavastu, ruled over by the Sakyas, a clan which claimed descent from the Solar race. King Suddhodana who ruled there had married the two daughters of the King of Koli whose names were Maya and Prajapati. Queen Maya had many wonderful dreams; and in one of them she saw a great multitude of people bowing down to her. Wise men interpreted the dream and said that she would have a son who would command the worship of the world. When the time neared for that Glorious One's appearance, Queen Maya expressed a desire to go to her native city. On the way, she rested in a grove where she gave birth to the child who became the Buddha.

Seven days after the birth of her son, who was named Siddhartha, Queen Maya died, leaving the child to be taken care of by her sister, Prajapati. The king provided for him as he grew up all that makes a young man's life cheerful. He would not let even a shadow of grief fall on the child's happy days. The wisest in the land were selected as his tutors.

One day, it happened that while he was in his garden, he saw a number of swans passing through the air. Suddenly one of the swans fell wounded at his feet. He gently lifted it and drew the shaft from the wound. His cousin Devadatta had shot the bird and now claimed it as his own. But Siddhartha said that he who saved a life had a greater claim to it than he who sought to destroy it. He kept the bird, nursed it till it regained strength and then sent it back to rejoin its kind.

Another day, he was looking at an insect on a blade of grass, when it was suddenly devoured by a lizard. Soon after, a serpent appeared and caught hold of the lizard. Then followed a kite which carried off the serpent. This incident affected him deeply and he asked himself, 'Is this life?'

As he grew up, he was often found to seek solitude and sit by himself for long hours. The father became anxious and consulted his ministers who advised matrimony, saying that a young bride would cure him of the tendency. Accordingly he was married to his cousin Yasodhara, one of the loveliest maidens. Siddhartha adored his beautiful bride and the two lived happily together in the luxurious home which the king had provided.

However, some years later, he wished to go and see the world outside the palace gates, which he had hardly been allowed to see. The king granted the request but gave orders to his attendants that nothing unpleasant should be allowed to cross the prince's path. Things went according to plan for a time; but later on, unexpectedly, unpleasant sights presented themselves in quick succession. The gods seemed to have themselves come in disguise to summon Siddhartha to his predestined mission of alleviating the misery of the world. The prince saw

sick people; he saw an old man whose palsied limbs and sunken eyes betrayed deep but unspoken misery; then he saw four persons carrying a bier. He questioned his charioteer and understood that all human beings were bound to die some day and that it was the way of the world. Siddhartha began to ask himself, 'Is there no way out of all this suffering to which human beings are subject?' He then saw a Sannyasin, serene of countenance, and came to understand that he was the one who had gone beyond this misery.

Siddhartha spent a few years with a mind made heavy by restless thoughts about the misery of man's lot on earth. When he was twenty-nine, a son was born to him. However, he looked with disdain on the pleasures of the palace. When his wife entreated him to tell her the cause of his unrest of mind, he said, 'When I see suffering all round and find men grow old, sicken and die, it is enough to take away the last hope of life and the love for pleasure.' The King, learning of all this, was greatly overcome with sorrow and was afraid that Siddhartha might renounce the world and take to the ascetic life.

Not long after the birth of the son, one night when all was quiet, the prince felt restless and going out into the garden sat under a Jambu tree, trying to calm his mind. He then had the vision of a holy man who seemed to tell him, 'You are the Blessed One come to the world to save and redeem mankind. Now is the time. Fulfil your mission.' Saying so, the vision vanished. The prince returned to his bed chamber. His mind was made up. He stood gazing at his wife and son and tears flowed freely from his eyes. Swami Vivekananda described the supreme moment thus:

"The gods sang 'Awake. Thou art the awakened. Arise and help the world.' And the struggling prince

returned again and again to the bedside of his sleeping wife. What was the problem that vexed him? Why, it was she whom he was about to sacrifice for the world! That was the struggle. He cared nothing for himself. Then the victory and the inevitable farewell and the kiss imprinted so gently on the foot of the princess that she never awoke. Have you ever thought of the hearts of the heroes, how they were great, great and soft as butter?"

Then he called Channa, his faithful charioteer, and asked him to bring Kandaka his peerless horse. He mounted the steed and rode out accompanied by Channa. The city was fast asleep and none knew that Siddhartha was riding forth from his royal home into homelessness. When he came to the river Anoma, he halted, cut off his silken hair with his sword and divested himself of his robes and ornaments. He gave the horse and valuables to Channa and asked him to give them to the King with his greetings and to tell him that all was well with the prince.

Now he went on his road alone, begging his food and after some time came to Rajagriha, the capital of the kingdom of Magadha, where King Bimbisara was ruling. People flocked to see Siddhartha, attracted by his noble bearing and beauty. The King also came to see him and told him, 'Your hands are fit to grasp the reins of an empire: you should not hold a beggar's bowl'. Siddhartha replied, 'Better than sovereignty, better than heaven is the fruit of holiness. I pray you pity me not. Pity rather those who are burdened with the cares of the world.' The King bowed to him and said, 'May you obtain that which you seek and having obtained it, come back, I pray you, and receive me as your disciple.'

In this quest, Siddhartha first came to two renowned teachers, Alara and Udraka, who were unsurpassed in

learning and philosophical knowledge. But their learned disquisitions did not fully satisfy him.

He moved on into the forest of Uruvela, near the present Buddha Gaya where he met a group of five ascetics. In course of time, they were struck by Siddhartha's deep humanity and holiness and they attached themselves to him as disciples. They marvelled at the resolution and strength of mind which enabled him to continue his fasting and austerities for long periods of time. For six years, he continued his penances, until his body was wasted and he became mere skin and bone. It began to dawn on him that his extreme penance was a mistake. He changed his way of life so as not to neglect the body any longer. The five ascetics, who thought that he had broken his vow, left him and went away to Banaras. Siddhartha had discovered the middle path:

“The string overstretched breaks, the music dies;  
The string overslack is dumb and the music dies;  
Tune us the Sitar neither low nor high.”

He declared later on, ‘One is the life of pleasure from which he who leadeth the religious life must abstain; it is base, ignoble, unspiritual. The other is a life of mortification: it is gloomy, unworthy, unreal. The perfect one, O Bhikshus, avoiding these extremes has discovered the middle path, a path which openeth the eyes, which leadeth to knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nirvana.’

During these days of loneliness, he was occasionally tempted to give up the struggle; and thoughts of home and wife and son used to arise in his mind. He understood that this was the temptation of Mara, the evil spirit, and fought resolutely against it. At times he felt an assurance that the light would soon dawn; but again darkness and despair would possess his mind.

In those days, he usually sat under an Aswattha tree

on the banks of the Niranjana. One morning, as he sat there, a young woman by name Sujata, came with a bowl of rice cooked in milk, as a votive offering to Aswattha Narayana who had blessed her with a son. When she saw Siddhartha seated there, she took him for the deity and offered him the bowl, which he accepted. That evening, which happened to be a Vaisakha Purnami, he made a seat of Kusa grass and sat under the tree with a firm resolution: 'Let my body dry up in this seat, let the skin and bone and flesh go back to their elements; without attaining that knowledge which is difficult to get even through ages of striving, this body shall not move from the seat'.

When one makes such a resolution, the dawn of knowledge cannot be far off. Gautama Siddhartha became the Buddha, the Enlightened one. The Aswattha tree under which he attained enlightenment is called the Bodhi tree and countless are the pilgrims who have visited the spot. The Buddha stayed there in solitude 'seven times seven' days, enjoying the bliss of Nirvana.

Then he thought of his old teachers who would have been glad to see him. But they were dead. His five disciples were still alive and he resolved to go to them first and proclaim the gospel of deliverance. At that time they were living in the Deer Park at Banaras. He came to them and told them 'The Thathagata does not seek salvation in austerities, but for that reason you must not think that he indulges in worldly pleasures, nor does he live in abundance. To keep the body in good health is a duty, for otherwise we shall not be able to trim the lamp of wisdom and keep our mind strong and clear. Reading of the scripture, making offerings to priests or sacrifices to gods, self-mortification by heat or cold and many such penances do not cleanse the man who is not free from

anger, bigotry, deception, envy, self-praise and evil intentions.'

The Buddha then went to Rajagriha to meet King Bimbisara, as he had promised. The King was persuaded to give up animal sacrifices and to practise Ahimsa. With a large number of his subjects he embraced the new religion and this conversion of a ruler had a great effect. The movement grew rapidly.

From Rajagriha, he went to Kapilavastu with his followers, at the pressing invitation of his father. He was received by the ministers and members of the royal family with great reverence. But when Yasodhara hesitated to make her appearance, the Buddha went to her and spoke kindly to her before he left the palace. Many people joined the Sangha here too. Among them were Ananda, Siddhartha's half brother, Devadatta his cousin, Aniruddha the philosopher and Upali the barber. Of all of them, Ananda was the one dearest to the heart of the Buddha. On the seventh day of his stay in Kapilavastu, Yasodhara sent her son Rahula to the Buddha, advising him to ask for his inheritance. The Buddha said 'I cannot give him perishable treasures. I can give him the inheritance of a holy life'. So saying, he accepted Rahula into the Order.

The Buddha continued his ministrations, going from place to place. He used the mildest means, sympathy, kindness and love, and raised the moral tone of the people he met. He worked incessantly 'for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many'.

Once, a householder in Rajagriha received a precious bowl of sandalwood decorated with jewels. He erected a pole in front of his house and tied the bowl on its top. He proclaimed that if any one brought it down without using a ladder or stick or missile he should

receive whatever he desired. Kasyapa, a disciple of the Buddha, performed a miracle and brought it down by a mere wish. When the Buddha heard of this, he went to Kasyapa, broke the bowl and forbade his disciples to perform miracles of any kind.

A foolish man, learning that the Buddha observed the principles of love and of returning good for evil, came and abused him, wanting to provoke him. When the man had finished his abuse, the Buddha asked him, 'Son, if a man declined to accept a present made to him, to whom would it belong?' And he answered, 'To the man who offered it.' The Buddha added, 'My son, I decline to accept your abuse.' Continuing he said, 'A wicked man who abuses a virtuous one is like one who looks up and spits at heaven; the spittle does not soil heaven but comes back and defiles his own person.'

One day the Buddha went with his begging bowl to a farmer. The farmer looked displeased and said roughly, 'I have ploughed my field, sowed the seed and gathered the grain, but you have done no work to earn your bread.' The Buddha replied, 'I too have earned my bread.' The farmer rejoined, 'Then where is your plough and where are your oxen?' The Buddha said, 'The seed I sow is faith, the rain that waters the seed is repentance, wisdom is my plough and yoke, the oxen that draw the plough are diligence; with truth, I cut away the weeds of sin and ignorance; my harvest is the fruit of immortality.'

Another day, the Buddha saw a monk in a monastery, suffering from leprous sores, neglected by every one. With the help of Ananda, he washed the sores of the monk and put him to bed. Then he called together the monks and spoke thus: 'Monks, you have no mothers or fathers to take care of you. If you will not help each other and wait on each other, who will wait on you?'

Whosoever would wait on me, he should wait on the sick'.

In his eightieth year, the Buddha visited Vaisali where he accepted the invitation to dinner of Ambapali, a courtesan, in preference to the hospitality of the nobles. Thence he went to Belua. Here he fell seriously ill. When Ananda asked him with tears in his eyes, how the Order was to conduct itself when he was gone, he said: 'What does the Order expect of me, Ananda? I have preached the truth. I have no closed fist and have kept nothing back. I am now grown old and my journey is drawing to its close. O Ananda, be ye lamps unto yourselves. Hold fast as a refuge to the truth. And whosoever shall be lamps unto themselves, it is they who shall reach the topmost height.'

When he recovered, he proceeded to Pava with his disciples, where he accepted the invitation of a blacksmith to a meal. After this, the Buddha was seized with acute dysentery. He did not want that his host should know about this. He reached Kusinara with the utmost difficulty and rested in a grove of Sal trees on a couch prepared by Ananda. The end came quickly. Ananda and other disciples stood by, weeping bitterly. The Buddha said, "Enough. Weep no more. All things must perish. We must be separated from things we hold dear. You have done well. You have acquired much merit. Continue to strive and soon you will be free from the great evils. Think not when I am gone, 'The master is no more, we have a master no more.' Think not thus. The Truth, the Law which I have taught you, that shall be your master when I am gone." So he passed into the Great Silence.

Mahatma Gandhi says: "I have heard it contended times without number that the Buddha did not believe in

God. Such a belief contradicts the very central fact of the Buddha's teaching. He reinstated God in the right place. It is my deliberate opinion that the essential parts of the teaching of the Buddha now form an integral part of Hinduism. It is impossible for Hindu India now to retrace her steps and go behind the great reformation that Gautama Buddha effected in Hinduism. By his immense sacrifice, by his great renunciation and by the immaculate purity of his life, he left an indelible impress on Hinduism."

## SANKARACHARYA

SANKARA was born in a Nambudiri Brahmin family at Kalady, a village situated on the banks of the river Purna in the State of Kerala. We know little that is absolutely certain about the date of his birth. Many believe that he was born in 788 A.D. The actual date of his birth is, however, irrelevant to the value and validity of his teaching. According to the Hindu calendar, the year was Nandana, the month was Vaisakha, the Nakshatra was Punarvasu and Thithi was Sukla Panchami. His father's name was Sivaguru and his mother's name Aryamba. For a long time Sivaguru and Aryamba were without child. They prayed to the Lord Siva at Trichur for three years. At last a child was born. Soon after Sankara's birth, Sivaguru died. The child was brought up by Aryamba with tender solicitude and care. By the time he was eight years old, Sankara had mastered the Vedic literature and was learned and wise beyond his years. The study of the Veda and the Upanishads apparently affected him deeply. He set his heart on becoming a Sannyasin. An incident happened which hastened the fulfilment of his wish.

As mother and son were bathing in the river early one morning, a crocodile caught hold of Sankara's foot, and he cried out to his mother, asking for permission to become a monk. As he was struggling with the crocodile, he said that if he became a monk, the destiny threatening him with death in the jaws of the crocodile might be overcome and he might live. Feeling helpless in the face of the danger to her dear child, the mother agreed to Sankara's wish. Sankara was rid of the crocodile. From that moment, he became a wandering monk. He declined even to accompany his mother back to his home and said that henceforth God was his mother as well as

father and the whole world his home. He immediately set out to go about the country, as a Sannyasin is bidden to do. But in answer to his mother's pathetic wish he assured her that he would be by her side in her last days; she had only to think of him and he would be at her bedside.

Young Sankara proceeded northward in search of a Guru. He came to the banks of the river Narmada where he met Govinda Bhagavatpada, a disciple of Gaudapada. Sankara requested him to initiate him formally into Sannyasa. The request was readily granted. Sankara thereupon received instruction in Vedanta from Govinda Bhagavatpada.

Govinda Bhagavatpada had been known as Chandra Sarma before he himself became a Sannyasin. He was a Kashmiri. It was while on a journey to Chidambaram, where he hoped to study Grammar under Maharshi Patanjali, that he happened to meet Gaudapada. Gaudapada told him that Patanjali was no longer at Chidambaram, and he himself taught him, after satisfying himself that he was fit to receive the teaching. Chandra Sarma then went to Ujjain and after a few years of married life went to Badrinath. There he met his Guru Gaudapada, a second time, and took Sannyasa from him and henceforth came to be known as Govinda Yogindra or Govinda Bhagavatpada. He went again to the banks of the Narmada and was staying there when Sankara met him and became his disciple. After a time, Govinda Bhagavatpada commanded Sankara to go forth to Banaras, the heart of Bharata Varsha, and expound there the Brahma Sutras, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, in the light of Gaudapada's teachings. Just as blood is pumped to all parts of the body from the heart, spiritual culture has, from ancient times, travelled from Banaras to all parts of the country.

The first disciple that joined Sankara at Banaras was a young man from Chola territory by name Vishnu Sarma. Sankara gave him the name of Sanandana. Soon, other disciples joined, but Sanandana excelled them all in his devotion and service to the Guru. We are told that one day when Sanandana was on the opposite bank of the river Ganga and the Guru called him, the disciple proceeded towards him promptly walking on the water, chanting the Guru's name. The other disciples saw with wonder lotuses spring under his feet, as if to support him. This was the miracle of his Guru Bhakti and he was from this time called Padmapada.

Then, one Divakara brought his mute son to Sankara and when Sankara asked him who he was, wonder of wonders, the boy began to reply in beautiful Sanskrit verse! The father gave the son to the Guru, who admitted him into his fold under the name of Hastamalaka.

Another person who joined Sankara about this time was one Kalanatha Giri from Karnataka, who sang a beautiful hymn in praise of the Guru which is remembered to this day. He came to be known as Totakacharya.

The venue of Sankara's exposition was the Mukti Mandapa in the Manikarnika ghat, at Banaras. His teachings, later recorded on palm leaves, percolated through the country and attracted the attention of scholars and men of religion. They assumed such importance that no philosopher of his own time or of succeeding generations could ignore him.

There is a belief that the first commentary which Sankara wrote was on the Vishnu Sahasranama. His writings are voluminous, including his commentaries on the Brahma Sutras, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita and minor works like Viveka Chudamani, Upadesa Sahasri, Sivanandalahari, etc.

Two incidents are recorded to have occurred during Sankara's stay at Banaras. One morning, when he was going to the temple of Viswanath accompanied by his disciples, after a bath in the Ganges, an outcaste, carrying a pot of liquor on his head and followed by dogs, came rather close to him and Sankara asked him to keep away. The man retorted, 'Whom do you bid to keep away, the soul or the body?' This question opened the eyes of Sankara and he realised that the person in the shape of the outcaste was none other than the Lord Viswanatha, who had come to teach him a profound spiritual truth. Sankara refers to this episode in his *Maanesha Panchakam*, where the refrain of the song is, "Salutation to him who comes as the Guru in the shape of the outcaste as well as of the twice-born".

