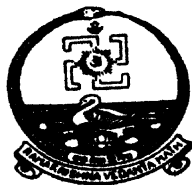


# SWAMI ABHEDANANDA

A SPIRITUAL BIOGRAPHY

*by*

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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The comprehensive life of Swami Abhedananda, the direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa and spiritual brother of Swami Vivekananda, is now published under the title of "SWAMI ABHEDANANDA : A SPIRITUAL BIOGRAPHY", which is written by Sri Moni Bagchi, a reputed writer on different subjects. The authorities of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, Calcutta, have supplied the writer the necessary materials, papers, records and documents, and I believe that Sri Bagchi has truly represented the authentic life of the Apostle of Sri Ramakrishna.

The life of Swami Abhedananda is eventful with his manifold activities, and the writer has tried to depict the true and recordful life of the Apostle, collecting facts from the Swami's own Diary, paper-cuttings and from various Journals of England, America, and other countries, carefully preserved by the Swami himself.

Some of the rare pictures of Swami Abhedananda and some photos of his hand-writings are included in this book. There are atleast six to seven hundred photos of the Swami, which were taken in different times in different parts of India, America, London, and other Continents, and we have a mind to separately publish an Album of his pictures. Now we have only given here some important photos which will suit the chapters of this book.

The book is published under the auspicious of the Swami's Birth Centenary Celebration, which was observed in 1966-67 by the citizens of India. We offer our thanks and gratitude to the reputed writer Sri Moni Bagchi for beautifully representing the life of Swami Abhedananda, and I believe that this life of the Swami will throw much light upon the life of Swami Vivekananda and also of the Ramakrishna Movement all over the world.

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## P R E F A C E

The multi-splendoured personality of Swami Abhedananda both as an individual and as a spiritual leader is absorbing. No other disciple of Sri Ramakrishna lived so fully his three score and thirteen years than did this patriot-saint of modern India, as Abhedananda was universally known. This study of his life, I must confess, is not a mere narrative. It is more than that. To write the biography of Abhedananda is to write the whole history of the Ramakrishna Age. We know too much about it but too little about its real impact on the social, moral and spiritual regeneration of India. I have therefore sought to examine and elucidate in the first instance certain aspects of this remarkable Age. Secondly, I have discussed at length the history of the Ramakrishna Movement in the West which forms almost an integral part of the middle period of Abhedananda's life. I hope, however, that the following pages may prove to be of interest from the strictly biographical no less than historical point of view.

A life divinely ordained and divinely fulfilled such as we witness in the life of Swami Abhedananda, is too important to be treated as mere symptom of the past. It has a value which is independent of any temporal processes which is eternal, and must be felt for its own sake. Anecdotes pale into insignificance in this life which was a mighty red-hot furnace with leaping flames of spiritual fire. I therefore make no apology for calling this work a spiritual biography. Swami Abhedananda was one of those great spirits that on occasion stride across the world of pygmies, shedding fresh light, giving new life, and expanding the frontiers of human vision and consciousness. He is the explorer *par excellence* of that inner realm which was thoroughly and completely explored by his Master, Sri Ramakrishna. His initiation into the Order of Sri Ramakrishna as we all know, resulted in a transmutation of his personality as a whole—physical, emotional, ideological and spiritual, and laid the foundation of the world teacher that was to come.

In attempting this work, I have followed the principle adopted by the renowned German philosopher, Dr. Hermann Oldenberg in his famous book, *The Life of Buddha*. "From the surface", writes Dr. Oldenberg, "where each phenomenon pre-

sents itself as something different from every other, the speculative imagination strives to pierce into depth below, in which lies the unifying bond of all diversity, Man looks for the essence in things and the essence of the essence, for the reality, the truth of all phenomenon and the truth of the Truth. This quest of the substance is necessarily a search for unity in all diversity". And so I have tried to capture the essence of Swami Abhedananda's life which is grand and infinitely sweet too.

The vastness of his soul is beyond comprehension of an ordinary man. From personal experience gained by his long and austere course of *Tapasya* initially at the feet of his Master and then after the demise of the latter, independently, Abhedananda was able to assert that the direct unmediated knowledge of the Absolute Reality, which is also identical with the illuminated consciousness of the spiritual unity of man and the universe, is the core of all religious discipline as understood by Rishis and Prophets who visualised and gave expression to the great truth co-eternal with God, and proclaimed with unshaken confidence that all the apparent diversions of our experiences are ultimately nothing but Sat-Chit-Anandam. His whole life was a clear manifestation of the working of the gospel of truth and a crystal-clear self-expression of a great soul thoroughly impregnated with the Divine Power, which is dynamic in its character and which is equally operative in the whole cosmic process as well as in every unit of energy and in every unit of phenomenal existence, the difference being one of degree and not of essence or kind. This Divine Power, kindled by the touch of his Master, made its appearance in a concentrated form in the life of the great personality of which we want to have a glimpse in this treatise.

It is not the intention of the present writer to deal with the life of Abhedananda as an isolated factor to India's religious life, for his life was a timely re-interpretation and a brilliant embodiment of synthetic spiritualism which characterised the Ramakrishna Age and which India and the world need so much in the present day. I see in him the regeneration and re-awakening of the essentially spiritual view of human life and mundane phenomena that have cast a halo of glory about Mother India from time immemorial.

In this book I have made no statement without authority

which I believe to be trustworthy ; and I am satisfied that this narrative is substantially accurate. I take this opportunity to thank the authorities of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, who have encouraged me to write this book, especially to my esteemed friend, Swami Prajnanananda, who gave me proper guidance and the unpublished diaries of Swami Abhedananda. I am also grateful to him for helping me in writing the last chapter, "Abhedananda and Vivekananda", a comparative study, though, in truth, those two Apostles are not in way of comparable with each other.

MONI BAGHI

*Calcutta, August, 1960.*





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## CHAPTER I

### THE SOCIAL BACKGROUND

“The individual is not an isolated unit, but is part of a whole, composed of many other individuals. This whole is called society. The relation between the individual and the social whole of which he is a part, is an organic relation. It means that the individual can fulfil himself only in and through society, even as this society can fulfil its collective life only in and through the fulfilment of the individual ends of the numerous humans composing it. The individual and the society to which he belongs, are, thus, inter-dependent upon one another for their self-fulfilment”. This remarkable observation of an eminent social philosopher can be helpful to us in grasping the background of our subject.

All the things that differentiate man from the rest of the creation, so far as we know it—his reason, his emotions, his will, his power of knowing himself and his capacity for love and self-sacrifice—all these are evolved in and through his social life and relations. The individual finds his highest self-expression and self-realization in and through his society, even as his society finds its highest expression and realization in and through the life and activities of the individuals composing it. The individual and his society are like the warp and woof of the social fabric. To truly understand the individual, we must see him in and through his social setting; and to correctly appraise social values, we must see society in and through the life and aspirations, the struggles and achievements, of its individual human units.

The value of the life-story of any individual consists, therefore, not in itself, however great or noble that life may be, but only as a revelation, an explanation and interpretation of the hidden currents of social history and evolution that, entering into it, shapes and moulds it to its universal end. That end is the education of the humanity at large. In this view, biographies of individuals become both the texts and the commentaries of universal social revelations. The real value of the life-story of any individual is, therefore, not in itself, but in the elucidation of social life and movements that play around that life.

The period covered by the life of Swami Abhedananda, reveals a most important epoch of modern Indian history and also to some extent of the Western world during that period. The seventy-three years of his life have seen mighty transformation in Indian as well as Western thought and religion. The social and religious life of seventy-three years ago cannot even be conjectured at this distance of time. And Swami Abhedananda had had the proud privilege of witnessing, and indeed personally sharing in his own way, the toils and turmoils through which these mighty transformations in Indian and Western thought and life did take place. So before we actually come to narrate his life-story, we have to try to use the thread of his personal life only to weave together the history of his times. So let us begin our narration with a short but precise account of the scene and society on which Swami Abhedananda opened his eyes as Kaliprasad Chandra, son of Rasiklal Chandra, a school teacher.

The sixties of the last century drew into Bengal some of the mightiest souls who were destined to leave their mark in almost every field of national as well as international culture. The last century had a grand entrance, and an equally grand exit; its existence was ushered in by Raja Rammohan Roy, and its passing away was heralded forth by Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Ramakrishna, Keshab Chandra and Bankim Chandra; and it was reserved for Swami Vivekananda to toll its death-knell, himself following it just on the advent of the present century.

The year 1817 witnessed the establishment of the Hindu College—the nursery of some of the outstanding personalities of Bengal. But the first generation of English-educated men preceded the era of colleges and schools, and consisted of such characters as Rammohan Roy, Raja Radha Kanto Deb and the grandfather of Keshab, Dewan Ramkamal Sen. They were sound, substantial, self-made men, uncrammed, untitled, without much mechanical finish about their intellectual outfit, but with indigenous home-spun faculties, definite religious impressions, and a sturdy backbone to their character. They were few numerically, they had fought their way to knowledge and distinction through enormous difficulties, and their influence was not immediately transmitted to their successors. The next generation of men might be looked upon as the first-fruits of English education in the land. They were of a different type. The very touch of

European knowledge affected their ancestral orthodoxy, and succeeding batches of graduates came out of the Hindu College with their idolatrous faith completely bleached out of them. The educationists of the time, who were mostly foreigners, congratulated themselves on this result, little perceiving at the time that the loss of Hindu orthodoxy meant the obliteration of every sense of religion. And thus with their healthy Hindu intelligence sicklied over with a pale cast of Western light, too faint to guide them in their path, those youngmen were unfastened from the safe anchorage of social customs with the authority of centuries of time-honoured tradition at their bottom. They drifted away yearly in great numbers to every species of radical doubt and moral irregularity, they were emasculated, giddied and more or less denationalised. Enthusiastic Christian Missionaries, official philanthropists and immature ethnic philosophers of all kinds, looked with complacence for the approaching or actual downfall of caste.

"Idolatry", they said, "was doomed". And so indeed it was. But no one gave a moment's reflection to the question whether the doom of caste and idolatry would not at the same time mean the doom of the fine old national character. We all know of the extravagances of the race of young Hindu reformers that sat at the feet of Derozio, the Eurasian Byron, who led them captive by his erratic genius, and non-chalant self-indulgence. We all know of the fatherly philanthropy, and reputed infidelity of David Hare, the pioneer of English education in Calcutta. These were the creators of the first generation of educated Bengalis. But the salt had not altogether lost its savour, and the first generation whose prominent representative was perhaps the 'mighty' Ramgopal Ghose, retained some trace of the original vigour of the Hindu mind.

But when the first half of the last century came to a close, Hindu society in Bengal presented a picture of chaos. The indications of mental irregularity became pronounced and unmistakable. The type of character known as 'Young Bengal' was fully developed, strong tendencies of a violent social transition had set in. What was known as education comprised a slight acquaintance with the idioms of the English language made through an uncritical study of the writings of a number of British authors, mostly belonging to the previous centuries. Consi-

derable value was attached to English composition, and he who could fluently speak or write in that language was looked upon as a sort of prodigy. But as a rule, education, except in rare instances, neither stimulated the intellect to originality, nor influenced the heart to profound impulse. On the other hand, with increasing knowledge there was an increasing progress of secret self-indulgence; scepticism had extensively infected the rising generation, and strict morality was ceasing to have any hold on Young Bengal.

Not only that. Bands of young men, who had lost their faith in the orthodox religion of the land, met frequently in debating clubs which were then established in different quarters of Calcutta and which had created a great ferment amongst bodies of young students. They met to discuss religion and now and then assailed the superstitious notions and practices of their forefathers with truculent zeal. All these things worked together to cause deep disturbance in the huge mass of native society. In fact, impurity of character among the educated became proverbial, and defiance of religion was the order of the day. All faith on morality and religion every day became weaker, and tended to decay. The advancing tide of a very mixed civilization, with as much evil as good in it, the flood of fashionable carnality, threatened to carry everything before it. There were no doubt some good men, both amongst Europeans and Hindus, who deplored the strange transition from extreme stagnation to headlong self-indulgence. The former were too unfamiliar with native society to resist the tide, and the latter were too effeté. Thus the character of the rising generation of Hindus was threatened with utter ruin.

The country was no doubt in a ferment, and the pulse of the nation had begun to beat quickly in unision with the new ideas and thoughts that indicated the advent of a new era; it was a new era indeed, alike in the domain of spirituality, politics and religion. Keshab Chandra Sen's influence was then in full vigour. Ramakrishna Paramahansa's influence had just then begun to be felt. It was Keshab and his followers who brought Paramahansa to the gaze of the public; Ramakrishna had already begun to exercise his influence upon Keshab, for we see the latter day utterances of Keshab were more or less tinged with the ideas of Paramahansa. Thus it can be inferred that Ramakrishna

Paramahansa's influence was not altogether insignificant in the religious movement that was then going on. It was through the agency of Paramahansa, we believe, that the Motherhood of God was introduced in the New Dispensation.

From the contemporary accounts we learn that in the religious world there was much ferment. In the Punjab, Swami Dayananda Saraswati was preaching his new doctrine. He was the founder of the Arya Samaj as Rammohan was the founder of the Brahmo Samaj. The epoch of modern Hinduism begins as much with the latter as with the former. Rammohan truly marks the beginning of a new revival in culture, in social reform and in religious awakening, and he could clearly see the needs of his age and supply the formative spirit for new construction. He was thus the messenger of a new social construction and the fusion of social forces. The vision of one God untarnished by the traditions of the age enabled him to envisage the one humanity with the freedom of intermixing and interfusion.

Swami Dayananda on the other hand, used to hold that the life in the Vedic ages and times reached its highest level in illumination, and culture—intellectual, moral and spiritual. He identified him with the cultural heritage of the Rishis in the Vedas and concentrated his energies for the revival of the Vedic studies and the Vedic discipline in life. He saw the practical utility of the synthesis of knowledge, Yoga and devotion. He favoured the Yoga of Patanjali. If Dayananda was earnest in reviving the Vedic studies and discipline, he was no less earnest in moulding society upon the ancient conception of natural fitness, character, and adaptation; and not upon blood-inheritance. An out-and-out critic of the social system of the Hindus which was prevalent in his time, Dayananda had no conservative instinct, but he based his ideas upon the Vedas. Thus he was destined and determined to initiate a revival of Vedic culture, which is the foundation of all other reformation. To this end, he founded the society now widely known by the name of Arya Samaj.

In Bengal, Maharshi Devendranath Tagore and Keshab Chandra Sen were working enthusiastically. Devendranath combined in himself an intuitive and rational mind. If Rammohan foresaw the universal church of Humanity, it was Devendranath, his spiritual inheritor, who formally established the theistic

church conceived in the universal spirit. Devendranath who was a living figure of faith and communion, reminds us of the Rishis of yore in his calm responsiveness to the finer intuitions of spirit in his soul and in all the varied expressions of life. Keshab, too, had a receptive soul. He had the spirit of constant communion of Devendranath. His whole art of life was intense and long continued prayer, and in prayer he could find the perennial light and the transparent life. If the Vedic seers saw the Truth in the silent forces of nature, the Upanishadic seers saw it in the silence of the soul. But Keshab's yearning went further. He saw the face of God in nature, on the communion of spirit in the souls which carries it far beyond nature and soul and reveals God on His transcendent beatitude. He sought the Divine in nature, in man and in the Divine Himself. The synthesis which Ram-mohan established is an intellectual synthesis, but Keshab drew his inspiration from life and he saw a finer synthesis of faiths since they are ultimately inspirations from life.

Ramakrishna who was a close contemporary of Keshab, is one of the most potent forces in the present-day cultural and spiritual life of India. He outshines all his predecessors and contemporaries by virtue of his being the "silent man of God"—a child of nature and a child of the Divine Mother. The nineteenth century renaissance, it should be borne in mind, witnessed a remarkable outburst of intellectual activity in India and a radical transformation in her social and religious ideas. The new spirit of the age is strikingly illustrated first by the life of Ram-mohan and subsequently by others and finally by the life of Ramakrishna which forms the real background of the life and career of Swami Abhedananda, who proclaimed himself as the humble spiritual son of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. One cannot, therefore, enter into the life of this great Vedantic preacher and thinker without first comprehending the spiritual synthesis of his Master with whom he came in contact when Kaliprasad was just a teen-ager school boy. But before that, let us have a glimpse into the spiritual backdrop of his life.



## CHAPTER II

### THE SPIRITUAL BACKDROP

“This search after great men”, says Emerson, “is the dream of youth and the most serious occupation of manhood”. Nothing gives us so much pleasure, nothing as so wholesome as to find out the hidden depths of a hero soul. Therefore it is that we dive into old records with the accumulated dust of centuries, therefore we toil and moil noting down events, jotting down anecdotes that help us to write the biography of a great man. Indeed it is a rare privilege to know a great man.

Difficulties meet us at every step to clear what is mysterious, want of proper materials thwarts us in our attempt to see the real man. But whence would man derive strength and gather courage to fight out the battle of life which is really a very serious business if we are to live like men, and if we really feel the responsibility of a man.

The whole world is upheld by the veracity of good and great men; they make the earth wholesome. So they, who come in contact with great souls, find life happy and fruitful. Life is sweet and tolerable only in our belief in such society. Thus we see myriads of souls are carried aloft as if on the wings of a bird to undreamt-of heights by the influence of the life and character of a great man. It is inexpressibly comfortable to know a great man, to see into him, to understand his goings forth, to decipher the whole heart of his mystery and view the world altogether as he views it.

We have attempted here to write the life of one such man whose individuality and personality outshone many of his compatriots and contemporaries. Here is a life so unique and so very spiritual such as we seldom come across in these days of gross worldliness and materialism. The man himself is greater than all his works, hence it has been our intention to depict him as best as we can by the light he shed around him, by the work he did for the advancement of humanity.

It has been my attempt in these pages to draw out the real man as Swami Abhedananda was. His life passed in uniform tranquillity. His life was a life of growth and progress, as I have

tried to show. It was a steady growth rising step above step, higher and higher in the scale of spiritual perfection. The aim of every biography is to bring out the real spirit of the man and the detailed events of his life are so far important as they help us to show the real man.

A genuine spiritual life is the most beautiful thing on earth and the noblest self-expression of the Spirit of God in creation. It is the living embodiment of what the artist in his highest effort tries to express with pencil or in words. The true spiritual life proceeds from the conscious communion of the human soul with the supreme Soul. We will see in the life we are just going to narrate to what perfection this communion can reach. Indeed, the life of this great religious preacher was a perfect blend of keen intellectual penetration with profound spiritual depth—a rare combination in a great spiritual character.

Characters are born—so goes the popular belief. Even then, environment, association, paternal care and discipline at a certain period of one's childhood, when the mould of one's self is on the anvil, have got so much to do with its building true and wholesome and undefatigable throughout life, manifesting at every opportunity that moral force, refinement and spiritual sublimity which make human beings akin to gods.

The second day of October, 1866, had seen such a personage to be born, who became a religious teacher of international repute and a great spiritual figure of this century. This was no other than Swami Abhedananda, the great interpreter of the universal doctrine of Vedanta. Character results from character, as life from life; there is no spontaneous generation in the moral any more than in the physical world. We shall find the truth of this process as we behold the panorama of the unique life we are about to relate.

But before we narrate the story of his life, let us take an objective view of the time and environments in which Swami Abhedananda was born as Kaliprasad Chandra. It is of the first importance when writing the biography of any man to describe his environments, the circumstances and times in which he lived and flourished. Taken care of by the tenderest and most loving and the most virtuous of parents, surrounded by the affection of the most gentle and affectionate of brothers and sisters, loved and sympathised by all friends, actuated by one great aim of life,

namely, the culture and glorification of the immortal spirit within, Kaliprasad grew up.

The time in which he flourished was a period of transition in every sphere of life. A true picture of it has been given by P. C. Mazumdar in the following words : "The light of Western education has dispelled the darkness of ignorance and superstition of ages under whose yoke the country groaned for centuries past. The culture of the science of the West has freed the Indians from the tyranny of antiquity. A new life seems to pulsate everywhere, a new feeling seems to inspire all as we reap the plenty harvest of Western science and civilization, literature and culture. Yet there is a dark side of the picture, the most gloomy that can agitate the breast of a patriot. This is the Godless education of the West. Cast adrift from the safe moorings of a fixed faith of our forefathers the minds of men are tossed about by tremendous doubts and obstinate questionings, till at last scepticism and agnosticism with wide gaping mouths seem to devour us all. The age in which we live is not an heroic, devotional, philosophical, or moral age, but a mechanical one".

Men are grown mechanical in head and in heart, as well as in hand. It is admitted on all sides that the metaphysical and moral sciences are falling into decay, while the physical are engaging every day more and more of our attention. The whole metaphysics itself from Locke downwards is not a spiritual philosophy but a material one. There is no philosopher, now-a-days, like a Socrates or a Plato to inculcate the infinite worth of religion, the great truth that our happiness depends on the mind within and not on external circumstances. The world has even been made great not by mechanical contrivances but by dynamical ones i.e. by making use of the inward primary powers of men. Science and art, poetry and philosophy have all been the free gifts of nature. The divine spirit of religion rises in the mystic depths of the human soul and flies like hallowed fire from heart to heart purifying and illuminating all. Religion is no longer a thousand voices psalm from the heart of man to his Maker, the fountain of all goodness, beauty and truth, but a wise, prudential calculation of profit and loss grounded on economy and utility. The tendency of the age is purely materialistic and, as Professor Blackie says, the madness of externalism. The truth is, we have lost sight of the only aim of this precious human life—

man with an immortal spirit, man in the image of his Maker—namely, culture and advancement of the spirit within through, moral perfection and religious training.

If India is ever destined to take her place among the nations of the earth, if India is again to gain back her lost glorious position, as the spiritual leader of nations, if ever she be called upon to rise up to that exalted position she occupied in the past as the light to show path to all other nations of the world, then she must do it again by her spiritual advancement. India is pre-eminently the land of spiritual culture, her sons were great only through their spirituality. Her Himalayas with peaks crowned with eternal snow, her deep forests, her rivers flowing to the oceans of liquid silver, still give proof of her deep spirituality. Neither Swami Vivekananda nor his spiritual brother, Swami Abhedananda were wrong when both of them uttered from many a platform that India is the cradle of spirituality in the world, and it is her privilege to teach the highest spiritual wisdom to the world.

Such was the condition of the country when Kaliprasad grew up and his heart bled to see her condition, just as the heart of his Master, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, had bled before Kaliprasad was born. Men do not believe in the existence of human soul, it has become synonymous with stomach or some fine chemical salt, as Carlyle significantly calls it. As Voltaire and his friends called religion a superfluity and a nuisance, so we care not much for religion, think it not our worth while to devote our time and attention to it. The torch kindled by the light of Western science has really helped to clear the jungles of superstition, but now in its place there is an arid desert with no verdure to cheer the spirit up. Thus fares our country. The great religious leader, Keshab Chandra commenting on this onslaught of Europe's haughty civilization said: "Europe, desist, you have carried this warfare too far". And it was just at the same time that the saint of Dakshineswar proclaimed with unfaltering voice: "Where will men find rest and peace if there be no religion; how will men bear the cross of life if there be no God to give us strength, how to suffer the various ills of life if we lose faith in life eternal?"

All these Kaliprasad felt. Though brought up in such a time when materialism ran rampant and was making a dire havoc

of the cherished institutions of the country, yet his soul, as we shall see later on, was not in the least touched by these vicious tendencies but matured in the lap of religion, guided by an ideal before him, he was true to his Indian instinct. With all his Western education and culture, he remained truly as Indian, given to religious thoughts and meditations from the earliest dawn of his consciousness.

A harmonious development of being is the first and last object of true culture. This was surely obtained in the life of Swami Abhedananda. A close study of his life and spiritual attainments reveal the truth that his life was an example of harmonious development and growth. As he grew in wisdom so he grew in purity and love. According to the testimony of his numerous followers and admirers in Europe and America, Abhedananda had a loving heart. He felt for all, he prayed for all and we can express it no better than in the lines of Goldsmith :

“As a bird each fond endearment trees,  
To tempt its new-fledged offspring to the sky,  
He tried each art, reprov'd each dull delay,  
Altered to brighter worlds, and himself left the way”.

A lover of truth, a seeker of supreme knowledge, Abhedananda was yet kind and tender, just yet forgiving, a strict maintainer of principle, yet not harsh or opinionative. Thus all the noble virtues that make man an angel, that go to make a man God on this earth, were blended in sweet harmony in his nature, almost from the beginning of his childhood days. Vainly do we seek for another such in the world of vice and selfishness. Simultaneously with the culture of intellect, he tried to rise higher and higher in the scale of spiritual perfection. Intellectual culture was to him only a means to an end, but all his efforts and struggles, his aspirations and energies were for spiritual growth. And well might one say in justice to his sacred memory that he attained what he aspired after and gained that for which he had struggled and tried. It is a sweet and serene face which is for ever hidden under a veil, never to be penetrated. Invisible to the eye of flesh, Abhedananda sits in glory in the land of everlasting bliss in company of the saints and sages of all ages and all clamps. If the outward life of this patriot-saint of India was crowded with events, his inner life was crowned with realization

seldom found in the lives of men with religious aptitude almost from his boyhood days.

“I am a humble spiritual son of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna”. So said Swami Abhedananda and this simple utterance of his forms the key to the understanding of his greatness and the purpose of his life. Men like Abhedananda are not born frequently, but they appear on the arena of the world only after a cycle of ages. But when they appear, they fulfil some lofty purpose in the economy of Providence. Abhedananda rose to his eminence from insufficient beginnings. The germs of genius were undoubtedly in him from the earliest years. But the circumstances which called forth his powers were such as happened only to a chosen few in the latter part of the nineteenth century when the spiritual horizon of Bengal was lit up with one luminous soul—a God-intoxicated man, now known throughout the world as Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

There was deep disturbance in the huge mass of native society long before Kaliprasad was born. The forces that worked together to cause this disturbance are now well-known to the students of renaissance in Bengal. The reaction was so great that our fathers had been for some time mentally convinced of the unsoundness of orthodox images, their sons wanted to cast aside altogether every restriction, to eat and drink and live as they chose. The Christian Missionaries, the Company Officials, the youthful journalists, the unfledged reformers, all united to raise a war-cry against caste, and the entire population of our colleges and schools joined the crusade. It meant the introduction of the European luxuries of food and drink, the free-and-easy ways of the West, the abolition of social discipline, of the exactions of Brahmin priests, and impecunious relatives. Excessive indulgence in the use of alcoholic liquors characterised the educated community; concomitant vices showed themselves, and premature mortality began to rage amongst the rising generation. The emancipation of women began to be talked about, and here and there the doors of the *zenana* were flung open. To make the long story short, all notions of moral danger, promulgated by the ancient Hindu teachers were set aside as old-fashioned and pernicious.

