

AMRIT

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Sri Sri Ravi Shankar
at the HOM's Conference



Swami Vivekananda: The Sage of Vedanta

अमृत



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From the Ambassador's Desk



Dear Reader,

I just returned after two back-to-back visits to India, one to Kolkata in the east and the other to Delhi in the north. One is the city of culture, until 1911 the capital of British India and the other the city of power, capital of modern day India where seminal events pertaining to the national freedom movement and thereafter have been played out since.

For me it was a journey into spiritual India as well as into the nation's heart which administers the country. The first occasion was an opportunity to give the Foundation Day Oration at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture and live amidst the monks and seers of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda order while the second to take part in the annual gathering of all the Heads of Missions to confabulate on vision, goals, targets and outcomes for Indian diplomacy, particularly in the rapidly changing context of globalization and emergence of a multi-polar world in constant flux. The interest of our Prime Minister in being the main force behind the conduct of India's foreign relations, ably aided by an energetic External Affairs Minister has added further elan and helped in raising India's stock in the family of nations.

While the economy of the country has undoubtedly come out of the morass to which it had been condemned and is showing promise of growth, with sectors of services, manufacturing and even agriculture bouncing back in relation to the previous figures, new schemes such as 'Make in India', 'Clean India', 'Clean Ganga', 'Digital India', 'Smart Cities', infrastructure building with creation of industrial parks and corridors have added the much needed boost to local industry as well as opened the doors for FDI like never before.

Yet amidst all these materialistic gains which the nation promises to undergo, it is her spiritual quotient which has remained the constant and unique phenomenon, giving India her pride of place to speak out loud and clear, the virtues of an undying millennial civilization. Beckoning spiritual seekers, cultural afficianados, even lay tourists by the thousands has been India's extraordinary success. For never in the history of

mankind has there been as example as exuberant as India's, a foundation as solid and everlasting, setting forth basic principles of life-peace, love, compassion, empathy, brotherhood in civilisational terms, the real idiom and metaphors which we, representatives of our hallowed nation, can take forward.

Reminds me of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru's iconic study in his 'Glimpses of World History', where he singles out Indian civilisation as not only unique and therefore needs to be given much better weightage in attention and detail, but also as the torch-bearer of future mankind, for in India lie all the secrets of a continuing and perpetually renewing civilisation.

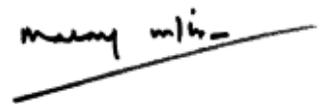
The focus on nature, climate, renewable energy, love for flora and fauna along with fellow humans have given India a distinctive edge over other nations scrambling for space in the negotiating tables. These had all been there since the Vedic times and we just have to renew them afresh for the world's reaffirmation. Vedanta, that body of knowledge, passed on to us by our ancient preceptors has value and essentiality for the contemporary world. In this, India comes out alive and forever enlivens herself. Those words, as Tagore has written so admirably, come out therefore from the 'depths of truth' and are meant for the benefit of all mankind.

The Gandhi School in Pecs observed the Gandhi Martyrdom Day in its customary manner by having a day of devotional songs (in Hungarian) dear to Gandhiji. The children also took part in a number of activities culminating in a programme in the India room, decorated with artefacts from India. The school's uniqueness is that it has 97% of the students on its rolls belonging to the marginalized Roma (Boyash) community of southern Hungary, in and around Pecs and has been performing exceedingly well at the national level, thus dispelling notions of any kind of physical or mental inadequacies in the Roma children. Singing bhajans loved by the Mahatma, memorising his famous quotations to be observed in life, the students were not only rendering paen to one of the most important figures of contemporary world history who had given a certain sense of self-esteem to the marginalized classes, but also increasing their social stakes in a highly competitive, yet globalizing society. The Mahatma's passing away on this day at the hands of a Hindu ascetic, was one of the greatest ironies of India's political history of the 20th century. But as historian and Gandhi scholar Makarand Parajmpe in his book on 'The Death and Afterlife of Mahatma Gandhi' brilliantly observes, "Gandhi's self-killed martyrdom was an offering, as he himself put it, a last and desperate jagna-sacrifice, oblation, sacred rite-to save India... The Mahatma's martyrdom was a mighty and potent act of love-jihad-he died to stop hatred and brotherhood, he gave us life so that we would stop taking each others". Poignant words, embedded in the wishes for the good of humanity, at large.

In starting the year with meditation and Yoga, discoursing on Vedanta and the great sage, Vivekananda who took it to the farthest corners of the world, bridging the East and West to bring peoples closer for all times, we have commenced on a high note. And with you, dear reader, as our companion in this journey, Amrit will trudge many a destination in its trajectory to a world of peace and understanding.

*Sabanau bhavatu, Sabanau bhunaktu,
Saba Vira Karava Vabai,
Tejaswina vadbhita mastu,
Maa vidh vidhisa vabai.*

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om.



Malay Mishra

Ambassador's talk at New Year Healing Meditation Day on 4 January 2015



Ambassador's talk on meditation

The healing meditation day was an opportunity to all beginners and advanced practitioners in Hungary to put aside the routine of everyday life for a day and give themselves completely to spiritual practice and the wellspring of peace and joy to celebrate the New Year in a special way. The day gave the floor for all the major spiritual organizations in Hungary to give spirit lifting lectures on various ways of meditation.

Ambassador's lecture on the importance of meditation and spiritual consciousness was the first block in the day and his words were warmly received by the 120 disciples present on the occasion. After the talk of Ambassador on Vedanta, representatives of different meditation groups held introductory meditation sessions for the visitors. First the Himalayan and Satyananda Tradition sang the Mahamrityunjaya Mantra, followed by the Dzogchen Community with the Healing Buddha meditation. After the tea break, Chakra Meditation was performed by the



Ms Anna Mezösi (East-West Health Centre) speaking



Audience preparing for the meditation

Shivananda Himalayan Yoga Tradition. The evening concluded with Healing Kriya Meditation by Yogananda Tradition, followed by discussions. ■

Vasant Panchami at Hindu Mandir on 24 January 2015

At the invitation of Hindu Mandir of Budapest, Ambassador attended the Vasant Panchami celebration at the Temple and gave a very informative talk on the tradition of the festival. Nearly 60 devotees attended the function.

As 'Diwali'—the festival of lights—is to Lakshmi, goddess of wealth and prosperity, and 'Navaratri' is to Durga, goddess of power and valor, Vasant Panchami is to



LEFT: Ambassador's talk on Vasant Panchami

RIGHT: Ambassador with Mr Ervin Nagy, head of Hindu Mandir

Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge every year on the 5th day or and arts. This festival is celebrated 'Panchami' of the bright fortnight of

the lunar month of Magha, which falls during January-February. 'Vasant' comes from the word 'spring' as this festival heralds the beginning of the spring season.

The most significant aspect of Vasant Panchami is that it is also the most auspicious day to begin one's education.

Pre-school children are given their first lesson in reading and writing on this day. It is also a great day to inaugurate training institutes and new schools—a trend made famous by the renowned Indian educationist Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya (1861-1946), who founded the Banaras Hindu University on Vasant Panchami day in 1916. ■

6th HOMs' Conference (6-10 February 2015)

The 6th HOMs' Conference was held from 6 – 10 February 2015 on the theme "Diplomacy for Development: New Vision, New Vigour". This time the format of the Conference was very different from the previous ones. The 6-day event was marked by many first time sessions and kept all the participating Ambassadors glued till the very end. Bearing the imprints of the vision of EAM, Smt. Sushma Swaraj and dynamism of the new Foreign Secretary, Dr. S. Jaishankar, proceedings of the session were conducted remarkably well.

While the first day i.e. 6th February was meant for pre-conference consultations with the opening address by EAM and session on Improving Services and Best Practices on Good Governance, the afternoon sessions were devoted to India's campaign for membership of UNSC and a comprehensive overview on the changing context of India's global engagement. In the evening, India's cultural diplomacy was talked by several specialists from Cultural Foundations of Japan, Spain and India. At the end, Dr. Pushpesh Pant from JNU gave his thoughts on Developing Indian Idioms and Thoughts in Diplomacy which was later elaborated by EAM in her valedictory address.

The actual conference began on 7th February with an inspirational address by PM, Shri Narendra Modi who called on all Ambassadors to represent the glory of the culture and civilization of India and speak from a



Prime Minister Mr Narendra Modi delivering his address at Heads of Mission Conference, in New Delhi on February 07, 2015. The Union Minister for External Affairs and Overseas Indian Affairs, Ms Sushma Swaraj and the Minister of State for Statistics and Programme Implementation (I/C), External Affairs and Overseas Indian Affairs, General (Retd.) V.K. Singh are also seen

position of strength. No longer should we be mere participants in global negotiations and the dialogue process but lead the debates as well, he said. The PM particularly emphasised on the ongoing dialogue on climate change as well as WTO discussions. He focussed a lot of his attention on digital diplomacy and the role of social media in the practice of diplomacy.

The 2nd day was also characterised by a working lunch with the two most important industry bodies – FICCI and CII where the 'Make in India' theme, earlier elaborated by the PM,

was taken up extensively. Following two other sessions i.e. expectations from Missions and issues and challenges pertaining to migrant labour, Ambassadors went on to call on the Hon'ble Vice President.

The 3rd day began with Africa and India's economic interests abroad with a key note address by Shri Arvind Subramanian, Chief Economic Advisor. Meanwhile Ambassadors had an opportunity to call on the Hon'ble President in the Rashtrapati Bhavan, where they were treated to an invigorating address by Rashtrapatiiji. Besides there were



The President Mr Pranab Mukherjee meeting the delegates of Sixth Annual Heads of Mission Conference, at Rashtrapati Bhavan, in New Delhi on February 08, 2015. Union Minister for External Affairs and Overseas Indian Affairs, Ms Sushma Swaraj is also seen

sessions on India's economic interests abroad as well on India's neighbours. The day concluded with Vibrant Gujarat presentation over dinner hosted by the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Gujarat. 9th February was taken up with sessions on use of Web-Interface and Social Media and a very useful session, the first time ever with top CEOs of the industry discussing the role of Missions in activating economic diplomacy. The afternoon was devoted to sessions on 'Act East' and India's North-East.

The last day began with New Development Initiatives with a key-note address by Shri Arvind Panagariya, Vice Chairman, NITI Aayog and went on to engage States in a brilliant presentation by Joint Secretary (States) followed by discussions with Chief Secretaries of Telangana and Finance Secretary concluding with Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh giving a dynamic presentation on his State. The post-lunch period was marked by yet another unique session, this time an address by eminent spiritual Guru, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, and Founder of Art of Living (a special feature on the session is on page 30-31). Sri Sri discussed the role of

spirituality and how diplomats could assist in promoting spiritual and civilizational India, in a highly motivated and interactive session. Secretary (Ayush), joined by DG (ICCR), spoke on the modalities for the forthcoming International Day of Yoga on 21st June to be observed by all Missions. The penultimate session was addressed by Shri Prakash Javadekar, MOS(IC) for Environment, Forest and Climate Change on 'Collaboration in Solar Energy'.

The concluding session discussed the Conference outcomes and recommendations and was charged with a lot of interaction between the panel and the participants following EAM's energetic valedictory address summarising the background, goals and outcomes of the six-day HOMs' Conference. By all accounts, the Conference turned out to be a very productive event which could lead to substantial improvement in the role of Missions in promoting pro-active diplomacy in the globalized multi-polar world of today. Ambassador was one among the 120 Ambassadors who attended the Conference. ■

Visit of Pharmexcil Business Delegation to Hungary 15-18 February 2015



LEFT: Capsules displayed at the B2B meeting, Embassy of India.
CENTER & RIGHT: B2B meeting on 16th February at Embassy of India

A 23-member Pharmaceutical Export Promotion Council (Pharmexcil) Business Delegation consisting of 17 Pharmaceutical and 5 Ayurveda firms visited Hungary from 15-18 February 2015. The main objective of the visit was to strengthen bilateral relations between India and Hungary in the field of pharmaceuticals including Ayurveda and herbal medicines.



LEFT: Ambassador speaking at Debrecen Chamber of Commerce and Industry.
RIGHT: The Delegation in Debrecen (Introduction to Atomki)

The delegation interacted with Hungarian business people, prominent organizations dealing in manufacture and regulatory standards as per EU norms and important institutions. They had fruitful B2B meetings on the 16th February in the Cultural Centre of the Embassy with prominent Pharma companies of Hungary. The event was attended by approximately 80 representatives of pharmaceutical products manufacturers and distributors in Hungary. The next day the delegation visited the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Hajdú-Bihar in Debrecen. The interaction was highly informative with several presentations by Dr. László Papp, Mayor of Debrecen, Dr. Zoltán Szilvássy, Rector of the University of Debrecen and also President of the Pharmapolis Cluster, Mr. Ferenc Miklóssy, President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Ambassador and Ms. Roja Rani, Assistant Regional Director of Pharmexcil & Leader of the Delegation, also spoke on the occasion. There were approximately 70 attendants



LEFT: At the Foreign Ministry. **RIGHT:** At the Ministry of Human Resources

at the Business Meeting including Ambassador and the members of Pharmexcil Delegation. Prof Baghel, who has recently taken up the chair of Ayurveda in Debrecen University, was also in attendance.

several renowned as well as local media took part and held individual interviews with Ambassador and Prof. Szilvássy. The subsequent visit of the delegation to the Nuclear Research Institute of Hungarian Academy of Sciences (ATOMKI) with relation to use of nuclear sciences in pharmaceutical fields was extremely interesting.