Another day, as Sankara was going along a street, he heard a scholar trying to memorize the difficult rules of Grammar. He then felt that this kind of dry learning was not going to save any man unless he used it as a means to the higher life of the spirit. He then composed the verses known as *Bhaja Govindam*.

Sankara, it is believed, stayed in Banaras for four or five years and then took to extensive journeys on foot, for propagating the truths of Vedanta. From Banaras he went to Badrinath and met Gaudapada. He visited Kedarnath, Kashmir and Mount Kailas. During his travels in the Himalayas, he obtained the first part of *Sundaryalahari* to which he added several verses, thus completing the famous hymn to the Devi. He also procured five famous Siva Lingas which he installed in course of time at Kedarnath, Pasupatinath (in Nepal), Sringeri, Chidambaram and Kancheepuram. During his triumphant march, he was received with royal honours in many principalities and was greatly respected wherever

he went. But there were not wanting people who opposed him and vehemently criticized his teachings.

When he went to Prayag, he heard that Kumarila Bhatta, the champion of Mimamsa philosophy was there. He wanted to discuss his views with him. When he met Kumarila, he found that he had decided to immolate himself for the sin that he thought he had committed pretending to be a Buddhist in order to enter the Buddhist fold and learn their secrets for the purpose of refuting their doctrine. Sankara was saddened by the incident. But, as directed by Kumarila, he went to Mahishmati to meet Mandana Misra, the famous exponent of Mimamsa. Mandana Misra used to condemn Sannyasins as renegades and even considered that it was a sin to see them. He was wealthy and influential and had a large following. Sankara wanted to convert him to his way of thinking. When Sankara went to his house, he was about to perform a Sraddha ceremony and he abused Sankara for appearing there and at such a time. But all the same, he accepted the challenge of Sankara for a discussion on the fundamentals of faith. After the Sraddha ceremony was over, a Sadas, a conference of Pandits, was held. The discussions of the conference lasted several days. Mandana Misra's wife, Sarasa Vani, who was a very learned lady and who was held in great respect by scholars for her integrity and wisdom, was requested to be the umpire. The wager was that if Sankara was defeated he should give up Sannyasa and marry and settle down as an orthodox householder. If, however, Mandana Misra was defeated, he should give up his house and become a Sannyasin. Sarasa Vani, with her powers bordering on the divine, gave two extraordinary garlands for the disputants to wear and declared that whoever was defeated in argument would find his garland

fading, while the victor's garland would remain fresh. And it happened that Sankara's garland remained fresh while that of Mandana Misra faded. Mandana Misra accepted defeat and was so changed that he now considered it a blessing to follow Sankara as his Sannyasin disciple. It was he who came to be known later on as Sureswaracharya and became the first pontiff of the Sringeri Peetham. Sarasa Vani also came to Sringeri and a shrine stands there today, dedicated to her worship.

In the course of his travels, Sankara exposed the crooked and evil ways of many organizations going under the name of religion and strove hard to establish the Upanishadic faith. He incurred the displeasure of men belonging to sects like the Kapalikas who used to practise sorcery and indulge in human sacrifices. When one of the Kapalikas approached Sankara with a view to behead him, Padmapada, his faithful disciple, though he was not nearby then, had a vision of the danger to his Guru's life and rushing to his side as if impelled by some force, was the means of saving him by encountering the Kapalika and killing him.

During his wanderings, Sankara had a premonition that his mother's end was near. Remembering his promise to her, he went to her side, losing no time. What joy it must have brought to the dying mother can easily be imagined. Though he was her son, he became her Guru now and enabled her to meet her death with unshakable faith in God. The end came peacefully and quietly. The Nambudiris of Kalady objected to Sankara, a Sannyasin, cremating his mother's body as being contrary to orthodox practice. They shunned him and left him severely alone. He cremated the corpse in the backyard of the house itself. A Samadhi built in 1910 marks the place now. Sankara cursed the people of the village for their

hard-heartedness and declared them unfit to study the Vedas or entertain Sannyasins. The descendants of those families do not enjoy these privileges even today.

After the obsequies of his mother were over, Sankara resumed his travels. He visited Srirangam, Jambukeswaram, Tirupati, and other places in the south. In Tiruvotiyur, near Madras, there is evidence to show that he changed the mode of worship at the temple there by stopping animal sacrifices. Then he proceeded north along the east coast.

The Maths established by him have continued to function through the centuries, at Kedarnath, Dwaraka, Sringeri, Puri, and Kanchi and the institutions of worship initiated by him in many temples continue his traditions to this day. The Sannyasins of the order of Sankara are called Dasanamis because they are recognized by the ten appellations of Teertha, Asrama, Vana, Aranya, Giri, Parvata, Sagara, Saraswati, Bharati and Puri.

When Sankara went to Kamarup (modern Gauhati) in Assam, he met Abhinava Gupta, a Sakta leader and defeated him in argument. In revenge, it is said, the followers of Abhinava Gupta injured Sankara's health by occult means and as a result, he began to vomit blood. Padmapada nursed him and took him to Kedarnath. But Sankara had done his work in the world and, entering a cave, he disappeared in the Himalayas at the age of thirty-two, according to one version. According to another version, he came back to Kancheepuram and spent his last days there.

Sister Nivedita, writing on Sankara, observes: "In the course of a few years, to have nominated the founders of no less than ten great religious orders of which four fully retain their prestige to the present day; to have acquired such a mass of Sanskrit learning as to

create a distinct philosophy and impress himself on the scholarly imagination of India which is a pre-eminence that 1200 years have not sufficed to shake; to have written poems whose grandeur makes him unmistakable even to foreign and unlearned ears, and at the same time to have lived with his disciples, in all the radiant love and simple pathos of the saints—this is the greatness that we must appreciate but cannot understand.”

## RAMANUJACHARYA

LIKE all great teachers, Ramanuja is a reflection and a commentary of the times in which he lived. Owing to the influences that had been set at work by Buddhism and owing to the continued onslaughts of Muslim invaders, the old Vedic religion was becoming a mass of vain disputations divorced from reality. In trying to keep its ground against alien attacks, it had become all head and no heart. It was at such a time that Sri Ramanuja appeared on the scene to preach the gospel of service to society. He came to interpret anew the old religion in terms of the orthodox traditions of Vaishnavism as lived and experienced by the Alwars and Acharyas before him.

About twenty-four miles to the west of Madras, on the way to Kancheepuram, lies Sriperumbudur where Ramanuja was born in 1017 A. D. His father was Asuri Kesava Somayaji, also called Sarvakratu Dikshitar who, we have reason to believe, was an Advaitin. His mother was Kantimati, a grand-daughter of Sri Yamunacharya.

Not much is known about Ramanuja's childhood days. He had his early education under his father. When he was fifteen, he was taken to Kancheepuram, where he was put to school along with a cousin of his, Govinda by name. The school was conducted by an Advaita Acharya, known as Yadava Prakasa. In the course of years, the disciple's mighty intellect threatened to eclipse the greatness of his master. Ramanuja could not accept Yadava Prakasa's interpretations of certain scriptural texts. Once the Guru was requested by the local ruler to exorcise the evil spirit which possessed his daughter. The Guru tried but failed. Eventually Ramanuja succeeded in driving the devil out of the girl. Thereupon relations between teacher and disciple became rather strained.

Hearing about Ramanuja's intelligence, Sri Yamu-

nacharya travelled to Kancheepuram to find out whether he could make him his successor, as the religious head at Srirangam. He observed Ramanuja without making himself known and returned satisfied.

Subsequently, Ramanuja accompanied a party of fellow-disciples on a pilgrimage to Banaras, along with his cousin Govinda. When they were near the Vindhya hills, Govinda warned Ramanuja that some members of the party were plotting against him and that he might come to harm. So, Ramanuja left the party and retraced his steps. He had the guidance of a kind-hearted hunter and his wife during the return journey, both of whom disappeared near a well on the outskirts of Kancheepuram. He knew then that the hunter who had guided him was none other than Lord Varadaraja. The spot where the realization came to Ramanuja became ever so dear to him and from that day he used to carry water from that well for the Lord's daily worship. An inner change came over Ramanuja and he began to think of the Lord as his friend and guide. He resolved that his life should be dedicated to His service. He was now 25 years old. In compliance with his mother's entreaties, he married and led the life of a householder. He cut himself off from Yadava Prakasa and chose as his hero a saintly person by name Tirukkachi Nambi, who was serving the Lord with unparalleled devotion.

At this time, Yamunacharya sent his disciple Mahapoorna to Kancheepuram to fetch Ramanuja, so that he might install him formally as his successor. But unfortunately, Yamunacharya passed away just before Ramanuja reached Srirangam. Ramanuja paid his last respects to him and noticed that three of his fingers remained folded; on enquiry whether he had any specific wishes to be posthumously fulfilled, he was told that the Acharya

had left three commands for him. The first was that he should dedicate himself to the elucidation of the Vedanta Sutras, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. The second was that he should popularize the Divya Prabandhas. The third was that he should train a line of worthy disciples to carry on the high traditions of Sri Vaishnavism. When Ramanuja took a vow to fulfil the commands, the closed fingers slowly opened out in a mysterious manner. After the obsequies of Yamunacharya had been performed, Ramanuja returned to Kancheepuram. Going to the Varadaraja temple he asked Tirukkachi Nambi, who could commune with the Lord, to find out the Lord's will in regard to his future. He was told tht absolute self-surrender was the road to salvation and that he must seek the guidance of Mahapoorna as his preceptor. There is a saying that if you take one step towards God, He comes a hundred steps to meet you. In like manner, Mahapoorna, accompanied by his wife, had set out just then, eagerly desirous of meeting Ramanuja at Kanchi. As Ramanuja was proceeding at that very time to Srirangam, the two met at Madurantakam. Ramanuja was initiated in the famous shrine of Sri Rama at Madurantakam. Mahapoorna later went to Kancheepuram and stayed with Ramanuja for some time.

Sri Ramanuja's wife was not very helpful to his pursuit of spirituality and service. She was frequently quarrelling with Mahapoorna's wife. This led to Mahapoorna leaving Kancheepuram abruptly. Ramanuja was greatly pained that his wife's behaviour had caused displeasure to his Guru.

Another incident of a like nature is also recorded. Ramanuja had invited Tirukkachi Nambi one day to his house with the idea of offering him worship and Bhiksha

and taking the leaving thereof as Prasadam. The Nambi happened to call at the house early, when Ramanuja was not in. As he was not of the Brahmin caste, Ramanuja's wife treated him as an unclean person and after feeding him as instructed, threw away the leavings. When Ramanuja came home and found out what had taken place, he decided to break away from wife and home. He was then thirty-two years. He went to the shrine of Lord Varadaraja and praying to the Lord for His grace, he put on the ochre robe, the emblem of renunciation. His fervour for the new life was so great that he very soon earned the title of Yatiraja, prince of ascetics.

He set out as a wandering monk and attracted a large number of followers. Prominent among his early disciples were Kuresa and Mudaliyandan. When he went to Srirangam, the disciples of Yamunacharya made him their leader. He continued, however, to consider himself a humble disciple and like a bee sought to gather honey from many flowers. As an instance of the earnestness of his quest, mention should be made of his trudging to Tirukkoshiyur no less than eighteen times to receive initiation from Tirukkoshiyur Bambi or Goshti Poorna, another disciple of Yamunacharya. On the last trip, he took with him Kuresa and Mudaliyandan. When he met the Guru, the Guru asked him 'Did I not tell you to come alone?' 'You instructed me to come alone with Danda and Pavitra; here is Danda and here is Pavitra,' he replied pointing to his two companions.

When he was given the Mahamantram, he was filled with ecstasy and such overflowing desire for the redemption of all beings that he went up the temple tower and, calling together the people, proclaimed the Mantram in a trumpet voice. The Guru was astounded at this strange behaviour of Ramanuja and scolded him for a breach of

instructions. It was a sacred secret. Ramanuja asked, "What is the punishment for the transgression?" "Hell," said the Guru. "The reward for chanting the Mantra?" "Heaven." "As I have helped so many to go to heaven, I do not care if I myself go to hell." The teacher's heart was touched and he embraced him saying, "You are not my disciple. You are my Lord and Guru—Emberumanar." This is a title by which Ramanuja came to be known thenceforth. His teaching is called the Ramanuja Darsanam.

Srirangam became the headquarters for his work. He set about introducing several reforms in the daily worship and management of the temple of Sri Ranganatha at Srirangam. The system which he initiated continues to this day. He did the same for the temples at Kancheepuram and Tirupati. He arranged that at these temples, along with the chanting of Vedic hymns, the Prabandhas should also be recited during the period of worship.

Ramanuja's fame as a great teacher began to spread. He met and defeated in argument several scholars, many of whom became his disciples. In Tirupati he spent one year studying the Ramayana under his uncle, Sri Saila Poorna. His cousin Govinda, who had previously been serving at the Kalahasti Siva Temple, was persuaded by Sri Saila Poorna to give up serving the Kalahasti temple and to become a devoted follower of Ramanuja. He came to be called Embar.

Ramanuja lived in Srirangam for nearly fifty years continuously, except for periods when he went to various holy places. He undertook a pilgrimage from Rameswaram to Badari. He travelled northward along the West coast and returned along the East coast. While at Srinagar in Kashmir, he was able to procure a manuscript copy of the Bodhayana Vritti, a commentary on the

Brahma Sutras by Bodhayana. Kuresa was able to retain in his memory considerable portions of it, even at the first reading. Closely following the Bodhayana Vritti, Ramanuja wrote his Sri Bhashyam and Kuresa helped him in this work. Among his other works are his commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, Vedanta Deepa, Vedanta Sara, Vedartha Sangraha and Gadya Traya.

When Ramanuja returned to Srirangam after this pilgrimage, he found that the Vaishnavas were being persecuted by the Chola king, Kulothunga I. Ramanuja was persuaded by his followers to leave Srirangam in disguise. He travelled up the banks of the Cauvery and took refuge in Mysore territory. The ruler, Bitti Deva who was a Jain, became his disciple and was converted to Vaishnavism, assuming the new name of Vishnuvardhana. Through his help, a Vishnu temple was raised in Melkote or Tirunarayanapuram and Ramanuja lived there for several years. During this period, he reclaimed the outcastes into his fold and converted many Buddhists and Jains. He allowed the Panchamas at Melkote to bathe in the Temple tank and to go into the Temple on chosen occasions.

When Kulothunga I died, his successor was not ill disposed to the Vaishnavas, and Ramanuja was requested to return to Srirangam. He was 102 years old then and lived for 18 years more. In his last days, he summoned all his chief disciples from far and near and made 74 of them 'Simhasana-Adhipatis,' the rulers of the Vaishnavite hierarchy. His followers had three images of Ramanuja made and entreated him to consecrate them by embracing them. He did so to please them. They were installed at Srirangam, Sriperumbudur and Tirunarayanapuram. Having completed his mission, he passed away in 1137 A.D., in his 120th year. He asked for last kind words

from all. Addressing those who had gathered round him he said: "My friends, at this last moment I am fully aware of all my weaknesses and failings; I know on several occasions I have caused you pain, wittingly or unwittingly. I ask you for forgiveness, without which I cannot leave this world in peace."

Though he had superhuman powers, he never claimed any superiority for himself and though he worked wonders and performed miracles, he set little value by them. He exemplified in his life the truth that man might make miracles, but miracles never make a man. The greatest miracle is a good and godly life. He appealed straight to the heart of man and taught that through the heart lay the nearest way to God.

Sankara and Ramanuja are like two beaconlights, shining undimmed through the centuries. That the birthday of Ramanuja as well as of Sankara falls on the same date, Vaisakha Sukla Panchami, is perhaps significant too. They did not preach two divergent faiths but taught the same Sanatana Dharma, in two different modes. Sankara says Brahman is Sat-Chid-Ananda. Ramanuja says Brahman has the qualities of Satyam, Jnanam and Anandam. Both point to the same truth that God is the life of our life. Sankara emphasised Vairagya or dispassion, and Ramanuja, Kainkarya or service of God and man.

## MADHVACHARYA

SANKARA, RAMANUJA AND MADHVA are the three great Acharyas who expounded the three ancient systems of philosophy, known as Advaita, Visishtadvaita and Dvaita. In the previous chapters, we have studied in outline the life and teachings of Sankara and Ramanuja. Now, we shall have a glimpse of Sri Madhavacharya, known also as Ananda Tirtha or Purna Prajna.

South Canara is the native district of this Acharya and his birth-place was a village, not far from Udupi, also called Shivalli or Rajatapeethapuram. Udupi is a short designation for Chandramouleeswara, Udupa being the Sanskrit word for moon. The chief temple in Udupi in ancient days was the temple of Chandramouleeswara. Sri Krishna's temple was established only in Madhva's time. Another ancient temple of the place was that of Ananteswara, where the Sivalingam is installed on a pedestal of silver and is popularly called Siva Belli or Shivalli, the silver Siva. The Tulu-speaking Brahmins of this area who were Saivites following the Bhagavata cult were called Shivallies. They represent the fusion of Saivism and Vaishnavism. Their chief tenet is that Siva and Vishnu are equal. They wear Namam in Gobi or sandal. Even today, except in the shrine of Krishna founded by Madhva, all the temples of Udupi and the neighbourhood have Lingam as the idol of worship. There is no image of Vishnu here though we have many Vishnu shrines on the East Coast, which came under the great influence of Ramanuja. Some of the Lingams are regarded as representing Vishnu and some others, Siva. Ananteswara temple of Udupi is believed to be a Vishnu Temple, though the idol is a Lingam. Sivasahasranama and Vishnu Sahasranama are both used in Archana in this and other Vishnu temples. The deity at Kooduvooru

is called Sankaranarayana. In other places, it is Harihara. Thus it is often a combination of Vishnu and Siva.

Madhva's parents were Shivalli Brahmins, who were followers of the Bhagavata tradition. Madhyageha Bhatta was the name of Madhva's father and Vedavati, the name of the mother. The appellation Madhyageha Bhatta conveys the idea that he was the occupier of the central house in the village; 'Naduvantillayya' is the Tuluva designation. This Pandit was regarded with respect because of the central situation of his house. He was a deep student of the Itihasas and Puranas, specially studying and expounding the Bhagavatam and Bharatam. His scholarship earned for him the revered title of Bhatta.