Not only this. Philosophers of the sceptical and agnostic school, scientific opponents of religion and morality, the apostles

of utilitarianism, the materialistic professors of nescience, and so-called positivism, over-spread the land with their teachings. In every shape, in books, magazines, newspapers, through men who filled public posts, and some of whom even occupied chair in educational institutions, these teachings found their way among young men. The ancient scriptures of the country, the famous records of the spiritual experiences of the great men of various Hindu sects, had long since been discredited. The Vedas and Upanishads were sealed books. All that we knew of the immortal epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, of the *Bhagavata* and *Gita*, were from the execrable translations into popular Bengali which no respectable young man was supposed to read. The whole religious literature of ancient India presented an endless void. Our young reformers studied Payne's *Age of Reason* to get fresh ideas on the subject of religion. There were of course some men who deplored this strange transition from extreme stagnation to head-long self-indulgence. But they were too effete to resist the tide. And what is worse neither the missionaries nor their converts showed any inclination to protest against the tide of corrupt civilized self-indulgence which upset the character of the rising generation. The Brahmo Samaj of the time, it may be noted, exercised a very considerable influence in shaping the destiny of the generation. But as a social and spiritual force that would sway the destinies of the nation, the Brahmo Samaj did not only manifest, but did not possess any indication of a revolutionary vitality.

The man who was destined to provide the Hindu society with the desired vitality appeared in the person of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. According to Swami Abhedananda, one of his chosen disciples, "Sri Ramakrishna came to give to the world something which is greatly needed in the twentieth century. The great renunciation of Gautama Buddha was certainly unparalleled, but there is another phase of renunciation which was never performed by any *Avatara* or Great Teacher of the world. . . . Sri Ramakrishna conquered all attachment to wealth and women not by running away from them, but by living in their midst and yet rising above them." Indeed, when the saint of Dakshineswara who is now universally regarded as the embodiment of the highest spiritual ideals, appeared, there dawned a new era of synthesis and harmony in religion and philosophy.

When Kaliprasad saw the light of the world, that era had already begun, shedding radiance all around.

Sri Ramakrishna's life was like an unfathomable music. Its many-voiced sweetness, its stupendous reality, its harmony of a hundred ideals, its ever-growing height and depth, had the gift of infinity in them. A negative infinite always moved his scorn. He held, worshipped, and taught the Infinite Positive. The soul of prophecy and poetry both was in him. He could not only behold, but he could utter and proclaim from the direct source of knowledge. And this is why all his utterances went forth as a song, as a glory, as an unnamable influence, deep into every soul, deep calling unto deep. His life had the heavenly magic of making the true beautiful, and the beautiful true. But the truth and beauty lay in his goodness. He was completely good, good in every relation, strong in his goodness, fearless and confident like a child, never vain in his success, never downcast in his failures. All religions found in him their congenial elements, all scriptures their expounder, all prophets their disciple. It seemed as if he could speak the language of a hundred spheres, and partake of the sacraments of a hundred communions. Every description of devotee found in him a fellow-devotee, Hindus, Muslims, and Christians alike. Every sinner, every sorrow-stricken soul found in him the curing consolation that comes of kindred experience. The joyful found in him abundant perennial joyfulness, the pure-minded came from him with a brighter flame of purity, only the wicked, evildisposed, and unbelieving found him fearful like a sword. The harmony of a higher world was with him. His complicated, many-sided perfection made it difficult to comprehend him. He was sound and whole to the very core, and he made the earth wholesome to those who were around him. Thus it was Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Ramakrishna alone who kindled higher aspirations of spirituality throughout the country. And it can be said without any fear of contradiction that ever since his advent in a lonely corner of Bengal, every religion has caught fire in India, every community scintillates with life. And what is more, the course of an imperfect civilization, borrowed at second-hand from sources unworthy to represent it, has been arrested. A great many reformers have risen of whom Sri Ramakrishna was the pioneer.

The genius of Sri Ramakrishna was complicated, profound,



God-inspired. It reflected every light, every want, every aspiration of the age. It aimed at removing all darkness, doubt and sorrow. He laboured really, radically to bring the kingdom of heaven on earth. He lived in that kingdom in his heart, he wanted to make it a fact in the world. He tried to live like an ideal Hindu devotee, to whom everything else seemed insignificant excepting a journey to Godward. He had only one mission in his life—to establish new ideals of spiritual culture and attainment. He was an originator and author of things, turning ideas into facts, making the abstract concrete. He was a seer of unseen truths and harmonies in strange phases of life and systems. He was the prophet of a higher faith, of a purer morality, of a superior humanity, never dreamt of or conceived by any prophet or seer, in any age and anywhere in the world. His soul was full of calmness and sweetness. The love of God was with him rest, full of the mystery of strength. With him faith was the profoundest wisdom, and a certainty in every-day life. With him, the presence of God was a ready guidance that sufficed for all the intricacies of a unique life of strange trials. His very advent brought in its trail a God-conscious era. And it was in this phenomenal era that Kaliprasad Chandra was born, to fulfil, in due time, the great task entrusted to him by his Master.

## CHAPTER III

### THE FAMILY

Swami Abhedananda has left behind him an excellent autobiographical narration, *Amar Jeevankatha* (The Story of My Life) which, unfortunately for us, he could not complete. The book covers the period of his life from 1866 to 1894 which constitutes just the first phase of his eventful career. From this personal account we gather that his father Rasiklal Chandra was a student of philosophy and teacher of English in the Oriental Seminary in North Calcutta, for twenty-five years from 1838 to 1863. Rasiklal was just a boy of ten years when Raja Rammohan Roy died in Bristol in the year 1831. Thus Rasiklal who was born in the second decade of the nineteenth century was a contemporary of such celebrities of the period as Maharshi Debendra Nath Tagore, Vidyasagar, Raj Narayan Bose, Michael Madhusudan, Bankim Chandra and others who shaped the minds of Young Bengal and to whom the renaissance owed so much for its flowering. Just as Hindu College had played a prominent role in the early days of renaissance in Bengal, so did Oriental Seminary which was founded by Gour Mohan Addy in the year 1825 and it was here that both Swami Premananda and Swami Abhedananda had their early schooling. It was one of the earliest institutions in Calcutta to teach English to the Bengali Hindus and a large number of students belonging to the noble class of the Hindu society came out of this school well-versed in English language. Among the pupils of Rasikmaster as Rasiklal Chandra was known, we find such names as Biswanath Dutt (Father of Swami Vivekananda), Kristodas Pal, Girish Chandra Ghosh, the renowned dramatist and his younger brother, Atul Krishna Ghosh, Amritalal Bose and Suresh Chandra Mitra, one of the householder devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. All of them held Rasikmaster in their high esteem. From all accounts we have been able to gather, it is certain that Rasiklal Chandra was an ideal teacher of his time. His scholasticness, purity of character and his strict adherence to the tenets of Hindu custom, earned him a great reputation as a teacher. His command in English was a talk of the town and people flocked to him to seek his services as an interpreter of that

language when they needed it in their dealings with Englishmen.

The family in which a child is born always throws a flood of light on its life and character. As there is a physical unity of type in every family so there are points of resemblances in the internal qualities, the inner characteristics. Some family bears a stamp of hereditary nobility. The Chandras of Ahiritola were noted for their nobility, which was reflected in a remarkable degree in Rasiklal. The simplicity of his life, the purity of his character and his trust in an all-wise and all-merciful Providence helped him to steer clear of all difficulties with his slender means and live a happy contented life. Seldom do we see a family so happy and contented where reigned peace and harmony and a moral atmosphere which helped the children to grow up in the path of virtue and rectitude. In religion, he was a confirmed unitarian; virtue was the breath of his life and philanthropy, a creed with him. He had a great faith in the preachings of Rammohan and he derived immense pleasure in reading the Bengali translation of the *Upanishads* done by Rammohan.

About his mother, Swami Abhedananda himself has recorded the following: "My mother was a virtuous and intensely religious-minded woman. She was an ideal Hindu lady who had little education but enough common sense. Her devotion to Hindu ideals of a woman's life set an example to her neighbours most of whom regarded her with high esteem. She never took a drop of water without reading a chapter of the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata* after her morning rites. When she used to read those two epics, I always stood by her side in wrapt attention." In those days almost all the pious Hindu housewives possessed a copy of the Bengali *Ramayana* written by Kirttivas and a copy of the Bengali *Mahabharata*, by Kasidas and they learnt it almost by their heart. Those two Bengali epics were regarded by them as the most holy scriptures out of which they would derive much to make their home and hearth happy. "Thus in my childhood I could fully realise the extraordinary characters as depicted in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* as well as the essentials of the Hindu religion"—says

Swami Abhedananda.

From the accounts we have been able to gather from

authentic sources, it must be said that Nayantara Devi, the mother of Kaliprasad was an uncommon woman, and there is no doubt that much of the maternal excellence was transmitted to the character of the son. It is difficult to describe a Hindu lady of the last century in words that will convey an adequate impression to the European mind. In the first place, she was without education in the ordinary sense of that word, she might be able to read a little, or write a letter or two; she may recite a *Sloka* or possess a smattering of scriptures, but the real orthodox Hindu lady was never learned in books in those days. In the second place the Hindu lady during the nineteenth century had no society, except now and then, that of other ladies like herself who met her on occasions of religious and domestic festivals. But the Hindu system of household during the period we are speaking of, was the joint patriarchal system by which many relatives lived under a common roof with their wives and children, so that the ladies had plenty of company in their own homes. The Hindu lady had no admirers, no fashions, no dinings out, no shoppings, no opportunity of producing the least impression upon the outside public. All her work was purely domestic work, plain, hard, daily drudgery, the rearing up of children, the cooking of meals, the cleaning and sanitation of the house, the preparation of preliminaries for the daily household worship and occasional religious festivals.

Nayantara Devi had become a widow at the age of forty-six, and her second son, Kaliprasad was less than sixteen years old at that time. The Hindu widow in those days and even today have to live the life of a perfect anchorite. She is a rigid vegetarian, eats a single meal in the day, fasts twice in a month without an atom of food or drink even in the hottest time of the year, never wears an ornament, dresses carelessly and coarsely, and devotes her life to religious duties which are her only pleasure. A great many practise this asceticism as mere routine, some follow it from fear of public opinion, not a few indulge in secret luxury and vice, but just a handful take to the asceticism out of genuine preference and a heart-felt desire to renounce the world. Kaliprasad's mother most undoubtedly answers to the last description.

Born of a respectable parents and trained up according to the strictest rules of Hindu seclusion, Nayantara was married to

Rasiklal Chandra when she was not more than fourteen years of age. She was the second wife of Rasiklal who was then a widower and by his first wife he had one son and one daughter. The son, Biharilal, was a student in the Free Church Institution (a school founded by Alexander Duff in 1830) and here among his classmates was one Kalimohan Banerjee (who became subsequently known as Rev. K. M. Banerjee). Kalimohan was a nephew of the renowned scholar and missionary, Rev. K. M. Banerjee. Both the boys after reading the Bible were attracted to Christianity and ultimately both of them were baptized in the Fort William church. They had then just passed the Entrance Examination. When his only son Biharilal was about to follow the example of his classmate, and was ready to embrace Christianity, Rasiklal tried his utmost to dissuade his son, but in vain. This was a great shock to the parents, particularly to the mother who died shortly afterwards. In those days a large number of Bengali youngmen who had their education at the missionary schools were attracted towards this alien religion and most of them belonging to the well-to-do family, left their ancestral belief and embraced Christianity in the hope that it would be helpful to them in their material life.

When Biharilal became a Christian and shortly afterwards when his first wife departed, Rasiklal lost all interest in his life and he resolved to commit suicide. With this intention in his mind, one morning he went to the banks of the Ganges which was not far from their Ahiritola house. He was about to take a dip for death in the sacred river. Suddenly came a bid from the blue—"Why are you bent upon committing suicide? Marry again". Rasiklal was then in the mid-stream when he heard this oracle. It was a breezy morning and the crimson sun was just about to rise on the eastern horizon. A serene calmness prevailed all around and there were but a few early bathers around him. It was a clear voice that rang in his ears: "Why are you bent upon committing suicide? Marry again". Nobody excepting himself knew that he was there with a sorrowing mind. As he heard the ethereal voice, Rasiklal looked around but found nobody who might have uttered the strange words. It must be an oracle, he concluded and consequently he then gave up his idea of committing suicide. He came out of the waters after having proper oblations and returned home in a pensive mood.

His heart was overwhelmed with grief and his house was empty. Days went on and Rasiklal remained undecided for sometime as to the course he would take. After a few months he married Nayantara. In course of time she bore him nine children of whom five met with early death and of the remaining four, Kaliprasad was the second. Of a fair complexion, rather tall in height, with a figure well-shaped and well-rounded, with features exquisitely chiselled, wearing over all her handsomeness the sacred veil of classical Hindu modesty, the newly married wife of Rasiklal soon became the cynosure of all eyes in that two-storeyed house situated at No. 22 Nimoo Goswamy Lane, Ahiritola, in north Calcutta.

“Long before my birth, my mother who was virtuous in true sense of the word, used to visit frequently the Mother’s temple at Kalighat, where she worshipped the deity with utmost devotion, desiring to have a religious soul as her own son. She also promised to the Divine Mother that if her prayer was granted, she would propitiate Her with the blood of her breast.” Thus writes Swami Abhedananda. The Goddess fulfilled her prayer and it was an august *Asvin* night, the 2nd of October, 1866, when Nayantara was with a child. The day was of *Bodhan Navami*. Goddess Durga was being ushered in the homes of Bengal with sacred lights and rites and this marked the hour of the advent of Kaliprasad who was destined to become a great world teacher, carrying the universal message of Vedanta in the two continents of Europe and America. The new-born child was accordingly named Kaliprasad, the blessed of the Goddess. Thus it was not a mere chance that the child was born in the house at No. 22 Nimoo Goswamy Lane, Calcutta, but an unseen Divine design which few could realise then must have played a vital role in the birth of Swami Abhedananda. Great souls are born only when the destiny so wills.

## CHAPTER IV

### HIS EARLY YEARS

Great cities produce great men and great deeds of courage. This is very much true about Calcutta—the greatest city of modern India. This city of Job Charnock has produced in course of a century a galaxy of great men who have brought all round renaissance, reformation and revolution. Particularly the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the birth of such great personalities as Rabindranath Tagore, Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose, Acharya Prafulla Chandra Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Abhedananda and a host of others who have by their talent and deeds of courage put their motherland on the high pedestal of glory and greatness, almost unparallel in the history of India. All of them were outstanding figures in Bengal and their activities were enormous and many-sided; and their contributions to the cultural and spiritual life and thought of the Indian people were profound and of far-reaching consequence. Both Vivekananda and Abhedananda who belonged to this band of nation-builders, stand apart as the bravest standard-bearers of the gospel of Vedanta from their very early youth. Indeed they were the most virile force in the newly awakened Hindu society. As the profound expositors of the deepest problems, social, cultural, philosophical and religious, they hardly had an equal in modern India. While Swami Vivekananda's life was cut short at the prime of youth, his great and worthy spiritual brother, Swami Abhedananda was spared a long life by the Providence and he was perhaps the only disciple of Sri Ramakrishna who lived a fairly long life. And in the mellowing years of his maturity when he returned to India after twenty-five years of triumphant preaching in the West, he rightly came to be regarded as an embodiment of all that is best in Indian life and culture. In Abhedananda the man of action harmonized most wonderfully with the man of contemplation. But let us begin the life-story of this great monist from the beginning of his childhood days.

Whether the circumstance makes a man, or a man makes the circumstance is a riddle of the sphinx. But a reconnoitering eye can see what Calcutta was like, at the time when Abhedananda

nanda was born. There was no gas, no electric light, nor even the kerosine lamp. There were no match boxes, no massive buildings for schools and colleges. The young boys like our Swamiji Maharaj had their first role of bearing by the cradle tales of their mothers sitting under the shadowy lamps and amidst simple environments. There were then hardly any psychological education or new methods. The lives were simple and unsophisticated. Too much ideas did not spoil the broth of education.

Swami Abhedananda has recorded in his autobiographical narration that he was educated first in a Sanskrit school, then in a Bengali Vernacular school and afterwards he went to the Oriental Seminary to have his English education there. He successfully passed the Entrance Examination at the age of eighteen. Thus his first schooling was in a *Pathshala* which was conducted by one Gobinda Seal, who was a strict disciplinarian. "Spare the rod, spoil the child", this was his motto. At the age of six, Kaliprasad went to Govinda Seal's *Pathshala* where he read for two years. Here the first printed book that was placed at his hands was *Sisu-Bodh* through which he was not only acquainted with the Bengalee alphabets, but also with some nice attractive stories, the subject-matter of which riveted the attention and oftentimes enthralled the imagination of little folks and thus taught them the use of the alphabets without any serious or conscious effort. In this respect, this primer (now no longer read) was much better than most of our present-day primers. Another distinguishing feature of *Sisu-Bodh* was the collection of Sanskrit *Slokas* which it contained. These were mostly taken from Chanakya. Among the very first stanza which young Kaliprasad was made to read and commit to memory was one which said: "Of the two, the master of a kingdom and the master of knowledge, the man of culture is superior, because while the king is honoured only in his own country, the man of learning is honoured everywhere." Of the stories in this book, that of "Data Karna" (Karna, the giver), the man who sacrificed his first-born to do his duty as a house-holder to a guest, made the profoundest impressions upon the mind of young Kaliprasad. He read and re-read it and eagerly committed the whole poem to memory until it became almost a part of his mental life. In his latter days, Swami Abhedananda while in



a reminiscent mood, used to talk highly about *Sisu-Bodh* which he read in his childhood days.

From the *Pathsala* he went to *Jadu Pandit's* *Banga Vidyalaya* and then at the age of ten, Kaliprasad became a student of the Oriental Seminary where he read for eight years. All along he was a brilliant student with a special aptitude for Sanskrit. The boy showed great promise and most of his teachers were struck with his intelligence which was the chief feature of his character as a student. At the annual examination, every year Kaliprasad carried away a prize, and sometimes two, there being only two prizes in the class, one for English, and the other for arithmetic, on both of which he did equally well. Kaliprasad prepared his lessons industriously, and added patient labour to his natural genius. This habit of hard work and systematic industry equally distinguished him at all the stages of his life. One day his mother missed him towards the end of the day, and after the servants had tried themselves by running in search of him everywhere, little Kaliprasad was found lying fast asleep on the roof of the topmost story of the house with a book half open on his breast. Year in and year out, the boy would get double promotion invariably and this endeared him to all the teachers of the school, who were full of praise for his exceptional intelligence and love for learning. At the same time he became affectionate to his teachers and classmates alike for his gentle and loving nature, which was another trait of his character. And years later when he appeared on the world stage as the preacher of Vedanta, this trait in his nature became a dominant factor of his magnificent personality.

Kaliprasad loved his classmates very dearly. Once there was a virulent epidemic of cholera at Ahiritola, which took a death-toll of a large number of people, and some of Kaliprasad's dear friends fell victim to it. Their sudden death was a rude shock to Kaliprasad's soft heart which was always full of tender feelings for all. One day it so happened that as he was going to school with tears in his eyes on account of the death of some of his classmates, he came to a spot, where to his utter surprise, he suddenly heard the voices of his dear departed friends in a chorus. The unseen spirits as it were asked him not to shed tears, as they were not dead but living. The truth of truths now dawned on the mind of young Kaliprasad's mind that death

is but a transfiguration, and his friends, though dead physically, were very much alive spiritually, and that he could hear their voices in the sounds of nature. Poet Shelley expressed the same idea in 'Adonais': "The spirit then lamentest is not gone." Surprised at this ethereal voice, Kaliprasad went to one of his teachers and told him all about it. The old teacher thought that the boy must be joking with him, and then with his lips puckered up and fiery rolling eyes, he was going to beat his pupil. Kaliprasad, however, persuaded the teacher to accompany him to the spot, and he also heard the voices of his departed pupils in a chorus. Even a person that denies the pre-natal and ante-natal existence of the soul, cannot but believe in such a situation. Our Horatio like septicism melts away, and we "let belief take hold of us". Out of deep affection, the teacher kissed the boy again and again. Those who have read Swami Abhedananda's famous book, *Life Beyond Death*, will realise that he was attracted to spiritualism even from his boyhood days, but it is with a scientific outlook and on a rational basis that he has discussed the entire problem of transfiguration.

Even as a boy Kaliprasad was a monument of morality. We cannot speak too highly of his lofty moral sense. In the realization of the immanent unity of the Divine, morality is perhaps the first stage. There are stages which must be got over: even Spinoza speaks of the degrees of perfection. Abhedananda also began from the beginning. It was a burning passion for truth. Love of truth absorbed the whole of his being, and he felt for those who deviated, either in thought or in action, from truth; for truth, he knew, is our only sheet-anchor in the sea of life. In fact, his early life crowds with many such incidents which at once show that he had, almost from the initial stage of his career, a burning passion for truth; and he knew no veneer, no sugar-coating, never in life anything, which we may call sailing under false colours.

Abhedananda's life was from the beginning a life of crystal sincerity and unassuming simplicity. Simplicity was perhaps the greatest of moral virtue with him. It is conspicuous by its absence in modern life. And what we find generally around us, are rank insincerity, hollow promises, empty demonstrations and assumption of mock-modesty and a genial complacent exterior, for the time being for personal gains. Young Kaliprasad was as

it were sincerity and simplicity incarnate, and when later on he scaled the heights of the Vedantic *sadhana*, he could very easily translate into reasoned convictions this as his spontaneous faith. From the point of sincere faith, emerges the river of religion, growing beautiful and expanding in volume as it flows, slaking the parching thirst of many souls, and fertilizing many lives, barren and covered with lichen, and leading to the ocean of the conscious, realized and mastered Being. Wherever there is the want of this feeder, the river of religion shrinks to its bed, and flakes and shallows appear in it. Sincerity is, (in the words of Shakespeare, used in another context), "the rich point from which all life springs or else dries up." The primeval force that motivates a religious life, is sincerity, and Abhedananda had this sincerity in an abundant degree. Wherever there is sincerity, there is also moral courage; and moral courage is the noblest form of courage that a man can possess. While in the modern world traditional morality is at a discount, and the blind followers of Kant regarding Life for Morality, have performed a somersault, here is the man before us, shining through the mists of a century, who has not tabooed the old-world morality, but freeing it from the mesh of academic observations, has practised it in life not for the sake of itself, but because it imparts the *elan vital* to one's personal and spiritual life.

To young Kaliprasad religion meant a spiritual certainty, offering him strength of character and making him work on the principle of "die to live." Where other people used to shrink back, he was fearless under all conditions supplied by the Cosmic power. His early life was concentrated on this single motto: there should be no defeat of the spirit, there is nothing like the defeat of the spirit. There may be defeat in outer life, but the spirit is not to be cowed down. Thus his mental attitude during the formative period of his life may be summed up in this expression: "The waves on the shore may be broken, the ocean conquers nevertheless." Calmness was a particular trait of his nature and even as a student he displayed it in a remarkable degree. It was specially due to this mental faculty which increased as he grew into age, that nothing, no obstacle whatsoever could deter him in carrying out the work he had mapped out for himself towards the closing years of the last century.

As a student he exhibited extraordinarily retentive memory.

It developed from his very infancy and remained as such throughout his long eventful life. Indeed, his memory was sharp to the extent of being prodigious. Once Swami Vivekananda is reported to have told to Swami Saradananda that among them none excelled Abhedananda in this respect; whatever he read, it would be invariably well treasured up in his mind. He was a voracious reader and was very fond of literature, history and philosophy. Philosophy was his first love. He was never given to light reading. He acquired much proficiency both in English and Sanskrit. He was so much attracted to the study of Sanskrit that when Kaliprasad was in his preparatory class, he studied Sanskrit (which was his second language) at the Hatibagan Tol of Heramba Pandit—a distinguished Sanskrit scholar of those days. The Pandit was also a regular teacher in the Oriental Seminary and it is here that he took a particular fancy for Kaliprasad's love of Sanskrit. After his school hours, the boy would return to home, have some food and then from Ahiritola to Hatibagan he would walk over the distance to have his course in Sanskrit at the Pandit's place.

One day it so happened that Rasiklal came to Heramba Pandit to enquire about the progress made by his son. The father who had all along been keeping an watchful eye on his son, was surprised to learn from the Pandit himself that Kaliprasad was really a prodigy. "How far the boy has read?" asked the enquiring father. And the Pandit replied: "Well, Kali has read by this time *Mugdhabodha* (the Sanskrit Grammar), *Chhanda-Manjari*, *Raghuwamsa*, *Sakuntala* and also something of *Bhatti*. And what is surprising", the Pandit added, "the boy has not merely read them, he has thoroughly mastered them." The father's joy knew no bounds when he came to know further that his son has also acquired such a command over the Sanskrit language that he could compose verses in it. This ground-work at Heramba Pandit's school must have done good to the faculty of Kaliprasad insofar as his deep passion for the study of Sanskrit was concerned in his latter-day life.