A Press Conference was later held with the participation of Mayor of Debrecen and President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, in which

On the concluding day of the visit,

Mrs. Roja Rani and two other members of the delegation accompanied Ambassador and Commercial Representative of the Mission to an interactive meeting with Dr. László Szabó, Honorable Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (who holds previous experience of having worked in the Pharma industry). The Minister assured the delegation of extending all possible cooperation in enhancing bilateral

relations between the two countries in the pharmaceutical sector. The rest of the delegation visited the largest pharma co. of Hungary, Richter Gideon which has a presence in India with an investment of US \$ 25 million.

The delegation's visit, on its first Central European leg, was deemed a success with several positive outcomes anticipated. ■

BOSNIA DIARY

By Malay Mishra

My diary this time will remain largely *noir et lumiere* (dark and bright) for reasons which I have not myself been able to fathom. The juxtaposition of the evil and the sublime, if not co-existence, in different times, places and contexts would make this small mass of land an extraordinary geography. In addition to the chequered history, of course.

Just when I begin to strain my nerves, writing about my reflections on Srebrenica, the playground of the devil, over 3 fateful days of July in 1995, which I had the chance to visit during my last foray into the country, I am reminded that India is going to be the focus country in the Sarajevo Winter festival which has already begun in early February, and will be played out over its 7- week course.

We shall then bring in a panoply of activities to highlight the civilizational strengths of India's heritage on the soil of Sarajevo, the nation's capital not far from Srebrenica, which had been drenched with blood not so long ago, in the name of ethnic cleansing. And Srebrenica had made its dreadful place in history, perhaps equal in intensity to the death camps of Nazi Germany which had exterminated millions. Here about eight thousand lives were wiped off in broad daylight, of young adults and grown ups, segregated systematically from the women along with their babies, the old and infirm, and shot at point blank range in pogrom style.

Could territorial aggrandisement have been a motive to make the Drina, flowing in such majesty, a part of greater Serbia, instead of a riparian river, I shudder to think. Watching the video of live footage of the 3-day carnage which the Director of the Cemetery and Information Centre played for me so stoically, was an act of revulsion, the most heinous killings that one could have encountered in modern times, even after the Great Powers had resolved on the killing fields of Auschwitz and Dachau not to allow mass killings on European soil. And today it is a fact, former Bosnian Serb leaders Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic stand trial in the International Criminal Tribunal of former

Yugoslavia (also called the Hague Tribunal) for war crimes, a theatre which has lasted some 22 years already with indictment of some 161 persons for being directly or indirectly responsible for the massacres of about 100,000 as officially stated, only in Bosnia & Herzegovina. The verdicts in the case of these war criminals may be close to fruition, but the process will not end here. For the history of the Balkans, following the dismemberment of Yugoslavia has been bloodied for ever.

Now the people of Sarajevo, or more so, of the country, await the oft-discussed visit of Pope Francis on the 6th June to take part in the commemoration of the beginning of the First World War, to pray for peace and brotherhood, inter-religious dialogue and friendship. What balm to shattered nerves will that bring when families on both sides of the ethnic divide, the Bosniak Muslims, the Serb Orthodox Christians and the Croat Catholics, have been decimated for ever, when Mostar, the capital of Herzegovina province, remains the most divided city of Europe? Those that have survived from the vestiges of that cruel past are haunted for ever with their shattered lives.

But, long before June, comes the part of India to project her strengths and eternal attributes during the course of the Winter Festival in mid-March in Sarajevo, the newly ordained ground of peace, or rather a quest for it, And we bring Yoga and Ayurveda, a photo exhibition on Eternal India, a dialogue of cultures and an Indian classical music rendition.

Now is there any confusion in the deroulement of events, or they fall in place, justified by providence, to have so happened. Our challenge, indeed the challenge of humanity, would then be to see that such providential deformities do not break the eternal pattern of creation. That man (and woman alike), despite the differences of colour, religion, ethnicity, language and context continues to love and empathise with fellow men and in the process moves solidly towards peace and brotherhood. ■

—The author has concurrent charge of Bosnia & Herzegovina

Swami Vivekananda in the National Consciousness of India: Regeneration of Vedantic Thought in the World

By Malay Mishra

*Utthisthata, Jagrata,
Prapya Varaha Nibodhata*

Arise, Awake and Rest not until the goal is reached.

The eternal call of the Master

The clarion call of the greatest Vedantic teacher of modern times had echoed loud and clear at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago over 120 years ago and is still the biggest panacea for the world at large. Then, the most pressing goal could have been the regeneration of faith in Man and a relook at Eastern, nay Indian, values; battling centuries-old superstitions, rituals, archaic beliefs and dogmas which had putrefied the society as nothing ever. In the immediate Indian context, it could also be a call for every Indian to awake to the sense of nationalism and galvanize for freedom. The call, which had stirred hearts and minds of millions leading them fearlessly to the battlefield of Swaraj, is still echoing in the national consciousness of multitude of Indians in the country and beyond, to make secular nationalism an article of faith, service to the 'Daridra Narayan', the credo of Dharma and awaken in oneself the sense of patriotism and duty, possessed with the mission of Vedanta.

I am not any scholar of Vedanta, just a foot soldier who uses Vedanta both as a shield as well as a sword, shield against terrible injustices meted out in the name of religion and sword to battle against all obstructionist and fanatical ideas which seem to be gaining ground in present day society.

Childhood experiences

I had my first acquaintance with Swami Vivekananda as a child of ten. Inquisitive as I was in that age, I used to run to the nearby Ramakrishna Mission library and reading room in my home town of Puri, to read English newspapers. The Ramakrishna Mission was the only place where the Calcutta Statesman was found. While reading news and stories happening in and around the country, the enormous body of literature of Shri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda opened up a new world before me. And I was initiated into the vast world of the two illustrious sons of India who had forged between themselves a unique master-disciple relationship which, in its dedication and passion, stands out as a living example for all mankind.

Inspiration of the Master

The lofty thoughts and vision of Swami Vivekananda inspired by his Master ring the pages of the eight volumes of his collected works. A man downcast in spirit will find instant succour and inspiration by imbibing the pages of those inspired volumes, more so in implementing them in his or her own life. Defining the true meaning of a 'universal religion' for the common man, simplifying the Shastras' esoteric remoteness and bringing him close to his duties and responsibilities was perhaps Swami Vivekananda's greatest contribution to mankind. A spiritual giant on whom so much is written, said and believed, a person despite having lived a short life on this earth played such a tremendous role in rejuvenating Indian society, inspiring India's national leaders, and rebranding India in the spiritual lexicon of the West was worthy of several lifetimes by virtue of his signal contribution to the growth of Indian nationalism and spiritual regeneration. Re-interpreting Hinduism in his time, hitherto a closed concept for a few western Indologists, Swami Vivekananda played a unique role in the pantheon of Indian religious leaders. He brought to his ministry, catholicity and intensity which impacted on the global firmament in rousing soul-consciousness to its most practical.

Strength and vigour ran in Swamiji's words, his vision highlighting creative pursuits for all human beings making them complete individuals. Vedanta, as re-defined by Swami Vivekananda stood out for 'Karma', making the person conscious of both his spiritual as well as material vocation in life.

In the course of my own life, I have evoked some of those ideas again and again and they have given me immense strength. The feeling that we are all children of immortality, ('Amritasya Putra') that the Atman does not perish unlike the cage in which it rests for a short while, that man comes to this world with an infinite purpose to serve humanity as a true 'Karmayogi' without paying any heed to the fruits of his action, that it is important to feed the hungry man first before teaching him religion, were revolutionary thoughts for those times, as they are now as well. Nourishing the malnourished, feeding the hungry and imparting education and health to the society at large are the true elements of religion, thundered Swamiji during his travels throughout the length and

breadth of India and to the West (hardly for 3 years – 1899-1902). These have been taken over by the Ramakrishna Mission and Ramakrishna Math – unique institutions in that they give primacy to societal development over spiritual upliftment.

Swamiji's words drip in nationalistic fervour and can be the standard flag bearer for an inspired nation and help in spiritual regeneration flowing out of a correct knowledge and understanding of Hinduism

Emergence of a new India

Today many of our leaders regularly invoke Swami Vivekananda in spirit, thought and action, and rightly so. Vivekananda came as a pioneer for a new India. He ceaselessly fought for the freedom of the spirit and preached that with the loftiness and temperament which India had displayed throughout her history. With political freedom not far away, he was rather more concerned about the new India that will emerge, how the society would address the issue of economic and social regeneration, how people could understand and embrace each other's views and thoughts and work for a united Bharat. India with its century-old civilizational history, carrying the burden of thousands of years of criss-crossing of time and adventures, has seen plunder, intrigue and battles for territory, colonization and the like, yet has never lost her soul.

The uniqueness of Swami Vivekananda's vision was in combining spiritual strength with social justice, thus his sermons were practical, yet at the same time greatly inspirational. Today Vedanta societies and Ramakrishna Missions are seen all over the world, rendering yeoman service to the society. They are engaged not only in spiritual teachings and practices but also provide excellent all-rounded education including special benefits to the under-privileged and marginalized, healthcare facilities to the needy, reaching out to people in disaster-struck situations. Swami Vivekananda's mission has come a long way. The spirit of Service, Seva, as laid down by Swamiji, was a concrete aspiration of the Ramakrishna Mission to fulfil its destiny in the cause of upliftment of the society, a prophetic observance made by Swamiji as a 'Parivrajaka'.

There is a need today for a renewed understanding of Swami Vivekananda and the truth he stood for. Like his contemporary Rabindranath Tagore, he was one of the greatest links between the Orient and the Occident, a peripatetic traveller collecting funds for upkeep of his mission, while back home he was sharing the teachings of the Dharma order in the highest tradition of Vedanta to groups of earnest seekers in the countries of the Western world.

Need for re-appraisal of Swami Vivekananda's teachings

and complete overhaul of a mindset which has dogmatized Hinduism, thus allowing evils to creep in, leading to its decadence

The universe as one family: conditioning for social transformation

In Vivekananda's world, there was no such problem of globalization, as seen in the contemporary context, no global terrorism, climate change, fear of pandemic. No such concentrated poverty of nearly half the global population had as yet started building itself to present its awful visage to mankind. To apply to effectively address these problems would require a gigantic exercise today. We need countless Vivekanandas in India and overseas charged with the mission of transformation and bringing justice all over the planet. There is need for a giant transformation which will be led by ideas of the highest spiritual order. To instil courage and confidence in humanity to trace the right path towards preservation and not annihilation.

"Vasudaiva Kutumbakam", the very first precept of Vedanta is to regard the universe as one family, thus aiming at unity of the human being with nature and all living creatures, a lofty thought indeed. We have to kindle the light of knowledge so that we recognise our own self - worth before we respect the humanity around and ourselves as an integral part of that. Thus we move to the level of the society so that we become an instrument of mass transformation. Swami Vivekananda has taught us to have faith in ourselves, to understand our own worth first before we understand the value of others and therefore to perceive the external manifestations of life whose values are getting systematically eroded. Today, we see utter decline of the basic social and human norms of behaviour where the debased nature of man numbs the senses. What can Vedanta do under these circumstances? Know thy true self, the Upanishads proclaim, for which we need to delve within.

Is there a hope at all? Yes, Swamiji would say

The practical application of Vedanta

Swami Vivekananda had called upon us to come out of our comfortable niche and strive for changes in the society in every way possible. That, in fact, is the spirit of Vedanta which we can apply individually and collectively. Vedanta teaches us the spirit of fearlessness (Abhaya), to stand resolute. In many of his discourses in the West as well as in India, the message was unambiguous. He was, as if, delivering the same message as Lord Krishna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. We however need to be an Arjuna to absorb that message to take us forward in the battlefield of life. That is not only our Dharma, but Karma as well. Since we all possess the spark of divinity in equal measure what prevents us to reach that realization? That,

indeed, is the transformative force, not only for ourselves, but for the society at large as we move higher in the plane of consciousness, as spiritualized beings.

“Ekam sat, viprah vahudha badanti”, Truth is one, the wise call it by different names. Yet another lofty Vedantic utterance from the Rigveda, in the context of mankind moving through different paths to ultimately discover the same truth. Had not the great master Sri Ramakrishna in his own lifetime proved the same, perhaps mocking at the skin-deep differences which we all tend to get stuck to. The simple priest of Dakshineswar had uttered the most fundamental of truths of Vedanta, on which the realization of the Self is based, the search and attainment of the final destination which is true for all, the Supreme Truth.

As all rivers coming from different sources lead themselves towards and merge in the same Ocean, Swami Vivekananda, in his Chicago address, declared that Hinduism believed in universal acceptance, not just tolerance but accepting all faiths and beliefs as equally true and embracing all. Thus it is easy to see Hinduism through the optic of Vedanta as an inclusive religion and there is no need for conversion. A true Hindu is eternally convinced of his own faith as he is of others, as they essentially espouse the same. Thus bigotry, communalism, fanaticism and radicalism, which arise out of superficial disputes arising from a wrong understanding of religion that plagues modern day society, can be addressed and we can lead ourselves towards a better future which is well in the realm of possibility.

The message of Vedanta has indeed spread far and wide, building relationships and associations, thanks to the significant efforts of Swamiji and his illustrious successors. Yet a great deal still remains to be done. I am convinced; a Vedantist can find a solution to every problem that besets mankind today. But for that a global campaign of Vedanta needs to be ushered in the four corners of the world. The message of Vedanta should spread like wildfire in tune with the rapidly moving times. How?