Whether the Brahmins of the day worshipped Hara or Harihara, whether they were pure Saivites or Bhagavatas, their philosophy was the Advaita of Sankara. Pandits who cared for fame studied the Advaitic system. Madhyageha Bhatta was no exception. But a secession was gradually forming. Madhyageha Bhatta represented the group which was restless and tending to break away from monism. He scrupulously adhered to the duties of the householder's life, faithfully observed the Ekadasi and other fasts, performed the ceremonials with all care and worshipped the Lord with genuine piety. He owned some lands but he was not always above want. His first two sons died as infants and he had only a girl left. From his village, he used to go to the temple of Ananteswara at Udupi and pray for a son. He prayed day after day for twelve long years and his prayer was finally granted. The temple priest had a vision and he assured Madhyageha Bhatta that by the grace of Ananteswara, god Vayu would incarnate himself as his son ere long.

Sri Madhva was born on the Vijayadasami day of the year Vilambi, corresponding to 1199 A.D. His child-

hood name was Vasudeva. He had his education under his father from the age of three to eight and after eight, when he was invested with the sacred thread, he studied under one Thottam Thillayya, a learned Brahmin who had a profound knowledge of the Upanishads. The course of study included Poetry, Nyaya Sastra, the Vedas and the Vedangas. When he had completed his studies he set out in search of a Guru who could give him Sannyasa, for he felt that he had a mission to fulfil and that family life would not suit his purpose. He found his Guru at Udupi itself in the person of Purushothama Theertha, belonging to the Bhandarkara Math, which continues in a flourishing state to this day. Vasudeva was accepted by Purushothama Theertha as a novice on probation. Vasudeva's father was heart-broken at the decision taken by his son without consulting him. He went to the Math and implored and entreated his son to go home but in vain. In desperation, he fell at his son's feet, asking him to relent. Vasudeva replied that the prostration of a father before his son only confirmed the fact that he was already a Sannyasin, though a novice. Madhyageha was silenced. He returned home and recounted to his wife all that had passed and both felt a great void in their lives when their only son had thus deserted them. The father wanted to try again to persuade Vasudeva to go back to the house and he went to a place 38 miles from Udupi where Vasudeva was camping with his Guru, in the village of Kayooru. This time, Vasudeva yielded a little and promised not to become a Sannyasin until a younger brother was born. At last the younger brother was born and Vasudeva paid a flying visit to his parents. He told his mother that he must have her permission to take up Sannyasa and that if it was refused, she might be sure that she could never look at his face again, for he would

disappear altogether. She gave him the permission though reluctantly. He then became an ordained Sannyasin, though he was only sixteen years old. He waited not a day longer than was absolutely necessary.

The Guru felt it the proudest moment of his life when he placed his hands in blessing on Vasudeva's head and gave him the new name of Poorna Prajna. The people of Udupi who had assembled in the Ananteswara temple to witness the ceremony considered it to be the most solemn spectacle they had ever witnessed and regarded it as an epoch-making event in the annals of Udupi. Sri Madhva took to the duties of the new order with great energy. Whenever he was not engaged with his Guru or with the routines of worship and meditation, he devoted his time to Srimad Bhagavatam and almost got the whole book by heart.

In course of time, the Guru thought that it was no longer necessary for him to keep the disciple in leading strings and he resolved to make him the heir apparent to the pontifical throne. On the appointed day, the customary ceremonies were conducted and the hero was anointed under the designation of "Ananda Theertha" in virtue of his new and exalted position as the ruler of men's hearts. From now on, he spent his time in a separate Math. Eminent scholars of the day came to Udupi to see the rising star in the religious firmament. They felt the vibrancy of a new life in the atmosphere breathed by Sri Madhva, who began to employ his powers and energies to attack Sankara's system, of which his own Guru was a protagonist. The Guru had a partiality for Sankara's Advaita: but he allowed the force of his disciple's destructive criticism. It was all very well to criticize and pick holes, he said, but Sri Madhva had not replaced that system by a cogent commentary of his own which could

stand the test of time. The Guru challenged him to write one if he could. The challenge was accepted.

Madhva then undertook a tour through the country to broadcast his views. The rules of his order too forbade adopting a permanent dwelling place. It was expected that he should ever be on the move. The Guru, though old, was persuaded to start on a pilgrimage with the disciple. They set out from Udupi and journeyed by easy stages, passing through Mangalore, Vishnumangalam, Cochin and Trivandrum. At Trivandrum, we are told, Madhvacharya had a meeting with Vidya Sankara, the Head of the Sringeri Math who was camping there. The meeting was not very pleasant. There was a stormy altercation and they parted. They met again after some months at Rameswaram, where both spent the four months of the rainy season. From Rameswaram, Madhva proceeded on his journey through Pandya and Chola territories and after visiting Srirangam, Srimushnam, Chandragiri, and other places, he returned to Udupi.

Soon after his return, he wrote a commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, characterized by brevity and profundity of thought. He placed it before his Guru for his perusal and then sought his permission to go on a pilgrimage to Badarikashrama before he undertook to write the Brahma Sutra Bhashya. The Guru hesitated, but finally gave him his blessing. In the company of a brother-disciple, Satya Theertha, and a few other followers, he started. Without tarrying in many places, he passed through Banaras, bathing in the Ganges, and reached Badari, pitching his camp at a place known as Ananda Math. He spent some days there in study and meditation. He expounded to his companions his commentary on the Gita. We are told that Veda Vyasa appeared

before Madhva one night and invited him to go to his hermitage up above. Next morning he told his companions, "I wish to go alone now to pay my respects to Vyasa. I may or may not return. May God bless you." Satya Theertha who was greatly devoted to him, pleaded to be allowed to accompany him and Madhva agreed; but the same evening, he was asked to go back to the camp. We are told that Madhva met Veda Vyasa and learned from him the true import of the Brahma Sutras.

The writing of the commentary was begun as soon as the party reached the plains, and was completed during the return journey. Satya Theertha made a few copies and sent one in advance to their Guru at Udupi. The party travelled along the East Coast and Madhva preached his gospel of devotion wherever he halted. When he returned to Udupi, a great ovation awaited him.

Madhva set about in earnest preaching his philosophy and converting people to join his fold. He exhorted them to renounce Advaita and to banish the delusion that man is or can be God. He asked, "How can light be identified with darkness, truth with delusion, knowledge with ignorance, the finite with the infinite, bliss with pain, absolute perfection with imperfection?" He taught Bhakti and whole-hearted self-surrender to God. Among his works are Gita Bhashya, Sutra Bhashya, Anu Bhashya, Mahabharata Tatparya Nirnaya, and commentaries on the Upanishads, the Bhagavata and ten of the Puranas.

One day when he went for a sea bath, he noticed a ship in distress and prayed for its safety. When the boat reached the shore, the Master of the ship presented to the Acharya a huge lump of Gopichandan earth. When it was taken to the Math, it broke in two and revealed an

image of Krishna inside. It had come from Dwaraka, where it had lain covered by earth. The Acharya soon built a temple, installed the image and became its worshipper. Later, he ordained eight ascetics, put them each in charge of a separate Math and made them jointly and severally responsible for the worship and festivals in Sri Krishna's temple.

Sri Madhva undertook a second tour to Badari when he was about sixty years old. After his return, he learnt of the death of his parents. And his brother came to him requesting to be ordained as a monk. His request was granted and he was made the head of one of the eight Maths.

The Acharya lived for seventy-nine years. His system of philosophy recognizes Bheda or the non-identity (distinction) between the Supreme Being and the immortal spiritual beings called Jivas who are subject to His rule; and between them and the physical substances which help the Jivas in their development. Thus, in this system there are five kinds of differences: (1) God is different from Jivas; (2) He is distinct from Achit or matter; (3) One Jiva is different from another Jiva; (4) Jivas are distinct from matter; (5) One kind of matter is different from another. Thus the system differs radically both from Advaita and from Visishtadvaita, which latter is a qualified form of monism.

Madhvacharya is the foremost among the realistic philosophers and one of the great leaders of the Bhakti movement.

## TIRUGNANA SAMBANDAR

OF THE FOUR Saiva Acharyas of the seventh century South India, Tirugnana Sambandar shows mainly the path of knowledge, Sundaramurtinayanar the path of friendship, Appar the path of service and Manikkavachakar the filial approach to God. Appar and Manikkavachakar remained unmarried; Sundarar was prevented from marrying by a divine intervention. Sambandar disappeared from the world immediately after his wedding, having fulfilled his mission in the world.

Sambandar was born at Sirkazhi in a Brahmin family, early in the seventh century A.D. His parents were Sivapadahridaya and Bhagavati. When he was three years old, his father took the child along one day to the temple tank. Leaving the child on the steps of the tank, the father plunged in the water to have his morning bath. The child began to cry. Legend has it that at this moment, Siva with Parvati appeared there and comforted the child. Parvati drew milk from her own breast in a tiny cup and gave it to the child. When the father emerged from the tank and came to where the child was, he noticed the milk dripping from his mouth and asked the child who had given him the milk. The child pointed to Siva and Parvati who were fast fading away from his vision. This experience is recorded in the first of his songs where the Lord is described endearingly as an insidious thief of the hearts of his devotees.

The father strained his eyes but could see neither Siva nor Parvati. He was, however, convinced that his son had received a special measure of divine grace. He took the boy prodigy to the temple close by, where he sang the praise of the Lord with the perfection of an accomplished poet.

By this time, the news had spread of the little child

singing after having had a vision of the Lord, and a crowd had gathered in the temple. The father returned home in an ecstasy of joy, taking the child on his shoulders and followed by an admiring crowd. The name, Tirugnana Sambandar, is indicative of the divine wisdom he had received through his direct contact with the Mother of the Universe.

The father carried the gifted child on his shoulders from temple to temple and at each of these the child sang moving hymns in praise of God. At Tirukkolakka, he mysteriously came by a pair of gold cymbals with the sacred Panchaksharam inscribed on them and these were taken as a gift from the Lord Himself. He used them to keep time to his songs. A minstrel by name Tiruneelakanta Yazhpanar volunteered to accompany him and to play on his lute when Sambandar sang.

Early in his pilgrimage Sambandar came to Chidambaram where he regarded the three thousand Dikshitaras devoted to the worship of Nataraja as the embodiments of the Lord Himself. The people of Tiruvarathurai presented him with a palanquin decked with pearls and a ceremonial umbrella when he visited the shrine there. They said that they had been commanded in a dream to extend this high honour to him. This symbolized his elevation to the status of a spiritual teacher. Henceforth he travelled like a prince, the highest honours being shown to him wherever he went. He visited the birth-place of Chandeswara Nayanar, Tiruppanandal, Tirukadambai and other places and at the end returned to Sirkazhi.

In his eighth year he was invested with sacred thread. There was no need for him, however, to go through the discipline of Brahmacharya and learn the scripture formally from a teacher. He had been born with perfect

knowledge. Instead of his needing teachers to instruct him, they received lessons in the spiritual life from him.

One of the most moving events in the life of Sambandar is his memorable meeting with Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar. The latter, having heard about the glory of Sambandar, visited Sirkazhi to meet him. Hearing that the elder saint was coming, Sambandar hastened forth to receive him along with several devotees and showered on him great love and respect, addressing him as '*Appar*'. They became instantly fond of each other and embraced each other, as if they had been life-long friends. Together they travelled to several holy shrines. At Vedaranyam, the main door of the temple had for long years remained closed. Requested by Sambandar, Appar sang a hymn to make the door open. During his travels, Sambandar met Tiruneelanakka Nayanar, Siruthonda Nayanar, Kungiliyakkalaya Nayanar and Muruga Nayanar.

A very important event in his life was his visit to Madurai, the capital of the Pandya Kingdom. In fact that completed his life-mission, which was to re-establish the Saiva faith. In Madurai, at that time, the Jains were all-powerful. They had converted the Pandya King and many people followed his example. The Queen, Mangayarkkarsi, and the Chief Minister, however, stuck to the traditional Saivite faith and were praying for the reconversion of the King to it. Having heard of Sambandar, they sent messengers to him inviting him to Madurai. The messengers met him when he was camping at Vedaranyam with Appar. Sambandar agreed to go to Madurai. But Appar, out of his affection for the young saint, begged him not to go, as he feared that the Jains might do him harm. He added that the stars too were not propitious then. In reply, Sambandar sang a song, the

substance of which is this: "As the blue-throated Lord, who wears the faultless crescent moon and the Ganges on his head and who plays on the Vina, has entered my heart with His Consort and is propitious to me, the planets and the stars cannot but be propitious. There is nothing to fear."

Appar wanted to go to Madurai in advance, but Sambandar requested him to stay in Chola territory, telling him that no harm would come to him.

At Madurai, Sambandar was received by the Prime Minister and taken to meet the Queen, who was waiting in the temple. He and his group were accommodated in a monastery. At the time it happened that the King was suffering from a serious malady. Many physicians had tried their skill on him in vain. The Jain monks made great efforts and employed medicinal and magical arts, but failed to cure him. The Queen then suggested that Sambandar, who was a great saint and who was then in the city, might be requested to visit him and give him his blessing. Sambandar visited the temple and after invoking the Lord's grace, went to the side of the King. He applied sacred ashes to the King's body and the King recovered completely. The Jains were crestfallen and feared that the King might lose his faith in Jainism. They challenged Sambandar to various trials of spiritual strength.

First, there was a test by fire. Sambandar took out a palm leaf whereon one of his hymns had been written and he put it into a blazing fire. The Jains also wrote out one of their scriptural texts similarly and inserted it into the flame. Sambandar's palm leaf remained uncharred, while the one put in by the Jains was burnt up. Then a test of superiority was made on water. The proof was to be that the leaf whereon the true doctrine was written

should travel against the current in the Vaigai River. The leaf put in by the Jains went down, whereas the one put in by Sambandar travelled up the river and was safely recovered when the saint stopped it at some distance. The victory for Saivism was now complete. The King became a Saivite again and along with him the people in large numbers came back to their original faith.

Before Sambandar left Madurai, his father came from Sirkazhi to witness and enjoy the triumphant progress of his son's mission. Sambandar went as far as Rameswaram with his father. During his return journey, when he reached Tirukkadavur, he enquired where Appar was. Being told that he was at Tiruppoonthuruthi, he started for that place to meet him. Hearing about this, Appar went forward with some devotees to receive him and seeing his palanquin, Appar became one of his palanquin bearers, unobserved. Sambandar entering the village enquired "Where is Appar?" Appar exclaimed from below, "Here am I sharing the honour of bearing your palanquin." Sambandar immediately got down and fell at the feet of the older saint, asking, "Is it proper that you should do this?" Appar returned the salutation and conveyed to him his rejoicing over his triumphs at Madurai. Sambandar took great delight in relating to him all that had happened since they parted at Vedaranyam. Their biographer says that their meeting was like the meeting of two oceans; the ocean of love and the ocean of grace.

Sambandar then returned to Sirkazhi but not for a long stay. He started on another tour and visited Tiruvannamalai, Kalahasti, Tiruvalangadu, Tiruvottiyur and other places and reached Mylapore. A merchant, by name Sivanesar, had a daughter called Poompavai. Having heard about Sambandar, he had resolved to offer his

daughter in marriage to him. But the girl suddenly died, bitten by a serpent. The father gathered her bones and preserved them in a pot. When Sambandar came, he arranged a grand reception for him and related to him the story of his daughter. Sambandar asked him to bring the pot containing her bones and place it in front of the Kapaleeswara Temple. Sambandar prayed to the Lord and we are told Poompavai came back to life.

Sivanesar wanted Sambandar to accept her in marriage and make his vow true. But Sambandar declined, saying that as he had been instrumental in calling her to life, she was like a daughter to him. Poompavai then spent her life as a virgin dedicating her new lease of life to the service of God.

After this, Sambandar visited Tiruvanmiyur, Tirukalukunram, and other shrines and reached Chidambaram where his father and several devotees from Sirkazhi joined the party and escorted him back home. They pleaded with him to get married, saying that marriage was a Vedic sacrament which a religious teacher should accept. Sambandar hesitated but yielded ultimately. The bride was the daughter of Nambiandar Nambi of Tirunallur and the wedding took place in the bride's house. After the function the party went to the local Siva temple for worship. After worship, Sambandar addressed the Lord and said, 'O Lord! my work is done. The time is come for me to reach your feet.' A celestial light beamed forth from the shrine and Sambandar with his bride walked into it and disappeared. A few others of the party who were of ripe wisdom also followed him and were engulfed in the effulgence.

The Tirumurai or canonical works of Saivism compiled and handed down to us by Nambiandar Nambi are in twelve parts. The hymns of Sambandar, consisting of

383 decades, are contained in the first three parts. Sambandar sings of the Lord, not as a penitent or sinner seeking redemption but as the son of God with a sense of filial affection and privilege.

## TIRUNAVUKKARASU OR APPAR

CHASTITY, poverty and self-surrender are the essential virtues of spiritual life. By chastity is meant an extreme and limpid purity of soul, virgin to all but God. By poverty is meant an utter stripping of the self, the casting off of immaterial as well as material wealth, a complete detachment from all finite things. By self-surrender is meant that abnegation of selfhood, that mortification of the will, which results in complete humility and a holy indifference to the accidents of life and absolute reliance on God. These virtues we see exemplified fully in the life of Appar.

The name 'Appar', by which Tirunavukkarasu is familiarly known, came into vogue from the time Sambandar so addressed him endearingly on their first meeting. Appar was born in 600 A.D. in a village called Tiruvamur in the South Arcot District, in a Saiva Vellala family. His father's name was Pugazhanar and mother's name was Madiniar. His own name in childhood was Marulneekkiar. He had an elder sister by name Tilakavatiyar who was betrothed to Kalippagai Nayanar, a commander in the army. But before the wedding took place, the bridegroom was called for active service in the north and he died fighting. Soon after, both the father and the mother of Appar died, successively. This triple tragedy completely upset Appar and his sister. The sister was so overwhelmed with grief that she wished to put an end to her own life. Appar fell at her feet and pleaded with her that she should live for his sake. Her love for her little brother ultimately gave her some consolation and she decided to live for his sake.