Kaliprasad was as much attentive to his lessons as he was to physical culture. In those days there were gymnasiums in almost all the well-known localities of Calcutta. Ahiritola was no exception to it and young Kaliprasad was a regular attendant of the neighbouring gymnasium. "I had little keenness and

interest in physical exercises. In order to keep the sinews of the body fit and strong, I used to practise swimming daily while taking my bath in the Ganges which was not far off from our house. I learnt the art of swimming from my companions." Thus writes Swami Abhedananda. But his love for physical culture waned when he read in Herbert Spencer's *Education* that those who take to physical exercises in excess have a shallow brain and that their thinking faculty remains undeveloped. This idea he carried with himself throughout his career.

Wilson's *History of India* was a text book which he read in his schooldays and it was from this book that he came to learn about Sri Sankaracharya. He became irresistibly attracted to the life of this great religious reformer of India. His curiosity to know more about Sankaracharya and his works were aroused. "I did not know why my reverence and devotion to Sankaracharya began to increase daily. When I came to know that Acharya Sankara was a great scholar in monistic philosophy and he had firmly established his school of thought by completely ousting Buddhism from the soil of India, then I became his adherent and almost from that time I was very much drawn to his philosophy and myself wanted to become a great philosopher." From this account given by Abhedananda himself, it can be concluded that it was the reading of the life of Sri Sankaracharya in Wilson's book, that must have inspired him to form and adopt a life after his heart.

Abhedananda has also recorded a very interesting account of his school days which deserves to be mentioned, for it clearly indicates the future course of his life. While a student in the upper class, he took to painting which was then started as a regular course in the school. "With a view to learn the art of painting, I joined the drawing class and began to learn it with great avidity. Soon I gathered proficiency in drawing and I could paint beautiful landscapes and touch up them with appropriate sepia colour. The Drawing Master was pleased with my skill and praised some of my works highly. Since then he began to take interest in me and taught me the drawing lessons with more care and affection."

This love for art remained with him, but Kaliprasad was destined not to become a painter. One day as he was busy at his drawing desk, suddenly he stood up and politely spoke to the

Drawing Master : "Sir, I have made up my mind to become a philosopher and not a painter. Now and here ends my drawing class." The teacher was very much taken by surprise at this and said, "But a painter is superior to a philosopher." "No, Sir," the boy replied, "a painter studies the surface of things, but a philosopher goes below the surface and studies the causes of things." The firmness in the pupil's tone and the manner in which he expressed it impressed the teacher. But he was so much affectionate to his pupil that he pleaded : "Well, my boy, be both a painter and a philosopher." "One cannot serve two masters"—came the thoughtful reply of the boy. And this was the future Abhedananda in making. This particular incident in his school life is significant, and just as morning shows the day, so this attitude of his mind was a clear indication of the future philosopher in him even when he was barely sixteen years old.

We might mention here another incident of Kaliprasad's student life, which also is equally significant for a boy of that age. Let the story be told by Abhedananda himself : "At that time I found a copy of the *Bhagavad Gita* in my father's private library and began to study it. When my father saw me reading it, he took it away from me, saying that the *Bhagavad Gita* was not meant for boys. 'It would make you insane.' So saying he kept the book hidden from me. Thus being deprived of the pleasure of reading the *Gita*, I became almost mad and began to search after the book at every corner of the house. At last as if some one whispered into my ears that the book had been kept behind an almirah. On searching out there, I came across the book at once and then my joys knew no bounds. I took possession of the book, kept it with me, and when at dead of night all the members of the household were asleep, then I would light up the lamp in my bed-room every night and read the book with considerable delight. My father of course did not enquire any further about it."

Another remarkable trait of young Kaliprasad was the inquisitiveness of his mind. He had a thirst after everything and in order to acquire knowledge about them the boy would ask question after questions to his father. They were strange questions for a boy of that age and Rasiklal while satisfying the enquiring mind of his son, once remarked to Nayantara : "Had

it been the case of another boy, I would have called him as precocious, but our Kali is made of different stuff and I have never come across such an inquisitive boy in my twenty-five years of teaching life." The reaction in the mother's mind could be easily imagined. Kali was her most favourite son and since his birth, Nayantara had all along been cherishing high hopes in her mind about the future of this son who was born by the grace of the Divine Mother. It was this natural inquisitiveness that drove the boy to rear up various sorts of birds at their home along with his elder brother. He also acquired at that age considerable skill in various kinds of boyish pranks such as fishing, playing cricket, buying best articles from the market at a comparatively cheaper rate, cooking and even he displayed talent in carpentry, book-binding and gardening. He could easily pick up any of these arts. Was it not indicative of his power of concentration even at that age ?

Thus we find that Kaliprasad showed all the signs of a born prodigy in various directions from his very infancy. But what he particularly developed was his distinctive and spontaneous craving for knowing the ultimate Truth of this universe. While still a student of the Oriental Seminary, he was fond of listening to discourses on Hindu philosophy and used to hear lectures on various phases of different religions. He attended the sermons on Christ and Christianity by Christian missionaries like the Rev. Dr. Macdonald, the Rev. Kalimohan Banerjee (who was a classmate of his step-brother Biharilal Chandra who embraced Christianity, as has been told already) and others.

The Company Bagan on the Chitpur Road in Calcutta (now known as Rabindra Kanan) was a well-known spot in those days where such public discourses were held frequently. The Brahma leaders as well as the missionary preachers used this spot for the propagation of their respective religious views. The missionaries spoke regularly, on every Monday, at the place mentioned. As the place was nearby, Kaliprasad was a regular visitor there and he liked to attend the lectures delivered at the Company Bagan. Sometimes there would be anti-Christian lectures which were based upon the higher criticism of the Bible and free thought. "I had the privilege of hearing the lectures of Keshab Chandra Sen and Pratap Chandra Mazumdar, the celebrated leaders of the Brahma Samaj. Keshab's lectures in those days pro-

duced a very great effect on young minds who flocked to hear him whenever and wherever he spoke, in Calcutta. He was, in fact, the greatest orator of his times, and even today he is regarded as such." Thus writes Abhedananda. Whenever young Kaliprasad went to hear him, he wondered at his eloquence and enthusiasm which gave Keshab Chandra the name of the "Thunderbolt of Bengal". Years later, Swami Abhedananda is reported to have made this remark: "In our youthful days we were simply awakened to religious thought and activity on hearing the lectures of Keshab Chandra Sen. Town Hall was the scene of his annual orations, attended by so many thousands. I gathered from my father who was an admirer of Keshab Chandra that when on the 28th September, 1866, the great Brahma leader delivered his well-known discourse on "Great Men" in the Town Hall, (incidentally, this was Keshab Chandra's first public lecture) a great sensation was caused. The hall was well-filled by an attentive and applauding audience. And when in our grown up days, I had the privilege of hearing the lectures of this great orator, I was simply electrified."

In this connection, Abhedananda has recorded an interesting personal reminiscence which is worth recounting here. It was the year 1882 and the time was the annual festival of the Brahmans. A large procession arrived in the afternoon hours at the Beadon Square with Keshab at its head. Here he delivered a lecture in course of which he said: "I am seeing Hari everywhere. There is my Hari! I see Him in the branches and leaves of the tree in front of me." As he was saying this in an inspired mood, Kaliprasad was thrilled to hear it and it left a permanent impression on his mind. "His greatness convinced me that he was truly seeing the Lord Hari"—this is what Abhedananda wrote afterwards. He also used to attend the lectures of Surendra Nath Banerjee and Lalmohan Ghosh and the lecture which the former had delivered in English on the life of Sri Chaitanya, had so much impressed him at that time that there dawned in him a great devotion for Chaitanya, the great prophet of love and devotion. Next to Keshab, Surendranath was his favourite orator. He was equally fond of Lalmohan Ghosh's oratory. And when their lectures were published in book forms, Kaliprasad procured a copy and learnt them by heart. There was Pratap Chandra Mazumdar, too, whose lectures



impressed him nonetheless. In the early years of 1883 he had been to England and America and when on returning to Calcutta after about a year, Pratap Chandra delivered his famous lecture "Tour round the World" at the Medical College Hall. Kaliprasad went to hear it and it was on hearing this particular lecture of Mazumdar that he first cherished the idea of visiting the New World. But the strongest idea that seized his youthful fancy was the determination to become an orator some day and how in course of less than two decades he fulfilled it both as a speaker and a preacher, we shall presently see.

## CHAPTER V

### THE AWAKENING OF THE SOUL

The age in which we live has its advantages as well as its disadvantages. In these days of civilization and enlightenment, of industry and enterprise, of trade and manufacture, of steam and electricity, of scientific discoveries and inventions, there are on all sides cheering indications of material improvement and prosperity. But the age does not seem to be favourable to the spiritual interests of man. In the midst of all this pomp and splendour of material prosperity, ill fares the spirit. While the senses enjoy an endless variety of physical comforts, the soul droops and pines in an unchangeable atmosphere. Modern civilization is eminently and essentially materialistic. All departments of thought and speculation are more or less of this character. The politics of the age is Benthamism, its ethics utilitarianism, its religion rationalism, its philosophy positivism. All seems dull, mechanical, unspiritual and lifeless. In the discharge of moral and religious duties especially, and in all corners affecting the interests of the soul, men follow not the high and immutable principles of conscience, but the low and convenient standard of conventionalism. All the nobler instincts and aspirations are smothered by the ignoble worship of custom and tradition. The orthodox fondly look through the vista of bygone days to a romantic past, peopled with saints and prophets and angels of God, adorned with all that is fairest and goodliest and holiest, and illuminated by God's direct revelations; and they fancy that by believing in that they will be saved. Those, on the other hand, who are beyond the pole of orthodoxy, are giving themselves up to the wild vagaries of free-thinking and scepticism, though outwardly, for political reasons, they conform as strictly to forms and symbols as the orthodox. Thus, as regards both those who are within and those who are outside the orthodox church, there is underneath apparent conformity, a striking absence of spiritual faith—that faith which is "the evidence of things not seen, the substance of things hoped for."

From the bigotry and dogmatism of traditional creeds to the cold abstraction of rationalism, the entire religious life of the

nineteenth century betrayed a lamentable want of spiritual insight, and of that direct inspiration which was witnessed in the life and *sadhana* of Sri Ramakrishna and which alone can give us light unto salvation. From such tendencies which characterize the civilization of the last century, India was not altogether free oblivious of her ancient greatness and the great spiritual tradition of centuries. India during the first half of the last century was brought up in the school of English thought and was inoculated with Western ideas and sentiments. As we have noted earlier, few cared about the sacred interests of the soul. With the advent of the Brahma Samaj which attacked the idolatry, there was a clash of religion which resulted in a sort of spiritual stagnation and the enslaved spirit of the nation cried to heaven for redemption. It was at this momentous period in the cultural and spiritual history of India that God revealed Himself to man in the person of a semi-literate Brahmin, born in an obscure village of Bengal during the thirties of the last century. But before we discuss anything about him, it is necessary to inquire how God reveals Himself to man. This is also necessary in comprehending the significance of the life and achievements of Swami Abhedananda.

The first manifestation of God is in nature, and it is from this that the earliest religious impressions of men and nations have been derived. This is the primary and ordinary revelation of God, and which is accessible and intelligible to all. Man, in the simplicity of his uneducated mind, and without the aid of logic or philosophy, "traces nature upto nature's God". He cannot but do so.

The universe exhibits on all sides innumerable marks of design and beauty, of adaptation and method, which one cannot explain except by referring them to an Intelligent First Cause, the Creator of this vast universe. Each object in nature reminds us of the Maker, and draws the heart in spontaneous reverence to His infinite majesty. The stupendous Himalayas, the vast deep Atlantic, the flowing rivulet, the fragrant and beautiful rose, the warbling bird, and all that is grand and beautiful in the world below, and the heavens above, "declare the glory of God and show His handiwork", and inspire devotional feelings in the soul towards Him who made them. Verily, there are "tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones and good

in everything." But, is God manifest in the universe simply as its Maker—who created it, but has no connection whatever with it at present? Does the universe bear the same relation to God as the watch does to the watchmaker? Certainly not. The world cannot exist for one moment without God, said Sri Ramakrishna. He is its life and power. He is the power of all secondary powers, the true life of all living beings. He is the immanent power of the world, its indwelling life, as the *Upanishads* proclaim. The same power that created men and things supports them. They can have no independent power of existence apart from their Maker. In Him we "live, and move and have our being." It is not true, as some would have it, that God created the world, invested each object and being with certain powers, and left them to work independently, according to certain fixed laws.

If the world is real, it is real because of the Divine power which animates it, and constitutes its immanent vitality. But is it merely the intelligence and power of God that we see in nature? We perceive His goodness in the countless and varied bounties which He showers on us, and which makes us gratefully bow to Him as our Merciful Father, who not only makes us live, but renders life agreeable. This is a great fact, and cannot be ignored—God's providence. It is God's goodness viewed from different standpoints that makes the distinction. But in the ultimate analysis to each of us God stands in the relation of Father for the manifold blessings He daily confers on us. And thus, while we worship Him as the Creator and Preserver of this vast and magnificent universe as a totality, we offer Him the grateful homage of our hearts as our Merciful Father for the particular benefits we derive from His works.

But is God manifested only in matter? Is the volume of nature His only revelation to man, the only source from which we are to derive our knowledge of His nature and attributes, and our relations and obligations to Him? Does He call forth our homage and gratitude simply by His wonderful manifestations in the world of matter? No. There is another revelation; there is God in history. He who created and upholds this vast universe also governs the destinies and affairs of nations. The same hand that we trace in the lily and the rose, in rivers and mountains, in the movements of the planets and the surges of

the sea, regulates the economy of human society, and works unseen, amid its mighty revelations, its striking vicissitudes, and its progressive movements. History is not what superficial readers take it to be, a barren record of meaningless facts, a dry chronicle of past events, whose evanescent interest vanished with the age when they occurred. It is the most sublime revelation of God, and is full of religious significance. It is a vast sermon on God's providence with copious and varied illustrations. The nature of history is partly divine and partly human. In fact, history is not altogether secular; it is sacred. If instead of merely looking on the surface of facts and events, where only human agency is visible, we dive beneath and trace them to the great principles which underlie them, and the energies which brought them about, we shall find that the source of all wisdom and power they display is God. Like nature, history reveals the marvellous workings of providence.

But in what manner does God manifest Himself in history? Through great men. For, what is history but the record of the achievements of those extraordinary personages who appear from time to time and lead mankind? And what is it that we read therein but the biography of such men? The history of the world, says Carlyle, is the biography of great men. The interest of nations and epochs centres in them; eliminate them, and you destroy the basic structure of history. It is through these great men, these leaders of mankind, that God reveals Himself to us in history. In short, they constitute what we mean by "God in History".

Great men have also been called Representative Men by Emerson. They are Geniuses, Heroes, Prophets, Reformers and Redeemers, according to their various functions and characteristics. Now the question arises what it is that constitutes great men; what are the distinctive features in their character which give them pre-eminence, and distinguish them from ordinary humanity. In the first place, they are destined to subserve the most momentous purposes in the moral economy of all men of whatever race, or country, or age. With what is purely personal, local, and contingent in them we have certainly nothing to do; but that which is divine and universal in them, that which makes them great men, deeply concerns us all, for it is God's gift to us. Nations rise and fall, revolutions and wars make a

wreck of society, but true greatness always lives—a standing miracle and an abiding revelation—to speak unto endless generations and unto all the nations of the earth, of the inscrutable riches of God's wisdom, power, and goodness. This is the sublime purpose of the lives of great men.

Great men are sent by God into the world to benefit mankind. They are His apostles and missionaries, who bring to us glad tidings from heaven, and in order that they may effectually accomplish their errand, they are endowed by Him with requisite power and talents. They are created with a nature superior to that of others, which is at once the testimonial of their apostleship and guarantee of their success. They are not made great by culture or experience ; they are born great. They are ordained and beautified as prophets at their birth. They succeed, not because of any ability acquired through personal exertions, nor of any favourable combination of outward circumstances, but by reason of their inherent greatness. It is God's light that make them shine, and enable them to illumine the world, He puts in their very constitution something superhuman and divine ; hence their greatness and superiority. They are great on account of the large measure of divine spirit which they possess and manifest. A true great man, in short, is both divine and human ; he is both God and man. He is a "God man". He is an incarnation of God.

Great men appear when they are needed. In the history of nations there occur now and then cries of a very serious character, when the advancing side of progress shakes the very foundations of society ; at such times certain great minds appear, being called forth by the peculiar necessities of the age, who avert impending perils, meet all existing wants, and remodel society on an improved basis. Hence their appearance is not a mere accident, a casual phenomenon, but the sequence of a regular and constant law which regulates the normal interests of mankind. Their birth is always the result of a deep and irrepressible moral necessity.

Great men cast their shadows before. The circumstances of the age foretell their birth ; signs and prognostics herald their advent. We see a peculiar fermentation and upheaving and excitement on all sides. The nineteenth century Bengal witnessed the advent of such a great man in the person of Sri Rama-

krishna Paramahansa, who gathered around him a galaxy of great souls, among whom Kaliprasad was one who as a teenager boy experienced the phenomena of awakening of soul at the touch of his Master to whom he was driven under circumstances which we will narrate just now.

As we have already seen, while studying Sanskrit under Jadu Pandit, Kaliprasad had impressed his learned teacher by his profound erudition and versatile genius. The young learner heard from his venerable Pandit Mahasaya that he could get a lot of information about God if he could read the original Sanskrit scriptures and at the same time at home, Rasiklal who was well-versed in Western philosophy as well, told his son that it would do him good if he could read the prominent philosophical works written in English by different good authors. His mind became enthusiast and while pursuing his academic career, Kaliprasad contemplated to read Hindu scriptures along with Western philosophy of Mill, Hume, Spenser, Hegel, Kant and other renowned writers, all by himself. Not that he could fully understand all he read, but the fact remains that a boy of sixteen years of age was on the threshold of the path that ultimately led to the awakening of his soul.

Calcutta in the year 1883 witnessed the appearance of a noted Hindu philosopher named as Pandit Sasadhar Tarkachuramani. The name is not unfamiliar to the students of Ramakrishna literature and there is copious reference about him in the *Kathamrita*. Once Pandit Sasadhar delivered a series of public lectures on the six systems of Hindu philosophy at the Albert Hall under the presidentship of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the great scholar and writer. As usual, Kaliprasad attended the lectures; he was, however, particularly interested in the *Vaiseshika* and the *Sankhya* philosophies on which, the Pandit explained, rested the atomic theory of Kanada, and the evolution theory of Kapila and compared them with similar theories of the ancient Greek philosophers as well as with the modern theory of evolution as propounded by Darwin. It is on record that those discourses aroused in him considerable interest in the systematic study of Western philosophies both ancient and modern. Then on another day, Kaliprasad heard Sasadhar Pandit's famous lecture on Yoga philosophy of Patanjali and since that time he became immensely drawn to Hindu psychology as well as in the

practical methods of the Yoga system. This was indeed the beginning of the turning point on his career.

Kaliprasad returned home and told his father all about the lecture he had heard on that day and finally sought his permission to read Patanjali. Discouraging his son, the father said : "But my son, it is difficult for a boy of your age to comprehend it. Boys never read Patanjali. So you give up the idea and mind your studies, so that you can come out successful in the Entrance Examination". The boy, however, was inquisitive and he lost no time in procuring a copy of the Patanjali, and he met the price of it out of his tiffin money. He read it, and though he knew Sanskrit very well, yet he could comprehend very little of it. It all seemed Greek to him. Now what to do? Whatever he wanted to learn, he learnt against any odd, such was the nature of Kaliprasad. Sasadhara Pandit was then residing at a residence in Cornwallis Street which was at a great distance from Ahiritolla. But distance did not daunt him. So one fine morning, the boy, trudging all the way on foot, appeared before the doors of the Pandit's place. "Sir, I feel an intense desire to read and understand Patanjali. Would you kindly help me in this matter?" Sasadhara Pandit was surprised to hear this from a teenaged boy, but busy as he was with his public engagements, it was hardly possible for him to fulfil the boy's desire. But at the same time he directed Kaliprasad to seek the assistance from Kalibara Vedantavagish, another noted Sanskrit scholar and philosopher of the time.

Thereafter he studied Patanjali system under the direction of the Vedantavagish who at that time was engaged in translating the Yoga-Sutras and also making an elaborate commentary on them in Bengali. "After completing the study," writes Swami Abhedananda, "of the Yoga-Sutras of Patanjali, I turned to analyse my own mind to gain self-control and to enter into *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* through the practice of Hatha Yoga and Raja Yoga. Then I studied *Siva-Samhita*, a treatise on the practical methods of Raja Yoga. But I was told not to practise any of those methods described in the book without being properly instructed by a competent Yogi preceptor".

But the way must be found out and since that day Kaliprasad's mind grew restless to find out a proper preceptor who could initiate him to the mysteries of Yoga in its practical aspect.



In his first enthusiasm he gave it a much higher place in the scale of mental values than any other cult. He wanted to become a Yogi, and how he longed for some one guide him to this path has been recorded by him. Since then from day to day, his thirst increased, and nothing could slake it. The hour of blossoming was about to dawn in the boy's life who himself was a great Yogi in his previous birth, as Sri Ramakrishna visualised it when he met Kaliprasad for the first time at his own abode. "Where to find an ideal preceptor who could teach me and guide me to my cherished path?"—this was the craving of his soul, day in and day out. The idea seized his mind so intensely and completely that finally he gave up food and drink and even sleep. Yet it was a state of mind which he could not express to anybody.

Jajneswar Bhattacharya was a friend and classmate of Kaliprasad to whom at last the latter confided everything. "Well, Kali, I know of a great man, a great saint and a great Yogi, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa by name. He resides at Dakshineswar Kali Temple, founded by Rani Rasmani. The place is just a few miles to the north of Calcutta. Perhaps he can fulfil your desire". So told his classmate to him and as he heard this, his joy knew no bounds. Kaliprasad then decided to make his journey towards Dakshineswar where Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna was eagerly awaiting to welcome his chosen spiritual sons, as they came one by one.

## CHAPTER VI

### HIS PILGRIMAGE TO DAKSHINESWAR

Kaliprasad was now eighteen, well-built, of striking attractiveness, strong and independent intellect and sparkling mind full of spiritual urge which was as profound as could be imagined. His actions always guided by a highly developed moral sense, he observed the utmost purity in his life—an effortless, innate purity which was never dampening. Worldly life meant little to him. So restless was his spirit for an intimate knowledge of God that he thought it necessary to renounce the world to attain it. It was during this period of restless search for God that one day in June, 1884, Kaliprasad first met Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar which was about six miles from Ahiritola, and which lay just on the banks of the Ganges. In fact, his journey to Dakshineswar was the pilgrimage of the soul of a truth-intoxicated youth, out for his *Guru*, his *Missi Dominici*.

Now, what do we mean by the pilgrimage of the soul? “He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.” This precept of renunciation as the only way to perfection, to true religion, found in Kaliprasad its most ardent follower. Nothing was sweeter to him now than to learn the Yoga science, which seemed to him to be the gateway to the golden temple of religion. A strong love of truth prompted him to make his journey to one who was the master of the Yoga science. Swami Abhedananda himself has recorded the story of his first meeting with his Master in the following words: “One Sunday morning, I reached the temple garden at Dakshineswar where I met the great Yogi, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, and asked him whether he could teach me the practical methods of Yoga philosophy. He replied, ‘yes’, and after reading of my past life, he said, ‘you were a great Yogi in your past incarnation. Come, my boy! I will teach you how to practise Yoga’. Then he initiated me and gave me instruction in concentration and meditation. He touched my chest and aroused my *Kulakundalini* (the serpent power or the coiling energy) at the base of my spinal column, and I went into Samadhi, the state of superconsciousness”.

What the Swami has described in few lines needs elabora-

tion without which the readers will not be able to follow the course of his quest for soul, which was in the stage of half-gleams of an awakening at that period of his life. The story has been told fully and in a very convincing manner in his autobiography. On that Sunday morning Kaliprasad left his home without telling anybody, though earlier he had expressed his desire to his mother to visit Rasmani's Kali temple at Dakshineswar and had also asked her about the direction. Practically the aspirant knew no direction and he had no idea about the way to Dakshineswar. Possibly his classmate Jajneswar might be of some help to him, thought Kaliprasad; but as misfortune would have it, he did not know his whereabouts. The boy was, however, undaunted. Address or no address, he must start for the pilgrimage to which he felt an irresistible urge within himself. He could not brook any further delay. This is what exactly happens in the life of a true seeker of spiritual knowledge.

So Kaliprasad set out alone on foot on that Sunday morning to the abode of his future Master. He was, we can imagine, in a restless mood and was determined to find out the way to Dakshineswar all by himself. If he was in a restless mood, he was nonetheless in a disappointing mood when he began the fateful journey, unnoticed by anybody of his house. There were passers-by on the road whom he asked about the exact direction to the Kali Temple of Rasmani. Crossing the Bagbazar bridge he took the Barrackpur Trunk Road and went a wrong way. The boy did not know that the temple garden of Dakshineswar lay so far from Calcutta. The road seemed to him so long as to be almost endless. In fact, he had left the place behind him while proceeding towards Barrackpur and when he approached a passer-by, Kaliprasad came to know about the exact location, and then he had to make a backward journey before he reached the spot *en route* the village of Ariadaha. At last he reached his destination. He entered by the southern gate of the temple, crossed the Panchavati and then arrived in the vast courtyard of the temple. His mind was full of joy only to sink in despair at the next moment when, on an enquiry to a temple employee, he came to learn that Paramahamsadeva was not 'in' at the moment. He has gone to Calcutta and the doors of his room remained closed by a lock. Kaliprasad cast a meaningful glance at the room. It was no ordinary room, he thought somewhat inwardly.

It seemed to him to be the sacred abode of a great spiritual person to whom he had come to learn the Yoga science. Every particle around the place appeared to him to be sanctified by some divine grace. It was then noon time and the day was getting hotter. He felt thirsty as well as hungry. Having walked a distance of six miles, he now felt somewhat fatigued and when he learnt that Paramahamsadeva was away to Calcutta, he was at a loss to decide what to do. Shall he return to Calcutta? Thirst and hunger and fatigue have completely overtaken him. Moreover, he has no money with him. He has come here without telling anybody at home, nor there is anyone here acquainted to him. He is simply a stranger here. As he continued to think in this way, tears rolled down his cheeks and Kaliprasad began to cast his glance here and there in search of somebody who might be sympathetic to him. It was just at that time that there appeared before him a young man almost of his age, with an umbrella held in one of his hands and on accosting him Kaliprasad came to learn that he also was there with the same intention. Soon both of them fell into conversation and when Kaliprasad told him about the absence of Ramakrishna, he too appeared to feel somewhat disappointed. Then both of them picked up their acquaintance with each other.