Every Vedantist should carry the torch of truth high as a panacea for a better future, as an effective and feasible transformative process. If I am convinced and can convince a few others around me, so can others. Thus it will, and should, engulf the world as a large spiritual tsunami. I am not being overtly ambitious or vain in such aspiration. It is my conviction that it is possible to bring hearts and souls together on one common platform, that of Vedanta. For this we need to fully understand the spirit of Vedanta and let that guide us with firmness of mind and strength of will.

The Self and the Cosmic whole: awareness of the complete

Sanatana Dharma has a unique synchronizing capacity to bring together a myriad faiths and beliefs, if properly explained and followed through. Not by disturbing the fragile inter-faith balance delicately nurtured, nor indulging in iconoclastic blasting of images and ideologies where every action could have an equal and opposite reaction; speaking of a synthesis between the tiniest particle in the Atman and the highest godhead in the Brahman in the process of realization of the Self. The essential point is of an oneness in cosmic consciousness to discover the true nature of the human soul, Sat- Chit- Ananda. The same energy present in the Atman is also present in the depths of the galaxy breaking down the superficial differences between science and religion, one reaching out into the structure of the outer cosmos and the other into the interiors of the human psyche. The highest denomination of the Indian mind could carry syncretic virtues for a global civilization which could have the propensity to hold together the best traditions of national cultures into a glowing and harmonious balance. It is all in our hands to transform the world, or perish with it.

A lot still remains to be done. It is not only the thoughts which could be expected to change the world but actions which flow out of those. Every action of the human being should be predicated on a rightful interpretation of the Vedanta for the usage of all spiritual leaders and for the common good of mankind as indeed a common universal heritage. Our spiritual leadership, imbued with the true meaning of Vedanta, should give the direction for a better world. And it is possible, with no dearth of spiritual leaders of all faiths in today's society marching hand in hand, in thoughts as well as in actions.

Swami Vivekananda with his enormous strength and conviction traversed the land planting seeds on both Western as well as Indian soil. We now need to see those seeds germinate into actions. Swamiji called upon all to understand the true values of Vedanta, imbibed by its sublime principles, providing leadership to the world at large. Thus no more shall we consider ourselves in anyway inferior, nor shall we have feelings of fear of an uncertain future. The clarity of Truth, the purpose of life and the adventure to transform the world is on the horizon for us. ■

—The author, a career diplomat, has taken to a life of spiritual discipline for better management and knowledge dissemination as a transformative tool for humanity. He has recently set up the Vedic Society of Hungary in the Indian Embassy, Budapest, the first such Centre to be established in Europe. He delivered this address extempore as the Foundation Day Oration of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute for Culture on 29 January 2015, the only diplomat to be so honoured ever. Links on www.indianembassy.hu

Foundation Day Oration

A moment untouched in time: Self-introspection

By Malay Mishra



One leads to the other, both are integrally linked, divinity in action and divinity manifested in consciousness, I explained to a thousand-plus audience packed in the majestic Vivekananda Hall of the Institute. The event was the 77th Foundation Day of RMIC – truly memorable with an assortment of senior monks, junior students, groups of housewives, school children, senior citizens, judges, bureaucrats, teachers; a potpourri of professions, backgrounds, status with varying degrees of spirituality. Yet when I started to say that consciousness resided in all, veritably of all our understanding, awareness of life around and role in the society, I found a communion of thoughts, between me and the audience who were thoroughly engrossed and I dare say, impressed with my forthrightness to speak on Vedanta so lucidly, in an instant.

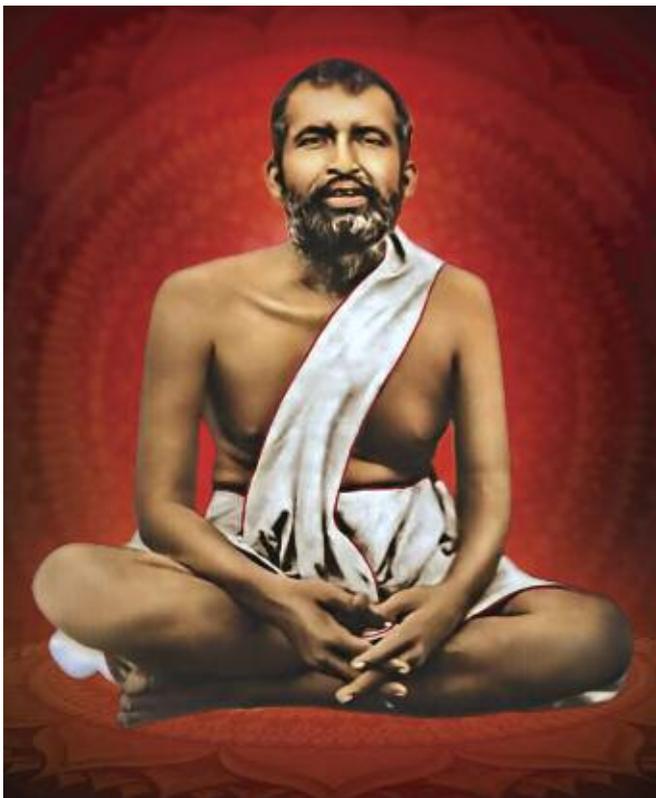
In the next thirty minutes, extremely limited as it was, thoughts tumbled out as if like an outburst of intensity raging within. I had been totally consumed by the fire of Vedanta which Swami Vivekananda had lit in me since my childhood. As I was a child of ten, I used to run to the Ramakrishna Mission Library to read the English daily and in the process get into the wonderful world of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

Then, even with a curious and reasonably sharp mind, I had not quite understood the dynamics of Swamiji's thoughts nor the mystic spell he was to cast on me, passing on the legacy of his Guru, the Saint of Dakshineswar in the most marvellous way. And I had been swept into the current that would remain forever a living energy, caressing my mind, and more

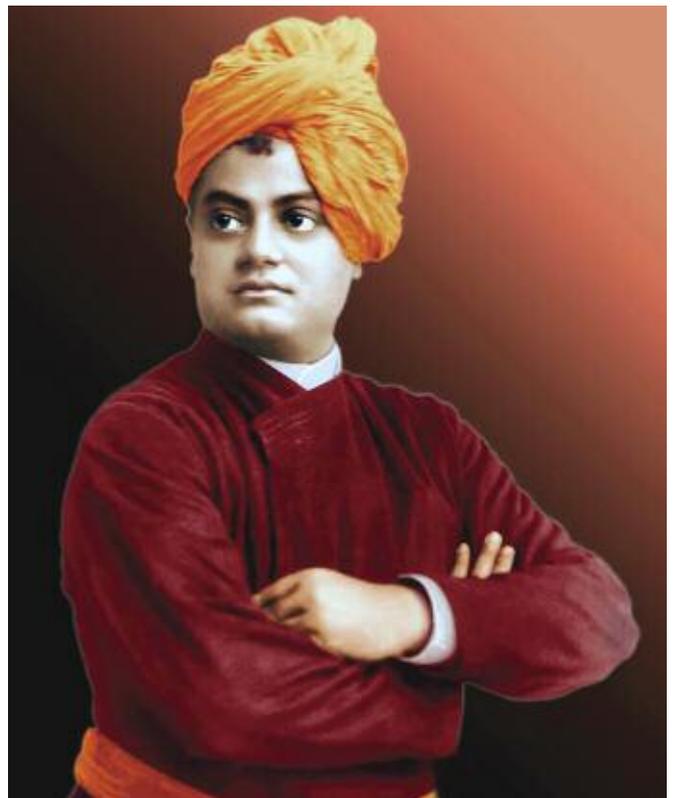
importantly, my heart. The emotions of love, compassion, empathy which came naturally to Swamiji, for the poor, the dispossessed, for the wretched of the earth, were etched strong in me. And I have always sensed an inexplicable joy whenever my heart has leapt out in compassion for a poor, undernourished soul, the child of God, the wretched of the earth no doubt, but the fruit of the earth as well, whom the earth having begetted was bound to nourish and nurture.

And now, with the earth having failed to undertake her responsibilities, even with the passage of 152 years since Swamiji appeared on this earth, the wretched still remain. Should we not therefore, intelligent, capable, evolved beings try to take her place, by owning to some bit our social responsibility? The task of social and economic regeneration has not been easy, not in a country like ours, where danger lurks from every possible corner, where problems sprout up from the soil more than hayflower and difficulties present how endemic and ubiquitous they could be, even more than dangerous pandemics. Yet things are taken so very casually. And we walk past, as if they would be fixed by a God in Heaven. Oh, what insult, Vivekananda would have cried, to ignore the God amidst us, the divinity which is immanent, embedded in each of us and take them as not worth the salt of which we are all composed in equal measure.

The two most important things I have personally imbibed from Swamiji's life and teachings, as I impressed upon the audience, was Karma in Dharma, the sense of duty as the highest good of humankind and therefore the most befitting way and value of life, and two, the pride and respect that he



Sri Ramakrishna



Swami Vivekananda

instilled in me about my motherland, the urge to know her immense infinite inexhaustible wealth, in her civilizational spread. For never, during her deepest travails, has India lost her soul. And thus the soul-force of her innate strength has remained intact, much to the awe and occasional disdain of the Western world whose development has long since outlived their materialistic prowess and who was now looking at the East for spiritual comfort and succour. Armed with the weapon of Vedanta, therefore, we have to challenge the world, first by engaging in a dialogue of civilizations and then applying this wonderful panacea to every global and transnational disease that afflicts mankind, as I forcefully remarked and I saw the entire audience join me in silent approbation. Vedanta was the only cure for all that has reared its ugly head in this highly globalized society of today. And we, the foot-soldiers of Vedanta have to take upon ourselves the task to correctly understand, assess, interpret and apply to the situations in the contexts in which they appear.

When I made my intentions clear, of offering my services to the cause of promoting the ideas of Vedanta to see a better world after my release from the bondage of serving the country as a dutiful diplomat, loud applause reverberated with Swami Suparnananda himself, my kind host, leading the chorus. Later in the evening, on the dining table, Swamiji nudged me to recall that moment when the entire audience was thrilled to know my intentions of being at the service of the Ramakrishna Mission. I realized then that my coming here, to the RMIC as the Foundation Day Orator, was all part

of my Karma, perhaps as part of the social good to which we are all entitled and normatively beholden to.

The crowd surged to meet me after the lecture. They came from all over, surrounded me with loving appreciation, gentle queries and innocent requests for signing my name on the little booklet which the RMIC had released containing my text though I had liberally departed from it during the course of my extempore address. Many among them felt that I had broken new ground by interpreting Vedanta in such simple, clear and forthright manner, some even said how they were so greatly impressed with what I said that they had made elaborate notes and were asking me further to attest to what they had inscribed. One even said that she broke down into tears on hearing my exposition on Swami Vivekananda's life-long message of love and compassion. A little girl came up to inquire my phone number so that she could talk to me. Many took my e-mail to convey their feelings on the lecture and many said they would definitely like to see and hear me again.

Touching, delightful moments, indelible in my heart, as I close my thoughts for the day. Tomorrow I visit Swami Vivekananda's ancestral home in Simula, yet another dream to be lived transcending this ontological plane to a higher level of consciousness. ■

—Composed on the night of 29th January, soon after the oration

FROM A STUDENT OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

By Anand Vaidya Nateshan

The first thought that comes to my mind when I think about Swami Vivekananda is his pride and patriotism for India. Swamiji is the greatest of the great patriots who were born on Indian soil. His love for his compatriots and vision for India's social progress is exemplary. Mahatma Gandhi said that after reading the works of Swamiji, his love for India has increased a thousand fold; such was the intensity of Swamiji's thoughts and teaching for the improvement of India. Swamiji's only dream was a developed India, self-reliant India and an India where women received utmost respect and enjoyed complete security and Independence. His wish was to see India regain her lost glory of being the role model of a traditional, spiritual, united, and an intellectual civilization. He strived to make India the leading nation in every aspect.



We celebrate Swamiji's birthday as 'Youth Day', and it is indeed interesting to know how it came to be so. The story behind this is when UNO decided to observe 1984 as Youth Year, the Government of India also decided to do the same. The then Prime minister late Smt. Indira Gandhi appointed a committee to decide the youth icon to inspire the Indian youth. Swami Vivekananda shone out as the unanimous choice to be the only personality for the youth icon.

The life of Swami Vivekananda was the life of an ideal youth as he possessed sterling qualities. He was a great orator, a great poet, singer, social reformer, patriot, and above all, a great spiritual leader of the world. Many eminent personalities have adopted Swamiji as their role model and drawn inspiration from his teachings and works. Bill Gates, the eminent computer professional, once came to Kolkata. Reporters asked him why he chose to visit Kolkata. He replied, "I have come to pay respects at the birthplace of Swami Vivekananda. Swami Vivekananda is an inspiration in my life! Not only that, every night before going to bed, I read 2-3 pages of The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda!"

Today India has no dearth of intellectuals, entrepreneurs, investors and financial giants, but the only thing they lack is the thought process to pool all these for the betterment of the country. Swamiji's teachings and message are more relevant today as India needs her youth power to help her realize her true power.

I simply stare at his poster in my room every night, his eternal message inscribed on it, "Stand up, be bold and express the divinity within you" with a yearning to measure up to his admonishment, some day. ■

—The writer is a Grade-10 student at the American School, Budapest. The essay has been written by him as part of an essay competition to mark the 152nd birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda

Practical Vedanta as the path of the future

By Melinda Irtl

The aim of this short article is not to introduce or talk about Vedanta in depth, but to enlighten the relevance and importance of this in general.