This crisis in their life paved the way for their sainthood. When one's world is in ruins, one naturally turns within and seeks God's compassion. So, pains and cala-

mities have a high purpose in life. Says Anatole France: "Pain is the lamentable pearl of this earth of ours. We spin unceasingly the web of sorrow. It is our hell, our tribulation, but it is also our greatness. If man builds at all, it is at the price of endless efforts and tears. If he were happy, he would be as though he existed not. If he were prosperous, he would not progress. Every one finds a pedestal on which to raise himself and the name of that pedestal is suffering." What is adversity in the language of men is blessing in the language of the gods.

But before illumination came, Appar passed through a very critical period of mental conflict, which is called by the mystics the 'Dark night of the soul.' He turned to religious studies for consolation; he tried social service to comfort his soul, helping in digging tanks, feeding pilgrims and doing numerous acts of neighbourly kindness. But he remained disconsolate. He began to feel that the religion of his forefathers and traditional practices were futile, for though he had followed them faithfully, he had only met with calamities and disappointments. Those were days when the Jains and Jainism flourished and many had joined the Jains, deserting their ancestral faith. Appar too felt attracted by the preaching of universal love and renunciation by Jainism. He became a convert without consulting his sister and joined a Jain monastery at Tiruppapulyur. His new name was Dharmasena. He made an intensive study of the Jain faith and became a preacher and valiant fighter in its cause. His sister's grief can be imagined. She felt as if her heart would break, for she had lived solely for him. She was now a recluse engaged day and night in performing minor services at the Siva temple at Tiruvathigai Veeratanam. She spent her time in constant prayer to Siva to bring her brother back to her. Her prayers were answer-

ed at last. The ways of God are mysterious. He sent to Appar a disease of the body to cure the disease of his soul. Remedies, both medicinal and occult, were tried at the monastery but they were of no avail. Appar suffered excruciating pain, and felt that he might die, and he would have welcomed death if it came to relieve him. He desired to see his sister and sent word to her. Much as she loved her brother, she could not brook the idea of going into the Jain monastery, even to see him. When he understood her mind and the strength of her faith, one night he decided to meet her, unobserved, outside the monastery. He was writhing in pain when he came to his sister and fell at her feet. She comforted him and assured him that the disease would leave him now, as he had left the alien camp. She smeared his body with holy ashes, uttered the name of Siva in his ears and took him to the Siva temple before dawn. As he went round the precincts and entered the shrine, he felt a new inspiration and sang ecstatically of the glory of the Lord. He prayed for forgiveness of the sins committed by him and expressed his gratitude for having been relieved of his affliction. When he finished the prayer, the pain had disappeared and he felt that the Lord was pleased with him. He heard a voice from the shrine calling him by the appreciative appellation of Tirunavukkarasu or Lord of speech. He dedicated his new power to the singing of the glory of God and he vowed to use his hands only in His service and to keep His temples clean.

The Jain leaders were upset that a promising recruit had gone back. They did not want to let him go away so easily, for they felt it would pave the way for more desertions. They went to the Pallava ruler at Kanchi and used their political influence to bring him to book. The ruler sent his messengers to bring Tirunavukkarasu to his

court. Tirunavukkarasu told them that he had no worldly interests and that therefore he accepted the rule of no earthly king. Yet, yielding to their entreaties and allowing them to do their duty of carrying out the King's orders, he followed them to the royal court. There were discussions and when the King saw that Tirunavukkarasu was adamant and seemingly defiant, he agreed with his Jain counsellors that Tirunavukkarasu should be made an example of, to show what punishment awaited renegades. There was a conspiracy to put an end to his life, whatever the means might be. He was imprisoned and we are told that he was put in a lime-kiln to be burnt alive. The flames of the kiln did no harm to him and he came out unscathed, to the despair of his enemies. Protected by the grace of God, he said that even in the kiln he felt as if he was enjoying an evening moon and the fanning southern breeze of the spring season.

The next move of his enemies was to poison him. But what could poison do to a devotee of Siva, who had willingly drunk the poison of Halahala to save the world?

An angry elephant was then set against him but miraculously, on approaching him, it paid obeisance to him as to a beloved master and went round him.

As a last measure of desperation, he was taken to the sea and thrown into the waters, bound hand and foot with a stone tied to his waist to take him down to his watery grave. After a time, he appeared at Cuddalore Port, joyously alive.

His trials were now over. He went to meet his sister and to worship the Lord at the place where he was reborn to the new life. The Pallava ruler, Mahendra Varma, came there seeking the saint and full of repentance, fell at his feet and asked for pardon. The saint blessed the King. Mahendra Varma gave up Jainism and became a

follower of the Saiva faith. This turned the tide against Jainism in this part of the country.

Appar spent the rest of his life in the service of the Lord and of His devotees. He went from temple to temple, singing hymns in praise of Siva and cleansing the holy environs with the hoe that he always carried with him as a symbol of service.

At a place called Thingalur, there was a Brahmin devotee by name Appoodi Adigal. Coming to know of Appar's greatness, he gave the name Tirunavukkarasu to his son, and associated almost everything he possessed with the saint's name, his house, his cows, his garden. When Appar visited Thingalur, Appoodi Adigal's joy knew no bounds. He prepared a feast for him but when his son went to fetch plantain leaves, he was bitten by a snake and was given up for dead. When Appar came and saw what had happened, he prayed to Siva and the boy was restored to life.

In a place called Tiruppazhaiyarai, the Jains had removed the Sivalingam from the temple and buried it somewhere. When Appar went there he took a vow that he would not move or have food till the Lingam had been found and re-installed for worship. And he succeeded.

When he was on his way to Tiruppaineeli, he was seized with uncommon thirst and hunger. At that moment, a Brahmin appeared by the roadside and offered him food and drink. He then followed him to Tiruppaineeli. When both of them reached the Siva temple in the village, the Brahmin disappeared mysteriously. Appar guessed who the Brahmin was and sang in praise of the Lord, glorifying the innumerable ways in which He showers His grace on His devotees.

Then he visited Tiruvannamalai, Mylapore, Tiruvotiyur and Kalahasti. Kalahasti is called Dakshina Kailasa

and, therefore, when he was there, the idea came to him that he should worship the Lord at Uttara Kailasa on the Himalaya also. He turned his steps towards the north and after an arduous journey, reached Banaras. When he proceeded further north, his health failed and for some time he had even to crawl, being unable to walk, for he would not give up the pilgrimage, having resolved on it. The Lord appeared to him in the form of a sage and then revealed to him His identity. The saint was told that he would be granted a vision of Siva as on Mount Kailasa at Tiruvayaru and that he might go back without having to negotiate the Himalayan heights in his weak health. He was commanded to have a bath in the tank nearby. He entered the tank and had a dip but when he rose up, he found himself in the temple tank at Tiruvayaru. He had there the promised vision of Kailasanatha.

About this time, Sambandar had returned to Chola Desa from the Pandyan capital. Hearing about his arrival, Appar went forth and met him at Tiruppoonthuruthi, where he was proud to be one of the unidentified palanquin bearers of the brother saint. They visited some places together and then Appar went to Madurai and Rameswaram. When he returned to Tiruppugalur in Chola country, one day when he was, as usual with him, engaged in removing the weeds from the temple precincts, his hoe happened to turn up a hidden treasure from under the ground. He covered it up and passed on, regarding gold and earth as one and not wanting to gather the gold or jewels, lest their possession should corrupt his mind. Appar lived to be 81 years of age and spent his last days at Tiruppugalur itself.

His collected songs, over 3000 in number, constitute the fourth, the fifth and sixth parts of Tirumurai, the saivite canonical literature.

## NAMMALWAR

THE ALWARS are to Srivaishnavism what the Nayanmars are to Saivism. The name 'Alwar' means one who dives into the divine, one who is immersed in God-bliss. The Alwars are twelve in number and come from all castes of the Hindu community. Their spiritual experiences are recorded in their songs in Tamil. They continue the tradition of the Rishis and their teaching is called Ubhaya Vedanta, as it builds a bridge between Tamil and Samskrit, the north and the south, the old and the new. The hymns of the Alwars were collected by Nathamuni, a great sage, under the title of Divya Prabandham. Of the four thousand stanzas in the collection, the third thousand and parts of the fourth thousand are outpouring of Nammalwar and go by the name of 'Tiruvaimozhi'. Vedanta Desika calls Tiruvaimozhi by the exalted name of 'Dravidopanishad'. Ramanuja and the Acharyas who came after him have written elaborate commentaries on Tiruvaimozhi.

The age of the Alwars is not definitely known. The traditional belief is that they lived at the beginning of the Kaliyuga. Modern research would assign Poigai Alwar, Bhutattalwar, Peyalwar and Tirumazhisai Alwar to the beginnings of the Christian Era, and Nammalwar, Madhurakavi and Tirumangai Alwar to the 7th or 8th century. Then follow the others. The first three Alwars are considered as the mind of the Srivaishnavite tradition, Nammalwar as the soul and the others as the body.

Nammalwar was born in Alwar Tirunagari in Tirunelveli District. His father was a ruling chief by name Kariyar and his mother's name was Udaya Nangai. Regarding ordinary children, it is the belief that 'Sata' or a veil of ignorance shrouds them even as they touch the earth at birth. Nammalwar is said to have rent that veil

and to have possessed unobstructed vision of the truth even from his birth and hence he is called Satakopa.

The parents were wonder-struck at their child who remained silent and serene, radiant and absorbed in the Self from infancy onwards. They named him Maran, meaning that he was different from ordinary children. He seldom opened his eyes or spoke to others till he was sixteen. He spent most of his time sitting under a tamarind tree in the local shrine of Vishnu at Tirunagari. His greatness was discovered and made known to the world by Madhura Kavi, a Brahmin saint who had been born a few years earlier at Tirukkolor not far from Tirunagari. He had studied the Vedas and was a gifted Tamil poet. For this reason, he earned the name of Madhura Kavi. He went on a pilgrimage and when he was in Ayodhya, he had a vision which directed him to Nammalwar. On coming and meeting him, he is said to have asked him: "If what is subtle is born in the world of mortals, on what will it subsist and how will it live here?" The reply was: "It will be hidden in the world, subsisting on what chance brings."

Madhura Kavi prostrated himself before Nammalwar and pleaded to be admitted as his disciple. He poured out his devotion to his Guru in a well-known decade of verses. To Madhura Kavi, devotion to the Guru was even sweeter than the love and worship of the Lord.

Nammalwar continued his life of meditation under the tree and lived in a world of his own. Judged by human standards, his life is devoid of any incidents. He departed from this world when he was only thirty-five years old.

He expounds in his poems what is called Arthapanchakam; the nature of the soul, the glory of God, the goal of life, the means of its attainment and the obstacles to be overcome.

The Absolute is the Supreme Self or the Paramatman, who is transcendent and at the same time immanent in all beings as their Inner Self and easily accessible to all through His incarnational forms.

From contemplation on the bliss of the realization of the indwelling self, Nammalwar leads us to the love of the incarnate beauty of Sri Krishna. The Alwar, as the eternal bride, is drawn by the captivating beauty of the Avatar and the Archa, and in his songs he pours out his heart's longing to embrace divinity and enjoy the divine through all his senses. To understand the import of his songs fully, one must have felt that supreme love at least for a fleeting moment.

To Nammalwar, Sri Krishna is everything and there is no life for him except in Sri Krishna.

## ANDAL

ANDAL was born at Srivilliputhur. She is considered an Avatara of Neela Devi. She was found on the earth under a Tulasi plant, as a little child, by Periyalwar. The Saint took the baby to his childless home, named her Goda or gift from Mother Earth and brought her up with tender care and loving devotion. The date of her birth according to the old tradition is the 97th year of the Kali Era. Modern scholarship assigns her to the middle of the seventh century A.D.

Periyalwar's main occupation was to offer flower garlands every day to the Lord in the temple at Srivilliputhur. He was not learned in the Sastras but was a good Tamil Scholar and poet and a great devotee of Sri Krishna. Once, he was invited by the Pandya King at Madurai, Sri Vallabha Deva by name. His exposition of Bhakti was greatly appreciated and the King honoured him with presents. He came to be acclaimed very soon as one of the greatest teachers of his time and was called Bhattar Piran. The Pandya King became his disciple. The royal Guru was taken in procession round the city on an elephant. The Lord was pleased at the honour shown to his devotee and we are told that He appeared in the sky with Lakshmi and His attendants to witness the procession. It was then that Periyalwar sang the decade of verses called Pallandu, glorifying the Lord and praying for His security in this world full of evil. Instead of the devotee praying for his own security, he prays for the security of the Lord Himself, his overflowing love for the Lord elevating him to the position of Yasoda or Nandagopa who had the privilege of bringing up Krishna and cherishing Him as a child who depended on their help.

Periyalwar lavished all his affection on his foster-child Goda, and she excelled her father in her service and

devotion to God, as also in the art of singing devotional songs in Tamil. Every one considered the child prodigy as an example of divine life and she came to be endearingly called Andal, one who held sway over the hearts of people and was the queen of their affections.

From her childhood, Andal considered herself to be the bride-designate of Lord Sri Ranganatha. As she grew up, she had no other thought than to become acceptable to the Lord. Her devotion grew into what is called bridal mysticism. It began as virgin love and grew into irresistible Prema. Andal was like a Gopi of Brindavan, mad after Sri Krishna. She declined to listen to the talk of her being married to any mortal. Every day, in the innocence and madness of her love, she used to adorn herself secretly with the garlands which her father used to prepare for offering to the Lord in the local temple. She would then look at her own image in the mirror and ask herself whether she looked fit to be the bride of the Lord. After doing so, she would replace the garlands in the basket and the father would carry it to the temple. One day, Periyalwar happened to notice what Andal did with the garlands and was somewhat horrified that she should be guilty of such sacrilege. He cast aside the garland, culled fresh flowers and made a new garland for offering. That night, the Lord appeared in his dream and told him that He valued the garland already used by Andal more than a fresh one, for the former carried the added fragrance of her unparalleled devotion. The father related the dream to the daughter and henceforth offered his garland to her for wearing, as directed by the Lord, before taking it to the temple. To Andal, Srivilliputhur was her Gokulam and the local temple the royal house of Nandagopa and Yasoda, where Sri Krishna lived. She herself was a Gopi. To qualify herself for the

companionship of Sri Krishna, she underwent the hardship of vows and penances, one of which was a thirty-day-long vow in the month of Margazhi, known as Tiruppavai Nonbu. The Bhagavatam tells us the story of how the girls of Brindavan observed this vow.

They bathed early in the morning in the River Yamuna and worshipped Katyayani on the river bank in an image of sand and prayed for Krishna Prema, the love of Sri Krishna.

Likewise, Andal rising before dawn, amidst the peal of the temple bells and the blowing of conchs, would call her companions together and they would assemble in the temple to sing the glory of the Lord and serve him. The thirty songs celebrating this love, called Tiruppavai, are amongst the most charming devotional lyrics in Tamil literature and are considered to contain the essence of the Upanishads. Tiruppavai is an allegorical interpretation of the mystic longing of the finite self for the Infinite, for union with It. Sri Ramanuja was such a great lover of Tiruppavai that he came to be called Tiruppavai Jeer.

Anxiety took possession of Periyalwar when he saw his daughter's God-madness increasing. Lord Sri Ranganatha appeared in a vision to Periyalwar and allayed his fears. He said he would himself arrange for her marriage. To the temple priests of Srirangam came the command from the Lord, asking them to go to Srivilliputhur with all temple honours and bring Andal, the bride elect, to Him. Andal also had her dream of her wedding with the Lord. In Vaishnavite households, the songs recording her dream are sung as part of every marriage sacrament, suggesting that human love is the gateway to divine love. Lovers will find in chanting them that they are transported to a region of bliss and their own little loves mingle with the love of God. Flowers and

rivers, the blowing of conch shells, the heavy rain or the parching heat, are images of the moods of the heart in union or in separation.

In obedience to the command of the Lord, Andal was taken in a palanquin to Srirangam, accompanied by devotees and priests and led by Periyalwar. She was beside herself, in ecstasy, when she reached the temple in bridal vesture. Entering the *sanctum sanctorum*, she stood close to the Lord for a brief while. Periyalwar had a vision of her wedding with the Lord. Then her physical form was dissolved. It was like the commingling of two lights or the mingling of the river with the ocean. She became one with the Lord. Periyalwar had a mixed feeling of joy and sorrow. The voice of the Lord was heard telling him that he had now become His father-in-law and asking him to go back to Srivilliputhur, keeping in his mind the vision he had had of Andal as the Eternal bride of the Lord. Andal typifies the highest aspiration of the human soul towards divinity. In recent times, the Holy Mother, Sarada Devi, the consort of Sri Rama krishna, embodied this ideal.

## SAMARTHA RAMADAS

JUSTICE RANADE says in his book entitled *The Rise of the Mahratta Power* :—“It was not a mere political movement that stirred Maharashtra at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The political movement was preceded and in fact to some extent caused by a religious and social upheaval which moved the entire population. The religious revival was not Brahmanical in its orthodoxy. It was the work of the masses and not of the classes. At its head were saints and poets who sprang from the lower orders of society—tailors, carpenters, potters, gardeners, shopkeepers, barbers and even out-castes, more than Brahmins. The political leaders acted in concert with the religious leaders. Sivaji’s chief adviser was Ramadas. The impulse of the time was felt in art, in religion, in the growth of vernacular literature, in the communal freedom of life and in increased self-reliance and toleration.”

Nivrattinath and Jnaneswara are the founders of the mystical school in Maharashtra, which later developed and assumed different forms at the hands of Namadev, Ekanath, Tukaram and others. Ramadas formed a school of his own, with a galaxy of eminent followers.