This youngman was Sashibhushan Chakravarty who subsequently became known as Swami Ramakrishnananda—one of the well-known and earliest disciples of the Master. Sashibhushan induced Kaliprasad to stay till the return of Sri Ramakrishna. “But are you sure that he will return?” To this question of Kaliprasad, Sashibhushan told him that he was no stranger either to the place or to the man. He knew that it was never the habit with Paramahamsadeva to spend his nights anywhere else except at this place. He is sure to return after dusk. So saying Sashibhushan requested Kaliprasad to have his bath in the Ganges and take some *prasada* which was freely given to all who came to the temple. Kaliprasad then had his bath and food and he now felt somewhat satisfied. Soon the day was over and the setting sun cast its crimson rays on the waters of the Ganges that flowed by the temple. The hour, the place and the sounds of the bells in the temple, all combined to create an atmosphere which seemed to Kaliprasad as truly sanctified and exhilarating. But one thing was troubling his mind. He had come to this place

without the knowledge of his parents and by this time the whole family must be bewildered as to his whereabouts, and her mother would particularly feel anxiety for him. It was impossible for him to return to home that night. This thought and many others set in his mind a wave of anxious mood and he could conclude nothing tangient. To go back, or not,—that was the question uppermost in his mind. Finally, he resolved that when he had advanced so far, he must stay here and come what may, he would not leave the place without having the long-cherished *darshana* of Paramahamsadeva.

One has to surmount many obstacles before performing a good act. Kaliprasad knew this very well. As the evening set in, again his mind became restless ; should he return to home to console his anxious parents, or stay here to see Paramahamsadeva? He remained almost undecided with his mind overcast with deep thought. It was just at that moment that his newly acquainted friend, Sashibhushan told Kaliprasad : "Well my friend, don't you feel worry at all. Look here, I have also come here without telling anything to my parents. Let us spend the night here. We are on the same boat. No doubt your parents will be anxious for you, but when they will get you back, they will be glad as before and everything will be all right. When the whole day is over, then why miss the golden opportunity of having the desired interview with Paramahamsadeva? Do stay here for the night in my company." Thus consoled by Sashibhushan, Kaliprasad finally agreed to spend the night at the holy place, come what may. He became somewhat pacified inwardly and the violent anxious mood was soon over. Then accompanied by Sashibhushan, he attended the evening *Arati* of Bhavarini Devi—the presiding deity of Dakshineswar. He then bowed down before the Mother and felt great joy and peace in his mind. Along with his new friend he then rested on the portico adjoining to the room where lived Paramahamsadeva. They began to talk about various things, mainly religious topics, among themselves. Presently they were treated with the *prasada* which Kaliprasad relished to his heart's content.

Evening grew into night and everything was calm and quiet all around excepting the flowing Ganges. While resting on the portico, Kaliprasad was conjecturing within himself about the probable figure of Ramakrishna. Shall he find in him a Sannyasi

with matted hair and loin cloth and ashes spread all over his body? Shall he be rude to him and chase him with his pair of tongues? It was just at that moment that the sounds of a hackney carriage was heard at a distance. Sashibhushan who was also lying beside Kaliprasad then told him that this sound was familiar to him and Paramahamsadeva must be coming from Calcutta. Kaliprasad then stood up; his whole body was almost trembling. Somebody, as if, pounded his heart. He stood up speechless. Alighting from the carriage, Paramahamsadeva first walked towards the northern side of the *verandah* where he crossed the steps and was about to enter his room through the southern portico and as he was thus walking, he uttered the word '*Kali*' thrice which reverberated in the still air of Dakshineswar. The voice was sweet beyond words and it filled the heart of Kaliprasad with great emotion. Emotion and ecstasy surged in his mind as he waited to have the cherished *darshana*. The room was then unlocked by his attendant and disciple, Latu Maharaj (Swami Adbhutananda) who also carried the napkin and the *botua* (a small bag made of cloth in which pieces of betelnuts etc. are kept and which are taken after meal). He entered into the room, followed by his nephew (Ramlaldada) and Sashibhushan and sat on a little wooden cot. He was then apprised of the coming of Kaliprasad who was then waiting outside. The boy stood there almost speechless, and with emotions surging in his mind—emotion mixed with devotion and apprehension. No question then arose in his mind although he continued to think a lot of questions within himself. At last he was ushered into the room by Ramlaldada. He bowed down Ramakrishna by placing his head at his feet and the moment he did it, Kaliprasad felt all his fatigue vanished away and his mind was now full of peace and calm.

"Take your seat on the mat, my son",—with these affectionate words Paramahamsadeva began the conversation with his future disciple. There were volleys of questions: "Who are you? Where do you live? What is your name? Why have you taken so much trouble to come to this place? What do you want?" And so and so forth. With his heart full of devotion, Kaliprasad asked him straight: "I want to learn the Yoga science. Would you kindly teach me it". A peculiar question it was, no doubt and so far he heard it from a very few people who

came to visit him. Sri Ramakrishna then remained silent for a while, with his gaze fixed on the aspirant before him. Then he said, "It is no doubt good of you to be an aspirant after Yoga and at this tender age. I see that you were a great Yogi in your previous birth and only little remains to complete your course of *sadhana*. This is your last birth, my son. Yes, I will teach you the Yoga science. Have your rest for the night, and come to me in the early hours of the dawn".

The man whom Kaliprasad saw before him was not a Sannyasi in the ordinary sense of the term. No matted hair, no loin cloth, or ochre cloth, not even ashes in his body. On the contrary, he had a simple dress—simple and ordinary, which consisted of a red-bordered white *dhoti*, a coat on the upper part of his body and a pair of slippers on his legs. And yet in this simple and unsophisticated person, Kaliprasad as it were, found the embodiment of the absolute Truth of the highest philosophy as well as of the universal religion which underlies all sectarian religions of the world, as he wrote years later. While Swami Vivekananda on his first interview had taken Paramahamsadeva for a mad man, characterized by sincerity and renunciation and it took days and months before he became attracted to him, it was altogether a different experience with Kaliprasad, who accepted him as his Master at the first sight. Not only that. He also accepted him as an embodiment of Truth and Light. From his very early life, as we have seen, Abhedananda tried to catch the First Principle in the vast mechanism of the universe; his soul began to cry like Goethe's *Foist*: "Where shall I grasp thee, Infinite Nature. ah where!" He had been yearning to learn 'the open-sesame' of the infinite treasure-cage of spirituality and in the language of Schiller, "to seek in the marvel of chance the Law which pervades, and controls it and to seek the reposing pole fixed in the whirl of events", and in his own language "to solve the problems and enigmas that have been perplexing the human intellect from time immemorial".

This is well illustrated by his quaint question to his Master: "I want to learn the Yoga science. Would you kindly teach me it?" The saint replies: "Verily my child, I will fulfil your desire". This moment is an important factor in the development of Abhedananda's life, for till then he had been looking for a proper guide. Now in order to comprehend fully the life

and *sadhana* of Swami Abhedananda, we have got to elucidate this point a little further. What he wanted to learn was no ordinary Yoga—it was the realization of the unity of the soul with the oversoul and, according to Patanjali, when an aspirant passes on to the stage of Yoga as prescribed by him, the aspirant in himself sees all things and beings, equally as he sees himself in all things and beings. The kinship between the human spirit and the universal spirit is like that between a unit of energy and the vast store-house of universal energy, which might be ether or something else. The individual has the same relation to the universal self, as one of the many divisions of a single vital cell bears to the entire original cell. Or, the relation between the two is like that between the surface-consciousness and the sub-conscious in psychology. The sub-conscious is the very ground of the existence of the former, although the surface-consciousness apparently behaves as being independent of it. If the glamour of the unity of God and Man so overpowers us as to make us oblivious of our essential and irresolvable distinction from Him, any spiritual culture along the path of devotion is out of court, for such culture depends for its very existence on the pilgrim-soul's surrender to God. It is because the individual self stands against the background of the universal self, and the all-aware Being to the ground of our individual conscious life and awareness, that the infinite Spirit is the dearest of the dears to us.

With Kaliprasad it was the half-gleams of an awakening, to him it was a consummation devoutly to be wished, for, with the spontaneous overflow of the Yoga-feeling in him so manifest in his words and deeds and thought, he could now give himself up to the Being, who is the source and substratum of life in Nature and Man. To offer himself upto the feet of God with a sense of complete dependence and dedication was ever Kaliprasad's perennial delight and for this he now submitted himself to this Yoga-discipline under his Master, which etymologically means 'yoke' or training oneself, for Abhedananda, this was the key that could open the gate of joy and ultimately lead him to the golden temple of Human Personality which is the soul—the real man. The realization of the body and the soul being mutually exclusive to the first stage of Yoga. The soul comes "trailing clouds of glory from God, who is our home", so the soul is the only abiding entity, the real 'I'. But this 'I' is not



the local or temporal 'I', our little self, but the Higher Self, indissolubly bound up and utterly dependent on the ultimate Reality. This higher Self appears as the kingdom of Human within us. This realization is somewhat the same as Browning has described in his *Paracelsus* :

“Truth is within ourselves; it takes no rise  
From outward things, whate'er you may believe  
There is an inmost centre in us all,  
Where truth abides in fulness; and around  
Wall upon wall, the gross flesh hems it in,  
This perfect, clear perception—what is truth,  
A baffling and perverting carnal mesh  
Binds it, and makes all error....”

Whence this height is reached, the soul is joined to the Self, and there is the Samadhi which Kaliprasad at this time passed into at the very first touch of his Master when he initiated him in the next morning. So the Yoga to which he was initiated by Sri Ramakrishna is no ordinary Yoga. On the one hand, it is complimentary to divine self-knowledge or *Brahmajnanam*, and on the other, is a sowing of the seeds broadcast into the soul for the splendid harvest of the enjoyment of Lord's feast of love and joy. Thus Abhedananda, a great Yogi reborn, was under circumstances insurmountable brought at the feet of one who himself was God incarnate and whose phenomenal spiritual experiences had ushered in a new era in the world of spiritual culture. But perhaps we are wrong to suppose that mere circumstances drove a boy from Ahiritola to make his journey to Dakshineswar. Vivekananda, Abhedananda and the band of the spiritual heroes of the new era who came one after another to Sri Ramakrishna, did not do so under any circumstances, but they had to come to this pilgrimage, for, their coming here was pre-ordained. They were all great souls whom the world needed so much at the turn of this century. Each of them was his *Lila-parshad* or selected companions to his divine manifestation. In every cycle of age, whenever the Lord manifests Himself in a human form to establish righteousness and to destroy evil. He seldom comes alone to fulfil this objective and this is why in the wake of His advent, the army of spiritual men appear one after another and they all gather and meet at the place of the

God-incarnate, at the appropriate time, to blaze the path of harmony and synthesis along which humanity is destined to trudge on.

Next morning Sri Ramakrishna initiated Kaliprasad into the mysteries of Being and gave him proper instruction in concentration and meditation. On the eve of his initiation, the Master asked him as to the extent of his education and he was glad when he knew that the young disciple before him was a student in the Entrance class. And when further asked about his knowledge in Sanskrit, Kaliprasad told him that he had read *Raghuvamsa*, *Kumarasambhava*, *Sivasamhita*, *Gita* and something of the philosophy of Patanjali. So the boy whom he was taking in his Order was no ordinary seeker of knowledge. A fine educated boy, like Narendranath, stood before him. This must have pleased him, for of all persons, Ramakrishna had a special fascination for those who were mentally alert and who had sparks of education in them. Fools he never could stand, although his love made no such demarcation as the learned and the person without learning. Abhedananda himself has given a vivid description of this important incident in his life and we quote the following from his Autobiography.<sup>1</sup> We know of the account of Swami Vivekananda's initiation, but it was altogether something different in the case of our subject. The process of initiation which it was his good fortune to experience was never repeated to any of Ramakrishna's disciples as far as we know. Nor in the whole spiritual history of India, do we come across such a phenomenon of inscribing the code words (*veeja-mantram*) by the finger of a *Guru* on the tongue of his disciple. But let Abhedananda tell the story of his initiation and the subsequent spiritual enlightenment that he had the privilege of receiving at the hands of his Master, for nobody excepting himself is capable of narrating it in the manner he has done. The unbearable inner urge in his heart of hearts that goaded him ultimately at the gracious feet of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, to find out if he could deliver the goods to him in any way, found its fulfilment on that memorable Monday morning. As we have already told, Paramahamsadeva could easily read the young aspirant's spiritual attainments of the past life and he could also

<sup>1</sup> *Amar Jivankatha*, Vol. I.

foresee the great role he was destined to play in his present life, as the Master cast his first look on him.

“I had no winking of sleep all the night and the still hours of the night were over through rambling thoughts. When the day broke at the warblings of the birds, I had my oblation in the soothing waters of the Ganges, and I began to meditate about Paramahamsadeva in that serene hour of the dawn. I was nonetheless eager to meet him. A sense of unspeakable joy and feeling of holiness had then seized my mind completely. Just then I was asked by Ramlaldada to enter the room of Paramahamsadeva. When I entered into his room, I found him seated on that wooden cot. I bowed down at his feet and received his blessings. Then after a few questions, he indicated me to follow him to the northern portico of his room. With tender and affectionate voice, he bade me to sit on a wooden cot that was lying there. There was nobody else. As I sat down, he again bade me to stretch out my tongue. He then wrote some words by the middle finger of his right hand, and as if through the influence of a supernatural force, all my consciousness was merged immediately into a deep *samadhi*, and a unique and unspeakable feeling and experience over-flooded my mind entirely, and I was fully convinced for the first time in my life, then and there, once for all, beyond any doubt whatsoever, that the existence of God, as the ultimate creator of this universe, was absolutely true. I did not know how long I was in this ecstatic mood. After sometime, Paramahamsadeva touched my breast and brought down the serpent power and then I regained my outward consciousness and my whole existence was filled with such an ecstasy and pure delight which is not possible for me to describe in words. I was subsequently told by Ramlaldada that no sooner had Paramahamsadeva touched me than my whole body had become stiff like a plank of wood. Then Paramahamsadeva again asked me affectionately what were my realizations in meditation and I recounted everything to him. Then finally he asked me if I had any desire to marry and when I replied in the negative, he was glad and enjoined upon me never to marry. Thereafter he taught me how to meditate and finally observed that the true realization of the Sacchidananda Brahman is not possible unless one crosses the barriers of senses of purity and impurity. The sense of good is invariably followed by a sense of evil and our

mundane existence depends on the both. If one is to attain Divine knowledge, one has to go beyond both good and evil as well as *maya* or illusion. The lesson that I received on that day from my Master was firmly imprinted in my mind. For the first time I learnt that one must go beyond the sense of dualism before one can hope to attain the highest knowledge of non-dualism. The initiation over, I was instructed by him to repair to the temple of Goddess Kali and meditate there for a while. The meditation being over I returned to his place when he placed on my hands some sweets and asked me to have my breakfast. He further told me to repeat my visits to him whenever possible and he would arrange the necessary expenses for my coming here. I returned home before noon on a hackney carriage provided by Sri Ramakrishna. My parents and the other members of my family were delighted to see me”.

The boy who made his journey to Dakshineswar was no longer the same when he returned to home. His mind was no longer what it was before; his entire mental world has now undergone a luminous transmutation. A pure soul as Kaliprasad was, he now returned home all the more pure. All that was dross in his life was converted into gold. In fact, the Master had revolutionised the mind of the spiritual aspirant. If Kaliprasad had the dim smouldering fire of spirituality in him, it was now set ablaze by a few puffs from the saint of Dakshineswar. The spiritual fire that was burning in him seemed to consume all the limitations and differentiations in his mind, and like heat tended to expand his soul infinitely, for the energy of his fire was as infinite as that of his great spiritual brother, Swami Vivekananda.

## CHAPTER VII

### RAMAKRISHNA : THE GREAT EXPLORER

The world has seldom witnessed such a great spiritual enquirer and explorer as Sri Ramakrishna was. The story of Swami Abhedananda's life cannot be complete without the story of the life of Sri Ramakrishna, for the life of the former is a vivid commentary of that of the latter and as such, the two lives—that of the Master and the disciple formed, as it were, one complete whole. We need not, however, deal with the usual life-story of Sri Ramakrishna which is too well-known to recount and which has already been told and re-told and discussed by some of the world's greatest philosophers and writers, from Prof. Max Müller to Romain Rolland. Paradoxically speaking, it was a great Brahmo leader and one of the earliest admirers of Sri Ramakrishna, who wrote the first account of the saint of Dakshineswar, while the latter was still alive. We are referring here to Keshab Chandra Sen's memorable account. The *Saint of Dakshineswar* which was published in the *Indian Mirror* as early as the seventies of the last century was, in fact, the first account we have about Sri Ramakrishna. It was this short but lucid account written by Keshab Chandra that brought Sri Ramakrishna first time before the public gaze. Innumerable books have so far been written about this great Hindu prophet of the modern age, which are very familiar to all lovers of Ramakrishna. They are indicative of the interest which his life has been able to create on the minds of all spiritual thinkers, in India and abroad. So instead of narrating his traditional life-story, it will help us if we can present an objective study of his spiritual life, set against the background of India's age-long spiritual tradition.

Sri Ramakrishna belongs to the lineage of India's great seers, who for ages have appeared in the arena of our history with the message of Eternal Man. India's special genius has been to acknowledge the divine in human affairs and the genius had its utmost fulfilment in the *sadhana* of Ramakrishna. Swami Abhedananda, in his presidential address before the Parliament of Religions held in Calcutta on March, 1937, on the occasion of the birth centenary of Sri Ramakrishna, thus observed :

“Nearly from thousand years ago, Bhagavan Sri Krishna declared : whosoever comes to me through whatsoever path I reach him. All men are struggling in the various paths of religion which ultimately lead to one Almighty Lord of the Universe. But this declaration could not be fulfilled in that remote antiquity when there was only the *Sanatana Dharma*—one eternal religion and when different sectarian religions did not come into existence. After Sri Krishna came Buddha who was the founder of Buddhism; Zoroaster, the founder of Zoroastrianism in Persia; Lao-Tze and Confucius in China ; and Jesus the Christ, the founder of Christianity. After Jesus arose Mohammad, Sankaracharya, Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism and other religious prophets. At last in the nineteenth century Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna came to fulfil that declaration by practising the religious methods of various creeds and living like the consummation of all the prophets, seers and incarnations and Divinity that appeared before His advent”.

And Vivekananda wrote : “Then it was that Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna incarnated himself in India to demonstrate what the true religion of the Aryan race is. . . He was the living embodiment of the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and other Hindu scriptures. He lived in one single life what not only the Hindu but the whole human race lived spiritually for ages.”

Ten years after the death of Ramakrishna, Prof. Max Müller brought out his essay, *A Real Mahatman*, in which the noted Professor showed the difference between the imaginary Mahatman and the real Mahatman or the Great soul of India, who had reached Godconsciousness and had manifested Divinity in all the actions of his daily life. This essay which was the highest tribute of honour and respect paid by this Christian scholar to a Divine manifestation in India, was subsequently elaborated into a book-form under the name and title of *Ramakrishna, His Life and Teachings*. It was since then that the unsectarian and universal teachings of Sri Ramakrishna began to attract the attention of the sincere and earnest seekers after Truth among the Christian world.

But let us consider for a moment the historical perspective of Ramakrishna's phenomenal advent, for essentially this colossal spiritual personality was a man of history. For over six centuries Bengal had been under foreign yoke, and one Muslim power

after another had claimed and exacted her allegiance till, on the eve of the nineteenth century, she became a veritable apple of discord among rival claimants including some of the greatest and most go-ahead European powers. The effects of these successive waves upon the social, moral and religious fabric of the Hindu community became exceedingly complex through the impact of English influence and incipient English education. Emerging from the sphere of operation of these conflicting forces, Bengal presented a piteous spectacle of a conflict of faiths and ideals, of a blind bigotry and equally blind scepticism, of rank atheism side by side with sanctimonious Brahminism, and of utter laxity of moral and religious discipline countenanced and supported by a pharisaic appeal to scriptural sanction in matters great and small. What applies to Bengal, applies also to other parts of India at the time, only in varying measures. But everywhere the forces of disruption were fully in operation. Christianity had made no appreciable impression on Hindu life and culture, and Muslim influence had left its mark on the outer ring of Hindu society. For, the Hindu social structure being pre-eminently conservative, prevented any effective saturation with Christian or Islamic principles.

To take another illustration. Bengal is the common home of Vaishnavism and Saktism. No two sects can be more unlike each other in the doctrines and disciplines which they indicate and the general outlook and attitude of life that they respectively induce. But the difference is appreciable only to the devotee eager to go into the heart of religion and bring his life into line with it. With a soulless religion, reduced to a set of conventions and customs, ceremonials and festivals, it matters little whether one professes Vaisnavism or Saktism, or even indifferentism or atheism. In the days before the advent of Sri Ramakrishna, Sakta or Saiva, Vaishnava or Vedantist, one had only to conform to the outward religion that went by the name of Hinduism to be counted as of the orthodox fold. With the large majority religion was but another name for convention, and the practice of it consisted in conforming to certain forms and rituals from which all spirit had departed and, what was worse, some of these rites and ceremonies were revolting to the moral sense of any but the most perverted mind.

The silent forces of good and evil prevailing towards the

closing decades of the eighteenth century in Bengal, told upon the fabric of society and brought about a veritable era of transition. The religious genius of Hinduism was not too slow to take advantage of the new atmosphere in the national environment. First it was in Raja Rammohan Roy we see the spiritual genius of Hinduism waking upto the beginning of a new life under the silent but sure operation of the forces mentioned above—the *sakti* and *vairagya-mukti* of Hinduism fired with the iconoclasm of Islam and manifesting itself in a fearless declaration of unidolatrous Hinduism based on Vedanta. Like the stream that issues from the mountain and yet lashes itself into fury against its mountaneous home till it breaks down all barriers and finds an outlet for itself, the spirit of Rammohan, essentially Hindu, lashed itself into fury against the Hinduism of the day till, breaking down all bonds of idolatry and meaningless ritualism, it found its lead in the contemplative Reason of the *Upanishads* and the *Brahmasutras*.

The conception of Divine unity with its resultant, that of universal brotherhood in a more or less pronounced form has again and again burst forth in the shape of reform movements which, despite bitter opposition on the part of the orthodoxy, have from time to time purged Hindu religion and society of impurities and re-establish them on the basis of truth, love and purity. Between the fourteenth and the seventeenth centuries three such movements arose led by Chaitanya, Kabir and Nanak respectively. They all preached the unity of the Godhead, they all abjured caste-distinctions and they all admitted Mohammedans into their folds. The vicissitudes through which these reforming movements passed and the diverse form which they ultimately took are beyond the scope of this work. It is common knowledge that they finally lapsed back into orthodox Hinduism divested of many of their essentials, some unessentials taking the place of the essentials and serving to distinguish them into separate sects of the Hindus. Yet it cannot be said that the spirit which underlay these reforms has been exhausted,—no more than the rich heritage received from the Rishi fathers of old.

Thus with the unclaimed heritage of divine unity coming down from the ancient Rishis, with the unseen impetus of the recent reform movement and with the unspeakable dynamic force of the early nineteenth century there dawned in India a new



era of reform and Rammohan Roy was called to play a unique role. To make the long story short, with Rammohan began the renaissance of Indian wisdom and the religious awakening of India in a reformed manner. It was he who resolutely rejected all those unhealthy elements which the long centuries and the decadence of Hindu genius were responsible for introducing into it. He proclaimed the *Upanishads* in which it was vested the authority for two milleniums. He interpreted them with the help of Vedantic Monism and in the light of modern ideas. He placed, as it were, India in the midst of humanity, and assigned to her a seat among the élite. Swami Vivekananda has rightly said that Rammohan was not merely an intellectual force, but a great spiritual genius. Thus it can be said that the epoch of modern Hinduism begins with him. The new spirit of the age—synthesis of religion actually begins with him. What he visualised was not the India of the Hindus but the India of cosmic humanity.

What was begun by Rammohan, was completed by Sri Ramakrishna who was born just three years after the death of the former. He is distinctly different from the other great spiritual sons of India, before his day. According to a modern philosopher : “Ramakrishna was the *silent man* of God. He was a child of nature, a child of the Divine Mother. His character can be summed up in one word, God-centre. He was God-intoxicated. Nothing in life—the warmest relations, the family ties could deflect his being from the quest of his soul—God”. Today this ‘God-intoxicated’ man is universally regarded as a Divine-incarnate who harmonised within himself all the spiritual thought and experience of the world’s past. “Living quietly on the bank of the Ganges at the Dakshineswar temple, Sri Ramakrishna renounced in an almost continuous state of Godconsciousness, sometimes losing himself utterly in the Absolute Brahman, sometimes in a slightly lower state, communing with the Personal God in one or another of His or Her infinite forms, sometimes again, perceiving this world of multiplicity start through and through with the unifying substance of Divinity”.

It is the character of Sri Ramakrishna that is of utmost importance to us. The very character of this ‘God-centre’ man tells a more complete tale in the way of revelation than all the most well-balanced metaphysical theories put together. Vivekananda himself used to express this view on more than one occasion. His

life is the demonstration of means towards all spiritual ends. A great spiritual path-finder as he was, the utterances of Sri Ramakrishna were the "utterances of human verity in regard to the highest possibilities of the spiritual life". Vivekananda saw him as the re-maker and preserver of the Hindu Dharma and it is on record that he also saw in the Master "a new Chaitanya, a new Sankaracharya, a new Buddha". And Sri Aurobindo finds in the life of Ramakrishna "a unique example of realization and possession of God by the power of love, by the extension of in-born spirituality into various experience and by the spontaneous play of an intuitive knowledge." Thus it was possible for Sri Ramakrishna alone to exhibit fine shades of religious feelings and sentiments in their infinite varieties. The life of this new Liberator of humanity flowered in love, devotion and divine wisdom. He experimented with every kind of spiritual experience, which was never attempted by any other prophets in India, or elsewhere in the world.