But...! What is Vedanta at all? It is considered to be one of the classical Indian sat-kaarya vaada darshanas (aatma-vaada philosophy) with several different branches, schools, guru param-paraa (from Aadi Shankaraachaarya, Madhvaachaarya, Raamaanuja etc.) . What next?

Perhaps, it is good to start to explore ideas from the word “Vedanta” itself and say that it’s root is derived from a Sanskrit verb: “vid” means “to know”, “knowledge”. This is also the root to understand what the Vedas are ...what is their core subject, what is their aim... So, what to know? The most existential questions in the Vedic scriptures are the followings:

- Who am I?
- What is this universe?
- What is my relation with this universe?

The second step to come closer to the subject of Vedanta is to see the two joining words as “veda-anta”, as often translated “the end of the Vedas”. It has again several different interpretations. Without questioning all of these, we can say the Sanskrit term “anta” could indicate simply the three main traditional texts called Prasthaana Traya (Upanishads, Bhagavad Giita, Brahma Suutra and their commentaries) and how they closely relate to the latest branches of the Vedic scriptures, called Upanishadic part (the other branches are samhita, brahmana, aranyaka).

Since it is not my aim to define the entire system or darshana here, in brief we can say that it is much better to consider Vedanta as the essence of the Vedic knowledge than merely a dry philosophical system. Also it is worth to think about that it is not “the end of something” at all, but better to say it is “the starting point of our real understanding about the reality”.

4 main aphorisms of Vedanta (mahavakyas)

- Prajnanam Brahman (Definition) – Brahman is Consciousness
- Tat tvam asi (Instruction) – You are that
- Ayam Aatman Brahman (Contemplation) – This



Main Vedantic Schools

- Advaita
- Vishista Advaita
- Dvaita Vedanta
- Shakti Vishista Advaita
- Shuddha Advaita
- Dvaita Advaita
- Bheda Abheda
- Achintya Bheda Abheda



(individual being) is same as that (Brahman Universal being)

- Aham Brahmaasmi (Experience) – I am Brahman (Universal being)

Why to talk about it in our era, what is the relevance of it? All kinds of philosophy become useful if it based on experience and it has practical application. In the same way “dry Vedanta” must become living one in everyday lifehere and now.

Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda gave good example to us by teach and showing (!!!) how One can think on God, on the Universal being or the Reality, during all kinds of activities of life, such as eating, walking, moving, talking, sleeping...this is called true religion by them (or we can say „meaningful philosophy”).

It sounds difficult for some or idealistic for some others but it is not far away at all, as simply we keep remembering the basic teachings such as “aham brahman asmi (I’m Brahman), tat tvam asi (that is you), brahma satya jagat mithya (Brahma alone is real, the world is illusory)”, the mahavakyas.

Moreover, as Swami Vivekananda says about the Vedanta: “It is hoped to keep it free from all superstitions and weakening contaminations. Here will be taught and practised nothing but the Doctrine of Unity, pure and simple; ...in

entire sympathy with all other systems...”! These thoughts give direct support to establish the acceptance, tolerance and open-mindedness in all of us regardless of religion, caste, political orientation and so on.

Vivekananda also highlighted some other important aspects of practical approach of Vedanta 150 years before (yet, they are still very fresh today): “In our country we go down on our knees before the man who reads the Vedas and we do not care for the man who is studying physics, that is superstition, it is not Vedanta at all. It is utter materialism. With god every knowledge is sacred. Knowledge is God. Infinite knowledge abides within everyone in the fullest measure.”

Where only the “inward-looking” and “spiritual-individualists” are preaching the values of a particular philosophy it will be easily neglected by the public. Therefore we should take responsibility to change the ego centered, selfish-motivation towards personal enlightenment or freedom from bondage and move on the spiritual path, for the welfare of all living beings in this world. Hence it is also a must to clarify our intentions in every moment in our life! Even if we are Christians, Muslims, Jews or Buddhists, there is a need to practise empathy, tolerance, patience, service related attitude, non-violence, truthfulness and so on...the values based on the universal ethical and moral thoughts .

If individuals are keen to keep up their spiritual practice and apply the teachings in their personal life (no matter even if they are politicians, school teachers, doctors or scientists), then it could change the entire environment, as it would start to generate political peace, economic fair play in business, social (moral, ethical, spiritual education), environmental (responsible, ecological way of thinking) effects all around the world.

For all of this practical reasons mentioned, Ambassador Malay Mishra has started to work actively in sharing Vedantic thoughts and values with the Hungarian people at large.

The first few steps in this noble process were the lecture series held in the Amrita Sher-Gil Indian Cultural center called Talk series of Indian Philosophy and Vedanta (included 5 unique discussions started in July, 2014 and ended on 6th November), the “Vedic Conference” held on 18 September 2014 and last but not least the announcement of the setting up of the Vedic Society of Hungary!

What do we need more for the future?... interest, open mindedness and cooperation to continue this movement to support of the mental and spiritual growth of all of us... ■

—The author teaches Yoga at the ASCC. She has done extensive studies on Yoga and Shastras in India.

PERSONALITY

Alexander Csoma de Kőrös (1784-1842)

By Géza Bethlenfalvy

In 1822 a really important ‘traveller’ Alexander Csoma de Kőrös arrived in India, in Ladakh. His journey was a kind of ‘chance’, his real aim was to reach the land of the Jugars / Ujgurs in Central Asia, whom he thought to be the descendants of the Huns, - but he could not take the straight road in that direction, as he had no passport, and to travel through Russia one needed papers, including permission from the office of the Tsar.

Alexander Csoma de Kőrös was born in Transylvania (today part of Romania) in a poor family, belonging to the military nobles called Székely. According to the Székely traditions, they and all the Hungarians were



descendants of the Huns who fought both the Chinese (against whom the great Wall was built, and in whose chronicles they were called Hsiung-nu) - and the Roman Empire, under Attila, the great Hun conqueror of the 5th century. According to these legends, the centre of Attila’s empire was in Hungary and he himself has been buried in the bed of the river Tisza in three coffins made of iron, silver and gold. And according to Székely traditions, Csaba, a son of Attila led their ancestors to Transylvania, where they settled for good.

In the early 19th century, Hungary was just beginning to revive after a century of lethargy following the brutally suppressed freedom struggle of

the years 1704-1711. For a nation in the process of awakening, belief in a glorious past was far more important than even bread. Alexander Csoma de Kőrös decided to take upon himself the task of giving scientific reality to the legend - of establishing the linguistic and historic relationships of his nation, and of finding the offspring of the Huns, that is, the Hungarians who remained in Asia.

He did not have any government support for his undertaking, and could collect only an insufficient amount of money - but he had certain qualities which were to be of more use. He knew languages - Latin, Greek, German, Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Russian and English, which he was able to learn in the Bethlen College of Nagyenyed, and in Göttingen (Germany), where he had studied for two years with the help of a British scholarship. And even more valuable was his ability to walk long distances, to sleep without a bed or a blanket, to survive on almost any kind and quantity of food, and that he was able to value the company of poor and simple people.

Csoma de Kőrös started his journey in 1819, and walked through Romania. From there he reached Lebanon by ship, from where he walked to Damascus, Tehran, Bukhara, Kabul, Lahore and Srinagar, and then entered Central Asia by the Karakorum-road, but he was stopped at Leh, the capital of Ladakh, - as Tibet was closed to foreigners.

It was not the worst place for a philologist to be stopped. All around were ancient monasteries full of books, unknown and inaccessible until then. Their language had not yet been properly deciphered by European learning. When the English agent William Moorcroft offered Csoma de Kőrös some financial assistance, he happily agreed to stay and prepare a grammar and dictionary of the Tibetan language, hoping that in the books preserved in the monasteries he would find some records about those legendary heroes he had set out to learn about. He found something else, and it was not less fascinating. As he got more and more involved in the study of the language, a hidden treasure-trove of literary works opened up before the eyes of the astonished philologist: hundreds of unknown Sanskrit works, which had been forgotten many centuries before in India, but preserved in faithful Tibetan translations.

Originally, Csoma wanted to prepare the grammar and dictionary within a year, and then to continue his journey to Central Asia - but actually he was so fascinated by the richness of the literature he discovered, that the study of Buddhist literature and wisdom took up more than ten fruitful years of his life. The first eight years were spent in the windswept and snow-covered monasteries of Ladakh and Kinnaur. Here he had great luck, because he found a real guru who was able and ready to initiate him into all the important sources of knowledge, hidden not only from Europeans but

also from Indian learning. As Csoma reports, Sangye Phuntsog, a red-sect lama of Zanskar had professional knowledge of the whole of Tibetan literature. Besides teaching him through conveying the oral tradition, Sangye Phuntsog wrote small compendia for his pupil, and whenever he himself could not satisfy Csoma's curiosity, he asked other famous lama-scholars of Zanskar, among them was Kunga Choleg, the abbot of the Dzong-khul gumpa, to satisfy the 'firangi' (foreign) student. Some of these question-answer books are still preserved and used in the monasteries of Ladakh.

By 1831 Csoma completed his work, walked to Calcutta and presented the books and papers he had compiled to the Asiatic Society of Bengal, which was entrusted by the British-Indian Government to sponsor his research since 1824, by giving him a monthly stipend of fifty rupees. His two most famous books, the Dictionary and Grammar of the Tibetan Language were printed in 1834. All later works on Tibetan lexicography and grammar are based on these pioneering works. Both of them remained in use up to now, reprinted several times in India, England and in Hungary as well.

His other two great works are less known but are of a similar significance for Sanskrit and Buddhist studies. The first is an edition and English rendering of the Sanskrit and Tibetan Buddhist terminological dictionary called Mahāvīyutpatti which originates from the 8th - 9th centuries A.D., the other work was a catalogue and survey of the Tibetan Tripitaka. This work, published in the Asiatic Researches in 1836 and 1839 and translated into French in 1881, has first given an idea of the various branches of Sanskrit Buddhist literature, which practically has been lost after the twelfth century in India.

If we leaf through the volumes of the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal of those years, we will find several articles by Csoma. They are all of major importance. Their subject matter includes questions of Buddhist philosophy, literature and history, questions of grammar, lexicography, anthropology and many other topics. Professor Lokesh Chandra writes about the importance of the activities of Alexander Csoma de Kőrös for Indian studies: "He opened up a vast vista of the treasures of art and thought, literature and philosophy, grammar and lexicography, medicine and metallurgy, astronomy and alchemy and other branches of learning of India hidden in the Tibetan language. The dark recess of India's history shone afresh by the dedicated and pioneering efforts of Csoma."

The Asiatic Society of Bengal elected him an honorary member and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences a member. But these successes did not change his life-style, which was formed in the Himalayas. His food was confined to tea, of which he was very fond, and plain boiled rice, of which he ate

very little. On a mat on the floor, with boxes of books on all four sides, he sat, ate, slept, and studied, never undressed at night and rarely went out during the day. He never drank wine or spirits or used tobacco or other stimulants.

While he was staying in a small village in Bengal in 1835-37 Major Lloyd wrote about him: "He would not remain in my house, as he thought his eating and living with me would cause him to be deprived of the familiarity and society of natives, with whom it was his wish to be colloquially intimate; I therefore got him a common native hut, and made it as comfortable as I could, but still he seemed to be miserably off. I also got him a servant, to whom he paid three or four rupees a month, and his living did not cost him more than four more."

What seemed strange to Major Lloyd (the ambitious founder of Darjeeling), is understandable if we look at the background. The behaviour of Csoma de Kőrös was determined by the fact that he came to India as a friend looking for 'relatives'. As Csoma himself puts it in the Preface of his Tibetan Dictionary (page VII) "...and he begs to inform the public, that he had not been sent by any Government to gather political information; neither can he be accounted for the number of wealthy European

gentlemen who travel at their own expense for their pleasure and curiosity; but rather only as a poor student, who was very desirous to see the different countries of Asia, as the scene of so many memorable transactions of former ages; to observe the manners of several people, and to learn their languages, of which, he hopes, the world may see hereafter the results; and such a man was he who, during his peregrination, depended for his subsistence on the benevolence of others."

However, his discoveries were initially received in Hungary with a kind of disappointment: the glorious past had not been established. Csoma himself was not satisfied with his results. He returned the money, which was collected by the Hungarian Academy from the public to promote his studies. Looking back at the life-style and accomplishments of Alexander Csoma de Kőrös, it is quite clear that this self-estimate was wrong. His popularity in Hungary has grown ever since his death. People are proud that a son of their country was able to contribute so much to the knowledge of mankind, to the better understanding of the culture and heritage of India and Central Asia. He became a living symbol of friendship, a link between the peoples of India and Hungary. ■

—The author was formerly director of the Hungarian Cultural Centre in New Delhi

INDIA - THE WONDER REPUBLIC @ 65

By S.Y. Quraishi





PM Modi called on the outgoing PM Manmohan Singh just after taking his oath of office

Think India, and two words spring up in mind – Democracy and Republic. That India is the world's largest republic is common knowledge. What, however, is lesser known is that republic is in India's DNA.

We had republics in India prior to the oldest known republics like classical Athens (508 – 322 BC) and Roman Republic (c.509 – 27 BC). Many Indian republics preceded these, most notably the Vaijjan confederacy in Vaishali (in Bihar) around 600 BC in the times of Lord Buddha. Since then, we have recurring evidence of republics in India. In 1830, Sir Charles Metcalfe, the then acting Governor General of India wrote, "The village communities are little republics, having nearly everything they want within themselves and almost independent of any foreign relations." It is these self contained, self governing village republics that have ensured the continuity and survival of the the great Indian civilisation which even the mightiest of empires could never penetrate.