Jnaneswara’s great work called *Jnaneswari* is an elaborate commentary in Mahratti verse of the Bhagavad Gita. He completed it in 1290 A.D. and passed away in 1300. According to him the path of Bhakti is the easiest and best for men. He wrote also a series of short poems called Abhangas in praise of Vittoba of Pandarpur. Vittoba or Vittal is the name given to Krishna worshipped along with Rukmini in the temple at Pandarpur. The Bhakti of all Maharashtra saints centres on this figure. Jnaneswara, though a great Bhakta, inclines to Advaita in philosophy, showing that he belongs to the school of

the Bhagavatas. About a century later came Namadev who wrote poems, not only in Mahratti but also in Hindi. Many of the latter are incorporated in the Sikh scripture, known as "Granth Saheb." Though originally a tailor by profession, Namadev spent his life propagating the Bhakti religion in Maharashtra and the Punjab.

The next in order is Ekanath who died in 1608 A.D. Though he was a Brahmin, he observed no caste distinctions. His verse paraphrases of the Bhagavata are used in Sankirtans in the temple at Pandarpur.

Next comes Tukaram. His hymns are full of his personal religious experiences, his boundless trust in God and his absolute self-surrender to him. He had to face poverty, domestic troubles and the opposition of the orthodox ritualists. But he overcame all obstacles and reached the goal of religious life.

Chatrapati Sivaji Maharaj was a contemporary of Tukaram. When Sivaji was 32 years old, he happened to listen to a Harikatha performance on Dhruva Charitram. It was emphasized therein that one could make no progress in religious life without a proper Guru and this went home to Sivaji. Soon after, he sought Tukaram and asked to be accepted as his disciple, but the saint directed him to Samartha Ramadas as the proper Guru for him. Sivaji had heard of Ramadas and also met him casually once or twice but had not fully realized his greatness. Tukaram's injunction opened his eyes and made him a most devout follower of Ramadas. Though at first Ramadas also tried to put off Sivaji, as he thought that a close association with a ruling prince might disturb an ascetic's life, eventually Ramadas accepted Sivaji as a disciple. Ramadas, born in 1608 A.D., was twenty years older than Sivaji and lived for one year after him.

Ramadas, as his name connotes, was a great Rama

Bhakta and was reputed to be an incarnation of Anjaneya. His father was a learned Brahmin by name Suryaji Panth and his mother was Renu Bai. The childhood name of Ramadas was Narayana and he was the second son of his parents. In his sixth year, he lost his father but before he was twelve he had mastered the traditional learning in Samskrit and his mother tongue. His mother sought to get him married even in his twelfth year and the day of the wedding was fixed. During the wedding ceremony, according to custom, there was a curtain drawn between the couple, before the bridegroom took hold of the bride's hand and the Purohit solemnly declared, "Savadhan, now comes the time, be careful." Narayan took this as a warning to him, from God, not to get caught in the meshes of married life and so he slipped out quickly from behind the curtain.

He went away to a place called Dangle near Panchavati on the Godavari and was immersed in intense Tapasya for twelve long years. He would get up at four in the morning and standing in hip-deep water, would make Ramanama Japa till eleven and then go into the village for alms. He would again be engaged in Japa from three in the afternoon. In twelve years, he completed three crores and a half of Ramajapa, with the Mantra, *Sri Rama Jaya Rama Jaya Jaya Rama*. He also made Gayatri Purascharanam thrice during this period. Many Siddhis or Yogic powers came to him as a result, but he rarely used them.

From the age of 24 to 36, for the next twelve years, he travelled all over India. But before he left Dangle, he had built there a temple to Anjaneya and a Math, in which he asked his first disciple Uddhava to stay.

During his pilgrimage in the Himalayas, he visited Badarinath, Kedarnath and Kailasanath. It was during

this period that he was ordained as a monk, by the command of Sri Rama, who appeared before him and gave him an ochre robe. As he had the ability to accomplish whatever he desired, he was called "Samartha" and as he considered himself the servant of Sri Rama, like Anjaneya, he came to be known as Ramadas. His name and fame spread all around.

One day, he stood in front of his own house in the village of Jamba with the begging bowl, calling "Jaya Jaya Raghuvira Samartha." His elder brother's wife recognized him and ran to tell her mother-in-law. The saint's mother slowly came to the door and exclaimed, "My child, my vision has failed and I cannot see you." Samartha made obeisance to her, touching her feet and she got back her eyesight.

Eventually Samartha Ramadas established his Ashram, not far from home at a place called Chabal on the banks of the River Krishna. Among the disciples who came to him there were Bhima Raj, Kalyanaswami and Ambaji, and among women-devotees Akka Bai and Venu Bai. He built temples to Sri Rama and Anjaneya in several places and established seventy-one Maths presided over by his disciples, for spreading the gospel of Bhakti and harmonizing the paths of Pravritti and Nivritti. Among his works, Dasa Bodha, Manachi Sloka, the Ramayana and the Abhangas are cherished as their very life by the people of Maharashtra.

In his first letter to Sivaji, he said: "We live in very bad times, when our Dharma is languishing, our temples are destroyed and idols broken before our eyes. Religious life is at a discount. Hindus are losing faith in themselves and their ways of life. They feel proud and pleased to imitate the dress and manners of Muslim rulers. What is this but slavery and disgrace? To protect

our Dharma and to infuse fresh vigour into religion, I believe you are chosen by God.”

After Sivaji had accepted Ramadas as his Guru, he treated him as his chief adviser on all important questions and for shaping his policy as a ruler. He liked to spend long hours in the Guru's presence but the Guru did not permit it often. He gave Sivaji a copy of Dasa Bodha and instructed him to treat it as his Guru and guide. He told him that he could have no rest till the enemies of Hinduism were subdued.

Once, when Sivaji asked for Prasadam from his Guru, he was given a packet which when opened was found to contain a cocoanut, a little clod of earth, a few pebbles and the leavings of a horse. Sivaji was somewhat perplexed to see the contents. By deep thought, he understood that the Guru wanted him to be pure and white inside with a hard rugged exterior like the cocoanut; that he must care for the earth and make it fertile; that with rocks and stones he must raise strong forts; and that he must have a strong cavalry in the army. The deeds of saints, though sometimes seemingly eccentric, have a deep significance. Sivaji perceived the meaning of Ramadas's Prasada and this was the beginning of his great imperial career. The substance of the teaching of Ramadas to Sivaji was this: “The Motherland is greater than heaven. The Dharma, the temples of our gods and the cows should be protected, by our laying down our lives for their sake, if the occasion demands it. Let no one wish to go on living, where he sees his religion destroyed and temples desecrated. The duty of a ruler is to unite his people and protect Dharma. If this is not done, our ancestors will feel most miserable looking down upon us below.” Ramadas was not only a saint but great patriot as well.

Once, when Sivaji was camping at Satara, Ramadas was going about for alms and came near Sivaji's camp. A new idea came into Sivaji's mind and he put into the Guru's begging bowl a palm-leaf gift-deed making over his kingdom to him and declaring himself as his servant. Ramadas blessed him and said: "Henceforth this kingdom belongs to Sri Rama and you are His servant. Remember this always and act accordingly." From that time onwards, Sivaji adopted an ochre coloured flag and greeted every one with a "Ram Ram".

Sivaji built a fine Ashram on the top of a hillock near his palace in Parali and begged his Guru to live in that abode. Many Sannyasins and householder devotees used to visit him there daily and the place came to be called Sajjan Ghar. The cot, clothing, vessels and walking stick used by Samartha Ramadas are still preserved in that Ashram.

The saint, though a man of perfect realization, is yet, according to Ramadas, a practical man. He is versatile but always works and leads people to the service of God.

He brings himself down to the level of the lowest, understands their hearts, sympathizes with them, forgives their faults and helps them to develop their merits.

The characteristics of saints should be studied and meditated upon to reveal to us our own pettiness by contrast, to make us feel ashamed of ourselves, to enable us to ennoble our own lives and walk in the path of God.

## GURU GOVIND SINGH

SIKHISM is a form of Hinduism with the evident influence of Islam on it. Sikhism accepts the Hindu doctrines of Karma and Samsara, Maya and Moksha, and shares the Hindu faith in the efficacy of the holy name and the grace of the Guru.

Guru Nanak is the founder of Sikhism. He lived from 1469 to 1538 A.D. He tried to shift the emphasis away from forms and rituals and, instead, attached supreme importance to the oneness of God and the brotherhood of man. He wanted a casteless society. He believed in the dignity and value of labour and in the usefulness of the devout life of a householder. He travelled widely within this country and up to Baghdad abroad. The Gurus who came after him were Guru Angad, Amar Das, Ramdas, Arjun Dev, Har Govind, Hari Roy, Hari Krishna, Teg Bahadur and Guru Govind Singh.

Guru Govind Singh came 200 years after Guru Nanak. He was born in Patna in 1666 A.D., the only son of the ninth Guru, Teg Bahadur. He was brought up till his sixth year by his mother and grandmother and he saw very little of his father, who had to struggle hard against the persecution of Hindus carried on by Muslims at the instance of the Mughal rulers. In his seventh year, Govind was taken to Anandpur and then he began to learn Hindi (Gurumukhi), Samskrit and Persian under his father's supervision. Soon after, he was married to Jito Devi, even as a child.

As Guru Teg Bahadur led a campaign against the conversion of Hindus to Islam, he incurred the serious displeasure of Aurangazeb, and had to go underground. Aurangazeb announced that if he was caught and brought to him, he would give a reward of one thousand rupees to his captor. Teg Bahadur, being fully aware of

the danger to his life, called his son to him and giving him his sword told him, "I am certain to die. You should be the protector of the Sikh religion. May God help you".

A few days later, he was taken prisoner by Aurangazeb's men and brought to his presence.

Aurangazeb told him that if he wanted to live, he should embrace Islam along with his followers; otherwise he would be beheaded. Teg Bahadur replied that he would offer his life as a sacrifice, with a prayer to God that Aurangazeb's tyranny might end. He prophesied that his death would pave the way for the fall of the Moghul Empire. He was thrown into prison and suffered terrible hardships for several months. On the day fixed for the execution, he had his bath in a well nearby and sat in meditation under a banyan tree. When he was executed, his body was hung up publicly in the Kotwali as a warning to others.

Govind was only nine years old. He made up his mind to recover his father's body. He dressed himself as a beggar boy and proceeded in the darkness of the night towards the Kotwali. As he was going, he listened to the conversation of an old cartman and his son, who were lamenting the death of Teg Bahadur. From what he had heard, he understood that they were very devout Sikhs. He confided to them who he was and the mission on which he had set out. The old cartman asked Govind to stay in an uninhabited hut, three miles away from the Kotwali. It was a tempestuous night and it was raining heavily. The old cartman and his son went in their cart to where the Guru's body was exposed and found it unguarded. The old man told his son: "No sacrifice is too great to honour the Guru who died for us. The only way to rescue his body without evoking suspicion is for me to die and for you to put my body in his place. Ask no

questions.” The Guru’s body was got down. The old man put on the Guru’s clothes and killed himself. The son left his father’s body where the Guru’s body had been hanging. Taking the Guru’s body in the cart, he returned to the hut. Govind performed the obsequies of his father and then the hut was set fire to, along with the body. The ashes were gathered in a pot and buried in the same place. This spot was identified a hundred years later, in 1775, near the Viceregal lodge and the pot containing the relics recovered. On the spot, now stands the Rakabgunj Gurudwar.

Guru Govind, in a book called ‘Vichitra Natak’ which he wrote later on, said: “For the sake of Dharma what did my father do? He gave his head. He did not allow his mind to waver. I want to follow in his footsteps.”

Guru Govind grew up, every inch a hero. When he was eighteen, Ram Charan of Lahore offered his daughter Sundari to him and he married her, yielding to his mother’s pressure. Four years later, in his twenty-second year, was born his first son to Sundari and he was named Ajit. In the next twelve years, he had three sons by his first wife, Jito Devi. He was now thirty-four years old.

He wanted to popularize Samskrit among the Sikhs, and he employed several Pandits for the purpose. He also sent many scholars to Banaras to acquire proficiency in Samskrit. He employed fifty-two Pandits to translate into Gurmukhi several original works from Samskrit as well as Persian.

He wanted to bind the Sikhs into a well-knit military community imbued with unique religious fervour. He decided to worship Mother Durga and to invoke Her blessings on his people. The Puja was arranged on a hill

near Naini under the guidance of priests who were specially brought from Banaras. The worship went on continuously for four months. People started a rumour that Guru Govind Singh had become mad and that the strange Durga puja had deprived him of his senses. At the conclusion of the worship, he cut off one of his fingers and offered it as a Bali.

There was a large concourse of his followers outside the Puja enclosure. Guru Govind came out and, addressing the people, said, "For the good of the country, a human sacrifice is to be given to Durga now. Who is prepared to offer his life?" One man rose up. He was led into the enclosure. The Guru came out after a while and said that a second Bali was wanted. A second man rose up.

Similarly, a third, a fourth and a fifth responded to the call. Ultimately, Guru Govind brought out all of them and declared them as the elect. The Khalsa, the new dispensation of Sikhism, was built on the spirit of sacrifice shown by the five. Guru Govind said to them: "I am in you, you are in me. He who sees difference between us will be committing a sin. In Guru Nanak's time, he employed a test and obtained one devoted disciple prepared to sacrifice every thing; and that was Guru Angad. In our time, we have secured five." The huge concourse burst into an acclamation of joy.

Guru Govind continued: "Baba Nanak taught us humility. He wanted us to purify ourselves by taking the water used for washing the feet of the Guru. I am going to infuse manliness into you. You shall no longer be merely obedient Sishyas or Sikhs, but you shall become Singhs or lions." An iron pot full of water was brought and placed in their midst on the Guru's command. He dipped his sword in it and asked the five heroes to drink

and they did so, saying "Victory to Guru." When they offered obeisance to him, he said "Rise up Singhs." Thus, Guru Govind converted the Sikhs into Singhs. He commanded his followers henceforth always to wear on their person five K's, a *Kripan* or sword, a *Kankan* or iron bangle, *Kesa* or hair on the head uncut, *Kanga* or comb, *Kaccha* or a tight mode of dress. They should take a vow to be ever ready to help the helpless. They should bathe and read the Guru Granth early morning every day. They should regard all Sikhs as brothers. Those who follow this discipline will be called the *Khalsa*.

Guru Govind then saluted the five and asked that he should be taken into their fold. From that time Guru Govind Roy came to be known as Guru Govind Singh. He told his followers: "Henceforth, I am not your Guru, I am your brother, your servant; the *Khalsa* is your Guru."

The *Khalsa* organization grew rapidly. Every one gave to it gifts in cash and kind and arms and ammunition. An old farmer brought his daughter, Sahib Devi, and offered her to the Guru. Guru Govind said, "Now, every woman is my mother." She was, however, accepted and she came to be regarded as the Holy Mother of the *Khalsa*. She is worshipped by the Sikhs as Mataji.

Then Guru Govind raised an army to which every family having four or more males sent at least two of its able-bodied men. Eight thousand men joined. At Anandpur, a factory was set up to make guns and ammunition. Four fortresses were built. He drove out the fear of death from his followers and gave them a new confidence and faith which worked wonders. He subdued warring chieftains and consolidated the position of the Sikhs. The defeated chieftains, however, sought the help of Aurangzeb and he sent Wazirkhan, the Gov-

ernor of Sirhind, to attack Guru Govind. He laid siege to the Guru's fortress in 1703 and the siege lasted for five months. Ultimately, Guru Govind had to abandon the fortress. He managed to send his wives and other women to Delhi for safety. His mother and two of his younger sons were sent to Sirhind with a servant. With his two elder sons and a few intimate followers he escaped. When he reached the next village, the enemy gave battle and his two sons died. The next morning, one of his followers got into the Guru's clothes and arranged for the Guru to escape in disguise. The two younger children, eight and six years old, fell into the hands of Wazirkhan and the chroniclers say that, as he was building a wall, he ordered that the children should be built alive into it.

Guru Govind took refuge in the kingdom of Patiala. The books he then wrote were Vichitra Natak, Akha Stuti, Charitropakhyan and Sabda Hazaar.

When Aurangzeb died, his elder son, Bahadur Shah, who was in Kabul, ascended the throne. Azam, the younger son, who was in the Deccan, led an army against his brother. There was a battle in Agra, Bahadur Shah sought the help of Guru Govind Singh, promising to reverse the policy of his father and to help the Sikhs. Thereupon, the Guru asked his followers to help him. Then was concluded a treaty with Bahadur Shah, which contained the following clauses :—

- (a) In the Punjab, no Hindu should be forcibly converted to Islam.
- (b) The Khalsa will not fight against the Muslims.
- (c) The Hindus and the Sikhs can follow their different religious practices unmolested.
- (d) Non-Muslims need not pay higher taxes.

(e) Sikh farmers will be allowed a concession of one half in land revenue payments.

(f) Cow slaughter by the Muslims will be stopped in the Punjab.

When the Guru was camping near Nasik on the banks of the Godavari, he had two Muslim servants who, unknown to him, were harbouring a spite against him and watching for an opportunity to kill him. He was stabbed by one of them. On hearing of this, Bahadur Shah sent his own physician from Delhi, but the Guru could not be saved, though he lived for a few days after the attack. He sent away his wife Mata Devi to Delhi with his sword and belt. When he knew that his end was near, he told those who were with him that no ceremonial obsequies should be performed for him and that no one should weep over his death. He only desired that Guru Granth should be read for forty days. He also added that he was the last of the Gurus and there would be no Guru after him. The Holy Granth would be their Guru.

He bathed and dressed himself like a hero going to battle. He retired into his tent, commanding that no one should follow him. He sat inside in meditation. After a time, the people outside noticed the tent in flames.