As we all know that during the early years of Ramakrishna, the Brahma Samaj had its palmy days; the synthetic intellectual spirit of Rammohan together with the aesthetic intuitionism of Devendranath and the living ecstatic faith of Keshab Chandra had made the Brahma Samaj movement a very strong and effective movement amongst the cultured people. Orthodox faith was shaken to its foundation. It was at this time that Ramakrishna by his intense spirituality which he had attained by the time-honoured disciplines and methods, showed the dynamism and potentiality of the orthodox faith. He had the spiritual genius to establish that Hinduism was not idolatry, that there was a fine scientific discipline in the orthodox cult to evoke spiritual powers and extensive visions.

We also know that he practised many forms of *sadhana*. Before his time differences prevailed among the adherents of various faiths, each of them claiming superiority for his own. It was Sri Ramakrishna who could not tolerate these differences in the fundamental convictions of human life. He had the special genius to practise these faiths and judge them by their fruits, before he could give out any solution. The history of the world had never witnessed a spiritual experimentalist like Sri Ramakrishna who gave out this famous declaration : "as many doxies, so many paths; all paths lead to the same goal."

A child of the Divine Mother as he was, Sri Ramakrishna could consciously feel the ingress of dynamic spirituality in his being which he could easily transmit to others. We gather from the story of his life that this dynamic spiritualism had its exhibition when he used to awaken "spiritual perception, luminous intuition and radiant sensation" by simply touching the physical bodies of his disciples. Abhedananda experienced the same inspiring touch on the very day when the former was admitted to his Order as a spiritual son. Once Vivekananda, too, had the same inspiring touch when his doubtful mind was not ready to accept him as the Master.

"The first part of Sri Ramakrishna's life was spent in undergoing extreme austerities and engaging in a multiplicity of spiritual practices. There was no religious path which he did not quickly follow to its destination and none which he found invalid. Thus he became a living verification of the fact—new to the world—that all religions if practised earnestly, lead to the Godhead. He became also an unerring guide, for he was intimately acquainted with the landmarks and pitfalls of each spiritual road, and knowing at a glance the heart and mind of everyone who came to him, he was able to mould and quicken the life of each along the line best suited to his nature".

The child-like purity of this God-intoxicated man was the source for the profundity of his teachings which were as simple and unsophisticated as could be imagined. A study of his gospels would at once convince anybody, scholar or illiterate, that they came right from the fountain source of perennial knowledge. Thus "the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, who combined in himself a vast intellect and an unbounded compassion, who was, in fact, cosmic in heart and mind, were unique both in their all-inclusiveness and in their insistence upon the ability of man to know God directly and in this life".

The *sadhana* that began at Dakshineswar during the second half of the last century and which continued for twelve years at a stretch, was unique. The story of Sri Ramakrishna's life reveals the stages he had to cross, one by one, before attaining the *summum bonum*. "The boy became the devotee; the devotee became the ascetic; the ascetic became the saint; the saint became the man of realization; the man of realization became the prophet; the prophet became merged in the Divine

Nature which is God". Innocent of simpleness and without having almost any help from guides at the earlier stage of his *sadhana*, Sri Ramakrishna received his actual lessons directly from the Divine Mother, by dint of his single-minded devotion to Her. Devotion mixed with sincerity characterise the period of his life when he was engaged in all sorts of spiritual experiments, all by himself. How the Divine Mother Bhavatarini at Dakshineswar revealed Herself to the young simple priest with all Her effulgent splendour and how Sri Ramakrishna felt Her direct presence and how finally his whole mind became attuned to the Highest Reality—are facts too familiar to need recounting here. But in order to comprehend the real significance of Sri Ramakrishna's earlier phase of spiritual craving, let us see what Swami Abhedananda has said in this connexion.

In the last chapter of his famous book, *Great Saviours of the World*, the Swami writes: "Ramakrishna performed daily duties of a priest in the Kali temple, repeated prayers to the Divine Mother, offered flowers, scent and cooked food of various kinds, burnt incense and waved light every morning and evening for a few months. But the earnest and truth-seeking soul of Sri Ramakrishna longed for something more and began to question within himself: 'What is all this for? Am I doing all these things before a dead statue of stone or does the actual Divine Mother listen to my prayers and accept my offerings?' This question of the mind was the turning-point in the life of this sincere young priest. It aroused the dormant spirit and forced him to take a new path, the followers of which are very rare and the goal of which is the transformation of the individual soul into a living God."

In his life we find that at this stage of *sadhana* whatever Sri Ramakrishna had achieved, he achieved it through prayer and nothing else. "He would constantly pray to the Divine Mother and entreat Her to manifest and appear before him". And she did appear, such was the power of his prayer which is one of the chief characteristics in the life of this silent man of God. It was, of course, no ordinary prayer. It came as if from the innermost recess of the soul. He was prayer personified. Prayer to the Divine Mother was almost instinctive with Sri Ramakrishna. It was entirely untaught; from the very day he was engaged as the priest to Bhavatarini, the act of prayer became

almost an effortless affair with him. It was a spontaneous impulse. He never saw anyone offering prayer to the unscen spirit God ; nobody ever spoke to him at that time on the subject. He could not be very much more than fifteen years when he first began to pray. It may be safely said that in the first ten years of his religious life, prayers brought him sentimental consolation and it also strengthened him morally. It was no mechanical prayer—it was a prayer of the soul. He prayed regularly, incessantly against the promptings of the world. In that morning of his spiritual life, the voice always sounded in his ears, Pray ! Pray ! there is no other way than prayer. So the boy-priest began to offer prayers, day in and day out. The prayers which came out of the depth of his soul as he sat before the image of the Kali, were not confined within the four walls of the temple, they must have echoed and re-echoed in the murmur of the leaves of the trees and in the water of the Ganges flowing by. We have said that the prayer that went forth out of the heart of this devoted young priest was no ordinary prayer ; it was, in fact, the communion of a soul to a Higher Soul.

What the great devotee Ramaprasad once achieved by prayer, was also achieved by his successor, Sri Ramakrishna in our times. Here is the example of a man who, from the small beginnings of a simple natural prayerfulness, gradually found in himself the grower of a dynamic spiritual life, whose magnitude has overshadowed the whole world. Sri Ramakrishna bears the grand testimony of undoubted heroism and the loftiest harmonies of soul, all attained by the easy accessible means of earnest prayer before the Divine Mother. Everything great or good which he achieved in course of twelve years of his spiritual pursuit, he ascribes directly or indirectly to prayer and nothing else. The history of the development of his spiritual attainments is, therefore, a study of unsurpassed interest. It is the corner-stone of his whole system of religion, the whole fabric of his beneficent activity. If Sri Ramakrishna's life has produced any great result, it is this. He has undoubtedly taught a number of men as well as his chosen disciples, like Vivekananda and Abhedananda, the reality of daily intercourse with the spirit of the Divine. The formless essence of the Divine Being and attributes he has embodied in a living, heartfelt worship which

has brought in its wake a new type of spiritual regeneration. The invisible God he has made visible to his disciples. This single accomplishment stands as the stateliest memorial to the character of this God-intoxicated man. Even when he was firmly established in the highest consciousness of God and was totally unified with the cosmic will, Sri Ramakrishna did not give up his earlier habit of offering prayers to his Divine Mother—such was his adherence to this simple art of worship. He has shown the world—this world of science and reason—that God is approachable and visible through prayer and prayer alone, provided it comes out of the utmost recess of the soul attuned to the love of God. To make it more precise, the prayer must be the panting of the pure heart, for in religion nothing is more requisite than a pure heart. The pure heart of a Sadhaka, who has affirmed himself in full consciousness, is transformed into a mental sky with its own sun, moon and stars. And Sri Ramakrishna was as pure and lovely as a lily. To him the attainment of religion was the very justification for his very existence, and Vivekananda truly says that, “When the power that attracts the light of religion in the receiving soul is full and strong, the power which answers to that attraction and sends in light, does come as a matter of course.”

Everything in Sri Ramakrishna's life was to the purpose, every occurrences showed in it the rough sketch of the future. It seemed as though his life was snapped out beneath his feet. He was ordained by God to marry at twenty-three a girl, who was only five years old. The marriage of this God-child with Sri Sarada Devi, who was a pure and noble soul has a special meaning for us and their conjugal life needs our closer study, just only to find out the true greatness of this great Sadhaka. And in this connection we can do no better than to quote from the writings of Swami Abhedananda. The Swami writes: “Sri Ramakrishna conquered all lust and attachment to woman by realizing that every woman, young or old, is the earthly representative of the Divine Mother. He worshipped all women by seeing the Divine Mother in them. He did not run away from his wife but worshipped and realized her as the embodiment of the Divine Mother. . . In the lives of previous Hindu *Avatars* as well as of great Siva we find that they all had wives and children. Gauranga married twice but had no issue. There

are examples of world teachers like Sankaracharya, Christ and others, who lived a pure life and remained unmarried. None of them could set such a high example of absolute freedom from sex-idea as was done by Sri Ramakrishna, even while he was living in company with his wife, who remained a blessed virgin all through her life. In this age of lust and greed when men and women have no control over sex-idea, when the ideal of *brahmacharya* (or celibacy) is almost forgotten, Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna and his wife, Sarada Devi showed in their lives how spiritual marriage is possible purely on the soul-plane." Once we can fully comprehend the secret of this spiritual union of the two God-intoxicated souls, we can perhaps realize the true significance of the advent of Sri Ramakrishna in this age of Science and Reason. It was the special genius of Sri Ramakrishna which uplifted womanhood. He taught that every woman, young or old, was the representative of the Divine Mother. He worshipped God as the Mother of the universe and frequently declared that his Divine Mother had shown him that all women represent Divine Motherhood on earth. This is why both Vivekananda and Abhedananda have firmly declared that "for the first time in the religious history of the world was this ideal preached by any divine incarnation", and this is where lies the real greatness of Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna fully realized the grand truth of the eternal Hindu religion practising all the various kinds of *sadhana* in one single life and when he proclaimed his message, the world listened to him. Abhedananda has rightly observed that "Pundits and scholars of every nationality as well as hundreds of devout men and women of all sects came to see him and listened to his original and wonderful teachings. Using the commonest occurrences of everyday life as illustrations, Sri Ramakrishna succeeded in making the dull minds of worldly people grasp the spiritual depth, beauty and grandeur of his sublime ideals. In this age of scientific rationalism, Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna has shown to the world how the Lord of the universe can be realized and attained in this life, and no one except him has ventured to go through all the tests of sceptics and agnostics to prove that he had attained to Godconsciousness".

To sum up, Ramakrishna realized the truth and handed it to his chosen disciples, particularly to two of them, Vivekananda

and Abhedananda, to give practical shape to it, so that humanity might realize the great truth of the Vedanta through life and make it a living faith in family and social life. The Master and his two great disciples—who were the apostles of monism—were truly united in the spirit of Vedanta.



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE NEED OF A GURU

In this chapter, it is our intention to discuss briefly one important aspect of Hindu *sadhana*—the necessity for accepting some one as *Guru* or guide in our path to spiritual pursuit. Every traveller in the path of joyous Light who is destined to climb up to the highest state in the attainment of Light and Love as the ultimate certitude, has achieved his desire only with the help of one whom he accepts as his spiritual guide. It has been enjoined by the Hindu scriptures that a preceptor or Acharya is absolutely essential to attain success in one's spiritual quest. The life of Sri Ramakrishna bears ample testimony to it. Himself a God-incarnate, he accepted not one, but more than one as his spiritual guide. He even accepted a woman as his *Guru*. As we all know, this woman—the Bhairavi Brahmacharini as she was called, helped Sri Ramakrishna in various kinds of *sadhana*, by staying at Dakshineswar for several years and teaching him different practices in various branches of Yoga. The only difference that we notice in the case of Sri Ramakrishna is this that he never went in search of a *Guru*, but every time there came some expert Sadhaka to give him proper instruction for reaching the goal. Each of these experts, however, was astonished to see him mastering within a few days the most difficult exercises which took them years to accomplish.

After Bhairavi there came Totapuri, a Sannyasin of the Vedantic realization under whose direction Sri Ramakrishna followed the path of Advaita Vedanta. This Jnana Yogin also had come to Dakshineswar of his own accord. Then he accepted a Mussalman Fakir, Govinda by name, under whose guidance and direction he learnt the mysteries of the Islamic *sadhana*. All these indicate that Sri Ramakrishna unmistakably pointed to the necessity of accepting some one as *Guru* to travel safely the hazardous path of spiritual pursuit. At a time under the impact of western modes of thought and culture when we had lost sight of this essential feature of the Hindu *sadhana*, it was Sri Ramakrishna who re-established it. Did he not say: "You can no more attain the knowledge of God by reading religious books

than you can form an idea of Banaras by a reference to its representation on a map." On another occasion he told to a house-holder devotee : "If the services of a teacher are considered indispensably necessary in the matter of ordinary education—how much more indispensable are the services of a *Guru* in the case of an aspirant after divine knowledge." Even the intellectual like Narendranath Dutt had his doubts initially as to necessity of a *Guru* and he did not accept Sri Ramakrishna as such until and unless the latter had fully inculcated upon his vacillating mind the truth of the *guruvaada* as laid down in our scriptures. Thus when the need of a *Guru* was finally driven home to his mind by the greatest Acharya the world has even seen, Narendranath had to accept the cult of *Guru* and himself became a staunch votary of this time-honoured cult. If Dante needed Virgil as his monitor in his journey to paradise, then it is needless to argue otherwise. The home of God can never be reached without the help of a proper guide. To some the cult of *Guru* might seem irreconcilable to the time-spirit. But nothing could be further from the truth. As Vivekananda puts it with marvellous force in *The Sages of India* : "Krishna is not the authority of the Vedas, but the Vedas are the authority of Krishna himself; his glory is that he is the greatest teacher of the Vedas that ever existed. So as to other incarnations ; so with our sages". The greatness of the *Guru* is that he does not speak with authority, but what he speaks is the authority.

The chief characteristic of a *Guru* is this that he must be a transformer, he must be an alchemist. This is the aspect which has been attributed to all the celebrated Acharyas and the spiritual teachers of the bygone days in India. In this bleeding piece of earth human nature has bled staunchlessly since the dawn of time and the soul of man has still to sigh over what his life remains in this day. Sri Aurobindo has appropriately described this state of human nature in Book VI of his epic *Savitri* in the following words :

"A seeker in a dark and obscure place,  
 An ill-armed warrior falling dreadful odds,  
 An imperfect worker given a baffling task,  
 An ignorant judge of problems Ignorance made,  
 Its heavenward flights reach closed and keyless gates,  
 Its glorious outbursts peter out in music".

What a real *Guru* extends to his disciple is not a vital human love which can be altered by external things. He tries to help the seeker up and lead him towards the Light where in the union of the soul and the heart he will recognize the *Guru* as the friend. It is only the teachings of a perfect spiritual teacher that can transform the wilderness of one's soul and make it blossom with roses of transcendental joy. What are the ultimate results of such transformation which a *Guru* is supposed to bring about in the nature of a spiritual aspirant whom he accepts as his disciple?

When the human will is given up for the divine Will, all the responsibility of the instrument, the devotee, ceases and the consciousness of the individual ego is merged in the divine consciousness. Then all his actions, thoughts and words emanate from the divine source, leaving him entirely free from all doubts, desires, intellectual preconceptions and bonds. We have said that a *Guru* is also an alchemist who alone can teach his disciple what is really meant by surrender. One has got to put oneself in the hands of the *Guru* rather than trusting one's own efforts alone and this implies one's putting one's trust and confidence in the divine and a progressive self-giving. Transformation of nature is a task which only a *Guru* is capable of performing to change the earthly life of his disciple to life divine.

There cannot, therefore, be any manner of doubt as to the truth that the *Guru* is the only awakener of the serpent-power (coiling energy) in man. This slumbering serpent-power which implies the latent self-conscious divine energy in man, the divinity that sleeps, has been believed by the Tantras to reside at the foot of the spinal column in the human body, and when it is awakened by the *Guru* by the transmission of dynamic spirituality, it becomes joined to the Absolute that lives in the thousand-petaled lotus in the highest centre of the *cerebrum*. By independent efforts no *Sadhaka* can bring about the functioning of this serpent-power, just as the young learners cannot be trusted merely with books. Though books are repositories of knowledge and sometimes in themselves self-sufficient wholes, they do not prelude external help. Those who want to do away with teachers in the field of spiritual culture are in the position of the old woman in the story, who did not see why people should speak so highly of the sun and prefer it to the moon, because

the sun appears when there is light enough. To say that the *Guru* is a splendid superfluity in the divine economy of things, is to say with the old woman that the sun is not needed, because it appears, not when there is a Stygian darkness, but light enough. How does a *Guru* put his disciples in their way to spiritual advancement? Take the example of Sri Ramakrishna again. With an extraordinary knowledge of human capacity in respect of matters spiritually he would at once find out the nature of a man's spiritual needs and defects and would shape and mould his own teachings and advices in a way which would be best suited to the particular requirements of particular cases. He would admit the claim of all to divine grace, such was his kindness as a spiritual teacher.

But there are *Guru* and *Gurus*. When Kaliprasad had set out in his pilgrimage to Dakshineswar, he was certainly not in search of an ordinary teacher, but an 'Incarnate Teacher'. A firm believer in God from his boyhood days, Kaliprasad was panting for such a *Guru* as would be able to lead him up the ladder of perfection. A *Guru* of this kind is indeed Godsent. Such a *Guru* can be had only when divine grace has been showered upon the aspirant whose yearning has been sufficiently proved to be a real thirst of the soul, and not a mere ebullition of humour that lives for a day or for an hour. In the modern world, where everyone is busy with making money and where in getting and spending we lay waste our powers, real seekers of religion are rare, very rare. The real seeker of a religion must have a pure heart, capable of holding the image of God; he must be a suitable receiver, capable of reproducing, as the same piece of music, a tune broadcast into space and vibrating through the ether. Such a pure heart becomes a receptacle of the inconceivable God through the mysterious vision and exaltation of mind.

A real *Guru* actually waits, weeping for his real disciple as we see in the case of Sri Ramakrishna. We all know how eagerly he looked for his chosen disciples to come to him one by one. And when they came, did he not throw open before each of them the gate to the house of God for them to see there the idol of the *sanctum sanctorum* of their heart? To the real *Guru*, his disciple is but the temple of his worshipped. If the worshipper finds that the temple has become unclean, and the

regular service is in any way neglected, he is deeply mortified at heart. The *Guru* does not accuse the disciple but accuses his own self, if he ever finds his disciple not enjoying a healthy spiritual life. The fortunate few that sit at the feet of such a *Guru*, are men whom God, whose working is inscrutable, has, out of His infinite mercy, saved from the grinding wheel of the universe by the award of true salvation, that is to say the termination of cycle of births and deaths and the participation of the redeemed soul in the highest ransom. For a time the *Guru*, who is divine grace in flesh, purges them in the fiery furnace of tribulation, so that they may come out pure and strong and as tempered as steel. The *Guru* so much identifies himself with his beloved followers (as very appropriately found in the life of Sri Ramakrishna) that their tears of sorrow and the smiles of joy become his own. Their smiles light his face, their tears depress him. But he knows that alchemy whereby he can effect the romancing of sorrow and make it as welcome to them as happiness.

One of the qualifications of the real *Guru* is that he possesses what is called "historic consciousness". It vies him the universal vision and not a mere fragmentary glimpse. Sister Nivedita thus spoke of Swami Vivekananda in *The Master As I Saw Him*, "It would seem sometimes as if the Swami lived and had his very being in the sense of his country's past. His historic consciousness was extraordinarily developed". A vast deal of ready scriptural knowledge and mythological lore, is not a prerequisite to one's being a *Guru*. Like the wiser man in Ramakrishna's story, who did not bother to count the myriad leaves of the tree in a garden but ate only its fruit, he takes into himself only the beautiful lessons, the gems of truths ensconced in the leviathan pile of the *Shastras*. And these lessons are not flashy distilled things, in the words of Francis Bacon, but the very essence of spirituality, the perfect white that alone can claim to replace all the colours of the rainbow, since it contains them all. He hears the symphony in the polyphony. As Heraclitus says, "from discords (weave) the most beautiful harmony". Although the universe in the nature of things, is a polyphony, under the master-hand of the great orchestra a splendid symphony is evolved out of the keyboard. And only a trained ear enjoys the concert, singing of God the Father and Man the Brother.

while each musician hears but the sound of his own instrument. "He sees himself in all and all in himself".

A true spiritual aspirant ever needs such a *Guru* as the mediator between the seen and the unseen. Lucy learning humanity from the willow and sublimity from the grand moving masses of clouds in the heavens, sitting in the lap of Nature with both the law and impulse, and "sermons in stones, books in the running brooks, and good in everything"—may sound very well as poetical figures, but unless we have "a heart that watches and receives", unless the lotus of our heart is fully blown by the touch of the soft moon-beam of the *tattvajnana* radiating from the *Guru*, even these natural never-failing teachers are of no help to us. According to our ancient Rishis only they can aid a seeker of spiritual knowledge whom God has honoured by making them His spokesmen, otherwise Tom, Dick and Harry, who thrive on the ignorance of pseudo-religious minded people, can hardly be ranked as real spiritual teachers. When the need for God is felt intensely in the innermost chamber of our being, we must approach, for the proper vista, those whom God has initiated into the mysteries of His Kingdom. "We cannot for the most part find God unaided". This ancient saying is as true as the sun rising in the east and setting in the west.

An earnest seeker of religion is in the position of a great artist like Shakespeare or Sophocles, of whom Mathew Arnold said that he saw life steadily and saw it whole. This is best illustrated in the life of our subject as well as in the lives of his other spiritual brothers all of whom achieved the highest realization aided and instructed by their Master, Sri Ramakrishna, whose life is perhaps the most shining example of an *Acharya* in the real sense of the term. Thus the cult of *Guru* is an established fact in the Hindu Sadhana and we owe it to Sri Ramakrishna for its glorious revival in our times. Swami Abhedananda has fully explained this while composing his tributes to his *Guru* in the following words: "salutations to Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, the perfect embodiment of the *Eternal Truth* which manifests Itself in various forms to help mankind, and the Incarnation of the Supreme Lord who is worshipped by all". A *Guru* must necessarily be a Yogi and Sri Ramakrishna possessed all the Yoga powers though he seldom exhibited them. But as a world teacher, the saint of Dakshineswar excels others not by

his Yoga power alone, but by divine power. This is where Sri Ramakrishna stands supreme.

Thus we see that it is absolutely necessary to accept somebody as a teacher and guide to gain self-knowledge and perfection. But this sort of *Guru* must have "a badge of divine authority" to quote Sri Ramakrishna. This is necessary, otherwise no one will listen to his words. A true teacher of mankind must possess a great spiritual power. Real *Gurus* are the divinely commissioned teachers and, to quote Sri Ramakrishna again, "he who has received a Divine Commission, does not seek followers. His own power of attraction is so great that people of their own accord crowd around him." Only who is vain and who has but limited vision, boasts in ignorance that he wants no initiation from a *Guru*. In his vanity he will never see that the One beyond life flowers in life in the person of the *Guru*. What we really see in a *Guru*, is the reflection of the Impersonal in the mirror of his personality. He is the supreme guide. Who but a *Guru* can suggest to you a way by which alone you can get rid of the habits that stand in the way of your true bliss—who but a *Guru* can show you that way to your spiritual goal? Those who knew the truly magnetic and mighty power which Swami Abhedananda as the *Acharya* had on the hearts of countless men, can have no doubt as to how needful the *Guru* is for all engaged in their spiritual pursuit.

## CHAPTER IX

### DAYS AT DAKSHINESWAR

Now let us take up the thread of our story. Kaliprasad returned to his home from the pilgrimage like a man lost in God with a heavenly glow playing about him. He lived among his parents, relatives and old friends and yet was not of them. If prior to his initiation he had only fragmentary knowledge of the self-shining One, the fuller and more complete perception was now vouchsafed to him. He was now approaching to a stage in his quest for soul where although the conception of God is that He is infinite and eternal and formless, "passing the flaming bounds of space and time", yet the touch of the Master has now convinced him that He can be known and His living presence can be perceived by a mind attenuated and purified. One of the distinguishing features of the life of Kaliprasad at this time, as before, was the singular emphasis laid on the operation of divine grace as the only thing capable of leading us to salvation. When man ascends and God descends, the mystical opening is grace and nothing but that. His life-energy being directly connected to divine energy by his Master, the encumbrances that could not so long be altogether cast off by his very best independent efforts, were now gone—there were no more any obstructions preventing his spirit from sending forth its pure white light. And herein we notice the necessity for accepting a *Guru*. Even Jesus Christ, who said, "I and my Father are one", had to be baptized by John the Baptist, and Chaitanya accepted the discipleship of Iswar Puri, although he made known to him the very *mantram* that he was to tell him.

Kaliprasad returned by the afternoon of the next day. In the meantime there was a great commotion at Rasiklal's house in Ahiritola when till noon of that Sunday there was no trace of the boy. Nayantara bursting into tears cried out, "Where is my Kali? Where has he gone?" The neighbours could not give any clue as to the boy's mysterious disappearance. Messengers were sent here and there, but still there was no information. Perhaps the boy had been drowned in the Ganges, so concluded the anxious father. Then suddenly Nayantara remembered that



one day her son had asked her about the direction towards Dakshineswar and so it occurred to her mind that Kali might have gone there. When she told her husband all about this and pressed him to proceed to Dakshineswar at once in search of Kaliprasad. Rasiklal started forthwith and no sooner had he reached the place than he learnt from Paramahamsadeva that his son had already left for Calcutta. His anxiety was over. Rasiklal on the eve of his departure from Dakshineswar requested the saint: "Kaliprasad is my son. Kindly instruct him so that he may become a worldly man in the true sense of the word". "But your son is a great Yogi", so told Paramahamsadeva to Rasiklal, "when the boy himself does not want to marry, it would not be wise for you to force him to do so". "But the greatest duty of a son is to serve his parents, is not so?" so argued Rasiklal and this pleased the saint.