Today the biggest republic of the world envelops in itself half a million tiny village republics managing their affairs through self governance called the Panchayati Raj (the rule of the village community). India now basks in 64 years of republican glory. It will be interesting to retrospect over these momentous years.

A vibrant electoral democracy has been India's most enduring and endearing identity ever since India adopted a great constitution that made it a democratic republic with universal adult suffrage. This was considered by the developed countries as a foolhardy misadventure. Their skepticism was based on the ground realities of the time. India had just got devastated by a deadly partition in which millions of lives were lost. It was an unequal, fractured caste based hierarchical society with 84% illiteracy and extreme poverty. How will they rule themselves?

The prophets of doom were silenced before long. India took to democracy like fish takes to water.

Adjusting itself to the new environment of freedom and democracy in no time. India went on to prove Nobel laureate Amartya Sen's famous statement that a country does not become fit for democracy, it becomes fit through democracy.

Over the past sixty four years, the Election Commission of India has delivered sixteen elections to the Lok Sabha (the House of the People) and over 360 elections to State Legislative Assemblies without missing a single deadline. Peaceful, orderly and democratic transfer of power has been the envy of the entire democratic world. The outgoing prime minister (or chief minister) offering the

chair to the incoming one with humility and folded hands has been a sight which many democracies only long to see.

The fourteenth General Election in May 2014 was the biggest election in world history. As many as 554 million of 834 million registered voters exercised their franchise at 931,986 polling booths on 1.8 million electronic voting machines (EVMs). In sheer size, the Indian electorate is bigger than the combined voter population of each continent. In fact, it is like 90 countries rolled into one, not just in terms of numbers alone but the complexities as well.

And the numbers are always growing. GE 2014 saw the addition of over 118 million voters since the last General Election in 2009. In terms of the voting population, this is like adding an entire Pakistan, or South Africa and South Korea combined, or three Canadas, or four Australias, or 10 Portugals or 20 Finlands!

India is undoubtedly the most diverse country in the world -multi-religious, multi-cultural, multi-lingual, and multi-ethnic, besides geographical diversity (deserts, mountains, plains, forests, islands, and coastal areas). We have all the world's major religions, 18 official languages and 780 spoken languages. The demands of this diversity can be mind boggling. Equally difficult are the other challenges of fighting terrorism, security threats, adjusting to globalisation and rising expectations of IT savvy growing middle class.

Inclusion and Participation the key features of the republic

Elections can be truly free and fair only if these are inclusive, socially just and participative. During the sixty four years of our democratic history, the voter turnout has remained around 55-60%, definitely far less than what ECI aspires to achieve. To address this, ECI came up with a Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) wing that rolls out multi-media campaigns to bring all citizens, especially the urban upper and middle class, the youth and women, into electoral participation. Dramatic results followed. During the last four years every state and the national election saw record turnouts, in most cases highest in history!

National Voters Day was one of the highlights of the programme focussing on the youth turning 18. A drive was launched to locate such youth well in advance and on 25 January (the founding day of the ECI) at felicitations were organised at all the 800,000 polling stations, celebrated as the National Voters Day (NVD).

The first NVD was inaugurated by the President of India on 25 January 2011, in the presence of Chief Election Commissioners of over thirty countries. The

beauty of the programme is that for this countrywide celebration, not a single extra rupee was demanded. We used the normal funds for electoral registration activities but converted it into a major national 'event'. Many countries evinced interest in this unique, zero cost but effective model and some subsequently adopted it.

Use of Technology

Managing elections in a country of subcontinental dimensions cannot be done easily without the application of every possible technology. This has brought great efficiency in the electoral process. These technologies are rigorously field- tested before adoption to ensure absolute reliability. We have seen many elections in several countries collapsing because of hasty introduction of untested technology.

EVMs: The Wonder Machine of Indian Democracy

EVMs have been used in all elections to Parliamentary and Legislative Assembly constituencies since November 1998. It has revolutionised counting, making it quick, peaceful, efficient and free from invalid votes. The counting day disputes and tensions have just disappeared. No surprise that it has come to be described as a wonder machine of Indian democracy. Many countries have adopted these like – Bhutan, Nepal and Namibia with many more studying it in depth. EVMs have undergone frequent updatation. The latest innovation is the addition of a voter verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT). VVPAT allows voters to verify that their vote was cast correctly, and to provide a means to audit the stored electronic results. Now we have the most transparent and credible voting system in the world.

Four hallmarks characterise the way in which the ECI handles the mammoth task: independence, transparency, neutrality and professionalism. That ensures full public trust in the Commission.

A distinctive new feature of the last general election was the significant role played by the New Media, including mobile telephony and social media, in any election for the first time. Some went so far as to call social media the new election 'battleground' and GE 2014 the first social media election.

Conclusion

One of the secrets of the success of the Election Commission of India is its openness to new ideas and to learning from its mistakes and achievements. We, therefore, expect that every election is better than the previous best. EC's efforts in pursuit of excellence must go on. Not just India but the world has a great stake in the success of democracy in the region.

Realising that the aspiring democracies around the

world look forward to sharing the knowledge, skills and expertise at ECI's disposal, the Commission set up the India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIDEM), as a training and resource centre in elections and democratic processes for both national and international participants. In just three years of its existence, the institute has imparted training to election managers of over fifty Afro-Asian and Commonwealth countries, besides thousands of domestic master trainers. The Institute has now become a training hub for assisting representative democracy worldwide.

A stage has come in India when holding a free and fair election is taken for granted. In fact not holding one would be news. We must not let that happen. This is India's promise to its own people and to the world. ■

—*SY Quraishi, a former civil servant, was the 17th Chief Election Commissioner of India. His earlier postings included Secretary Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs, DG, National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO), DG, Doordarshan, the world's largest national broadcaster*

HERITAGE

INDIA'S INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE: A CIVILISATIONAL LEGACY TO THE WORLD

By Bhaswati Mukherjee



Background

India's intangible cultural heritage flows from her 5000 year old culture and civilisation. Dr. A.L. Basham, in his authoritative "Cultural History of India", has noted that "While there are four main cradles of civilisation which, moving from East to West, are China, India, the Fertile Crescent and the Mediterranean, specially Greece and Italy, India deserves a larger share of credit because she has deeply affected the cultural life of most of Asia. She has also extended her influence, directly and indirectly, to other parts of the World."

The civilisation that developed in the Valleys of our two great river systems, the Indus and the Ganges, although in a sharply demarcated geographical region due to the Himalayas, was complex, multi-faceted and was never an isolated civilisation. The notion that before the impact of European learning, science and technology, the 'East' including China and India changed little if at all, over the centuries is false and should be rejected. Indian civilisation has always been dynamic, not static. Settlers and traders came to India from the land and sea routes. India's isolation was never complete, from the most ancient times. This resulted in the development of a complex pattern of civilisation, demonstrated so clearly in the intangible art and cultural traditions ranging from Ancient to Modern India, whether in the dancing Buddhas of the Gandharva school of art which was strongly influenced by the Greeks, to the great tangible heritage seen in the temples of North and South India.

It is no surprise that India's diversity has inspired many writers to pen differing perceptions of the country's culture. These writings paint a complex and often conflicting picture of the culture of India. The best definition has been provided by Dr. Amartya Sen, the Indian Nobel Laureate in Economics. According to him, the culture of modern India is a complex blend of its historical traditions, influences from the effects of colonialism over centuries and current Western culture - both collaterally and dialectically. Western writers usually neglect, in important ways, crucial aspects of Indian culture and traditions and its diversities. The deep-seated heterogeneity of Indian traditions, in different parts of India, is lost in these homogenised descriptions of India. India is not and can never be a homogenous culture. The best example is her intangible heritage.

A pen sketch on this subject cannot be complete without recalling E.H. Carr's chapter on 'What is History'. Carr pointed out that facts do not speak for themselves. They speak only when the historian calls on them to speak. It is the historian who decides which fact to give and therefore the historian is necessarily selective. Thus Carr concludes that "History is a continuous process of



interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and past, a dynamic, dialectical process, which cannot be limited by mere empiricism or love of facts alone". This demonstrates the complexity of the task of interpreting this intangible heritage historically and in an objective manner.

It is clear that Intangible Cultural Heritage such as the Indian example, is difficult to explain or interpret, because of its complexity. Tangible heritage on the other hand, being more visible is much better understood. The best definition of Intangible Cultural Heritage is contained in the 2003 UNESCO Convention on ICH which defines it in a manner broad enough to include diverse experiences and expressions across the globe such as "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith - that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognised as part of their cultural heritage". This is an excellent definition of India's great spiritual and cultural intangible heritage.

Definition of ICH

What is Intangible Cultural Heritage? Heritage does not



end at monuments or collection of objects of arts. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendents, such as oral traditions, performing arts, religious and cultural festivals and traditional crafts. This Intangible Cultural Heritage, by its very nature, is fragile and needs protection and understanding since it is an important factor in maintaining cultural diversity in the face of growing globalisation. Developing understanding of the ICH of different communities, such as in India, helps the process of an international, inter-cultural dialogue and promotes, in the long run, international peace and security.

ICH is best defined as

- Traditional, contemporary and living at the same time, since it is a dynamic process;
- Inclusive since it contributes to social cohesion, encourages a sense of identity and helps to preserve communities and community life;
- Representative since it prospers on oral skills passed on from generation to generation;
- Community based since it can be defined as heritage only when it is recognised as such by the communities, groups or individuals that create,

maintain and transmit it.

ICH therefore, based on the above definition, is important not as a cultural manifestation as such but rather on the wealth of knowledge and skill that are transmitted through it from one generation to another. The social and economic value of this transmission of knowledge is as significant for developed countries as for developing countries.

Festivals such as Holi : A Case Study of ICH

Holi's historical origins date back to pre-Christian times. Paganism and Pagan festivals, based on pre-Christian rituals and 'Bacchus' traditions were frowned upon by the earliest Christians and soon disappeared. Only the Christian mistletoe traditions have survived. Similarly, the rituals of Holi date back to the earliest times based on social traditions. Religious and cultural festivals, such as Holi, express the heart of the people, reflecting their culture and identity. Several of the world's best known festivals exist in India. Many of them are rooted in India's diverse culture and civilisation. Eminent Indian historians believe that Holi was celebrated by Aryans who came to India from Central Asia in 5000 BC. Thus, Holi

existed several centuries before Christ. There are also many references to Holi in India's ancient archaeological remains.

Another example is the Chhau dance. This dance form is a tradition from the Eastern part of India, specially Bihar, Bengal and Orissa, which enacts episodes from the epics, including Mahabharata and Ramayana, local folklore and abstract themes. Its three distinct styles hail from the regions of Seraikella, Purulia and Mayurbhanj, in Eastern India. Chhau dance is intimately connected to regional festivals, notably the spring festival of Chaitra Parva. Its origin is traceable to indigenous forms of dance and martial practices. Its vocabulary of movement includes mock combat techniques, stylized gaits of birds and animals and movements modelled on the chores of village housewives. The Chhau is one of the earliest indigenous form of dances in India. These practices demonstrate that in India, living continuity with the past is an important criterion for its heritage.

Some Concluding Reflections

In India, we are the repository of an astounding wealth of living patterns and modes of heritage. With about 1400 dialects and 18 officially recognized languages, several

religions, various styles of art, architecture, literature, music and dance, and several lifestyle patterns, India represents the largest democracy with a seamless picture of diversity in unity, perhaps unparalleled anywhere in the world.

Through a history of changing settlements and political power, India's living cultural heritage was shaped by centuries of adaptation, re-creation and co-existence. The intangible cultural heritage of India finds expression in the ideas, practices, beliefs and values shared by communities across long stretches of time, and form part of the collective memory of the nation. India's physical, ethnic and linguistic variety is as staggering as its cultural pluralism, which exists in a framework of interconnectedness. In some instances, its cultural heritage is expressed as pan-Indian traditions not confined to a particular locality, genre or category, but as multiple forms, levels and versions inter-linked yet independent from one another. Underlying the diversity of India's heritage is the continuity of its civilization from the earliest times to the present and of the later additions by different influences. ■

—Bhaswati Mukherjee is a former diplomat and was Permanent Representative of India to UNESCO (2004-2010).

ASCC ACTIVITIES

Film Club

On the first and third Friday of every month, film evenings are arranged at the Amrita Sher-Gil Cultural Centre. Five films were screened at the Cultural Centre in January and February in 2015 under the aegis of the Cine Club including a special screening of Adi Shankaracharya on the occasion of Vivekananda Day:

Adi Shankaracharya (1983, Sanskrit) 12.01.2015

Wake Up Sid! (2009, Hindi) 16.01.2015

Konchem Ishtam Konchem Kashtam (2009, Telugu) 06.02.2015

City Lights (2014, Hindi) 13.02.2015

Ship of Theseus (2012, English, Arabic, Swedish, Hindi) 20.02.2015



Bharatanatyam performance by P. Senthilkumar-6 January 2015

The first occasional programme of ASCC this year was the dance

performance of P. Senthilkumar. The artist visited the Centre for the second time; the audience had been waiting for the opportunity to see him again with

enthusiasm. P. Senthilkumar grew up in a small village in Tamil Nadu, India, where the classical South Indian dance form called Bharatanatyam originates. His



P. Senthilkumar performing

affection for dance drew him to Kalakshetra, the world-renowned institute for South Indian classical dance and music in Chennai. After graduating with the Diploma of Fine Arts from the Kalakshetra Foundation, Rukmini Devi College of Fine Arts in Chennai, India, he started his professional dance career. Settling in Europe in 2007, he has worked with the western contemporary choreographer Felix Ruckert and his dance company in Germany (Betwixt & Between). He also teaches dance theory, choreographing, nattuvangam and Carnatic vocal music, Silambam (martial and folk art of Tamil Nadu with stick). Global Television's interview with the artist can be seen on: <http://www.globoport.hu/23569/ku%CC%88lo%CC%88nleges-gesztusok-es-ritmusok-egy-indiai-tancmuvesztol/>

Vivekananda Day-12 January 2015

To commemorate the 152nd birth



Dr Ferenc Ruzsa



Dr István Perczel and Ms Kata Aklan speaking on the occasion



Ambassador giving the keynote address



Audience seeing the photo exhibition



Book exhibition and bazaar

anniversary of Swami Vivekananda & Vedanta Day, the Indian Embassy organized a programme under the aegis of the Vedic Society of Hungary on 12 January 2015 from 18.00 onwards at the Amrita Sher-Gil Cultural Centre.