A Gurudwar has been built on the spot. Guru Govind Singh lived in the world but was not of it. He was ever devoted to God and at the same time lived his life for the sake of others. He did not shun worldly possessions or relations, but was ever ready to sacrifice them all. He was only 42 years old when he died but he accomplished what others could not accomplish in 400 years. Sikhism in its final shape, with the creation of the Khalsa, is the gift of Guru Govind Singh, the tenth and last of the Sikh Gurus.

## MIRA BAI

MIRA BAI, born in 1547 A.D., was the daughter of Raja Ratan Singh of Khurki in Mewar, forty miles east of Jodhpur. When she was a child of three, one day, she took a smooth pebble and asked her mother, who was busy with her household work, "Mother, what is this?" The Mother replied, "A stone". She threw it away. A little later she brought another pebble and asked the same question and the mother gave the same reply. Mira threw it away. Bringing yet another pebble, she repeated the question to her mother, and in her annoyance the mother said, "It is your husband." Mira accepted the statement and began to treat the pebble as her beloved and to worship it.

A little later, a Sannyasin came to her house with an image of Giridhara Krishna. Mira thought her wishes were fulfilled by the arrival of that image in her house. She wanted to have it and to worship it, but the Sannyasin hesitated to part with it. She began to weep and refused to take her food. The stranger then gave it to her and blessed her. Henceforth, she became greatly absorbed in the worship of Giridhara Krishna.

When she was a child of five, she witnessed a marriage procession and asked her mother, "Where is my bridegroom?" The mother said "Why, have you not already got your bridegroom in Giridhar whom you worship?" Mira felt convinced that Giridhar was her Lord and thereupon her prayers were intensified. She cried, "These eyes of mine demand to be fed on your beauty. Pray appear before them. Now that your sweet face is ever the subject of my thought, how can I live if you deny me sight of you?" In one of her songs she says, "I have lost my sleep. The whole night I passed waiting for the beloved. Without sight of him, my heart is restless. My body is emaciated and I am without peace. Yet the name

of the dear one is on my lips. Like fish pining for water, Mira longs for her beloved." Neither her parents nor relatives or friends could understand this divine madness of the little child. But she had brought it with her from a previous birth.

As was the custom of the people in those days, her wedding was arranged when she was only eight years old. She protested, but her protests were brushed aside as childish. She was married to prince Bhoja, son of Maharana Pratap of Chittore. But even during the wedding ceremonies, Mira held the image of Giridhara close to her and considered that she was wedded only to him.

When the time came for her going to her husband's home, her mother offered to her ornaments and delicate garments, but she said: "Mother, bestow on me my Giridhari. I want no ornaments or garments. Giridhari is dearer to me than life. I have completely surrendered myself to him."

In her husband's house at Chittore, Durga was being worshipped, but Mira felt reluctant to offer obeisance to any deity except her Giridhar Krishna. She had a shrine erected for Sri Krishna and she would spend most of her time there, even forgetting her husband and her household duties. The Rana's relatives did not like this and they whispered that she seemed to be carrying on some love affair secretly. The Rana also watched her movements and one midnight, going to the shrine, he only found her lost in a trance in the presence of the image. She was put to trouble in a variety of ways but every act of persecution proved a blessing to her, as in the case of Prahlada.

The Rana took a second wife. He married Tara Bai, daughter of the ruler of Jalwar. But she had set her heart on somebody else. She proved a thorn in his side and he

put her in prison. His married life thus having twice proved bitter to him, he was unable to appreciate Mira's divine qualities. He wanted to get rid of her and once we are told that he sent her a drink containing poison. Mira drank it and it turned to nectar. In one of her poems, she says, "The Rana sent a cup of poison, Mira drank it and laughed."

She is said to have received formal initiation from Saint Raidas. Today, the Samadhi of Raidas is seen near Mira's temple in the old palace. Many wandering monks used to visit Mira's temple and spend hours and days in singing sacred songs and Bhajan. Mira's sister-in-law Udha, disapproved of all this. Mira says in one of her songs: "I have none but Giridhar Gopal. Krishna with the peacock feather on his crown is my lord. I have abandoned the status of my royal birth and position. Whom should I please? Mixing with the devotees of the Lord, I have lost my shyness as a woman. I tended the creeper of love, watering it with my tears. Now, it is giving the fruit of bliss. Devotees of God are pleased with it but the world is displeased. O Giridhar, Mira is your slave. Protect her."

The emperor Akbar himself came in 1568 A.D. in disguise, in the company of his court musician Tansen, to see Mira's great devotion. He offered a necklace of diamonds to the deity she worshipped, with the prayer, "Decline not the gift of this sinner, in His name". The news of this incident reached the Rana and he rushed to kill Mira for having conversed with a Mussalman. But in her presence, he found that he was deprived by some invisible power of all his strength. When the cruelties of the Rana towards her made it impossible for her to continue in Chittore, she set out for Brindavan as a poor pilgrim.

She sang: "No one can deter me from my decision. O, my friends, hear me, for I tell you just what passes in my heart. I shall henceforward spend my time in the company of saints and enjoy the Lord's bliss. What matters it, if it demands the sacrifice of all property and even the body? My whole life is a sacrifice to Him. I shall put up with harsh words, for my mind is fixed in His contemplation. I reach my Giridhar through prayers and tears."

When Mira reached Brindavan in 1590, she was forty-three years old. Saint Jiva Goswami was then living there. She sought an interview with him, but this was refused. The saint sent word that he, being a Sannyasin, could not grant an interview to a woman. Mira was somewhat surprised. She exclaimed: "In Brindavan, who except my Giridhar is a Purusha? If Sri Radha hears of your bold pretensions, you may have to quit Brindavan." When this remark was carried to Jiva Goswami, his eyes were opened. He then learned of the great secret of the love of the Gopis. He not only granted to Mira the interview, but he and other saints like Haridas came to recognize her as a Gopi who had come to shower on them her grace and open to them the gates of the heavenly abode of Sri Krishna. We are told that the Rana too repented of his cruelty to Mira and came to Brindavan as a pilgrim to see her.

Later on, Mira went to Dwaraka where she lived for twenty years. She passed away at the age of 67 in 1614 A.D.

In Mira's life and work, we see a revelation of the nature of one-pointed God-love or Prema.

## SRI RAMAKRISHNA

SRI RAMAKRISHNA was born in the little village of Kamarpukur in West Bengal. His father was an orthodox Brahmin, by name Khudiram Chatterjee. His mother was Chandra Devi. Before Ramakrishna was born, they had lived in another village called Dereypore, with two children, Ramakumar and Katyayani. Khudiram had incurred the displeasure of the local Zamindar by refusing to bear false witness, which led to his being ejected from the old village. In the new place in Kamarpukur a friend had found for him a small piece of land called Lakshmijala and on its yield he led a quiet uneventful life.

Khudiram was a devout worshipper of Sri Ramachandra, his family deity. He undertook a pilgrimage to Rameswaram on foot and he named the child born thereafter as Rameswar.

In his sixtieth year, he went to Gaya to worship his forefathers. In that place, he had a vision one night that a divine child would be born to him. Not long after his return to his village, the vision came true and the child that was born was named Gadadhar after the deity worshipped at Gaya.

Gadadhar's father passed away when he was only seven years old. The boy had his Upanayanam in his ninth year. He was sent to the village school but his studies did not progress beyond the second standard. He used to go about from house to house and spend his time in entertaining the women-folk with his songs and antics and with sundry little services. In the evenings, he would gather the village urchins and act with them the Puranic stories. He was the leader of an amateur troupe of boys. Often, he would spend hours with wandering Sadhus passing through the village and run errands for them.

Once, he tore a new piece of cloth given to him by his mother, and wearing it in the fashion of those Sadhus, told his mother that he had become a Bairagi. That showed his tendency even as a child. He would take a mischievous delight in dressing himself as a girl and going to the village tank to fetch water. The make-up would be perfect. He was welcome in every household at all times, even when he was grown up, though other boys of his age were generally kept out of women's apartments.

There was a merchant by name Durgadas in that village. He swore that Gadadhar would not be able to enter his house. Gadadhar was watching for an opportunity to play a trick on him. One evening, a village girl presented herself before Durgadas and said to him: "My village is five miles distant. Those in whose company I came to sell yarn have all gone away. Now, it is getting dark. Please permit me to stay this night with the women here. I shall go away next morning." She was directed to go in and ask the women. She did so and was allowed to stay. Later in the night, some one was calling out 'Gadadhar, Gadadhar.' It was Rameswar searching for his brother who had not returned home. The village girl ran out saying, "Here I am, brother". That was our Gadadhar. He spent his days in this fashion till he was seventeen.

His brother Ramakumar had established a small Samskrit Patasala in Calcutta and he took Gadadhar there. He tried to teach him Samskrit, but did not succeed. Gadadhar told his brother, 'I do not care for these studies. I wish to seek God'.

About this time, Rani Rasmani, a rich lady, had erected a temple at Dakshineswar, dedicated to Kali. Ramakumar became a priest in that temple. Gadadhar used to visit the place frequently. But, as his brother died

about a year after he had become a priest, Gadadhar was persuaded to take his place. He came to be known subsequently as Ramakrishna, perhaps in conformity with the family tradition of 'Rama' being added to the appellation. Near the Kali temple, there was a shrine of Radhakrishna. A leg of Radhakrishna's image was one day broken by the carelessness of the priest. The experts who were consulted by the Rani declared that the image should be thrown into the Ganges and a new one made and installed. When Ramakrishna heard of this suggestion, he resented it and remarked: "If the Rani's son-in-law breaks his leg, would she throw him into the Ganges and get a new son-in-law?" His meaning was clear. The image was not to be treated as a piece of metal or stone but as a dear object of love. The Rani accepted the suggestion and had the image mended and re-installed. Ramakrishna's way of looking at things through the heart appealed to her and he won her esteem.

One day, the Rani asked Ramakrishna to sing devotional songs, for he could sing very well and fill the listener with devotion. He agreed and sang; but in the middle of his song, he rose up from his seat and, approaching the Rani, gave her a shaking in a most unconventional fashion. The attendants of the Rani were flabbergasted; they ran forward and pulled back Ramakrishna. The Rani opened her eyes and saw the confusion. Ramakrishna asked her, "Why do you sit thinking of your litigation and the law court after asking me to sing on the Mother?" Ramakrishna had read her thoughts. This incident further enhanced the Rani's regard for Ramakrishna.

Day and night, Ramakrishna's sole occupation was to worship, to meditate, to pray or to weep like a child longing for a sight of the Divine Mother. Who weeps for

God? People seeing him thought perhaps he was mad. Ramakrishna used to say: "Some are mad after money, some after fame and name, some after women, some after eating and drinking, and I am mad after God. Which after all is better?"

Hearing of the peculiar ways of her son, his mother became anxious. She took him to Kamarpukur and proposed to get him married. Ramakrishna was like a child and he did not resist. As he had acquired the reputation of being unbalanced in mind, it was not easy to get him a bride. Ultimately a little girl of five years was married to this young man, who was then twenty-three years old. Her name was Saradamani Devi. Ramakrishna returned soon after to Dakshineswar to pursue his meditations and austerities in which he persisted unremittingly for eight more years.

To purify his mind of all selfish and narrow ideas and attachments, he practised Sadhanas in ways all his own. He would take in one hand some coins and a lump of clay in the other and telling himself, "This is money, this is clay; these are the same to me," he would throw both into the Ganges.

He would tell a story to prove how the possession of money fills the minds of little men with pride. There was a frog by the side of a lake. One day, an elephant came there to drink water. The frog began to kick the elephant with its hind legs. A sage who noticed this lifted up the frog and to his surprise found that it had been sitting on a Rupee coin which some one had left. That, he said, had evidently made the frog arrogant enough to kick the elephant. All his life, Ramakrishna refused even to touch money with his hand.

To overcome the feeling of pride of birth that clings to one, he would set himself the task of cleansing the huts

of sweepers. One night, he went unobserved and swept the front portion of the temple sweeper's house, using his own long hair as a mop.

To overcome the body-consciousness, he would go to the cremation ground at dead of night, remove his clothes and sacred thread and sit in meditation. He felt that all trappings, all robes of vanity, and petty notions and prejudices should be put off before one can come to God.

Ramakrishna did not go in search of Gurus. Gurus came seeking him. The most important of them were Bhairavi Brahmani, a lady who was an adept in the Tantra Sastra, and Tota Puri, an Avadhuta or naked Sannyasin of the order of Sankaracharya. The former taught him Tantric practices and the latter initiated him into Sannyasa and the Advaitic Sadhana leading to the height of Nirvikalpa Samadhi. He became a fully realized soul or God-man. Not only did he ascend to God but was ever ready to descend to His creatures and to love and serve them. Once, he went on a pilgrimage to Banaras and Brindavan, along with Mathuranath, the son-in-law of the Rani. At Vaidyanath, on the way, he saw, at the railway station, an unusually large number of famished men and women, stricken by famine. He wanted Mathur Babu to arrange to feed them and clothe them. When Mathur hesitated, Ramakrishna got down and said that he would rather stay with them than go on a pilgrimage. He started only after the poor people had been fed and clothed. When he returned from Brindavan he brought with him the sands of Brindavan and spread them at Dakshineswar, saying that the place had thereby become as holy as Brindavan.

Ramakrishna was henceforth a Paramahansa. He was free from all bonds. His heart went forth to all,

without distinction of high and low. To him, all religions were the same. He was sometimes like a child, sometimes like a mad man. He would meditate, he would play, he would cut jokes. Some thought he was a Sannyasin, some took him to be a householder. He would pray like a Christian and say Namaz like a Muslim. He worshiped Siva, Kali and Krishna with equal fervour but his Ishta Devata was the Divine Mother Bhavatarini, enshrined at Dakshineswar. He would pass into Samadhi, the state of transcendental beatitude, several times a day.

Saradamani Devi, whom Ramakrishna had married, was now 18 years old and he was 36. She was living in her native village of Jayarambati with her parents. She wanted to meet him and came for the purpose to Dakshineswar with her father. Now, to Ramakrishna, even the wedded wife was like the Divine Mother. He, in fact, installed her on the pedestal of worship and performed the Shodasi Puja to her as the living goddess. If the goddess can be invoked in a stone image, why not in a perfect human body? Henceforth, Saradamani was the Holy Mother. She was a nun, disciple, nurse and mother rolled into one. Though this divine couple had no children in the ordinary sense, their spiritual children were Vivekananda, Brahmananda, Ramakrishnananda, Sivananda and others. Speaking of how Sri Ramakrishna trained them, Swami Vivekananda says: "I do not find a more marvellous miracle than the manner this mad Brahmin used to handle human minds like lumps of clay, breaking, moulding and remodelling them and filling them with new ideas by a mere touch."

These men, so moulded by him brought into being the Ramakrishna Order and made his name resound through the world. The numerous Ashramas, Maths,

dispensaries, schools and colleges established in the name of Ramakrishna and his disciples bear testimony to the far-reaching social benefits that flow from a really good life. Sri Ramakrishna taught in parables and they form the gospel of the new age.

In his last days, Ramakrishna suffered from cancer in the throat. He would address himself and say, "O mind, do not worry about the body. Let the body and its pain take care of each other. You think of the Mother and be happy." He passed away in 1886. As the seed of a banyan which is buried in the earth, seemingly dies, but grows into a mighty tree, Sri Ramakrishna's death was the beginning of a new life which is unfolding itself before the world. Romain Rolland, his French biographer, says: "He is the consummation of two thousand yeas of spiritual life of three hundred million people, a great symphony composed of the thousand voices and the thousand faiths of mankind. His soul animates modern India."

## SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA was born a few minutes after sunrise on Monday, the 12th January, 1863, the day of Makara Sankranthi or Pongal. He was given the name of Narendranath Dutta and was endearingly called Naren.

His father, Visvanatha Dutta, was a prosperous Attorney-at-law of the high Court of Calcutta. Bhuvaneswari Devi, his mother, was regal in appearance and gracious in conduct. She commanded universal respect because of her devotion to God, her tranquillity and dignified detachment in the midst of her arduous duties. She gave birth to two sons after Narendranath, and four daughters, of whom two died at an early age.

Naren grew up to be a sweet and bright but irrepresible boy. Whenever Naren proved intractable, his mother would put his head under a cold-water tap, repeating Siva's name and it always calmed him. Naren was very fond of animals and birds. Among his pets were the family cow and calf, a monkey, a goat, a peacock and several pigeons.

Naren bore such a striking resemblance to his Sannyasin grandfather who, many thought, had been reborn in Naren. The little boy had a special fancy for wandering monks and beggars and one day he gave away his new cloth to one who appeared at the door asking for alms. He delighted in listening to stories from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, which his mother used to tell him.

As a child, when he was about to fall asleep every day, he would see between his eyebrows a ball of light of changing colours which would slowly expand and at last burst, bathing his whole body in a white radiance. Watching this light, he would gradually fall asleep. Since it was a daily occurrence, he regarded it as common to all

people. He was surprised when a friend said he had never himself had such an experience. Years later, Sri Ramakrishna said to him that the vision indicated a great spiritual past. The vision remained with Narendra till the end of his life, though its occurrence became irregular as he advanced in years.

While still a child, he practised meditation in the company of a friend, before an image of Siva. On one occasion, he saw in a vision a luminous person of serene countenance carrying a staff and Kamandalu.

At the age of six, he was sent to a primary school. One day, he repeated at home some of the vulgar words which he had learnt from fellow-pupils. Disgusted with this, the parents stopped him from school and appointed a private tutor. Very early, he learnt the rules of Samskrit grammar and got by heart many Slokas. When at play with other boys, he was always the leader. An important lesson that he learnt from his father was never to show surprise at any thing but to take in calmly and naturally whatever came. This enabled Naren in later years to preserve the serenity of his mind whether dwelling with princes in their palaces or sharing the straw huts of beggars.

At the age of seven, he entered High School; but the school studies consumed only a fraction of his time. He organized an amateur theatrical company and a gymnasium and took lessons in fencing, wrestling, rowing and other manly sports. He also tried his hand at cooking. He was the arbiter in the disputes of his play-fellows and was a favourite with the people of his neighbourhood. Every one admired his courage, straightforwardness and simplicity.