Rasiklal, however, could not realize then that Sri Rama-krishna had already shown Kaliprasad the path towards the service of the Father of the world. Then he returned to Calcutta and was pleased to see his son back to their fold. "Did I not tell you that Kali must have gone to Dakshineswar?"—told Nayantara to her husband, and the burden of anxiety was now lifted out of their breast. On the other hand, there began a new chapter in the life of Kaliprasad. Since his return from the pilgrimage, he became somewhat abnormal, feeling an irresistible attraction for the Master whose compassionate touch brought about a complete change in his mind. As the yearning for Dakshineswar grew intense in him day by day, Kaliprasad began to meditate more and more every night as directed by the Master. And this brought to him every time a host of inspiring visions. Nothing but constant meditation was now desired by him. Even his mind was now diverted from his studies and other household duties. It did not take long for his parents to notice this change in the mind of their son and they forbade him not to visit Dakshineswar again. But Kaliprasad would invariably slip away unnoticed, hire a boat from the Ahiritola Ghat (which in those days cost only one anna) and run away to Dakshineswar. Here the Master encouraged the disciple to repeat his visits frequently assuring him that the passage would be provided.

"Unless you come here, I become restless for you".

“But my parents do not like that I should come here. What to do?”

“Well, in that case, the best course for you would be to run away from house without telling anything to anybody”.

“But where shall I find the passage every time?”

“Have it from me”.

These had been the talks between the Master and Kaliprasad. The affectionate words of the Master easily moved Kaliprasad to such an extent that tears would roll down his cheeks. “How merciful is the Master! Even the affection of the parents is not free from the tinge of self-interest, but here the thing is just the opposite. He loves me for my own benefit and he wishes nothing but my spiritual development and this is why the Master always wants to see me, never did I experience such unmixed affection.” Such were the trend of his mind in the earlier days of Kaliprasad’s association with the Master.

One day it so happened that he felt an intense desire to repair to Dakshineswar. And as Kaliprasad was about to leave the house, he was prevented by his parents from going to that place and was compelled to remain indoor. The main gate of the house was then bolted up and was locked from outside. The boy found himself helpless and there was nothing to do but to wait. Hours passed till it was afternoon and Rasiklal thought that the boy would not leave home, and so he unlocked the door. Kaliprasad at once slipped out unnoticed and ran straight to the Ahiritola Ghat, hired a boat and after a while arrived at Dakshineswar. As he saw Kaliprasad before him, Sri Ramakrishna felt immensely delighted. Kali bowed down at his feet as usual and recounted everything to him about his realizations in course of meditation at home during the past few days. His mind was now somewhat pacified. Sri Ramakrishna then expressed his approval and asked him to continue the process and also to report to him regularly. The boy spent the night with the Master, and it brought immense joy to him.

From that time on, proceeding according to the direction and guidance of Sri Ramakrishna, the young aspirant continued to practise meditation with great zeal. During this period he acquired a store of potential energy to be used up and converted into kinetic energy later on. His soul now could find no pleasure in limitation ; it flapped its wings, as it were, to go beyond

limitations and relativity, and to fly in the Absolute; he began to say with never-satiated craving, "Light, more light". His existence now completely merged with that of his Master and was now fully impregnated with the divine grace. As Kaliprasad now began to call on Sri Ramakrishna frequently, he accepted him with greater conviction as his sole guide, monitor, and guardian angel. It was during this period of constant meditation one day it so happened that Kaliprasad saw the large omnipotent eyes of the Lord. Speaking about this strange realization, Abhedananda writes: "Those two eyes were as wide as the wide heaven, pervading the entire space. Thus every morning and every night before retiring, I would be absorbed in deep meditation and there would appear in my vision radiant divine figures—gods and goddesses of various sorts. And as I reported to the Master all about it, he would explain to me the significance of such visions, which, according to him, were not mere visions, but realizations of the highest order".

Each day at Dakshineswar brought new experience and new knowledge to Kaliprasad and his mind attained to the spiritual consciousness, tasted new pleasure, not only from his association with the Master, but also with other devotees who used to visit frequently and regularly the holy place. Gradually he acquired the privilege of serving the Master. There were rows of Jhau trees at the northern side of the Dakshineswar garden and also a powder magazine. Sri Ramakrishna used to perform his daily morning rites below those trees beside the Ganges. It was at that time Kaliprasad would be permitted to carry his water-pot and accompany him. From *Panchavati* to the site, the Master would walk the distance by leaning on the shoulder of his young disciple, imparting to him various sorts of spiritual lessons. There he would patiently wait till the Master finished his rites. Thus he became one of the Master's intimate circle. At this period one day Kaliprasad heard from the Master about his other householder devotees, such as, Suresh, Girish, Ram Babu and Mahendra Gupta. He also came to know from the Master about his other young disciples, such as, Narendranath, Baburam and others. One day when Sri Ramakrishna came to know about his exact address at Ahiritola, he instructed Kaliprasad to meet one Deben Majumdar who resided in the same locality, and who was also a great devotee and mentally

well-developed. A frequent visitor to Dakshineswar, Deben Majumdar had once invited the Master to his residence. In those days Paramahamsadeva used to visit frequently the houses of Ramkanta Bose and Ramchandra Dutt at Baghbazar and Simla respectively. The Master asked Kaliprasad to come to their places on the occasion of his visits there and to pick up thin acquaintance with them. Thus in course of his frequent visits to Dakshineswar, Kaliprasad shortly came to be acquainted with almost all the devotees and disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. One day when Kaliprasad found one of his classmates Baburam Ghosh (who subsequently became known as Swami Premananda in the Ramakrishna Order), his surprise knew no bounds. He was very much pleased to see his friend there and straightway asked him the reason for his coming to that place. Baburam too reciprocated the same question to Kaliprasad and since then both of them became close spiritual associates. One afternoon as the two friends were sitting on the banks of the Ganges at Dakshineswar, they fell into conversation about religion and the practice of Yoga. The subject delighted Kaliprasad most.

“Devotion is much superior to Yoga, don’t you agree, Kali?”

“No, Baburam. How can one be a devotee of God without first practising Yoga?”

“But that is a kind of spiritual exercise. Devotion is something higher, so far as I have understood”.

“No. If you just ask the Master, you will come to know that the practice of Yoga means absorbed communion with the spirit of God and this is, in fact, the highest form of devotion that one can have.”

“Kali, do tell me something on the nature of the Yoga exercise which you practise now”.

“Well, I look upon Yoga as nothing but communion with God. You know that the created soul, in its worldly condition, lives altogether separate from the supreme Soul. A reconciliation is needed, nay, more than a mere réconciliation. A harmonious union is sought and realized. The union with the Divinity is the real search of Hindu Yoga. It is spiritual unification, it is a consciousness of two in one, duality in unity”.

This lucid exposition of the Yoga philosophy seemed to Baburam as the most original and thoughtful of all he had so far read or heard. How was it that his classmate had got this

knowledge at this age, so thought Baburam. Kaliprasad must be far advanced in the practice of Yoga, so it struck him. Years later, in his mature age when Swami Abhedananda delivered before a talented audience in America, in 1920, his famous lectures on *Yogasutra* of Patanjali, he displayed his thorough mastery on the subject. If anybody interested in higher knowledge and wisdom cares to read these lectures incorporated in his book, *Yoga Psychology*, he will find the volume helpful to his spiritual life. In this book Swami Abhedananda gives a rationale of the process by which the transcendental practice ought to be carried on. This book is perhaps the most original and thoughtful of all his writings. We shall discuss more about it later on.

Speaking of his early days at Dakshineswar, the Swami writes: "There I met his other disciples, among whom Swami Vivekananda was the most brilliant. I was attracted to him and became his close companion. Frequently I used to discuss with him various abstruse points of Epistemology, Ontology and Metaphysics of India and Europe. With Swami Vivekananda I studied the Buddhistic philosophy as well as principles of the Advaita or the non-dualistic philosophy of Vedanta". Narendranath and Kaliprasad who were destined to appear on the world stage within one decade after passing away of the Master and on whom fell the great task of preaching the universal doctrine of Vedanta and the gospel of Sri Ramakrishna as well became close spiritual associates, and soon after they were acquainted to each other. What little he was able to gather about the strange life of Narendranath had already fascinated Kaliprasad to such an extent that he was all the more eager to be personally acquainted to him who was then regarded by many as the most favourite of the Master—almost heir-apparent. As he grew towards young manhood, Narendranath became an agnostic, reading Herbert Spencer with great enthusiasm. But whether agnostic or devotee, the search for God was always uppermost in his mind. It was touching to hear him tell how he went from one religious teacher to another, asking, "Sire, have you seen and realized God?" and not receiving the answer he hoped for, until he found Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. The same quaint question when put to his future Master, he at once replied, "Verily my child, I have seen myself and shall show unto thee". The rest of the story is too well-known to recount at length. On one occasion Naren-

dranath himself told him of his struggles to accept this priest of Kali, who worshipped the Terrible One. He, the unorthodox agnostic, a product of Western education, to sit at the feet of a superstitious worshipper of idols. It was unthinkable! And yet, in this simple man and in him alone, he found what he had been seeking, a living spirituality. If the worship of Kali could produce such purity, such truth, such flaming spirituality, one could only stand before it in reverence. The intellect surrendered, but the instincts did not submit so easily. There was a long long struggle and endless arguments before he could accept Sri Ramakrishna as his *Guru*. His life was now being turned to the harmony which became his motto afterwards. His mind began to drink deep but quiet draughts of inspiration in the Master's company, which was kindled into reverence and ecstasy. No more of knowledge and analysis, Narendranath became mad after the divine Mother. The Mother responded to the call of Her guideless child, now converted into pure gold by the contact of Sri Ramakrishna. Thus Narendranath Dutt, son of Biswanath Dutt and his wife, was reborn as Swami Vivekananda. He was supposed to have been born by propitiating the household deity, Bireswara Mahadeva, just as Kaliprasad was born by the grace of the Divine Mother, Kali. Although Narendranath had the dim smouldering fire of spirituality in him, it was set ablaze by a few puffs from Sri Ramakrishna. The spiritual fire that was burning in him seemed to consume all the limitations and differentiations in his mind, for the energy of this fire was infinite. After he had an experience which is difficult to explain in words, Narendranath's devotion to his Master became intense and sincere. Such words as love and loyalty acquired a new meaning. In him he saw the living embodiment of Divinity, whose very body changed with the realization of his ideals. "Although he was illiterate," Swami Vivekananda said of him, "he had the greatest intellect of any one I ever met". This was from one whose scintillating intellect amazed men of outstanding intellectual achievements.

Such was the man whom Kaliprasad met for the first time at Dakshineswar and from the very first day of their acquaintance, both of them became partners in the sacred task of carrying the message of their Master to the four corners of the world. One day they were discussing among themselves about the

character of the saint of Dakshineswar. Kaliprasad was somewhat fortunate than Narendranath in this sense that initially he had no such struggles and it was somewhat easier for him to accept Sri Ramakrishna without any demur. "It is not for me to speak about the Master's character. What I find in him is a being of shining radiance, the very embodiment of love, of Divinity". When Narendranath heard this from Kaliprasad, he was simply struck with wonder at the latter's assessment of Sri Ramakrishna. "Yes, Kali", he said without reservation, "you are perfectly right. If ideal worship can produce such a character, I bow down before it". They were then sitting in a lonely corner of the *Panchavati*, the sacred place of their Master's *sadhana* and as they discussed about this Godman of the modern age, both of them were deeply immersed with the lofty thought about one to whom religion was a matter of experience and not merely a belief. The life of their Master has clearly shown to the world, beyond any shade of doubt, that man may here and in this body become divinely transmuted, from the human to super-human. In Sri Ramakrishna both of them saw One who lived in the faith : "God is the only Reality."

During the early days of his association with the Master, Kaliprasad witnessed an event of national significance. It was the death of Keshab Chandra Sen for whom Sri Ramakrishna himself cherished a great love. When the Brahma leader fell ill, Paramahamsadeva prayed the divine Mother for his recovery. He loved Keshab so much. But when he died on the 8th January, 1884, Sri Ramakrishna was so grieved at the news that he simply wept for him, saying, "Here was a man endowed with grand ideals of moral and spiritual character. He was the blessed child of the divine Mother." No doubt, Keshab Chandra Sen, who was a close contemporary of Sri Ramakrishna and who himself since his acquaintance with the saint of Dakshineswar cherished high esteem for him, was a person of purer morality with a heart as broad as human goodness. With him faith was the profoundest wisdom, and a certainty in everyday life. He lived and died on tense, burning, restless light, which suddenly went down in its fullness and undimmed lustre. No wonder, therefore, that Sri Ramakrishna felt so much aggrieved at the death of this great son of India.

## CHAPTER X

### AT THE FEET OF THE MASTER

“Since I became his humble disciple, I had the good fortune to be with him and to serve him for two years.” Thus writes Swami Abhedananda. From this statement it appears to us that Kaliprasad must have come into Sri Ramakrishna’s contact during the early months of 1884 and remained with him till August, 1886, when the Master passed away into great illumination. When in April, 1885, Sri Ramakrishna fell seriously ill, it is on record that Kaliprasad was among those who remained with him constantly and nursed him wholeheartedly. So let us now follow the events of this period which were memorable in his life—memorable in this sense that this constant association with the Master for a period of full one year and four months must have provided him with an opportunity to learn and realize many things in his spiritual pursuit. In his autobiographical narration, Swami Abhedananda has given an indication, though brief, of what he exactly learnt at the feet of his Master. “I learnt from Sri Ramakrishna”, writes the Swami, “that *Dvaita* or dualistic philosophy leads to the *Visishtadvaita philosophy* of Ramanuja in search after the ultimate truth of the universal, which is one and the Absolute (Brahman); and that the search after Truth ends in the realization of the oneness of the *jiva* (individual soul), *jagat* (world) and *Isvara* (God) in Brahman as taught in the *Advaita* philosophy of Vedanta; and that they are the different steps in the path of the realization of the absolute Truth or Brahman.”

We notice three main factors operating on and moulding the character of our subject during the formative period of his religious life. His wanton spiritual tendency, his awareness of his real nature, along with his passion for studies, and lastly, the guidance of Sri Ramakrishna, who pointed to him the path of certainty and bliss. He had, as we have indicated, some innate spiritual qualities as reflected in his intense thirst to know God, his quest for a real Yogin, and his taking shelter at the feet of the Master at Dakshineswar. Passion for study was a special trait of Swami Abhedananda’s nature as it was with Swami Viveka-



nanda. In fact, among all his disciples, only these two, Vivekananda and Abhedananda, exhibited this passion in a remarkable degree and this finally enabled them to encompass all knowledge, Eastern and Western, philosophical as well as scientific. "At that time", writes Swami Abhedananda, "I began to devote myself to self-education and studied Ganto's Physics, Herschel's Astronomy, John Stuart Mill's Logic, and three essays on Religion, Herbert Spencer's *First Principles and Psychology*, Hamilton's *Philosophy*, and Lewes' *History of Philosophy*, and attended the courses of lectures at the 'Science Association' which had been established by Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar, the famous Homoeopath." From this statement, it is clear that his range of study varied and it covered almost all the branches of knowledge, with the zeal of a true seeker of Truth. It was at this time that the idea dawned on him that "True philosophy should be the mother of spiritual action, the fountain-head of creative energy, the highest and the noblest stimulus to the will".

We have noticed in the life of Swami Vivekananda how the abstruse philosophy of Herbert Spencer interested him and how later on he used the Spencerian mode of reasoning in his argumentations on the more abstruse doctrines of the *Upanishads* and the Vedanta. It is equally true in the case of Swami Abhedananda. The study of Spencer had equally helped him in gaining that power of thought, penetrating discrimination and spirit of search for a scientific basis, which stood him in good stead in delivering the message of Vedanta in later years, as in the case of Vivekananda. But the philosophy of Spencer could not affect any fundamental change in his earlier conception of religion, nor it could shatter in the least the foundation of his belief which was built up on the basis of Hindu Theology and which was subsequently strengthened by the teachings of his Master. Born of religious minded parents, Kaliprasad never rebelled against the Hindu social system as Vivekananda did. He remained almost undisturbed amidst strong antagonistic feelings that were directed against the religious ideas he picked up in his boyhood days. Thus the strength and structure of his inner self remained untarnished all through his life and it was never impregnated with any foreign element, philosophic or otherwise. Living fully in the world of pure intellectuality, Kaliprasad never lost the moorings to find his way to God. He

never questioned the existence of God, and the faith in God was inborn with him. God was never a problem with him as it was with Vivekananda and hence he never experienced any mood, agnostic or otherwise. The quest for Truth, therefore, was all along natural with him—natural and spontaneous. His mind was never assailed by doubts, nor he ever was lost in the maze of agnosticism. Though Kaliprasad had great respect for Western material science and its analytical processes, he never used them to test the various supernatural experiences of his Master whom he accepted without questioning. This accounts for the special training he received at the feet of the Master during the two years of his constant association with him, at Dakshineswar, Shyampukur and finally at the Cossipore garden house. We shall now narrate the story of his spiritual development, stage by stage, directly under the watchful eyes of his Master who had discovered in Kaliprasad a great Yogin when he met him for the first time on a memorable Sunday night.

Of the stories of his some earlier realizations in the close company of the Master at Dakshineswar, we will reproduce here one or two, just to indicate the high level of Kaliprasad's spiritual attainments soon after his initiation. One night while staying at Dakshineswar, he was attending his Master, carefully moving his hands on the outstretched legs of Sri Ramakrishna who was then resting in his room, lying on his bed. He was all alone with the Master and he considered himself extremely fortunate in having the rare privilege of attending him exclusively. Suddenly Kaliprasad felt that the physical body of the Master was transformed into that of the luminous divine Mother and in that transformed state, the Master was feeding him with the breast milk as a mother does to her child. Kaliprasad lost his consciousness and at once he experienced a sort of unspeakable transcendental delight. This was not the only time that he had such strange experience; in fact there were at this time innumerable experiences of various types all of which brought to him in their wake new sensations and new delights, carrying his mind far above the mundane sphere to the transcendental world.

During this period as his meditation grew intense day by day, Kaliprasad began to see various sorts of visions in which gods and goddesses appeared before him. One day at dead of night it so happened that while absorbed in deep meditation,

Kaliprasad, in superconscious state of mind felt that his soul coming out of the physical cage, soared high and still higher in the boundless sky like a bird with outstretched wings. Strange visions began to appear before him, one after another, until the soul reached a beautiful spot where stood a beautiful palace. On entering inside it, he saw the vivid revelations of all the religions along with their symbols. Then as if carried by some great supernatural inspiration, he gradually entered into a large room where all around were seated on high pedestals, Gods and Goddesses, Incarnates and Prophets, such as all the ten incarnates Lord Sri Krishna, Jesus Christ, Mohammad, Nanak, Sri Chaitanya, Sankaracharya and others. There in the committee of gods and goddesses he beheld Sri Ramakrishna standing in the centre. While he was thus enjoying this superb view, it seemed to him that the figure of Paramahamsadeva had become effulgent, and gigantic. And all the gods and goddesses, as well as all the Incarnates stood up from their respective seats and one by one they merged into the body of Sri Ramakrishna. Later on when Kaliprasad referred to his Master about this strange vision, the latter is reported to have told the disciple: "You have been fortunate enough to see for yourself the *Vaikuntha*, the abode of the Lord Vishnu. So you have crossed the bounds of the finite into the Infinite. It was from that time onwards that whenever meditating, Kaliprasad never experienced the sight of any finite form of the Divine—his mind would invariably merge into the Infinite. This strange realization of the *Vaikuntha* has been subsequently recorded by Swami Abhedananda in his Hymn to Sri Ramakrishna which is a superb piece of composition in Sanskrit.

Kaliprasad had the privilege of the Master's company not only at Dakshineswar but also at various places in Calcutta whenever Sri Ramakrishna visited the places of his selected household devotees such as Ramchandra Dutta, Suresh Mitra, Balaram Bose and others. At Kankurgachi, Baghbazar and Simla there were the places which Sri Ramakrishna visited most frequently. Dakshineswar was little far from Calcutta and it was not always possible for his devotees and their relatives and friends to go there to have the blessed *darshan* (interview) of Sri Ramakrishna. And this was perhaps one of the reasons why he frequently undertook his journey to the metropolis. His

occasional visits to Calcutta also afforded an opportunity to such eminent persons as Pratap Chandra Mazumdar, Sivanath Sastri, Pandit Sasadhar Tarkachuramani, and many others to come to him. Kaliprasad, who always kept information of his Calcutta visits, never missed a chance of having the company of the Master who was always pleased to see his chosen disciple by his side.

It was the month of May, 1885. The day was Saturday. Paramahamsadeva came to the house of Ram Chandra Dutta (who was a distant relative of Swami Vivekananda) at Madhu Roy's Lane, Simla. Kaliprasad, who had been to Dakshineswar on that day, accompanied the Master. A large number of people had then gathered at the house of Dutta. Sri Ramakrishna entered into the room and took his seat. He then cast his glance, hither and thither, as if in search of somebody. "Where is Naren?"—he asked eagerly, "I do not find him here". Now the house of Ramchandra Dutta was not far from that of Biswanath Dutta. It was in the same locality and as such Sri Ramakrishna was sure to find his beloved Naren there. Naren also knew that the Master would be coming there. He, too, like Kaliprasad never missed a chance of having the company of the Master during the latter's visits to Calcutta. The Master was informed that Naren was somewhat indisposed due to terrible headache. The news itself was too much for the Master to bear and he became very much anxious to see Naren. So he again implored, "Do ask him to come here." Then Kaliprasad accompanied by Niranjana and some others went to Biswanath Dutta's house to bring Naren. There they found Naren lying on a cot with a wet napkin placed on his forehead, inside a room where doors and windows were all closed. He was writhing in pain. It was Kaliprasad who talked to him: "The Master has come at Ram Babu's place. He is very anxious to meet you. So we are here at his bidding to fetch you".

"I am having a great pain now due to headache, I can scarcely open my eyes, not to speak of moving out. I cannot stand the light at this time. Would you therefore tender my respects to the Master, telling him that it is impossible for me to go there". Thus said Narendranath, slowly and with great difficulty.

"But the Master is anxious to see you. You must go. We will see to it".

"How can I go when I cannot open my eyes?"

“In that case, we shall lead you carefully to his place”.

Narendranath then agreed and stood up with the wet napkin still on his head. Kaliprasad and Niranjan helped him to stand up. They then escorted him slowly and tenderly towards the house of Ramchandra Dutta, where Sri Ramakrishna, surrounded by his devotees, was waiting for Naren. It was a fairly big parlour and Paramahamsadeva was seated in the centre. Presently making their way through the crowd arrived Kaliprasad and Niranjan along with Narendranath who was placed just in front of the Master. All eyes were then fixed to him and everyone saw how affectionately he received Narendranath. He touched the latter's head with his own hands. The moment he felt the touch of the lotus-hand of Sri Ramakrishna on his head, all his pains vanished and he astonishingly cried out : “What have you done? All my pains have vanished as if by magic. How wonderful it is”.

Kaliprasad read in the life of Christ such incidents of healing by touch. Now he saw for the first time the same miracle happening before his own eyes. Sri Ramakrishna seldom exhibited such supernatural powers, but when he did it, it silently proclaimed his spiritual power in a degree which was beyond the comprehension of those around him. The pain being over Narendranath was requested by the Master to sing a song. Narendranath had a sweet voice and could sing very well. Kaliprasad had heard of the gift of music in him, but so far he had no fortune to hear him singing. So this particular occasion afforded him an opportunity for which he was so long eager. Some one brought a *Tanpura* and Narendranath began to play on it. He then began to sing in his sweet voice which charmed the audience and which also made Sri Ramakrishna to lose his consciousness at once. The performance went for three hours and Narendranath did not feel least tired. How it was possible for one laid down by headache, to sing for three hours? It was therefore a matter of surprise and delight for all who were present there on that day.

Then with the approach of the evening, there began *Kirtan* which presented a delightful sight which Kaliprasad never forgot in his life. As the *Kirtan* reached its tempo, suddenly Sri Ramakrishna stood up and began to dance like a mad lion. And as he danced, it seemed to Kaliprasad that the entire surrounding

was completely changed and the room itself had acquired motion; time, space and the persons present—everything underwent a complete change which cannot be appropriately described in words.

A few days after this experience, it so happened that Kaliprasad met Narendranath at Dakshineswar and both of them fell into intimate conversation about their respective progress towards the path of spiritual realization and the uplifting of their soul. "Did you ever experience any inner conflict before you accepted him as the Master?"—abruptly asked Kaliprasad. Narendranath who was then in a very quiet and peaceful state of mind, began to recount some of the earlier incidents of his life since he came into contact of Sri Ramakrishna. "Though I considered him to be a mad man", began Narendranath, "I was at a loss to account for the strange feeling of blessedness that came over me as I sat near the Master. Everything about him—the number of adoring devotees, the unaccountable religious exaltation of Paramahamsadeva, his return from ecstasy, his words—were bewildering to me. But in spite of the impression made by the Master, I was slow to accept him as my teacher. When I came here for the first time, I found the Master sitting alone on the small bedstead in his room. He was glad to see me and calling me affectionately to his side, made me sit before him on his bed. Presently I found him overcome with a sort of emotion and his eyes were fixed on me. He slowly drew me near. Then in the twinkling of an eye he placed his right foot on my body. The touch at once gave rise to a novel experience within me. With my eyes open, I saw that the walls, and everything in the room, whirled rapidly and vanished into naught, and the whole universe together with my individuality was about to merge in an all-encompassing mysterious void. After a while he stroke my chest when I came back to my normal sense. All this, believe me, Kali, happened in less than a few moments, but at the same time it revolutionised my mind. Yet I can confess to you that I was in a dilemma about the real nature of my experience as well as the truth about this remarkable man, who seemed to me pure and simple as a child. I had still my hesitations to accept him as the Incarnation of God. On another occasion the Master had told me that I was a sage in my previous birth. It took me pretty long time before I began to regard Sri Ramakrishna as

the God Incarnate and since then I came to realize that a *Guru* is necessary in the quest for soul”.