A panel discussion on the life &

philosophy of Swami Vivekananda consisting of experts such as Prof. Ruzsa Ferenc, Prof. István Perczel and Ms Katalin Aklan was the highlight of the occasion. The discussion concluded with a key-note address by Ambassador Malay Mishra. A summary was presented about Swami

Vivekananda's life-events so that the Hungarian non-professional audience could place him in history and understand his importance not just in relation to India but in connection with the Western world.

The symposium was followed by an exhibition of photos, books and materials on Swami Vivekananda, Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi, received from the Ramakrishna Mission Institute in Kolkata.

The programme concluded with screening of the film titled 'Adi Shankaracarya'. The film, originally in Sanskrit and subtitled in Hungarian, was introduced by Dr Ruzsa Ferenc and was highly appreciated, being the first of its kind ever.



LEFT: Ms Beata Jakusovszky reading a poem. **RIGHT:** Mr Lóránd Bodor & Mr Roland Ferenczi singing folk songs



LEFT: Poems by students. **RIGHT:** Meera Bai-dance drama performance

World Hindi Divas-22 January, 2015



Ambassador speaks on the occasion



Bharatanatyam dance performance

To celebrate the World Hindi Divas, ASCC organized a programme with the contribution of the Hindi students and the Dept. of Indo-European Studies of ELTE University. The programme consisted of several cultural items such as



Audience listening to the performances

dance, music, poetry.

The evening began with a short programme by Sivasakti Kalananda Group. After the welcome speech of Ambassador, who emphasised the importance of dedication in learning the language, those who were interested in calligraphy, participated in a competition. Meanwhile some students read out Hindi poems and Hindi translations of Hungarian poems. Two students cheered the audience by

singing Hungarian folk songs translated into Hindi. The key performance of the evening was a musical presentation titled 'Meera Bai', directed and acted by Dr Rama Yadav, Hindi Chair at ELTE University. The piece was a dance drama based on the life of the mystical poetess who sacrificed her life in her dedication to Lord Krishna.

The evening concluded with refreshments and free discussion among the participants.

Bollywood dances & Gujarati garba folk dance-24 February 2015



Kamala Group performing



Dr Rama Yadav performing

On 24 February ASCC organized a dance programme including 3 items of Bollywood dance and Gujarati folk dance-cum-workshop. First the Kamala Bollywood Duo performed 2 dance pieces (Ringa-Ringa és Jai Ho) from the film Slumdog millionaire. It was followed by the folk dance performance of Dr Rama Yadav. Besides the garba dance performed to praise Durga, the Goddess,

she also held a mini workshop for those who are eager to try the steps of this lively folk genre that makes Navaratri festival so colorful. The programme concluded with the Kamala Group's Jogi dance (Bhangra style) and a collective dance on stage.

Ambassador's meeting with Christian priests from India-26 February 2015

ASCC organized a discussion on the experiences of Indian Christian Missionaries in Hungary on 26 February 2015 in a group presentation to Ambassador.

The discussion centred on faith matters. The Indian Christian Missionaries shared the experiences of their missionary work in Hungary. The participating Indian Missionaries belonged to different congregations. Hence, they shared their experiences of dealing with different types of ministries. The Indian Missionaries felt that their missionary work was well appreciated by the Hungarian society. Ambassador concluded the discussions with his inspirational talk on true vocation of Christianity in the contemporary world. He said he belonged to a universal religion which brooked no boundary nor was confined to any entity or denomination. Ambassador lauded the selfless work being done by Indian Christian



Shri Malay Mishra, Ambassador and Mr Umesh Kumar, Director listening to Fr Mahimai Raj



The Sisters and audience listening to the speech

Missionaries in Hungary. He stressed that this kind of interaction was a novel idea which would help in deepening the contacts between India and Hungary.

Besides a large number of other attendees, twenty five Indian Christian Missionaries led by Fr. Mahimai Raj and several members of the Embassy were present during the discussion. A unique evening indeed! ■

Romani Design fashion show in India

Responding to the invitation of the Hungarian Embassy of India, Romani Design presented a fashion collection at a festive show in New Delhi on the 3rd of December, 2014. The fashion show was set in the beautiful premises of the Embassy and featured the most colorful, beautiful creations of this very special fashion brand that reinterprets traditional Roma motifs and patterns in a modern style.

Mission

Romani Design, Hungary's first Roma fashion studio is an enterprise of exceptional social value. Founded by Hungarian couturier Erika Varga in 2010, Romani Design is an enterprise aimed at creating contemporary attire that defies stereotypical expectations while remaining true to the customary aesthetic

roots of Roma society. The Romani Design clothes, accessories and jewelry combine traditional Roma motifs with contemporary design and are made for all those who are willing to stand for acceptance, respect and diversity. In addition to creating a unique couture that is affordably priced, Romani Design is also dedicated to providing local education in the fashion industry by hosting creative classes for disadvantaged children and providing training to unemployed women of all ethnicities, as also skills and opportunities that are unavailable elsewhere.

Erika Varga, founder of Romani Design

"Fashion means to me what words mean for writers, colors for painters. Through my clothes I express my identity



Ms Erika Varga, founder of Romani Design



and create a world in which I enjoy living.”- states Erika Varga, founder of the brand, who draws her inspiration from the rich cultural heritage of her own community and family. After years spent in social and educational field work carried out in underprivileged Roma communities, Erika has turned to design and fashion to convey the cultural heritage of the Roma, both to the Roma communities as well as to mainstream society. She collects traditionally patterned textiles, cashmere dresses and scarfs and has a significant collection of traditional Romani women’s wear.

In addition to designing a unique brand of clothing, Erika is dedicated to the educational and social mission of Romani Design. She regularly organizes creative classes for disadvantaged children and unemployed women and is the editor of *Glinda*, a Roma youth magazine. To honor her social commitment and dedication, Erika Varga was awarded the “Glamour Woman of the Year” award in 2012.

New collection 2014/2015

Varga’s latest line of dresses, skirts, tops has generated considerable interest in the regional style world after premiering last summer at a gala fashion show held in Budapest’s Museum of Fine Arts. An audience of more than 400 people gathered to applaud the colorful new Romani creations. The new collection has been inspired by the notions of freedom, identity, courage and acceptance. Entitled “My Identity –My Freedom”, the collection puts the spotlight on

the modern and independent-minded woman, free to explore her identity, use her creativity and express her joy of life.

“Bright floral patterns, flowing black fabrics, and beaded jewelry are motifs commonly associated with the traditional clothing styles of Central Europe’s Roma community. Thanks to the creative talent of Erika Varga and her team, these attractive fashion elements now add distinction to a complete new collection of 21st-century women’s wear. The central source of inspiration of the latest collection is the traditional apron (called *kretinca*), worn by Romani women. The apron has a special meaning, spanning generations: the apron is inherited from mother to daughter, and the daughter continues the embroidery and decoration of the apron, transmitting and enriching its motifs. The new collection reinterprets the *kretinca* as a center piece of clothing, combining it with vivid floral waistcoats and intriguing porcelain jewelry.

Assisting in the latest Romani Design line, Helena Varga crafted a series of accessories and purses that reflect traditional styles of the Roma community, including black bags embroidered with intertwined boughs of red roses and other vivid flowers; and corresponding decorations like the floral headdresses that crowned many of the outfits at the collection’s fashion-show debut.

Apart from the exclusive premises of the Museum of Fine

Arts, the collection has also been showcased in more informal surroundings, such as cultural centers, pubs, open-air venues. The new collection has received considerable attention in the fashion world and has been featured along the most prominent Hungarian fashion brands at the Marie Claire Fashion Days in November 2014.

Romani Design places a cultural heritage into a contemporary context to make it available to the 21st century costumers. It creates a unique, stylish world, in which fashion is a way to remain true to one's own identity.

It celebrates the modern, free and passionate woman, the woman who uses fashion consciously to express herself and

create a world crafted to her identity. The unique Romani Design products are there to offer her quality, comfortable, personalized choices. Romani Design stands for the values of multiculturalism, respect and tolerance, using the language of fashion and design to build bridges among cultures. ■

Contact

Erika Varga

Romani Design Fashion Studio

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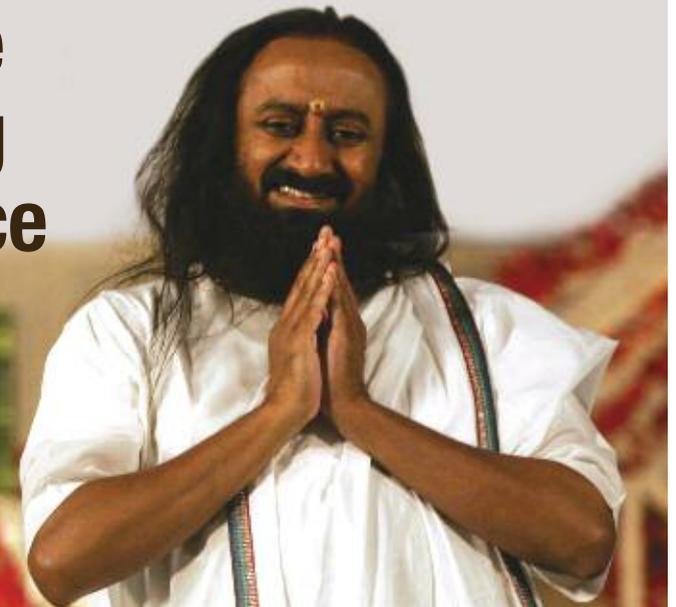
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SPIRITUALITY

A session with the Guru: an enriching spiritual experience

By Malay Mishra



An out-of-the-ordinary occurrence, an experience which savours the senses in those rare moments of life, 120 Ambassadors and High Commissioners from all over the world, out on the Mission to represent the glory of India, eagerly awaited the Guru's arrival to address them on the eternal values of life in projecting spiritual India.

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, the iconic founder of the 'Art of Living' movement, which undoubtedly has traversed the four corners of the world, arrived in the hall to a standing ovation with the External Affairs Minister, Smt. Sushma Swaraj in attendance. The Guru took to the microphone in his characteristic soft mellifluous voice and for the next forty minutes or so, his words poured forth conveying the distilled wisdom of eternal India to

the inspired Heads of Missions.

This world is built on love and compassion, he said, and India should teach that to the rest of humanity. Indeed! The spiritual fount, that is Bharatavarsha, never a matrix of history and geography alone as many other entities around, but a living and continually renewing civilisation. The need is to project spiritual India, that is her strength, her identity, her uniqueness. It seemed Sri Sri's words were penetrating every crevice of one's consciousness. India, her glory and heritage, has spirituality integral to her. Today Yoga and, to some extent, meditation are household words, globally accepted though not understood properly. The task of ours, representatives of that hallowed nation, is to stand high and talk about the virtues of such practices which have descended

down from the Vedic seers, to a dried out world. If India is today a key member of a rapidly globalising family of nations, she has to show her uniqueness, standing high on the platform of the noble virtues of love, peace, empathy and brotherhood. And sound convincing at that. If the universe is one family, as the Upanishads have described so aptly, we have to tell the world that the foundations of that universe will have to be built on the eternal virtues of mankind.

No wonder, therefore, that the world flocks to India, to discover her spiritual secrets as the visitor perceives. For unless they were secrets, how would they be unravelled through experience. We Indians have, however, lived through those age-old secrets all through our lives, right from the first day when our conscious breaths formed part of the cosmic consciousness of which we are all a part.

The Guru's discourse was lofty, for him too, it was an experience of addressing so many Indians of the diplomatic family at one place. And we could see a perceptible joy coursing through his face when he was articulating his words of wisdom. The session but naturally turned interactive with several HOMs giving their views on Yoga as defined in the Bhagavad Gita or Vedanta as enshrined in the Upanishads.

For me it was more practical, given that I am convinced of the essentiality of Vedanta to solve the manifold problems of

the contemporary times and having brought into being the first Vedic Society in Europe under the aegis of the Embassy. What role does and can a Guru play in today's turmoil-ridden world. Is it not incumbent upon spiritual leaders to not only confront but resolve the conflicts of this world and in thus be a supporting arm of the national government and her representatives abroad? For hallowed masters like him, who move around with ease in the highest congregations of the world, rubbing shoulders with the most powerful men and women, what stops them from delving head on into the trouble-ridden conflict-zagged spots, what prevents spirituality from transforming into a powerful external panacea from an internal experience?

I called upon Sri Sri in the same vein to beseech his disciples in Hungary, and he said there were a good number of them, to join the Mission's manifold spiritual activities. My joy knew no bounds when I discovered later that the Guru was planning a trip to Budapest later this year, may be to take up on that challenge.