He was an entertaining conversationalist and would keep his hearers in a state of hilarious enjoyment. With

every one he claimed a special relationship. He would call even the servants of the household as uncle and aunt. Music was his favourite pastime. He insisted that songs should express lofty ideas and lift the mind high above daily trivialities. He read serious books on history and literature, devoured newspapers and magazines and attended public meetings. He loved to meet big people and discuss with them topics considered too obstruse for boys of his age.

At the age of sixteen, he passed his Matriculation examination in the first class and entered the Presidency College, Calcutta. After a year, he joined the Scottish College. It was from Mr. Hastie, the Principal of this college, that he first heard about Sri Ramakrishna. Narendra specialized in Philosophy and History. His memory was prodigious. Professor Hastie once remarked about him that he was a genius and was bound to make a mark in life. Narendra's father had a desire to send him to England for higher studies and to compete in the I.C.S. examination. But Naren's ambitions were of a different kind. He used to tell his friends, "At best, you will be lawyers or doctors or businessmen. I am going to be none of these. I will chalk out a new way and surprise you all".

It was a time when the Brahma Samaj, a movement which sought to liberalize Hinduism, had captured the imagination of the educated youths of Bengal. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, its founder, Devendranath Tagore, Keshab Chandra Sen and other followers had broken away from the rituals, the image worship and the observances and practices of orthodox Hinduism. Narendra was stirred by its ideas and became one of its ardent members.

About this time, he was urged by his father to marry. A wealthy friend offered the hand of his daughter with a

rich dowry. But Narendra refused to marry. He felt somehow that it was not his destiny to lead a householder's life.

Narendra used to relate that he had two visions every night before sleep. One was that of a prosperous worldly man, with an accomplished wife and children, luxuries, fame and social position; the other was that of a wandering monk, bereft of earthly security and devoted to the contemplation of God. He identified himself with the monk.

In his eagerness to seek God, he went to Devendranath Tagore and bluntly asked him, "Sir, have you seen God?" Devendranath was embarrassed and replied, "My boy, you have the eyes of a Yogi. You should practise meditation". Naren was disappointed and felt that this was not the kind of person who could satisfy his longing. He received no better answer from several others whom he approached. Then he remembered having heard the name of Ramakrishna Paramahansa from Professor Hastie, who while lecturing on Wordsworth's poem, 'The Excursion', had spoken of trances, which occurred as a result of purity and concentration of mind. He had said further that an exalted experience of that kind was a rare phenomenon and that he had known only one person who had attained that blessed state and that was Ramakrishna, who lived at Dakshineswar.

Narendra had also heard about Ramakrishna from a relative, Ramachandra Dutta, who was one of the foremost among the householder disciples of the Master. Hearing of Narendra's unwillingness to marry, Ramachandra had told him, "If you really want to cultivate spirituality, then visit Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar".

Narendra met Ramakrishna for the first time in November 1881 at the house of Surendranath Mitra, one of

the Master's devotees. The Paramahansa was much impressed by his sincerity and devotion and he asked him to visit him at Dakshineswar.

When Narendra went to Dakshineswar, he sang a few songs at the request of Ramakrishna. His first song was:

*Let us go back once more, O mind, to our proper home;*

*Here in this foreign land of earth*

*Why should we wander aimlessly in stranger's disguise?*

When the singing was over, Ramakrishna suddenly grasped Narendra's hand and took him to the northern porch of the temple. To Narendra's utter amazement, the Master said with tears in his eyes: "Ah! You have come so late. How unkind of you to keep me waiting so long. My ears are almost seared listening to the cheap talk of worldly people. Oh! how I have been yearning to unburden my mind to one who will understand my thought! I know you are the ancient sage Nara born on earth to remove the miseries of mankind." Naren regarded these words as those of an insane person. He was further dismayed when Ramakrishna presently brought from his room some sweets and fed him with his own hands.

When he said, "Give them to me, I shall share them with my friends," Ramakrishna replied, "No, no, they will have their share afterwards" and put more of the sweets into Naren's mouth, like a mother feeding a little child. They returned to the room and Naren asked the Master, "Sir, have you seen God?" Without a moment's hesitation came the reply: "Yes, I have seen God. I see Him as I see you here, only more clearly. God can be seen. One can talk to Him. But who cares for God?"

People shed torrents of tears for their wives, children, wealth and property, but who weeps for the vision of God? If one cries sincerely for God, one can surely see Him." Narendrā was astounded. For the first time, he was face to face with a man who asserted that he had seen God. For the first time in fact he was hearing firmly that God could be seen. He could feel that Ramakrishna's words were uttered from the depths of an inner experience. Naren returned to Calcutta somewhat bewildered, but with a feeling of inner peace which he had never experienced before. Ramakrishna had told him before he left that he should come alone the next time, for company was a distraction at such meetings.

During his second visit, Naren had a foretaste of the state of Samadhi. Sri Ramakrishna drew near him, muttered some words, fixed his eyes on him and placed his right foot on his body. At this touch, Naren saw with eyes open, the walls, the room, the temple garden—nay the whole world—vanishing and himself disappearing into a void. He cried out, "What are you doing to me?" The Master laughed and stroked his chest, restoring him to his normal mood. He said, "All right, everything will happen in due time."

On his third visit, Naren strove his utmost to be on guard and exercise his strong will to resist any hypnotic influence that Ramakrishna might exercise. Sri Ramakrishna took him to a neighbouring garden and in a state of trance touched him. Completely overwhelmed, Naren lost consciousness. Ramakrishna then asked him many questions about his past, his mission in the world, the duration of his present life, etc. The answers only confirmed what Ramakrishna had thought about these matters. In this momentous meeting, the age-long spiritual tradition of India came face to face with the scientific

spirit of the modern age. Ramakrishna tamed the rebellious spirit of Naren.

Narendra could not come to Dakshineswar as often as Ramakrishna wished. If he was absent for a few days, Ramakrishna could not bear the separation. He would send a disciple to fetch him or he would himself go in search of him.

In 1884, when Naren was preparing for the B.A. Degree Examination, his father died. He had lived beyond his means and he left the family burdened with a heavy debt. As the eldest member of the family, Naren had to find the wherewithal for keeping the family going.

One day, Naren asked himself why Kali, the Divine Mother, who listened to Ramakrishna's prayers, should not remove his poverty. When he mentioned this to the Master, he directed him to go to the shrine and pray. But in the presence of the deity, Naren forgot to ask for worldly prosperity; instead, he asked for the boon of wisdom, discrimination and renunciation. When he returned to the Master's room, he was directed to go again and pray to the Mother to satisfy his immediate needs. Naren went again, but again found that it was impossible for him to pray in that manner. The same thing happened a third time. Naren suddenly realized that Ramakrishna himself had made it difficult for him to ask for worldly boons. He now asked Ramakrishna himself to do something for the family. Ramakrishna said that he could not pray to the Mother for such things but he assured him that his family would be able to get on fairly well. This incident left a deep impression on Naren's mind and he sang, "Break my chains, O Mother, and make me free." The great love of Ramakrishna enabled Naren to face calmly the hardships of life. His own poverty made him feel intense sympathy for the needy and afflicted.

Naren learned from Ramakrishna that religion is a vision which transcends all barriers of caste and race and breaks down the limitations of time and space.

He learnt of the divinity of the soul, the non-duality of Godhead, the unity of existence and the harmony of religions. Ramakrishna showed by his own example how the same God-consciousness could be reached by following the diverse disciplines of Hinduism, Christianity and Islam.

Naren, in course of time, became the idol of the young devotees of Ramakrishna. They were awed by his personality.

In 1885 Ramakrishna showed the first symptoms of an ailment in the throat, which was later diagnosed as cancer. He was removed to a garden house at Cossipore, a suburb of the city. Naren and other young disciples took charge of him, disregarding the wishes of their guardians and neglecting their studies and duties at home. Sarada Devi looked after the cooking and the older devotees met the expenses. All regarded this service to the Guru as a great blessing and privilege.

Naren, realizing that the Master would not live long, intensified his own spiritual practices. One day, he asked Ramakrishna for the boon of remaining merged in Samadhi. Ramakrishna said: "There is a state higher than that. To see the world alone without God is ignorance, *Ajnana*; To see God alone without the world is *Jnana*; but to see all beings permeated by God is supreme wisdom, *Vijnana*." Ramakrishna wanted Naren to attain to that state and be like a banyan tree under whose shade thousands of people could rest.

The Master regarded Naren as his spiritual heir. He wanted him to look after the young disciples. A short while before his passing away, Ramakrishna called

Naren to his bedside and gazing intently on him passed into deep meditation. Coming back to normal consciousness, he said: "To-day, I have given you everything I possess. By this power, you will accomplish great things in the world."

On August 15, 1886, at midnight, Sri Ramakrishna entered into Mahasamadhi. He had brought with him deathless life and in passing away, released that life for the whole of humanity.

After the Master's passing away, the disciples badly needed a suitable place which could serve as their Ashram. Surendranath Mitra, a householder-disciple of Ramakrishna, came forward to pay the expenses for its maintenance. A house was rented in (Varaha-nagar) Baranagore, midway between Calcutta and Dakshineswar. Dismal and dilapidated, it was a building that had the reputation of being haunted by evil spirits. So they were able to secure it for a low rent. This place became the first head-quarters of the monks of the Ramakrishna Order. In the shrine room, the copper vessel containing the sacred ashes of Ramakrishna was worshipped daily. Sasi Bhooshan constituted himself the priest and caretaker and he came to be called the 'mother' of the Math.

Some of the disciples, eager for the life of a wandering monk desired to visit holy places and started on a pilgrimage. Naren too left in 1889 without a companion and with only a staff and a begging bowl. First he went to Banaras. One day, he was pursued by a troop of monkeys. When he was running, a monk called to him, "Face the brutes". He turned and looked defiantly at the beasts and they quickly disappeared. He used to recall this experience and ask people to face the dangers of life and not to run away from them. From Banaras, he went to Ayodhya, Lucknow, Agra, Brindavan and Haridwar.

He visited Ghazipur, where he met Pavahari Baba, the saint reputed to be living on air. He asked for instruction from the Baba for the practice of Yoga. Then Sri Ramakrishna appeared to him in a vision, looking intently at him. Naren reproached himself for his lack of complete faith in Ramakrishna and for seeking another Guru. He then returned to Calcutta to be at the bedside of Balaram Bose and Surendranath Mitra, devotees of the Master who were seriously ill. Both of them passed away soon after.

In 1890 again, he left the monastery, saying to himself, "I shall not return until I gain such realization that my very touch will transform a man". He went to take leave of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and she asked him whether he would not take leave of his own mother. Naren replied, "You are my only mother".

Naren was accompanied by a few brother disciples for some time. In January 1891, he bade farewell to them and set out alone, assuming the name of Vividishananda. He wished to remain *inognito*. He said to himself:

*Even as a lion, not trembling at noises,  
Even as the wind, not caught in a net,  
Even as the lotus leaf, unstained by water,  
Do thou wander alone like the rhinoceros.*

During his wanderings Swamiji traversed the whole of India. He was now on the snowy Himalayas, now on the burning sands of a desert, now in a mountain cave, now in a populous city, at one moment the honoured guest at the court of a prince, at another alone on a dusty road.

When Swamiji passed through Alwar, the Maharajah of the place was attracted to him. He had no faith in image worship and he said to Swamiji, "I cannot worship wood, earth, stone or metal like other people. What will

happen to me?" Swamiji made no reply. He looked up at a picture on the wall and asked, "Whose picture is that?" The Dewan, who was sitting by, replied, "Don't you see Swamiji, it is the likeness of the Maharajah?" Swamiji had it taken down and then he said to the Dewan, "Spit on it." The Dewan shrank back in fear. "Spit on it. What is it but a piece of paper? It may be that you find there the likeness of your Maharajah. But he is not actually present in it." A moment later, Swamiji turned to the Prince and continued: "Your Highness! Look at the regard that your Dewan has for this piece of paper. He looks upon it with as much respect as upon your person. Thus it is with those who worship stone and metal images. They do not worship the stone or metal as such. God appears to all according to their understanding of Him." The Prince was conquered. He said, "You have opened my eyes. Have mercy on me." Swamiji said, "O Prince, none but God can be merciful. Pray to Him."

Then Swamiji visited Khetri. The Maharajah sought a blessing from him: "I have no son to succeed me to the throne. Bless me that I may soon have one." Swamiji blessed him heartily and departed. He then went to Porbunder, Bombay, Bangalore, Mysore, Cochin, Madurai, Ramnad, Rameswaram, Trivandrum and Kanyakumari. He was happy in the end that he had traversed the length and breadth of India. After worshipping the Mother at the Cape, he swam a small distance to a rock jutting out of the sea. Sitting on that last stone of India, he said to himself: "Thou art born as a sacrifice at the altar of thy motherland. Forget not that the lower classes, the ignorant, the poor, the cobbler and the sweeper are thy flesh and blood. Thou bold one, be proud that thou art an Indian and proudly proclaim, 'I am an Indian; every Indian is my brother..... The soil of

India is my highest heaven, the good of India is my highest good'. Yes, thou hast found thy mission at last. Pray that thou mayest be born again and again to worship the only God thou believest in, thy God the wicked, thy God the miserable and thy God the poor of all races."

From the Cape, Swamiji went to Pondicherry and then to Madras, where he became widely known as Swami Vivekananda, for that was the last name he had assumed.

He was now possessed with the idea of going to the western countries in the name of India's millions, and he waited for a command from his Master. One night he saw Ramakrishna in a dream, walking on the sea and beckoning to him to follow. He awoke and felt glad at heart. He had received the command. He wrote to Mother Sarada Devi begging for her blessings. She had seen a similar vision, which she mentioned in her reply. When the Swami received the letter, he wept and danced with joy.

The devotees who had gathered round Swamiji began to collect funds and make the necessary arrangements for his voyage to America. He was to represent Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions which was to meet in Chicago that year.

When he was about to start, the Private Secretary to the Maharajah of Khetri came to meet him. He said: "Through your blessing, a son is born to the Maharajah. Without offering his homage to you in due form, the Maharajah's joy will not be complete. So, be pleased to grant this desire of his." Swamiji could not say nay. When he arrived at Khetri, the Rajah rose from his seat and, like a true disciple, prostrated himself before his Guru. The Rajah worshipped him and was beside him-

self with joy. When Swamiji started for Bombay to take ship to America, the Rajah accompanied him as far as Jeypore and sent his Private Secretary to Bomaby to arrange for Swamiji's comforts during the voyage to America. Swamiji was provided with adequate funds and a comfortable first class berth in the steamer by which he was to travel. He left India on the 1st May, 1893, in his thirty-first year.

He was dressed in a robe of ochre silk and a turban of the same material. He looked like a prince. During the voyage, he went on shore at Colombo, Singapore, Hongkong, Canton, Nagasaki, Osaka, Kyoto, Tokyo and Yokohama to see those places and the peoples. When he reached Vancouver he took train to far-off Chicago.

There he was lodged in one of the best hotels. The Parliament was to meet two months later, in September. His purse was rapidly emptying itself. Swamiji learnt that at Boston living would be cheaper and so he went there to spend the interval. At Boston, he became acquainted with Professor Wright of the Harvard University, who prepared the way for the acceptance of Swamiji as a delegate as it was found that no one without credentials from a *bona fide* organization would be accepted and also that it was too late for registration. Professor Wright encouraged him saying, "To ask you, Swami, for credentials is like asking the sun about its right to shine." He introduced him to the Chairman of the Committee for selecting candidates, in these words: "Here is a man more learned than all our learned Professors put together." He bought also the Swami's railway ticket to Chicago.

The Swami had unfortunately lost the address of the Committee and so did not know where to go for the

night's lodging when he arrived at Chicago. He was stranded and slept in an empty waggon in the freight yard.

The next morning, he met Dr. Barrows, President of the Parliament, who cordially accepted him and arranged for his lodging with the oriental delegates.

On the 11th September, 1893, at 10 A.M., the Parliament opened as an adjunct to the World's Columbian Exposition. The delegates arose, one by one, and read prepared speeches. Vivekananda had no prepared speech. He had never before addressed such an assembly. He said later: "My heart was fluttering and my tongue nearly dried up. I was so nervous that I could not venture to speak in the morning session."

At last, he appeared on the rostrum and Dr. Barrows introduced him. Bowing to Saraswati, goddess of wisdom, he addressed the audience as, "Sisters and Brothers of America." Instantly thousands arose from their seats and gave him a loud applause. It took two full minutes before the tumult subsided and the Swami began his speech by thanking the youngest of the nations in the name of the most ancient monastic order in the world. The keynote of his address was universal toleration. He told the audience how India, even in older times, had given shelter to the religious refugees of other lands and he quoted the following verse: "As different streams mingle in the sea, different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they may appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee." In conclusion, he pleaded for the quick termination of sectarianism, bigotry and fanaticism.

Whereas every one of the other delegates had spoken for his own ideal or his own sect, the Swami spoke about the God of all religions, as he had learnt that truth at the

feet of Ramakrishna, whose life and religious experience included all and excluded none.

The Swami addressed the Parliament a dozen times and his outstanding address was a paper on Hinduism. He told his hearers how man is a child of bliss and it is a sin to call him a sinner. In the final session, he said: "The Christian is not to become a Hindu, or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth. If the Parliament has shown anything to the world, it is this: it has proved that holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any Church in the world and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character." In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreamed of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others, he pitied him from the bottom of his heart and pointed out to him that on the banner of every religion would soon be written: "Help and not fight, assimilation and not destruction, harmony and peace and not dissension."

From obscurity, Vivekananda had leapt into fame. His life-size portraits were posted in the streets of Chicago and his speeches were read with warm interest all over the country.

Several people invited him to their houses and treated him like a royal guest. When he retired at nights to the rooms provided for him with their soft beds and velvet cushions, he wept and prayed, "O Mother, what shall I do with all this honour and name and fame, when millions of my countrymen are starving? Lead me to serve them."