Kaliprasad was hearing all this almost spellbound and as he looked at the glowing face of his brother-disciple, he could easily realize that just as he himself belonged to the Master from the moment the latter had touched him, so it was with Narendranath. Is it any wonder therefore that both of them were destined to become the greatest disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. “You are sure, my brother, to transcend all limitations and become a spiritual giant”, so said Kaliprasad to Narendranath who was very much pleased to hear such encouraging words from one who himself was another chosen disciple of the Master. But he only added, “Only if the Master continues to guide and instruct me with his love and patience”. And it is on record that both Vivekananda and Abhedananda were the recipients of infinite love and grace from their living Master, and with it began a new chapter in their lives, but that is a story often told. During their training under the Master, the story of their lives is to be told in terms of ideas and realizations. The relationship between the *Guru* and the disciples was really wonderful and the full account of it can never be given. Sri Ramakrishna who always felt deep love for these two, regarded them as two great souls reborn to fulfil a great mission in this life.

Great Teachers realize the highest spiritual Truth and when they came in touch with a fit disciple, are eager to impart that Truth. And it did not take a long time for Sri Ramakrishna to recognize from the very beginning the spiritual potentialities of both Naren and Kaliprasad. One was a sage and the other a Yogin in their previous life. His love for both was therefore so deep that if either of them failed to come to Dakshineswar for some days he would become restless and disconsolate. Did he not weep and pray to the Divine Mother, begging Her to make Naren come? Did he not provide Kaliprasad with passage to enable him to come to his place? So we hear Narendranath telling at that time to Kaliprasad: “It is his unbounded love for me that binds me to him”. The same was true with Kaliprasad too. During the two years of his discipleship, Kaliprasad was not only a regular visitor to Dakshineswar, but he left his home and hearth also to remain his constant companion from the time the Master fell ill. And by remaining in the

close and effulgent presence of Sri Ramakrishna, he had the unique advantage of going through the practice of severe spiritual discipline within a short space of time. For two years he had the blessed company of his Master. This was a period of silent realization, silent teaching and silent assimilation. Every time Kaliprasad visited Dakshineswar it was a stirring event both to himself and to the Master, making the intensification of their relationship and the absorption of the ideas and ideals on the part of the disciple. Gradually he was becoming saturated with spirituality. The all-merciful Guru gave to the disciple all that was to be given, all that he had, as he had done in the case of his beloved spiritual son, Narendranath.

The biographers of Swami Vivekananda have stated that "Sri Ramakrishna was like the one who had struggled hard amidst almost inseparable difficulties to acquire a great treasure, and Naren was the son and heir who was to reap the treasure. Sri Ramakrishna had built up a great spiritual empire in lust and gold by conquering the dangerous invaders. Naren was to extend this empire over the earth. Sri Ramakrishna had dived deep down into the spiritual ocean. Naren was to show to the world the treasures which the Master had found therein. Sri Ramakrishna was the realization and insight, and Naren was to become the utterance thereof". This statement is also equally true in respect of Swami Abhedananda, whose life was, in fact, a living commentary of his Master whose life appeared to him as the gateway to all spiritual ends. In another sense, the life of Swami Abhedananda could be regarded as the supplement to that of his Master, for it was Kaliprasad who perhaps best realized Sri Ramakrishna as the re-maker and preserver of the Hindu Dharma of which Abhedananda himself in his mature years became a high priest. In short, the greatness of Sri Ramakrishna was as much reflected in the life and activities of Vivekananda as it was in the life and activities of Abhedananda. They were the twin sparks born of the spiritual dynamo of Ramakrishna destined to ignite millions of hearts in India and abroad.

One afternoon while he was attending on his Master, Kaliprasad wanted to know from him the true nature of meditation which had all along been a special feature of his spiritual practice. The teacher who was a passed master in meditation, told his inquisitive disciple some truth about meditation which is



worth reproducing here, in the Master's own words as depicted by Swami Abhedananda in his book *Memoirs of Ramakrishna* : "Perfect concentration of the mind is necessary. Mind is like the flame of a lamp. When the wind of desire blows, it becomes restless; when there is no wind, it is steady. The latter is the state of the mind in Yoga. At the time of true meditation the body becomes absolutely motionless like a statue and senses become inactive. Meditation is possible even with eyes wide open, even when one is conversing with another. If you have true concentration on God, your mind will remain fixed even when your body is moving or you are speaking. He who meditates upon God for a long time gets Divine grace in his soul".

On another occasion Kaliprasad heard his Master telling to Narendranath the necessity of having spiritual awakening first to have the experience of the Reality. The subject was intricate but the lucid exposition of Sri Ramakrishna impressed Kaliprasad so much that in his latter years, whenever referring to the Master, he would invariably remark : "He was all-knowledge". He remembered all through his life what the Master told him during the early days of his spiritual apprenticeship under his feet : "One must have an awakening of the spirit within to see the reality, to have the realization of the universal spirit. It is the spirit that can realize the spirit". Such and many other teachings had their desired effect in helping the young aspirant to grow beyond the confinement of the utmost spiritual hopes.

The time with the Master was drawing to an end. "It was in the middle of 1885 that Sri Ramakrishna showed the first symptom of a throat trouble which ultimately ended in the fatal cancer. He suffered so much from the intense heat of the summer that he began the use of ice. After a month or two he developed pain in his throat which was aggravated by talking and *samadhi*". Swami Abhedananda has recorded in his *Memoirs* that it was about this time (June, 1885) that Sri Ramakrishna attended a Vaishnava festival at Panihati which he used to attend every year. Some of his devotees cautioned him not to attend the festival this year in view of his pain in the throat. But the Master heeded not and so a boat was hired in which Kaliprasad along with Latu Maharaj accompanied the Master while the other devotees went in another boat. The whole day was spent in singing and dancing and often going into *samadhi*. The party

returned to Dakshineswar in the late hours of the evening and the coldness aggravated his disease which was diagnosed by the doctors as 'clergyman's sore throat'. The disciples and the devotees all alike became anxious. And when it was finally realized that the sore throat had turned into cancer, their anxiety knew no bounds. It was during this time that Narendranath is reported to have remarked to his brother-disciples in the following words: "I am afraid the object of our love and adoration will not live for long".

It was then that the Master could be prevailed upon to move out of Dakshineswar for regular treatment. Thus he was brought to Calcutta where he stayed for three months in a rented house at Shyampukur. Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar, the eminent Homœopath physician, began to treat him. This was the last journey of Sri Ramakrishna from Dakshineswar and as usual Kaliprasad and Latu Maharaj accompanied him. It was from this time till the final hour, almost all his disciples constantly remained with him. Their leader, Narendranath organised the nursing while Sarada Devi came from Dakshineswar to do the cooking to which the Master had strongly objected. While companionship with Sri Ramakrishna and whole-hearted service to him gave the disciples increased faith and devotion, they were inwardly getting ready for the inevitable to come.

When there was no appreciable improvement, the Master was removed to Cossipore garden house, to the north of Calcutta. He was now practically in the death-bed. "Day after day the body of the Master grew weaker and weaker." The boys, his chosen eleven disciples—Naren, Rakhal, Baburam, Niranjan, Jogin, Latoo, Tarak, Gopal, Kali, Sasi, and Sarat gave all their time in nursing him. The last days of his life were practically spent alone with these youngmen who were to become the future torch-bearers of his message. "Every one of them was a tower of strength in consecration and single-minded devotion. The Cossipore garden-house became a temple and a university hall in one. At times philosophy held the floor; again devotion rose high; singing and chanting would fill the time that could be snatched out from nursing. The Master would send his disciples to meditate."

Thus the days at Cossipore "passed in devotion, in service, in sorrow, in ecstasy" and as "the last days were approaching, the

Master set himself with greater energy than ever to mould, in calm and silent way, the spiritual life" of his disciples, particularly those of Narendranath and Kaliprasad. It was the 16th of August, 1886, that Sri Ramakrishna passed into *Mahasamadhi* from which he never returned to this mortal plane of existence, leaving behind him a little band of disconsolate disciples, who were to prove themselves as his worthy spiritual sons by their renunciation and selfless work for the betterment of the humanity at large.

## CHAPTER XI

### HIS LIFE AT COSSIPORE

The making of the future Swami Abhedananda was almost half-complete during the period he remained at the Cossipur garden-house, nursing the ailing Master. Therefore, it is of utmost importance for us to have a glimpse into his life at this last abode of Sri Ramakrishna. Fortunately for us, Swami Abhedananda himself has narrated some of the chief events of his days at Cossipur, which are interesting as well as informative, for they will help us to follow the course of his life in its proper perspective. And what is true of Kaliprasad, is equally true of the rest of his brother-disciples, only with a difference in degree. Cossipur afforded to all of them an opportunity to remain together in company with their Master for full eight months, beginning from the middle of December, 1885, when Sri Ramakrishna was removed from the Shyampukur house to the Cossipur garden-house. Cossipur also afforded an opportunity to Kaliprasad and his brother-disciples to witness many new aspects of the life of their Master. Not only that. It was here that Kaliprasad was fully convinced that apart from his being God-incarnate, the life of the Master was unique and universal and as this feeling grew more and more in him, he was drawn more and more closer to him, almost to the inner recess of his soul. But this is to say only the least. The whole-hearted and almost unparalleled service to the Master actually led Kaliprasad and others to the path of renunciation blazed by Sri Ramakrishna himself. What was begun at Shyampukur, now found its fullest exposition at Cossipur where the disciples denied of everything personal—the duties and pleasures of life, in order to put their whole soul to the service of the ailing Master for whom they felt nothing but intense and unalloyed love. Yet another significance of his days at Cossipur was this that it is here that Kaliprasad had his actual training for the next phase of his career which awaited him immediately after the death of Sri Ramakrishna.

We notice that the days Kaliprasad spent under the watchful eyes of his Master were of deep study and meditation which

afterwards earned him the title of 'Kali Tapasvi' and 'Kali Vedanti' and for a long time he was known in the Ramakrishna Order by these two names. So great was his attraction for study and meditation that everyone who came into his presence at this time would like to regard him as an ardent seeker of spiritual truth. Even men like Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar who could not usually spend more than a few minutes when he visited his venerable patient Sri Ramakrishna owing to his pressure of work, would remain with Kaliprasad for some time discussing with him about religious matters. Though much younger in age, Kaliprasad impressed this elderly man who was equally a great scholar. "That disciple of yours is as studious as he is meditative. Every time I come to your place, I find him either reading a book or in contemplative mood", thus once remarked Dr. Sarkar, pointing to Kaliprasad who was then attending the Master, during the time he was staying at the Shyampukur house. Kaliprasad who along with others cherished great respect for this physician, is reported to have once said that though apparently a stern man, Dr. Sarkar was a man of fine intellectual attainments. Once when the physician asked Kaliprasad: "How do you look upon your Master?", he got this reply, "we all look upon him as a person who is like God".

"Do you regard him as a human being or God?"

"Everything in him is human and at the same time God-like".

We do not know whether the intellect of Dr. Sarkar was satisfied with this sort of reply from the disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, but this much we know that most of his spiritual sons, particularly Narendranath and Kaliprasad, were always alert while talking to the physician, lest they might wound his feelings.

The garden-house at Cossipur was large and beautiful. It was two miles north of Calcutta. When Sri Ramakrishna moved from Shyampukur to here, he was always surrounded by his most beloved Sannyasin disciples and also by others who were specially devoted to him. Swami Abhedananda in his *Memoirs of Ramakrishna*, has given the following account:

"The Sannyasin disciples were eleven in number.\* They

\* Narendra (Vivekananda), Rakhai (Brahmananda) Niranjana (Niranjana-nanda), Sashi (Ramakrishnananda), Sarat (Saradananda), Baburam (Premananda), Kali (Abhedananda), Jogin (Yogananda), Latoo (Adbhutananda), Gopal (Advaitananda) and Tarak (Sivananda).

were all of noble families and most of them were young and well educated. They had left their homes and relatives for his sake. Their one aim in life was to serve their Master, the living God on earth and the Incarnation of Divinity in a human form. The love of Sri Ramakrishna captivated their hearts and souls. Indeed these earnest and sincere disciples were the pillars upon which the Divine manifestation was about to build the structure of his universal mission. The illness which the Bhagavan had assumed upon his physical form was the means by which he gathered his beloved ones around him and gave them the opportunity to nurse and wait upon their divine Master. They sacrificed their personal comfort upon the altar of true devotion and served their Lord with whole heart and soul day after day and night after night. Their devotion was unique and unparallel in the religious history of modern India. These young disciples afterwards became the world-renowned Swamis of the Order of Sri Ramakrishna”.

From this account it is clear to us that the eleven blessed souls which were consecrated at the altar of renunciation, love and service, had one great mission in their lives. They were all fortunate as well as proud of being the spiritual sons of one whom they regarded as “the incarnation of Divinity in a human form.” They were all inspired with the highest spiritual ideal that we can conceive of and their mission was to translate that ideal in action so that a new era might be ushered in the world of religion which was the crying need of the century. And the subsequent history bears ample testimony to the fact that, not only they achieved their mission fully, they also demonstrated to the world that Sri Ramakrishna was really a potent force, and historically speaking, that force carried its own path and left its impress on the refined religious consciousness of the humanity which had been the special privilege of India in the bygone days. Thus the *sadhana* that began at Dakshineswar, was fully achieved by the blessed eleven, each of whom may be regarded as a fraction of Sri Ramakrishna himself. And of these fractions, the world remembers two particularly—Vivekananda and Abhedananda, for they were the most successful standard-bearers of their Master.

Here is an intimate picture of a day at the Cossipur garden-house as given by Swami Abhedananda : “Ramakrishna occupied

the larger room on the first floor of the beautiful house situated in the centre of the spacious garden. He was seated on his bed, which was spread on the floor, and was surrounded by his Sannyasin and householder disciples. One day conversation arose concerning Sannyasa (renunciation) and a householder's life, and Girish asked : Bhagavan, which is right—to renounce the world with a view to avoid worldly cares and suffering or to worship God living with one's family?

“Bhagavan referred to the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita* and said : He who lives with his family but is unattached to the relations and things of the world, who performs his duties without seeking the result of his works, attains to God in the same manner as one who has renounced the world after realizing that earthly relations and objects are transitory and unreal. Those who renounce the world merely to avoid worldly cares and sufferings, belong to the lowest class of Sannyasins. He who has attained to God living in the world is like the man who resides in a crystal palace and sees everything of the outside as well as of the inside of the palace.”

Kaliprasad who was among the listeners on that day wanted to know the nature of a true Sannyasin and the disciple's inquisitiveness was at once satisfied by Sri Ramakrishna in the following words : “The nature of those who have renounced the world is this. They have detached their mind entirely from lust and wealth and have fixed it upon the Supreme. They constantly drink the nectar of divine Love. The mind of a true Sannyasin does not care for anything other than the Supreme. He leaves the place where worldly talks prevail. He listens to discourses about the highest spiritual Truth alone. A true Sannyasin does not speak of worldly matters, he utters no word which has not any bearing on the spiritual ideal, just as a bee sits on flowers only to drink honey.”

Later on, it was that time while Abhedananda had been travelling all over India barefooted for a period of ten years, he scrupulously observed the code and conduct of a Sannyasin as he had learnt from the Master. Sri Ramakrishna by his foresight knew very well that it would devolve on his disciples to revive and re-establish the ideals of a true Sannyasin and presumably for this purpose, in all his teachings to them towards the closing days of his life, the Master was very much

particular to inculcate upon each of them the perfect ideals of a monk. Long before his advent, a sort of degeneration had set in the Order of the monks belonging to all religious sects in India, and none knew it better than Sri Ramakrishna. And to lift the Order out of the quagmire of degeneration, it was absolutely necessary for him to uphold once again the true ideals of the monk. Saffron garb and matted hair, the outward symbols of a Hindu Sannyasin, were not enough for a Sannyasin. He must under all circumstances conform to the rigid practice of detachment and renunciation and fix his mind entirely upon the Supreme. "It was Sri Ramakrishna who by his own example placed before us what a true Sannyasin should be and if his advent has any meaning, it is here". Thus remarked once Swami Abhedananda to one of his foreign disciples who wanted to become a Sannyasin. Not only Abhedananda, Vivekananda also held the same view and it is on record that on more than one occasion, as the Hindu Monk of India he preached before his Western audience the same ideals of a Hindu Sannyasin as he had learnt at the feet of his Master.

If Cossipur witnessed the last chapter of the wonderful life of Sri Ramakrishna, it nonetheless saw the beginning of the real and intense training which all his spiritual sons—the blessed eleven—needed then. So their life-story and for that matter the life-story of our subject cannot be complete without a fuller reference to those days they spent there in company of their Master. Here we see, on one side, "the melting beauty of the setting sun" and on the other the grandeur of the severe austerity practised by the "all-renouncing and determined disciples who would carry on his message". The illness was only a pretext, as Sri Ramakrishna told one day to Kaliprasad and his other disciples at Cossipur; all that he desired was the get-together of the youthful boys who were destined to fulfil his mission in the world. His great hope, however, lay in two—Narendranath and Kaliprasad,—one a sage, and the other a Yogin. It was, therefore, not for nothing that "even on his death-bed he devoted himself to the task of moulding their lives and characters".

"Narendranath was our leader and he was to us a constant source of inspiration and we all followed his instructions as to our respective duties to our ailing Master". Thus writes Swami Abhedananda. There were many factors in nursing and each



of them was in charge of a particular aspect and accordingly they attended the Master by turn. Two of the disciples were deputed to keep a watch for two hours daily on Sri Rama-krishna. Kaliprasad served him daily for two hours in the day and two hours at night. At noon he would rub mustard oil all over the body of the Master and helped him in having his bath at the portico of the garden-house. "It was during this time", writes Swami Abhedananda, "and afterwards that he would talk to me and explain to me a good deal of spiritual topics which were mostly deep. One day he took up a small rod and drew the picture of a bird on the wall. It was really a drawing by a left hand, so lively the bird looked and I was simply taken by surprise at this. When I was just thinking in my mind how it was possible for him to perform this skilful act of drawing, he told me, "In my childhood days I used to surprise all the village *Patuas* (artists) by such drawing". While nursing him I used to watch him daily till the dead hours of the night; Narendranath and others also did the same thing daily".

As days went by, in continued flow of meditation, gradually it became a fixed habit with Kaliprasad. In this connexion the incident that happened on the *Sivaratri* day which took place in the month of March in the year 1886, is worth mentioning here. "On that occasion", writes Swami Abhedananda, "we (Narendranath, Sarat, Niranjana, Gopal and myself) had fasted the whole day and intended to spend the night in meditation, worship and prayer. Naren sang in his sweet voice a hymn to the Lord Siva which was composed by him. There was a small shower of rain in the evening. When it struck two at night, the worship of the first part of the night was over. Sarat, Niranjana and Gopal-lada then left the place. I was left alone with Naren and both of us began to meditate sitting side by side. Suddenly the entire body of Narendranath began to quiver and he asked me to put my hands on his right knee and if I felt anything there. As I did so, I felt a shock as from an electric battery. It made my hands shake terribly". When the midnight worship was over, they all sat again for meditation. It is on record that Kaliprasad his time became absorbed in deep meditation, quite unconscious of the outer world. And he, it may be noted here, achieved his all by himself and not due to any external agency.

It was on this particular occasion that when the Master came to know everything that had happened, he is reported to have told to Narendranath "not to fritter away his power before he had accumulated enough". He also informed him that Kali prasad had been following a particular line for a long time and from this remark we can infer that he needed no power-transmission from anybody. He was as much fixed in meditation as in knowledge, which are the characterization of a Yogin.

At one time the topic of discussion among themselves centered round the career and the gospel of Lord Buddha, the enlightened One. The verses of the *Lalitavistara* appealed to them and they quoted them from their memory. They all seemed to be saturated with Buddhistic love and for the time being they imbibed the Buddhist spirit in them. "Sometimes while sitting in our meditation room we would recite these famous lines of Buddha: 'Let my body dry up, as it were, on this seat; let the flesh thereof and the bones sink into dissolution; without realizing that Enlightenment which is difficult to attain even in the aeon and this body shall not rise from its seat'. The more we recited it, the more we felt an irresistible desire to visit the place of Buddha's place of Illumination. Then one day in the beginning of April, 1886, we all three, Narendranath, Tarakdada and myself, left for Buddha Gaya, without informing anybody at Cossipur, not even the Master".

The rest of the story is being reproduced here from the biography of Swami Vivekananda: "The three friends alighted at Gaya and walked seven miles to the place of Buddha's Illumination. The wonderful solitude of the place and its sweet associations gladdened their hearts beyond expectation. One evening when all was silent and hushed, they repaired to the stone seat under the sacred Bodhi tree and sat in meditation" Swami Abhedananda himself has recorded that as "Naren meditated, the sublime character of Buddha, his wonderful compassion, his humane teachings and the subsequent history of India transformed by the magic wand of Buddhism—all these presented themselves before his vision in such glowing colours that he could not control his feelings. He actually visualised the Divine Spirit. And as for myself, I felt a sort of serene peace within me which I never experienced before. After two hours of meditation we had our oblation in the river Niranjana that was

nearby and then we had some food and afterwards we repaired to a local *Dharmasala* (a place where pilgrims usually put up, free of cost) where we spent the night”.

Kaliprasad and his companions stayed three or four days at Buddha Gaya as guests of the Mahanta of the temple. Then they began to feel a desire to see the Master again and soon they were back to the Cossipur garden-house. It is needless to mention that Sri Ramakrishna as well as their fellow-disciples were now overjoyed to see them back. “Well done, my boys”, thus remarked the all-compassionate Master when he came to know of their adventure in Buddha Gaya.

Now we shall relate the most important episode in the lives of the disciples at Cossipur. “To destroy the pride and egotism of his disciples, Sri Ramakrishna told them one day to wear the ochre robe of the Sannyasin and to take up the begging bowl. Being himself a perfect Sannyasin, he loved to see his disciples following him in the path of renunciation”. One day some *gerua* clothes and *rudraksha* beads were procured which the Master distributed among his chosen eleven. Then “one evening he called the boys, the future apostles of the Ramakrishna Order and put them through a certain ceremony. Thereafter they were permitted to take food from all irrespective of caste and creed. The Master himself initiated these boys as monks, fulfilling their heart’s desire”.

The next step in their spiritual training came invariably. It was the begging-bowl, the most sacred symbol of a Hindu Sannyasin. One morning the Master called certain among his beloved ones—Narendranath, Kaliprasad, Sarat, Niranjan and Jogin and told them : “Let me see if you can beg. The food procured by begging is very pure. I need that sort of food now. No more food is to be provided by the householder devotees”.

The indication was clear enough for the disciples. “Then all of us”, writes Swami Abhedananda, “said in chorus, ‘certainly we shall beg for you’. We consented immediately with enthusiasm and next morning we first went to the mother (Sarada <sup>phasi</sup>) and stood before her, asking for alms. She granted our <sup>need</sup> and put grains of rice into each bowl held in our hands. <sup>enough</sup> with the name of the Lord in our lips, we went forth to <sup>of the</sup> the neighbourhood. This we never did before, nor did

we know how to beg. We had varied experiences. Some were pleased to give us, while others flatly refused throwing taunting remarks at us. At last we brought before the Master whatever we could procure then and he seemed to be overjoyed at our performance. He then asked the mother to cook food with that and when it was offered to him, he took a grain of rice and said, 'well done. This food is very pure, for it is untinged with anybody's secret desire.'

Kaliprasad knew that just as Buddha and Sankara had done with their disciples, so the all-merciful Master asked them to do, which indirectly meant the preparation for their prospective monastic life. It was also a great blow to the caste pride and the sense of self-respect of these young spiritual aspirants. In his later days, while recounting this episode of his life at Cossipur, Swami Abhedananda is reported to have made this remark: "I still remember how the Master blessed us and rejoiced at our sincere and earnest devotion. This was the method and manner of his training to bring about a complete transformation of our nature and to direct us towards the path of absolute renunciation".

A few days after their return from Gaya, it so happened one day that there came to Cossipur garden-house Bijay Krishna Goswamy to pay his tributes to Sri Ramakrishna for whom he cherished great regard. It was he who once declared in emphatic terms and in the presence of Vivekananda and others that it was here (meaning Sri Ramakrishna) that he found everything although he had been late in making pilgrimages to various holy places. In his own words: "In Paramahamsadeva I find everything in full complement. I have not found anyone who possesses anything more than Paramahamsadeva". These words, coming as it did from no less a person than Bijay Krishna Goswamy, who subsequently came to be regarded as one of the luminaries in the spiritual firmament of India during the last century, had impressed Kaliprasad very much. In his later years, Bijay Krishna was universally held in the highest esteem not only as a religious teacher but also as an eminent personality in the field of devotional mysticism. All the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna have spoken highly of this great Vaishnava. Sri Ramakrishna himself liked him even from the days when he was attached to the Brahmo Samaj as a

of that church. He was one of the frequent and regular visitors at Dakshineswar and later on also at Shyampukur.