The memories of that day, ensconced with the most uplifting feelings saturated with his blessings, will remain forever alive in my heart, as in all other hearts present, who may have undergone the same powerfully transformative force with those simple words emanating from the depths of enlightened consciousness. ■

Hornbill, the Festival of Headhunters

Article and Photos by **Ádám Lázár**

These days, people are looking for unknown destinations, places where hardly anybody has been. The Westerner in Nagaland feels that this must be one of those places. All around are mountains, valleys, forests, streams and green hillsides. Cut out from the hillsides are terraces of rice fields and wooden houses clinging to the mountain. There are hardly any roads here. If there are, they are winding, steep or are under construction. From where I am, there is a vertical little pathway leading up to a barn. On the lane a lady is carrying a huge basket on her back with wood from the forest. There is a young girl behind her with the same size of a basket. She is carrying a giant milk can. I ask the old lady to take her load off so that I could try to carry it. I can hardly pick up her basket, never mind carrying it up the steep path. I have boots on and she has slippers. We both smile. She takes her pack back and hurries away to catch up with the lost time. The landscape radiates peace. But this was not always such a calm area. This is the land of the great Nagas, the

Headhunters. Originally, the Nagas were warriors and hunters. Now they are banned from both of these activities, so they are farmers and craftsmen.

However, now I am not only admiring the scenery, I am looking at a man on the terrace of the "morung", sipping tea. I am gazing at a Headhunter. Finally, I have located him. We are a few miles from Kohima, the capital of Nagaland in the mountains, at an open-air museum. Nagaland, one of the smallest states of India, rises up from the plains of the mighty Brahmaputra River. Until 2011, even Indians could travel only with special permits to this remote mountainous republic. Those who have heard of Nagaland know that Headhunters lived here once. This country is bordered by Tibet (China), Burma, and Bangladesh. Nagaland is important for India, not only strategically but economically as well, as it is rich in crude oil and precious metals. Its less than two million inhabitants belong to 16 different tribes. They don't speak each other's



languages, but communicate in an artificially created mixture of Naga languages, and in English. Since 2000, every December they organize ten days of cultural and sporting activities called 'The Hornbill Festival'. They chose this name because the Hornbill bird, which lives in the foothills of the Himalayas at the edge of the rainforest, is the sacred bird of all the Naga tribes. It is one of their most important symbols.

Not far from their capital city, Kohima, the Nagas have built a museum village. Here they have erected for each tribe a special area with a community centre called 'morung'. In the first days of every December, representatives of the tribes gather to this Festival Village to exhibit their special pieces of art, and to showcase their customs, traditional costumes, arms, dances, pop concerts, fashion shows and beauty contests, theatre performances, film shows, lectures, plays, discussions and food to keep the customs alive and to show them to themselves and to the visitors. The tribal outfit and the customs are handed down from fathers to sons unless the sons move away in the hope of finding better jobs and an easier life.

The Festival Village is about 14 kilometres away from the

capital. On both sides of the only road connecting Kohima with the Festival Village, at every 20 metres, military personnel are stationed with machine guns. Within the last three to four kilometres, beautiful policewomen and lady soldiers are smiling; they secure the road for the honorary guest: the Prime Minister of India. He is coming to open the festival. PM Narendra Modi arrives at the grandstand, representatives of the Government of Nagaland fit him anew. They dress him in Naga tribal outfit, with loin-cloth, girdle, headdress, necklace, spear and dagger.

The Prime Minister addresses his audience dressed in traditional attire like a Naga warrior. He announces a slew of developmental programmes and benefits for the people of the northeast. A Special Economic Zone will not be necessary for the northeast, he says, since there is a "natural economic zone" there already because of the biodiversity and salubrious climate. People from other states will be attracted to Nagaland because this area has remained untapped. He announces that each year, 10,000 students from the northeast will be given scholarships in various fields. During vacations, 2,000 students and 500 teachers from this region will be taken to other parts of India to enrich their knowledge. The union government



has set aside Rs 20 crore each year for the development of the garment industry in Assam, Nagaland and Sikkim. Prime Minister Modi says his government has kept back Rs. 53,000 crore for the overall development of the eight states in the region. Besides, Rs 28,000 crore had been sanctioned for the construction of 14 new rail lines in the region. This will go a long way in developing tourism. There is a huge potential for tourism and without rail, road and air connections, it cannot go ahead. Power is essential in modern life. To improve the power position in the region, Rs 5000 crore has been sanctioned. Rs 5000 crore is set aside for the improvement of the services of 2G mobile providers. He also states that six more agricultural colleges will be opened in the region. Finally, he greets the 50th anniversary of Naga statehood.



After the Prime Minister's inauguration speech, the programmes of the Festival begin. Each tribe is given 10-15 minutes to show their traditional dances, songs, to create war scenes, to illustrate their fighting skills as well as unusual customs and games. Following the cultural performances of four different tribal groups, competitions take place over the next ten days. The first one is the Naga Chilli Eating contest. At one time, four contestants sit at the stage and they have 15 seconds to eat 10 long, very hot king chillies. Behind the scenes a well equipped medical team is expecting the participants. Many people get sick, some need to have an infusion; they all get milk powder and sparkling water to recover.

The next contest is the Hornbill Bamboo climbing race. Easier said than done, as the eight meter high bamboo poles are dripping with oil and the contestants find it difficult even to get a grip, never mind climbing the poles. The first price of Rs 30,000 is sufficient incentive. One of the participants starts throwing sand from the ground onto his pole. Everybody follows suit. The organisers protest but nobody takes any notice of them. Finally after 20 minutes or later, another young man succeeds. The rest of the 16 competitors never make it to the top. A special area is set up for the 'Bamboo Carnival'. Here one can see how bamboo can be used in the building industry, in arts, in food, and in music.

The spectators are mostly Nagas participating in other performances and who are waiting for their event. Everybody is enjoying the sunny day, the many different programmes and the occasional rice beer. The Naga Wrestling competition also

draws a significant crowd. The Hornbill Fashion Show in the evening is sold out. The girls with their colorful dresses look beautiful. In the morning the biggest crowd of the Festival gathers for the Traditional Monolith Pulling ceremony. In Naga villages, cities or in fields, one can often see huge megalithic stone blocks. When an outstanding goal is reached, a village, a city, or a person is awarded with these. Long vines are connected forming several hundred meters of rope and 7 to 8000 men in traditional attire pull the enormous stone block for a few kilometres to the spot where the stone is finally erected.

Festivities aren't really complete without food and drink. For the lovers of exotic cuisine, this week and this place is paradise. The Nagas'

favorite is the pig. "We eat everything," says our guide, and loads my banana-leaf plate with delicacies: grasshoppers, larvae, insects and slices of snails, snake, monkey, dog, cat, and fish. 'I'm a vegetarian,' I utter regretfully. This is the big week for Nagaland. The hotels are full. Tourists come from India and from some other places abroad. I met a group who flew 78 hours to get here from Peru.

We leave the Festival Village and drive off to one of the nearest Naga villages to see how the Nagas really live. We walk about in the near-deserted village. Only old ladies and children and many dogs can be seen. Water spouts out from the rocks in the hillside. A woman squats down and washes her long hair in the ice cold water. When finished, she washes the dishes. From a big house a man comes out and invites me in. This is a morung, the community building of the village. It has massive windows but there is no glass in the frames. In the middle of the room sits a huge pot with some pieces of wood smouldering underneath. The man indicates that I should sit down. There is plenty of room next to the pig. He dips a cup in another container and offers it to me. 'Rice beer, that is our drink,' he says. The room is pitch dark as the sun has set behind the Naga Hills. The wood does not burn; it just smokes and reeks. There are 8 to 10 other shadows in the room, but it is difficult to see anything as there are no lights and the smoke is dense. The men pull out pieces of the pig stewing in the pot. They offer it to me too. They ask if we have morungs in the country where I come from.

By this point I am dying to meet and talk to a Headhunter. We go back to the Festival Village. But where and how could one find the few still-living Headhunters among the many

thousands of Nagas? During the wrestling competition, I ask some of the spectators, ‘Which one was the most vicious tribe?’ They all state that the Konyaks were the most feared ones. So I take off to find the Konyaks’ morung. Each tribe has a little terrace outside their morung where they or their visitors can sit down to eat or drink something special from that tribe. Some young Konyaks sit next to me. They ask if they could take some pictures with me. I look just as unusual for them as they do to me in their splendid outfits. After the photo sessions I ask one of them: ‘How can you tell who is a Headhunter?’ ‘The Headhunters’ faces are tattooed,’ he answers. I look across to the other table where two older warriors are drinking tea. Both of them are tattooed. ‘Are they Headhunters?’ ‘Just one of them; the other one is the Chief of the Tribe,’ he says. I ask my new friends to find out if the Headhunter would be willing to talk to me.

‘How old are you?’ ‘76’ ‘Do you always wear tribal outfits?’ ‘No, we only wear them during the Hornbill Festival. But at home, in the villages, it is compulsory for men to wear the shawl.’ ‘Are Nagas monogamous?’ ‘Even 20 or 30 years ago it was different. One had a wife but one could still have some lovers. ‘What is a Naga family like now?’ ‘In the 60s we still had 10 to 12 kids, now we have only three to five. All Naga villages are independent states; they are led by the Chief of the Tribe. The best fighter who brought home the most heads becomes the Chief of the Tribe. This office lasts for a lifetime. In some villages the smartest, in others the richest, will become the Chief of the Tribe. Villagers cannot kill anyone from the same village, or the village excommunicates him. The Nagas were nomads. If one tribe accidentally discovered another village, war broke out over some small thing. Once killed, the most valuable part of the enemy’s body was the head, but we cut off the arms and legs as well. In front of the Konyak houses or villages, the decoration was made out of skulls. It was a warrior’s trophy. Just like the hunters take home the antlers of the deer. ‘But why did wars break out?’ ‘There are always arguments about whom an area belongs to.’ ‘But there were no roads, no maps until recently. Here, everything is hilly and there are hardly any settlements, how do you know which spot belongs to which tribe?’ ‘We know every blade of grass. If someone violates this, war

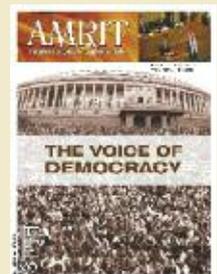
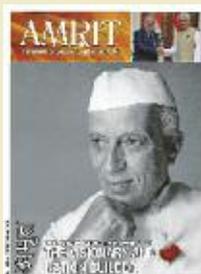
breaks out.’

Sitting next to the Headhunter, there are two other warriors now. They have different tattoos on their faces. ‘All Headhunters have individual tattoos?’ ‘There are three types of tattoos. I’m a Headhunter. The other is a Chieftain, and the third is the Priest with other motifs. ‘Do you declare war?’ ‘We might or we might not. Or we might just break into another village during the night.’ ‘What horns and teeth do you use for headdress or on your necklaces?’ ‘On our arms these are ivory rings, on the headdress these are boar tusks, the necklace is made of the fangs and horns of the animals we slaughtered during a hunt. I have a tiger’s teeth on my chain. Then he looks at me and flashes over from a Headhunter an unexpectedly warm smile and asks: ‘What do you think of us?’ ‘I think you live in a transitional phase. You have not given up your traditional past but you have not adjusted to modern life either. You need to have major improvements in infrastructure, an airport closer to the capital, roads and hotels that always have electricity, water and heating. It is strange that when you are travelling by car and you want to overtake the car in front of you, in case you want to signal, you signal the opposite direction to where you want to go.’

I meet yet another Head hunter. There are four copper heads on his necklace. If I understand it correctly, there are as many heads on the chain as the number of people he killed. Now, finally, I ask: ‘When did you last cut off somebody’s head?’ ‘In 1959. But first we shoot the enemy.’ ‘Did you know the one you killed?’ ‘He was someone from the neighbouring village.’ ‘Were you angry with him?’ ‘No, I did not know him but there was a war.’ ‘What happened to the severed heads?’ ‘There are some tribes where they still keep the skulls, but in most places they buried them after their conversion to Christianity.’ ‘Is murder not a sin in your tribe?’ ‘Yes, murder is, but not in war.’ ‘Have you ever regretted killing someone?’ ‘Either the opponent kills me or I kill him. Naturally there are conflicts today as well. But there is no retaliation. We forgive and forget. There is no more head-hunting.’ ■

—The author is an avid traveller and a friend of India

Some of the previous issues of Amrit



A védánta filozófia és Vivékánanda tanításai

írta: Veszprémi Krisztina

„Ó, ember! Először ismerd fel, hogy egy vagy a Brahmannel - abam Brahmásmi -, majd pedig ismerd fel, hogy a világegyetem valójában ugyanaz a Brahman - sarvam khalvidam Brahma.”