The monks at Baranagore were wondering what had happened to their Naren. They did not know that this

world-famous Vivekananda was their dear chief. One day, six months after the Parliament, Swamiji wrote to his brothers. You can imagine their joy at the receipt of the letter.

For a year and a half afterwards, Swamiji continued to work in America. Towards the end of 1895, he went to England on a short visit. He was very well received and he made many sincere friends. He went back to America and, leaving his work there in the hands of the disciples whom he had trained, returned to England. Here also he gathered many valuable co-workers, supporters and disciples, among whom were Captain Sevier, Mrs. Sevier and Margaret Noble, who later became Sister Nivedita. His meeting with Professor Max Muller resulted in that great scholar publishing the life and sayings of Rama-krishna which was the first publication of its kind.

At the end of 1896, Swamiji made preparations to return to India. He wrote to his friends in Madras: "On my return to India, I want to start two centres, one in Calcutta and the other in Madras. The English friends who are coming with me will found a third centre in the Himalayas. We will begin our work with these centres and later on, we will invade, if the Lord be pleased, not only the whole of India but send preachers to every country in the world."

London was left behind. On January 15, 1897, Colombo was reached. One of his brother monks had come to Ceylon to meet him and a national reception awaited him. He passed through the important towns of Ceylon and South India in triumphal procession and reached Madras. It was Madras that had first recognized his greatness and prompted him to go to the West. The streets and thoroughfares of the city were profusely decorated for his reception and seventeen triumphal

arches had been erected from Egmore Railway Station to the "Ice House" in Triplicane (known as "Vivekananda House" since the occasion of the Swamiji's birth centenary celebrations) along the route of the procession. During his stay in Madras, he gave six public lectures. In February 1897, he reached his home town of Calcutta. When someone asked what he thought of India now, after he had seen the West, he said, "I loved India before I went, but now the very dust of its streets is sacred to me." In the public reception given in Calcutta, he spoke of Sri Ramakrishna, "My teacher, my master, my hero, my ideal, my God in life", and said, "If there has been anything achieved by me, by thoughts or words or deeds, if from my lips has ever fallen one word that has helped any one in the world, I lay no claim to it; it was his. But if there have been curses falling from my lips, if there has been hatred coming out of me, it is all mine, not his. All that has been life-giving, strengthening, pure and holy has been his inspiration, his words and he himself. Yes, my friends, the world has yet to know that man."

On May 1, 1897, Swamiji called a meeting of the monastic and lay devotees of Sri Ramakrishna at the house of the Master's intimate disciple, Balaram Bose, for the purpose of establishing his work on an organized basis. He asked for the co-operation of the monastic and householder disciples of Sri Ramakrishna in order to start educational, philanthropic and religious activities in a systematic way. All the members enthusiastically approved of the proposal and the Ramakrishna Mission came into existence.

To give the association a legal status it was registered later on under the Societies Registration Act. The Memorandum of Association laid down the following as the aims and objects of the Mission:—

(a) To impart and promote the study of Vedanta and its principles as propounded by Sri Ramakrishna and practically illustrated in his own life and of comparative theology in its widest form;

(b) To impart and promote the study of arts and sciences and industries;

(c) To train teachers in all branches of knowledge and enable them to reach the masses;

(d) to carry on educational work;

(e) to establish, maintain, carry on and assist schools, colleges, orphanages, workshops, laboratories, hospitals, dispensaries, houses for the infirm, the invalid and the afflicted, and to organize famine relief, flood relief and charitable works of a like nature;

(f) to print and publish journals and books, and

(g) to carry on any other work calculated directly or indirectly to promote the above mentioned objects.

On July 9, 1897, Swami Vivekananda wrote to a Western disciple: "Only one idea was burning in my brain, to start the machine for elevating the Indian masses and I have succeeded in doing it to a certain extent. It would have made your heart glad to see how my boys are working in the midst of famine and disease and misery.....I feel my task is done—utmost 3 or 4 years of life are left. I must see my machine in strong working order and then knowing for sure that I have put in a lever for the good of humanity in India at least which no power can drive back, I will sleep without caring for what will be next. And may I be born again and again to serve the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls."

The Ramakrishna Order has a double aspect, the Math and the Mission, embodying the twin ideals of renunciation and service. The Math consists of those

who have renounced the world and Mission consists of the lay disciples working under the inspiration and guidance of the monks. In the Math the emphasis is on renunciation and in the Mission on service.

After organizing the Math and the Mission, Swamiji paid another visit to England and America, along with Sister Nivedita and Swami Turiyananda, a brother monk, leaving India in June 1899. Early in 1900, he went to Paris to attend the Congress of the History of Religions and stayed there after the Congress for nearly five months. Then he toured in the company of some of his admirers through Austria, Turkey, Greece and Egypt before he returned to India towards the end of 1900.

He stayed in the monastery at Belur for some months and then as his health was not good he went for a change to the Himalayas and afterwards to Eastern Bengal and Assam. During the latter trip, he said to those that were with him, "I shall at the most live a year more. I feel it my duty to see my mother now and take her to some places of pilgrimage." He did this and then returned to Belur, the Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.

As his health had not improved, doctors advised complete rest. He said, "What good is this body? Let it continue to help others. Did not *Thakur* preach unto the very end? And shall I not do the same?"

He devoted himself to the work of setting the monastery in perfect order. He insisted on spotless cleanliness. He would himself sweep the floor sometimes as an example to others. He would examine the beds and see that they were exposed to air and light and kept clean. Great attention was paid to the purity of food and drink. In the mornings, the monks and Brahmacharis had to get up two hours before sunrise and sit in meditation. In the afternoons, Swamiji would give religious talks for the

benefit of the inmates. One morning, he found only two meditating. He was vexed with the others. He bade them go out for the day and do penance by begging rice and cooking their food under a tree in the compound of the monastery. Thus sometimes loving, sometimes stern, Swamiji adopted various means to train his brothers and disciples.

He spent his leisure with a number of pets as in his childhood days—a dog, a goat, an antelope, a stork, ducks, geese, and a kid. The kid was a great favourite with him and followed him wherever he went. He would play and run about to amuse the kid.

Then he would also work in the garden and enter into lively conversation with the gardener, a simple country-fellow, Keshta by name. One day, Keshta told him of his poverty and family troubles and Swamiji began to shed tears. Swamiji fed him that day with his own hand. His heart was overflowing with love and he became soft like butter.

He was fully aware that his stay on earth was rapidly drawing to an end. One day, as he was pacing in the garden, he pointed to a spot on the banks of the Ganges and said, "When I give up the body cremate me there."

The eventful day arrived. It was the 4th of July, 1902. He entered the chapel at eight in the morning, closed all the doors and remained inside till eleven. He usually dined alone; but on that day he dined with his brothers. In the afternoon, he took a walk and discussed a plan for a Vedic College. He conversed on the rise and fall of nations and observed: "India is immortal if she persists in her search for God. But if she goes in for politics and social conflict, she will die."

At 7 P.M. he went to his room and told the disciple who attended on him that none was to come to him until

called for. He sat in meditation, facing the Ganges. An hour after, he called the disciple and asked him to open all the windows and fan his head. Then he lay down quietly. At the end of an hour, his hands trembled a little and he breathed very deeply. His eyes became fixed and eternal silence fell.

To Swami Ramakrishnananda in Madras, he appeared in a vision and said, "Sasi! I have spat out my body."

His body was cremated at the very place he had pointed out. A shrine has now been built over it. Inside it is an altar on which is placed a marble image of Swamiji.

Though he is away, his voice comes rolling down through the years with added strength:

"Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached."

## HOLY MOTHER SARADA DEVI

SARADA DEVI was born in Jayrambati, a village about sixty miles to the west of Calcutta, on the 22nd of December 1853. Her father was Ramachandra Mukherjee and mother, Shyamasundari Devi.

She was married at the age of five to Sri Ramakrishna, who was then twenty-three years old. It was a novel kind of wedlock in which both the partners were to observe life-long celibacy.

After the wedding, Sri Ramakrishna returned to Dakshineswar to pursue his spiritual practices. Sarada glided into her girlhood days in her paternal home. After a long gap of seven years when she had fairly grown up, she had an opportunity to meet her husband, who had then gone to his native village for a short period. He gave her instruction about God and devotional life and how one should discharge one's duties in the world. Of those days she said later on: "I then felt as if a pitcher of bliss was kept in my heart. It was a constant experience."

Thus four years passed by. There were rumours that Sri Ramakrishna had become insane. People pitied Sarada for her misfortune. The more she thought about it, the more she felt that her duty was to be with her husband giving him in whatever measure she could a wife's devoted service. But how to go to him? In March 1872 an opportunity turned up for her to fulfil her longing. Some of her neighbours went to Calcutta for a holy dip in the Ganges on a sacred day. She made up her mind to accompany them. Her father read her mind and agreed to escort her.

Sarada had an attack of malarial fever on the way after three or four days of tiresome walk. Allowing the rest of the company to go on, her father took her to a wayside inn. Lying on her bed, she saw a lady of dark complexion but amazingly beautiful sitting by her side and soothing her

aching limbs with her gentle touch. Sarada asked her, "Who are you? Where do you come from?" Quick came the reply, "I am your sister. I come from Dakshineswar. Soon you will get well and meet your husband". The presence melted away. Sarada was stirred to her depths by the vision.

The next morning the journey was continued but a palanquin had to be hired to carry her as she was unable to walk. No other kind of conveyance could be had in the forest path. After nightfall, Sarada Devi and her father reached Dakshineswar.

Swayed between despair and faint hope, Sarada approached Ramakrishna with a good deal of trepidation. Her misgivings vanished the moment she met him, for he extended her a cordial welcome, though the visit was most unexpected. Seeing that she had fever, he made her stay in his own room with a female attendant till she recovered. After four days, she was allowed to move to a place known as the Music Tower, not far from Ramakrishna's room, to live with his mother, who had been there for a long while. Her father returned to Jayrambati, his mission fulfilled.

One of those days of her first stay in the new surroundings, Ramakrishna asked her whether she had gone there to drag him down to the worldly plane. "No" came her prompt and dignified reply. "Why should I pull you down? I am here to serve you so that you may go ahead on your chosen path."

When Ramakrishna dedicated himself to the austere life which he chose, the choice had already been made for Sarada and there was no struggle in her soul in making the great sacrifice she made.

Sri Ramakrishna admitted that marriage as a sacrament had a place in spiritual evolution and proved that an ideal couple could live together purely as spiritual

companions. Sarada Devi was an ideal wife, ideal nurse and the first disciple of Ramakrishna. Their lives are different from our lives "as wings are from feet and music from prattle."

To Andal of Srivilliputhur, God is the beauty that is Krishna and to Karaikkal Ammayar, God is the ascetic that is Siva. Andal sublimated her sex but Ammayar fulfilled herself by its starvation. The one became the spouse of the Lord and the other His slave. Sarada Devi was both spouse and slave to her Lord.

Though she considered herself a slave and humble disciple, Ramakrishna placed her on the pedestal of the Goddess of the Universe. On the auspicious night of the Phalaharini Puja in the year 1873, Ramakrishna directed her to be seated on the seat set apart for Devi's worship. He then conducted the worship in the living image of his wife and offered to her his obeisance, the fruits of his austerities, his rosary, himself and everything that was his. This was the consummation of Ramakrishna's spiritual Sadhana.

The place where Sarada lived in the Music Tower was a small octagonal room nine feet in height with fifty square feet of floor space. It had only a pair of ventilators and no window. The doorway was only about four feet in height. There was a narrow verandah all round which was closed by bamboo mats for the sake of privacy. How Sarada Devi managed to live here without giving a chance to outsiders to know her presence is a wonder. The manager of the Temple remarked once, "We have heard that she lives here but we have never seen her".

She would get up at three or four in the morning before anybody in the compound got up. She would finish her bath in the Ganges and shut herself up in her room. After her daily prayer and meditation, she would

attend to her work. She would not waste a single moment in idleness.

She would eagerly wait for the hour of carrying meals to Ramakrishna's room and spend a little time in his blessed company. That was the only moment for her to meet him alone.

To look after his health, to hear his voice and to see him from a distance would fill her heart with intense joy. She had no other craving. She would make small holes in the bamboo mats surrounding the verandah and watching through them enjoy the scenes of devotional songs and dances of the Master with his devotees. For this she would be on her legs for hours in the enclosed verandah.

In speaking of Ramakrishna's consideration and courtesy to her, she observed in later days: "It was my good fortune to have a husband who never slighted me and who never even addressed me as 'Thou'. Ha! how he treated me! Not even once did he use a harsh word. He did not strike me even with a flower."

After her first stay at Dakshineswar, she went to Kamarpukur in October, 1873. It was then that Ramakrishna's brother, Rameswar, died and some months later in March, 1874 her beloved father also passed away. She returned to Dakshineswar in April, 1874 and stayed for a year and a half. This time she was lodged for a period a little more comfortably in a cottage put up close to the Temple. A maid servant was engaged for helping her and to keep her company. After about a year, she fell ill and had to go to Jayrambati to recoup her health. During her absence her mother-in-law Chandra Devi passed away at Dakshineswar in February, 1876. She came back in January, 1877, and started living in the separate cottage but soon she had to shift to the Music Tower for the convenience of attending on the Master.

The next time when she went to Jayrambati and returned with her widowed mother and some other relatives in February, 1881, the rude behaviour of Hriday, the Master's attendant, compelled her to go back the same day. Hriday had been warned by Ramakrishna: "Well, you often slight me. But don't you do that with her. If she is offended, even Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara will not be able to save you." It so happened that within six months of his offence to the Holy Mother he had to leave Dakshineswar for good, being removed from service by the Temple authorities.

Then, Ramakrishna, having no one to look after his personal needs, asked Sarada Devi to come back in February, 1882. She spent a year and a half with him and again after a break she rejoined him in January 1885 and stayed with him till the end of his life in August 1886. Thus from 1872 to 1886 for fourteen years her stay at Dakshineswar could not be a continuous one, though her heart was always there.

In October 1885, Ramakrishna was removed for medical treatment to a rented house at Shyampukur and in December to a more spacious house in Cossipore in the northern part of Calcutta. Sarada Devi's whole-souled attention was needed for nursing him. She was aided by Golap Ma, a lady devotee of Ramakrishna. Here most of the young disciples of Ramakrishna gathered together to give their unstinted service. After a short spell of recovery, the Master's health declined rapidly and the end came on the night of August 15, 1886.

The next day when Sarada Devi was about to put off her bracelets, she had a vision of Ramakrishna in which he said, "I have not gone away. I have only shifted, as it were, from one room to another." The vision assured her that he had not forsaken her and that she was not to

dress and behave like a widow, as required by social usage. Ramakrishna continued to live in and through her and became "a more poignant presence, a more pervasive power, a more lenient love and a readier redemption."

Sarada Devi moved away from the Cossipore house after five days, spent a little more than a week in the house of Balaram Bose, a householder disciple of Ramakrishna in Calcutta and then started with a group of devotees on a pilgrimage to Banaras, Ayodhya and other places, and on reaching Brindavan stayed there for a year.

Then she went to Kamarpukur. When some orthodox women criticised her dress, one Prasannamayi, a respected lady of the village, said: "The wife of Gadadhar is a veritable goddess. She is not an ordinary type of woman."

After a year of hard life at Kamarpukur, she was taken to Calcutta by the devotees of the Master. They took upon themselves the duty of providing everything for her so that she might carry on her work as the standard-bearer of Ramakrishna's faith and bless the rising generation of spiritual aspirants.

Fresh in her mind were the various Mantras imparted to her by Sri Ramakrishna and meant for different groups of persons with varying aptitudes and temperaments. So she went on fulfilling her mission with indomitable zeal and patience. It was not for her to pick and choose the disciples. She used to say, "If my child gets covered with mud or dust, is it not my duty to cleanse him and take him on my lap?" Swami Premananda said: "We are sending to the Holy Mother the poison that we cannot ourselves swallow. She is the refuge of them all for she is able to assimilate their sins." With her there

was no bar with regard to sex, caste, community or nationality so long as the individual was sincere.

Once during her visit to Orissa, the post master of the place where she stayed being a Christian anxious to come back to his original faith of Hinduism sought her blessings and he was reconverted under her directions and initiated by her.

In February, 1911, she started on a pilgrimage to South India with eight companions. Swami Ramakrishnananda, the founder of the first monastery of the Ramakrishna Order in the South made the necessary arrangements. The Holy Mother worshipped at Madurai and Rameswaram. Before returning to Calcutta she visited Bangalore, Rajahmundry and Puri.

Of the great qualities of her head and heart, her universal love, utter simplicity and humility were remarkable. She would not allow her disciples or visitors, even if they were of low caste, to remove the leavings and plate after they had eaten. "There will be some one to do all these things", she would protest. And that some one was herself, whom Sri Ramakrishna had worshipped as the Divine Mother. This she did in an atmosphere of compelling orthodoxy. Her people would say: "You belong to a Brahmin family; above that you are their Guru and they are your disciples; why should you remove their leavings? This will do them harm." She would say "Don't you see I am their mother? If the mother would not wait upon the child, who would?" Every one who was the recipient of such love was transformed immediately.

Holy Mother lived for thirty-four years after Sri Ramakrishna as his spiritual successor and passed away in 1920, after seeing the Ramakrishna Math and Mission well established.

Her last message was "If you want peace of mind, do not find fault with others. Learn to make the whole world your own."

Of her Swami Vivekananda said: "Without Sakti there is no regeneration for the world. Mother has been born to revive that wonderful Sakti in India and making her the nucleus, once more will Gargis and Maitreyis be born in the world."

Sister Nivedita, a western disciple of Swami Vivekananda, wrote in one of her letters to the Holy Mother:

"Surely, you are the most wonderful thing of God, Sri Ramakrishna's own chalice of His love for the world. Surely the wonderful things of God are all quiet, stealing unnoticed into our lives; the air and the sunlight and the sweetness of the gardens and the Ganges. These are the silent things that are like you."

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