—Szvámí Vivékánanda

Naréndra Náth Datta, akit később Svámí Vivékánanda néven ismert meg a világ, 1863. január 12-én Kalkuttában született, egy előkelő család legidősebb fiúgyermekéként. Rövid élete során, melyből összesen tíz évet szentelt nyilvános tevékenységeknek, számos könyvet írt a védánta filozófiáról és a jóga különböző útjairól, valamint számtalan előadást tartott világszerte, melyek közül talán a leghíresebb az 1893-ban, Chicagóban, a Vallások Parlamentjén elhangzott rövid beszéde volt, mely a gyűlés legünnepeltebb szónokává és a közönség kedvencévé tette. Az eseményen egy régóta dédelgetett vágya valósult meg: bemutathatta a Nyugatnak India ősi és egyetemes bölcsességét, és utat nyithatott Kelet és Nyugat között. Utolsó chicagói beszédében így összegezte tapasztalatait:

„A keresztényeknek nem kell hindukká vagy buddhistákká válniuk, mint ahogy egy hindunak vagy egy buddhistának sem kell felvennie a keresztiséget. Viszont mindegyiküknek magába kell olvasztania a másik szellemiségét, ugyanakkor megőrizni saját identitását, hogy saját törvényei szerint növekedhessen. Ha a Vallások Parlamentje képes volt bármit is bebizonyítani a világ előtt, az a következő: a szentség, a tisztaság és a könyörületesség nem kizárólag egyetlen egyház meggyőződése, mint ahogy minden hitrendszer adott magasztos jellemű férfiakat és nőket ennek a világnak.”

„Tudom, ki vagy Uram! Te vagy Nara, az ősi bölcs, Nárájána testet



öltése. Visszatértél a Földre, hogy felszámold az emberiség szenvedését és szomorúságát!” – lelkesedett mestere, Srí Rámakrisna, akit mindmáig India egyik legnagyobb szentjeként tartanak számon, amikor szeretett tanítványa – és későbbiekben szószólója – 1882-ben első ízben felkereste. És valóban, a Svámí küldetésének érezte, hogy segítsen India elszegényedett népének, melynek tagjai elvesztették emberi és nemzeti méltóságukat. „Emelkedj fel, te ragyogó! Emelkedj fel, te örökké tiszta! Emelkedj fel, ki sohasem születél és kin nem foghat halál! Emelkedj fel, te mindenható! Nyilvánítsd ki valódi természetedet! Ezen alacsonyrendű megnyilvánulások nem méltóak hozzád.”

A névtelen szerzetes, aki csupán amerikai útja előtt, Khétri maharádzsájától kapta a Vivékánanda nevet, melynek jelentése: „a megkülönböztetés üdvös boldogsága”, hatalmas népszerűsége tette szert hazájában és külföldön egyaránt. Mivel Amerikában kezdett el tanítani, beszédeinek és személyiségének elsöprő sikerével megnyitotta a nyugati szíveket India ősi bölcsessége előtt – elsősorban a védánta előtt, melyre Vivékánanda a legnagyobb hangsúlyt helyezte. A

védánta a hat ortodox hindu bölcséleti iskola egyike, egy, az upanisadokon, a Bhagavad Gítán és a Brahma-szútrákon alapuló gondolatrendszer. Maga a védánta szó a Védák végét vagy lényegét jelenti. Ennek a tiszta nemkettőséget vagy abszolút egységet (advaita) hirdető ága szerint egyedül a végső Valóság létezik, illetve a világ és a tapasztalati én nem valós, azaz nem rendelkezik független és örök léttel. A védántin célja a Valóságot elfedő káprázat fátylának (májá) eltávolítása.

Szvámí Vivékánanda tanításai a védántáról több pontban is eltértek a védánta klasszikus tanaitól, legfőképpen azért, mert a filozofikus szószálhasogatást meddőnek érezte. Tanítása legjellegzetesebb vonása az, hogy a filozófiai alapelveket a mindennapi élet dolgaira vonatkoztatta, megteremtve ezzel az úgynevezett „gyakorlati védánta” alapjait. Mindenekelőtt kiemelte azt, hogy a világ illúziójától való megszabadulást nem a hagyományos módon, a világot elutasítva és visszavonultságban kell megvalósítani, hanem úgy, hogy az emberben lakozó Istent szolgáljuk. „Lehetőségét tekintve minden lélek isteni. A cél az, hogy ezt a belső isteniséget

megnyilvánítsd azáltal, hogy uralkodsz a természetben, úgy a külsőn, mint a belsően. Valósítsd ezt meg munka, imádat, a psziché uralma vagy filozófia révén; az egyik segítségével vagy többel, esetleg mindegyikkel – és légy szabad! Ez a vallás. A doktrínák, dogmák, szertartások, könyvek, templomok vagy formák nem egyebek, mint másodlagos részletek.”

Szvámí Vivékánanda méltóságos alakja hatalmas erőről árulkodik, tekintetéből tisztaság és állhatatosság árad. Szavai a mai napig milliókra hatnak ösztönzőleg. „Hogy sikerrel jársz, hihetetlen állhatatossággal és hatalmas akarattal kell rendelkezned. »Kiiszom az óceánt is – mondja az állhatatos lélek. – Akaratomtól hegyek porladnak szét.« Legyen ilyen erőd, ilyen akaratod, dolgozz keményen, és eléred a célt!”

Még negyven éves sem volt, amikor 1902. július 4-én bevégezte földi küldetését. Felbecsülhetetlen hagyatéka előtt fejet hajtva említést kell tennünk az 1897 májusában létrejött Rámakrisna Misszióról, melynek elsődleges feladata a Mester

(Srí Rámakrisna) tanainak terjesztése, és amely minden más olyan tanítást is támogat, ami az emberek gazdasági és szellemi épülését szolgálja. S végül, az eljövendő századoknak álljanak itt örök érvényű szavai: „Talán örömmel tölt majd el, hogy elhagyhatom ezt a testet – mint amikor egy viseltes öltözetet dob le magáról az ember. A munkával viszont soha nem hagyok fel! Lelkesíteni fogom az embereket mindenütt, amíg a világ fel nem ismeri, hogy egy Istennel!”

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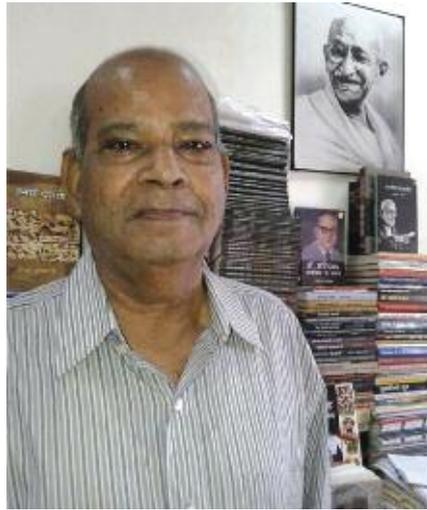
HINDI SECTION

सच्चे स्वर सिद्ध साधक के नाम

प्रोफेसर कृष्णदत्त पालीवाल दिल्ली विश्वविद्यालय के अप्रतिम अध्यापकों में से थे। 8 फरवरी 2015 को आसमयिक निधन हिन्दी साहित्य के लिए अप्रतिम क्षति है। प्रोफेसर पालीवाल एक अच्छे अध्यापक होने के साथ-साथ हिन्दी के एक बड़े आलोचक और अग्रणी लेखक भी रहें हैं। यह कविता अपने प्रोफेसर कृष्णदत्त पालीवाल जी को सादर याद करते हुए।

असाध्य अध्यायों को
साधना आता था उन्हें
रीतेपन को भरा जाता है कैसे
अर्थवान भावों से
और ध्वनियों से
उसमें सिद्धहस्त थे वो

एक ही अध्याय को बार-बार बांचना
कैसे धारदार बनाता है
हमारे शब्दों को पैना और
नुकीला कर जाता है
हे स्वरसिद्ध सीखा हमने आप ही से



तमाम हस्तक्षेप से निरपेक्ष आप
वो साधक थे जो समर्पित थे
सिर्फ और सिर्फ अपने
गढ़िया भाव को
गढ़ देते थे कब कैसे
बिना छुए किसी भी
साज़ को और
वो बज उठता था

आपके वाचन की ताल-गति-यति और लय
बाँध लेती थी हमें
साध लेती थी हमें
अपने मौन में सदा समर्पित रहते आप
अपने भीतर के दाता भाव को
जिसमें हम फूलते-फलते और
होते जाते थे पल्लित-पुष्पित

हमारा होना अगर कुछ होना है
तो वो आपका ही है
आपका बोना और रोंपना
गहरा था बहुत
आगे भी सींचत जाएंगे
हम उसे

जैसा जितना होगा भरसक
दाय निभाना, आखिर सीखा
आपसे ही है...
(कृष्णदत्त पालीवाल के नाम)

-डॉ रमा यादव
विज़िटिंग प्रोफेसर ऐल्टै विश्वविद्यालय



प्रधान मंत्री
Prime Minister

संदेश

अपार हर्ष का विषय है कि विदेश मंत्रालय तथा विदेश स्थित सभी भारतीय दूतावासों द्वारा प्रत्येक वर्ष 10 जनवरी को "विश्व हिंदी दिवस" के रूप में मनाया जाता है। आज हिंदी भारत में ही नहीं बल्कि विश्व भर में बोली और समझी जाने वाली विश्व भाषाओं में अपनी पहचान स्थापित कर चुकी है।

"विश्व हिंदी दिवस" के अवसर पर मैं सभी हिंदी प्रेमियों और हिंदी भाषियों को बधाई और शुभकामनाएं देता हूँ और आशा करता हूँ कि हिंदी भाषा के प्रचार-प्रसार में आप सबकी ओर से किए जा रहे प्रयासों में और गति आएगी। इन प्रयासों के सार्थक सुपरिणामों के साथ-साथ हिंदी का परचम विश्व भर में लहराएगा।

नव वर्ष की हार्दिक शुभकामनाएं।

जय हिंद।

(नरेन्द्र मोदी)

नई दिल्ली
15 दिसंबर, 2014

लहू के फूल

मेरे देश, मेरे महान देश
तेरी रजत-सी रज में
लोट-लोटकर मैं शैशव के
निष्पाप क्षणों को खेला
तेरे पावन पवन में

सांसें लेकर
यौवन के मादक भार को झेला
तेरे अन्न-जल से शैशव-सुमन
जवानी का चट्टानी
फूल बन गया और रणभूमि में

बलिदानी धूल बन गया
मेरे देश आज मैं
राष्ट्र-मंदिर में निज यौवन के
ताजे फूल अर्पित करता हूँ
आजादी की अर्चना में

अपने लहू के फूल
समर्पित करता हूँ।

(लहू के फूल 1968)
डा. श्याम सिंह शाशि

CHILDRENS' CORNER

Ahimsa—Childrens' programme 10 February 2015



Children answering questions



Ms Melinda Irtl talking to the children

ASCC organized a programme for children on 10 February. 30 children participated in the discussion-cum-puppet performance with Ms Melinda Irtl and her group called Soup Theatre. The topic of the programme was Ahimsa, Non-Violence.

The programme started with a power point presentation on India's most important message: non-violence. Children were informed on the symbols, religions, great personalities of India whose contribution to non-violence was essential. Ms Melinda also told some tales from the Buddha's life from the Jatakas giving examples for the Buddha's method of winning by kindness. The children were very cooperative and eager to answer Ms Melinda's questions. Even if they do



Soup Theatre

not learn much about India in primary school in Hungary, they are aware of a lot of things connected to the country. One of them even quoted a sentence from Mahatma Gandhi, taught to him by his father: "Speak only if it improves upon the silence."

After the discussion, the Soup Theatre performed a tale titled The



Children playing Yoga game

Forgetful Giant that tells the story of a giant who learns how to love and live without violence. The programme concluded with playful Yoga practice for the children, giving them instructions on physical and mental practices to be calmer and healthier. In the end they received a questionnaire to be filled and evaluated by Ms Melinda. ■

PHOTO GALLERY



U.S. President Barack Obama waving his hand in the company of Indian President Pranab Mukherjee and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Republic Day Parade



Summary meeting with Ambassador at the Pharmaexil Delegation visit



Republic Day - Flag Hoisting Ceremony



Republic Day evening function in Kempinski Hotel



Mr Vijay Khanduja, FS (Consular & Commerce) speaking on the evening function of Republic Day



Debrecen Chamber of Commerce - Ambassador and President Ferenc Miklossy



Ambassador's spiritual talk on vedanta in Kolkata



6th HOMs conference, New Delhi

DAKSHINESWAR KALI TEMPLE

Dakshineswar Kali Temple is a Hindu temple located in Dakshineswar near Kolkata. Situated on the eastern bank of the Hooghly River, the presiding deity of the temple is Bhavatarini, an aspect of Kali, meaning, 'She who liberates Her devotees from the ocean of existence i.e. Samsara'.

The temple compound was built in the traditional 'Nava-ratna' or nine spires style of Bengal architecture. There are twelve shrines dedicated to Shiva, Kali's companion along the riverfront, a temple to Radha-Krishna, a bathing Ghat on the river, and a shrine dedicated to Rani Rashmoni. 'Nahavat-Khana', the chamber in the north western corner just beyond the last of the Shiva temples, is where Shri Ramakrishna spent a considerable part of his life and achieved God realisation.



Narendranath (later Swami Vivekananda) was among his foremost disciples.



BELUR MATH: THE HEADQUARTERS OF RAMAKRISHNA MATH AND RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

Belur Math, sprawling over forty acres of land on the western bank of the Hooghly (Ganga), is a place of pilgrimage for people from all over the world professing different religious faiths. Even people not interested in religion come here for the peace it exudes.



It was at Belur Math that Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), the foremost disciple of Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886), lived the last years of his brief life and left his body. Swamiji consecrated the grounds in 1898 by worshipping the urn containing the sacred relics of Sri Ramakrishna which he himself carried on his shoulders to the place of worship. On that

occasion, he uttered these prophetic words about Belur Math: "The blazing light of universal harmony that will emanate from here will flood the whole world." True to that prophecy, Belur Math has become the hub of a worldwide spiritual movement known as the Ramakrishna – Vivekananda movement, synonymous with Vedanta.

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