When on that day Bijay Krishna came to Cossipur, he incidentally narrated the story of one Hatha Yogi with the highest achievements whom he met on the Barabar hills near Gaya. He was speaking highly of the Yogi, and on hearing it, Kaliprasad among others, felt an intense desire to meet that Yogi. Hatha Yoga, it may be mentioned here, deals entirely with physical body. It describes the methods by which the internal organs can be purified and perfect health can be acquired, so that the body remains fully immune to any disease or decay. It was therefore quite natural for Kaliprasad, himself being an aspirant in the Yoga since his boyhood days, to feel such a desire. And as he was a man who never allowed the grass to grow under his feet, he felt a strong desire to learn Hatha Yoga. So we find him, on the very next day, making his journey all alone towards the place mentioned by Bijay Krishna. It was a surreptitious journey, for he did not tell anything about it to anybody, not even to the Master. The passage was procured by him secretly. It is better that we hear the rest of the story in the words of Swami Abhedananda himself. Thus he writes in his autobiography :

“This was, in fact, my first journey outside Calcutta and quite alone. All along I had cherished a great desire within me that one day I would become a *Parivrajaka* (traveller) and travel here and there, depending simply on begging. I took the train from the Bally station and reached Gaya in due time. From there I travelled eight miles on foot and reached a village which was situated just below the Barabar hills. I spent the night there in a *Dharmasala* where I picked up an acquaintance with a Sannyasin belonging to one order of Sankaracharya. In course of my conversation with him I came to know of a manuscript in his possession in which were written the rules and regulations of how to adopt Sannyasa by performing the *Virajahoma*. I had with me a small note book in which I copied out the whole thing. Next morning I got myself ready for my next phase of journey to the Hatha Yogi and for this purpose I secured necessary directions from the local people. They were kind enough to indicate to me the way uphill and the exact location of the particular cave in which the said Yogi lived. But every

one also discouraged me to proceed there, saying that the Yogin was a bad-tempered one and he as well as his disciples used to throw stones at anybody who attempted to go there. In fact, none was allowed to see him. I was warned not to risk myself.

“But I was hardly frightened at it. Determined as I was, I wanted to see the Hatha Yogin, no matter even it cost my life. So on the following morning I started on foot with a fearless mind and began to climb the hill-top, making my way through the narrow path that lay through the jungle, ending just before the approach of the cave. I walked silently and with utmost precaution, looking all around to find if any one was throwing stones at me. At last I reached my destination and there inside the cave sat the Yogin before a *dhuni* (sacred fire), encircled by his disciples. They were simply startled at my appearance before them and at once all of them stood up and were about to beat me. I was equally startled to find them. But without feeling myself least frightened as was my nature and with the help of my ready wit, I uttered the words ‘Om Namō ‘Narayanaya’ (salutation to the Lord Narayana) and bowed to all of them. They looked at my *gerua* garb and as they heard me uttering the words of salutation, they reciprocated it. Then they questioned me about my *bona fide*. As I have mentioned already that on the previous night while staying at the *Dharamsala* I had gathered all the necessary informations regarding the order of the monks which I now reproduced to them and they seemed to be satisfied. Here I realized the mercy of the Master and the way in which he saved my life. I paid a silent salutation to him. When I replied to all the questions correctly, I was allowed to sit by the Yogin, and his disciples accorded to me a reception due to a Sannyasin. After a while when I expressed my desire to learn all about the Hatha Yoga, I was requested to enter into an inner chamber of the cave. I was alone, and I was also doubtful as to what they will do with me once I am inside the cave. However, I went inside the cave where I found another *dhuni* burning, and as directed, I took my seat beside the Yogin. I put a number of questions to him as regards Hatha Yoga, *pranayama* (breathing) and other related matters. The Yogin replying to all my questions, finally asked me to remain with him in order to learn the Yoga at his place. Suddenly I looked around and found the cave quite spacious and a large

quantity of food were stored up there. On one side I noticed a goat and a fowl, tied with ropes. Then I realised that the Yogin belonged to the *Aghora* sect. I also noticed that one of his disciples was suffering from asthma. It then struck me that if I allow myself to learn the Yoga and the breath control under him, I might be afflicted with such kind of ailment. Thereafter, on questioning him I found that his knowledge about the Yoga science was but shallow. He himself knows only something of the *pranayama* (the control of breath) from a book named *Pavana-swarodaya*, but he seemed to have achieved not much. So I did not feel any further urge to learn anything from the Hatha Yogin, though he insisted to have me as his disciple with a view to teach me the Yoga science.

“It was just at that moment that an incident occurred. I saw the effulgent image of the Master flashing in my mind. I was very much surprised at this strange phenomenon and I began to compare the all-merciful Master with the Hatha Yogin in my presence and the latter appeared to me to be only a minor or insignificant one having little knowledge. I saw the Master looking at me with a glance full of compassion. Then tears rolled down my cheeks. It was at that moment that I realized that the Master was an ocean of knowledge and also that as regards spiritual attainments none can stand him in comparison. No longer I felt any desire to remain there. The Yogin then offered me some food for my mid-day meal which consisted of bread and pulse. He also requested me to stay a few days with him. I then began to think seriously of ways and means to get rid of him and to run away from the place”.

Now to make the long story short, Kaliprasad somehow managed to escape from the place. He spent another night at the Gaya station and took a train the next morning and finally arrived at Cossipur. He then went straight to the Master and saluted him putting his head at his feet. The Master looked at the run-away boy and said smilingly, “where had you been without telling me?” Kaliprasad then made a clean breast of the whole thing, narrating his adventures in Barabar hills. It was then that Sri Ramakrishna told him emphatically these words which are of utter significance: “I know all the *sadhus* and *siddhas* wherever they are. They are all fake and charlatan. Wherever you might go, nowhere will you find what you see

negative aspects of Vedanta. And consequently he would accept only those things which stood the test of hard logic. "Whatever I used to learn", writes Swami Abhedananda, "about the existence of God, I was inclined to smash it with the help of logic. I then read John Stuart Mill's *Logic, Philosophy and Essays on Religion*, with a great deal of interest. While I attended the Master at night as I sat beside him, I studied books on Logic. One day, as he noticed me reading those books, the Master asked me: 'What are you reading, my boy?' 'It is an English book on Logic which teaches how to make arguments about the existence of God', I replied. 'Very well', the Master said, 'It is you who have introduced the habit of reading among the boys. The fact is that one needs just a pen-knife to kill one self, but it requires large weapons to kill others. God can never be attained simply by reading books, but at the same time it is necessary for instructing the people'. I then hardly realized the exact implications of the words of the all-merciful Master, but now I have understood that possibly to equip me for my future work as a preacher that he did not forbid me to give up the study of books".

The Cossipur garden-house have thus paved the path of the future Abhedananda, who, ten years after the passing of the Master, appeared on the world stage to fulfil a great mission sanctified by history and inspired by the universal teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. As the curtain fell on the life of a great spiritual personality on that memorable 16th of August, 1886, the historical forces began to gather momentum out of his ashes, to help raising that curtain once again before the full gaze of the world, within less than a decade, and there stood on the world platform two shining figures—Swami Vivekananda and Swami Abhedananda—as the accredited inheritors of their Master's ideals of universal truth and love. And through them India was about to speak to the world at large.



# PART TWO

## The Ascetic

*"I travelled throughout the length and breadth of India, barefooted, without touching money, without thinking of the morrow and with one garment as my bed and garment."*

Swami Abhedananda



## CHAPTER I

### ON THE PATH TO DEVOTION

So the seraphic Master passed away leaving behind him a rich spiritual heritage to be taken up by his blessed eleven to draw light and inspiration from it in their path towards new life. But the task of disseminating "the grain of his thought throughout the world" fell particularly on two of his chief disciples—Vivekananda and Abhedananda, the two sparks born out of the sacred flame of that pyre which consumed the earthly remains of Sri Ramakrishna. In studying the work of one whose whole life was a continuous fulfilment of the will of God, our first concern should be to look at the principal factors that formed the fabric of his being and of the country from whose soil he sprang. The meaning of Swami Abhedananda's glorious and eventful life may therefore suggest itself through an attempt to discover what place it occupies in the historical development of India, and what significance it has for her future. It seems he came just when his coming was most called for, when it was decreed by providence. What he said and did during the long years of his life, was the culmination of the past endeavours of the race, of its high achievements, a restatement and revival of which as an actual experience on his own part was needed so that India might regain her full stature as a nation conscious of its divine destiny. But before that let us follow the events of his life after 16th August, 1886, which is indeed a memorable date in the annals of the spiritual history of India in our times.

When the saint of Dakshineswar closed his earthly life in *mahasamadhi*, his young disciples were determined to work out the ideas propagated by Paramahamsadeva—"to think of the spirit and to live in Godconsciousness for the good of others"—and to this end they were firm and sincere. But it took them months and years before the work could be actually begun and it also needed much training and self-preparation on their part in translating the Master's thought into living action. Much spadework awaited them although they possessed the necessary energy. But more energy was not enough. There was another important factor—a constructive genius, without which it was

impossible for them to become the standard-bearers of Sri Ramakrishna. Among the chosen eleven, two were specially gifted with this trait and as we proceed with the life-story of our subject, we will see what a constructive genius Swami Abhedananda was, next only to his great spiritual brother, Swami Vivekananda.

Now let us see how Kaliprasad, the disciple, became Kali Tapasvi, the ascetic and finally there emerged Swami Abhedananda, the teacher. But in between these stages there was the travelling monk or the Parivrajaka Abhedananda about whom we must discuss first just to follow the chronological sequences of our narrative. A fortnight after the death of the Master, we find Kali Tapasvi in Brindavan, in company with the Holy Mother who was then overwhelmed with grief following the passing away of her Divine consort. Along with them went Jogin, Latu and whither Tarak also soon followed. There were also a few women devotees in her company. On their way to Brindavan, the party halted first at Baidyanathdham and then at Banaras where they stayed for three days. Years ago, accompanied by Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi had visited this holy place and the memories of those days flashed before her mind now, making her all the more sad and sorrowful. From Banaras, they went to Ajodhya where they spent one night. At last they reached Brindavan and here arrangement for their stay were made at the *Kunja* (abode) of one Kali Babu who was a younger brother of Sri Ramakrishna's householder devotee Balaram Basu. Kali Tapasvi however did not stay for a long time at Brindavan. He himself has recorded the account of his woodland travel at holy place which is worth reproducing here :

“On reaching Brindavan, I felt a strong desire to undertake a woodland travel which is essential for anyone visiting this pilgrimage. (This is known as Brindavan-Parikrama. It is customary with all Vaishnava devotees who visit the place to do so). Brindavan is also known as Brajamandal. And for this purpose I gathered necessary informations from the local Vaishnavas. At that time I used to garb myself in the ochre robes that I received from the hands of the Master. All that I had with me then consisted of two pieces of waist-cloth (*koupin*), two pieces of ochre cloth (*gerua-bahirvasa*) and a small waterpot (*kamandalu*). Neither any blanket nor any bedding I had with me, not to speak of coins which I never touched at that time. Food I used to

secure by begging (*madhukari*) once in a day, at four or five places. The Brajavasis (people residing permanently at Brindavan) were very kind to me and I went from house to house, uttering the words, 'Narayana Hari'. Whatever I thus procured (the alms consisted chiefly of breads prepared from maize and sweets), I ate them in the afternoon hours and then I would set out for the woodland travel, in company with the Bairagins (saintly Vaishnavas of Brindavan). At nightfall, I would spread out my *gerua* robe under a tree over the dust of the holy place (the dust of the place is reverentially called *Raja*) and enjoy a short nap in the open air. Thereafter I would get up before the dawn and begin the travel in company with the Bairagins. At noon, as I reached in a village, I would do the begging, have some food and rest, and after that I would again commence my travel around the Brajamandal. But the Bairagins though otherwise kind to me, never talked to me, because of my ochre robe. They seemed to cherish in their minds a strong aversion for the Sannyasins wearing ochre robes. Perhaps they were under the wrong notion that the Sannyasin sect who do not worship Lord Sri Krishna must be atheists. Aware as I was of this sort of adverse feeling in their minds, I used to keep myself aloof from their company without talking to them as I walked around the holy place. Here and there, places associated with the memory of Lord Krishna would delight my sight and inquisitive as I was, I used to gather necessary information of those interesting spots from my fellow-travellers whom I followed, wherever they went. Even to beg my food, I went behind them.

"One day it so happened that in a mood of trance I was chanting aloud in praise of Sri Krishna and recited a few stanzas of the *Gopi-Gita* as incorporated in the *Srimad-Bhagavat* which I had memorized on a previous occasion. This attracted the attention of my fellow travellers who were surprised at my devotion to Radha-Krishna. They then addressed me, saying: 'It seems, Sir, you are a great devotee of our Lord Krishna which we did not realize so long. May we tender our apology to you for our act of omission. Allow us to attend on you from this day. You need not go abegging, we will do that for you'. Thus my act of begging was over since that day. There would be plenty of breads procured by them for me. Even at times if I attempted to go out to beg, they would invariably prevent me

from doing so, saying, 'where shall we find another devotee like you, Sir! All that we beseech of you is the right to serve you and may you be pleased to accept our service'.

"It was from that day that my tour round the holy place was performed easily in company with them. I visited all the spots associated with the memory of Sri Krishna and as I did it, I realized more and more the glory of the Lord. At last I completed the desired tour (*parikrama*) of one hundred and sixty-eight miles (*chourasi krosa*), around the entire place. Returning from my *parikrama*, I went to see the mother at the place of Kali Babu and after bowing down at her feet, I related to her the story of my sojourn. There I found everyone of our party, excepting Tarakdada (Swami Sivananda), and on enquiry, I came to know from Jogin that he had left for the Baranagar Math founded by Suresh Babu. My joys knew no bounds at this news and at once I felt a strong desire to go there. I then solicited the permission of the mother which was easily granted to me and thereafter I proceeded to Calcutta to join my brother-disciples at the new monastery."

By his own admission, his pilgrimage to Brindavan in company with Sarada Devi and others and his subsequent woodland travel were refreshing to the mind of the young travelling monk. It was this holy place which the Master himself had once visited, and as such, it must have had a special attraction for him at that time. His stay at Brindavan was a wondrous tale as recounted above. He must have formed acquaintances of a number of pious Vaishnavas there, with whom, it might be imagined he had frequent religious discourses and exchange of religious views. He had, of course, nothing but severe contempt for the lay Vaishnavas whose ways of life he did not like. Long before Sri Ramakrishna, the Lord of Nadia, Sri Chaitanya also visited this place associated with the memories of Sri Krishna. In fact, it was Sri Chaitanya who salvaged this holy place out of the debris and once again placed it on its pristine glory. Thus the place subsequently came to be regarded as the most holy pilgrimage not only for the Vaishnavas, but also for all religious sects. Insofar as his spiritual urge was concerned, Kali Tapasvi's short stay at Brindavan was not fruitless. Although he has not recorded anything of his inner experience during this period, it may be surmised that he must have conceived the eternal *Lila* as was

realized by his Master once. He must have also realized that the *Aprakrita* Brindaban lives and one can actually feel that the trees and creepers of this holy place were not what they were to the eyes of the mortals; they were really saints, and it was "love shackled with vain-loving" that had led them to take their births as flowering shrubs to adorn the Lord Krishna and kiss the dust of his feet. Although we often hear that there is no logic in the affairs of the heart, yet Pascal truly observes, the heart has reasons which reason does not know. It would seem a sacrilege to the devotee that proceeds through the faiths to allow reason to tear assunder the preternatural mist that enshrouds *Brindavan-lila* and the experiences of Sri Ramakrishna bears the glowing testimony to it. Did he not say to a devotee at Dakshineswar that "those plants and trees, which are *Kalpatarus*, dance to the tune of Sri Krishna's flute and to the rhythmical movements of His feet?" It is not merely the poet who has said that "every flower enjoys the air it breathes", but the scientists, with all their vaunt of exactitude and reason, have told us that mental phenomena are caused by stimuli in plants as well as in animals. Sri Vijaykrishna Goswamy had also the same experience when he stayed at Brindavan for one year. One of his biographers has related an incident which is worth quoting here: "One day a *Sankirtan* party was led by some devoted persons of Brindavan headed by Vijaykrishna. At that time, they were struck with wonder to notice the emotional ecstasy of a particular tree on the road-side".

At this distance of time when we imagine Kali Tapasvi travelling around Brindavan, visiting the places associated with the *Lila* of Sri Krishna, he must have experienced within himself that not only the music of the place but also the warm radiance of the divine sentiment, working on the surroundings, particularly on the wayside trees and creepers. This is no illusion or absurdity. This is realization *par excellence*. Thus the woodland travel undertook by Swami Abhedananda at the early years of his Paribrajaka life must have had its benign effect on his mind and it opened up for him greater opportunities for watching Krishna's *Lilas* and for that matter of the all-pervading Infinite or the Absolute. In this he must have had the guidance of the spirit of his Master. He did not merely see the woods, but Elysium regions where one meets with nothing but joy, and

plenty, and contentment ; where every gale whispers pleasure, and every shade promises repose. His experience must have been this that in these woodlands of shimmering green, there is naught to be done, save to love and be loved. And the disciple<sup>4</sup> must have experienced what once was experienced by his Master. And Kali Tapasvi returned to the Baranagar monastery with a heart brimmed over with love. . . From the path of knowledge, the young ascetic now advanced to that of devotion. The rest of Abhedanandas spiritual hope saw the consummation as well as synthesis of knowledge and devotion.



## CHAPTER II

### THE MONASTERY AT BARANAGAR

"In 1886, after the departure of Sri Ramakrishna, I renounced the world and became a *Sannyasin* along with Swami Vivekananda and other co-disciples (*Gurubhais*). As this was our second birth, we gave up our former names, and from that time I have been known by my present name." Thus writes Swami Abhedananda. The scene now shifted from the Cossipur garden-house to the new monastery at Baranagar. But the story must be told in its proper perspective. It is on record that "in the last few days of Sri Ramakrishna's earthly life he entrusted the care and training of his other disciples—themselves all boys of profound spirituality—to Naren's hands and imparted to him his final instructions." Verily, the leadership of the newly created Brotherhood of Ramakrishna devolved on Narendranath, the greatest of his apostles, to whom the Master had transmitted all the spiritual powers that he had acquired through years of austerity and experience. Naturally, his leadership was therefore unquestioned.

Swami Abhedananda, who was junior to Swami Vivekananda by three years, was one of the close associates of the latter when both of them appeared on the world platform. Those who have carefully read the Jamshedpur speech and other public addresses of Abhedananda in India, must have seen his attitude towards Vivekananda whose biddings he always followed. It is interesting to note that it was at Cossipore, as the days of his teachings were coming to a close that Sri Ramakrishna himself strengthened the bonds between Narendranath and his other brother-disciples, always indicating to them to accept Naren as the central figure. "Since the days at Dakshineswar as my association grew more and more intimate with Narendranath, I began to regard him as my elder and leader. This was equally true of the rest of us also. It was all due to the Master's high estimate of his spiritual worth." This statement of Swami Abhedananda is worth remembering at this point. The remarkable personality of Swami Vivekananda no doubt contributed largely to his leadership. In fact, it was Sri Ramakrishna who told his young boys

that when he would be no more in physical form, Naren would then become their leader. But it was perhaps at the Cossipur garden-house where all the chosen eleven were assembled together for the first time to nurse him, that the Master "made them feel that the spiritual understanding of his chief disciple should be their infallible guide in the days that were to come."

Now let us see how and in what way the leadership of Narendranath rose to the occasion when the day actually came, following the passing away of the Master. Thus Vivekananda had the authority of Sri Ramakrishna himself as regards his future leadership for the newly created Brotherhood which was destined to usher in a new era in India insofar as her spiritual and cultural regeneration was concerned. Of course, the spiritual life of the boys were perfectly moulded by the Master, but it was left to one to keep his brother-disciples together when the physical frame of Sri Ramakrishna would be removed from their sight. Not only to keep them together, but to guide and train them also, this was the main task that awaited Narendranath at the monastery at Baranagar. Thus saddled with a great responsibility, he had hardly any time to pass his days in bereavement, and he at once set himself to the task, shouting inwardly—"victory to Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna!" But it would be travesty of truth to say that it was Narendranath's spirit alone that sustained these fiery souls in those days of desolation and held his brother-disciples together. The biographers of Swami Vivekananda seldom mention in this connection about one silent and self-effacing benign figure. We are speaking here of Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother. It was under her loving care that the young boys lived at the Cossipur garden-house as a happy family. When the Master departed from the scene of his *Lila*, it was the sympathy of the Mother that brought blessing and hope to the boys. In the words of Vivekananda, "she was a woman . . . that lady, his wife, was the only one who sympathised with her spiritual sons and we could not have remained together then but for the loving care and inspiration of the mother". In fact, and also historically speaking, when the Master departed, it fell on his divine consort, Sarada Devi, who herself was a living embodiment of all the highest and noblest virtues of an Indian woman, to gather round her all the disciples of her husband who have left their home and hearth, and to bestow on

them the motherly affection and care. This ultimately paved the path to the establishment of the monastic Order which was the cherished dream of Sri Ramakrishna.

The young disciples stayed at the Cossipur garden-house till the lease expired. Their grief together with the pressure of their guardians now exerted upon them to return to their homes and live a normal life, might have disbanded them had it not been for Narendranath who was determined to hold them together against all odds. On one side there was dire poverty, and on the other renunciation and devotion. They had to pass through various ordeals, internal and external, before they emerged as apostles of a new faith—the faith which was to show to the world “that the work of the Man of Dakshineswar was not to end with the death of the body” and which was also “to express itself in an eternal flow of spiritual life and knowledge of the Indestructible.”

It was but natural that after the passing away of the Master, the young disciples would become at first bewildered to realize what to do. The first question was that of a shelter which would be needed after one month. Some of the disciples had already left their homes and were living in the house at Cossipur, and the others were about to leave their home to join the rest. The memories of their Master held them together and they spent most of the time in meditation, singing and also in recalling over and over again the last days of Sri Ramakrishna, as also the memorable days at Dakshineswar. And yet at the same time the young disciples under the leadership of Narendranath were seriously engaged in discussing among themselves about the mission and the teachings of their Master. In short, “a great spirit filled the whole place and throbbed with wonderful vitality and power.”

It was against this background that the monastery at Baranagar was about to take its shape as a nucleus of the future Ramakrishna Math and Mission, the full history of which has been recorded in the book, *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission*. The inquisitive reader would do well to go through this remarkable book, from which we quote the following lines having special bearing on our narration. .

“Meanwhile, the budding monastery at Cossipur got uprooted and the youths scattered to different parts of North India.

The future looked gloomy so far as their organised monastic life was concerned. One evening, when Surendranath Mitra (a householder devotee) was in his shrine, Sri Ramakrishna appeared to him in a vision and said, 'What are you doing? My boys are roaming about without a shelter. First find some remedy for that'. This excited Surendra, who rushed at once to Narendra and said, 'Brother, fix an abode where the Master's picture and ashes and the articles of his daily use can be kept and worshipped regularly, and where the all-renouncing devotees like you can live together in amity.' Needless to say that Narendra jumped at this idea. He started at once in search of a house, and wrote to Tarak, at Brindavan, to keep himself ready to return at a moment's notice. Narendra ransacked the suburbs of Calcutta<sup>†</sup> for a house on easy terms, for he had not much money to spare. Surendra had promised to pay monthly the amount he used to spend at the Cossipur garden. At last Narendra chose a dilapidated house, near the Ganges, at Baranagar, a little way above Cossipur. The rent was fixed at eleven rupees monthly, and six rupees went to the cook, the other expenses were for the plainest food and clothing."

So the monastery at Baranagar came into being at that dilapidated house. But what a house it was! In the words of Swami Virajananda, "The Math was located in the upper storey of the back i.e. western portion of the dilapidated and neglected temple precincts of the Munshis of Taki on the Pramanik Ghat Road at Baranagar. As one entered through a door from the road and crossed a small open space, one came to a staircase leading up to a *verandah* with pillars and wooden railings, on the right side of which in the front portion there was a big room. The inner portion used for the Math could not be seen from outside; it was desolate... The ground floor was full of the dirt of the ages and so covered with weeds that it became the resort of snakes and jackals. Nobody approached the house. It was regarded as haunted, and nobody cared to take it on lease... There was a hall on the left which served as the bedroom of the monks as well as a parlour to receive visitors and devotees."

Thus it was in this dilapidated and haunted house that about three quarters of a century ago the seeds of the Ramakrishna movement that was to sweep the world, were laid down. This monastery was, in fact, a strange innovation in Bengal.

Strange in this sense, that here in that wretched house came to live a band of educated youngmen of cultured families, all dressed in ochre clothes of full width and with the monistic philosophy as their main belief, while adopting for practical purposes devotion, meditation, study and other forms of spiritual discipline. They even changed their family names in order to wipe out all links with the past which was something socially objectionable. "All things combined, the new movement seemed", as the author of the *History* puts it, "the new movement seemed to be crazy and beyond the grasp of the common people. It was no easy task to build up a monastery and a monastic life in the midst of so much unenlightened apathy and prejudice."

Here a few words about the historical implications of the Ramakrishna movement may not be altogether out of point. The teachings of Sri Ramakrishna could not have spread so successfully and so widely without the Ramakrishna movement which, so to say, began in a nucleus form at the dirty and dilapidated monastery at Baranagar. The *sadhana* that began at Dakshineswar actually found its historical fulfilment when this movement began under the leadership of Vivekananda and Abhedananda towards the close of the last century. This statement may sound startling, but it is true in the true sense of the word. In the words of Christopher Isherwood, "the movement must be regarded as the most important of all existing religious movements, no matter how large or influential or venerable the others may be. It is always hard to recognize the power and the magnitude of a new spiritual force ; and the Ramakrishna movement is very new, historically speaking." Not only spiritual, the social role it played, is equally significant, and the founders of this movement were well fitted for the task. They intended from the beginning, it may be pointed out, that the spiritual aspect of the movement should not be confined to the East only, it must serve the West as well, and the subsequent history of the movement bears ample testimony to it. We have indicated already that historical forces were behind this movement almost from the beginning and the leaders connected with it were fully possessed of the keen historical sense as they went from the East to the West. The Ramakrishna movement differs from the earlier religious movements in India and elsewhere in this sense that from the very inception it "avoided the much more deadly

mistake of trying to create a cult of itself." As we all knew, it never confined to "meditation in retirement from the world." The course of the movement had all along run on two planes—the Mission and the Math or the monastery, and unless we take into our account this dual character of the movement, it will not be possible for us to realize its significance. While the Mission, with all its hospitals, schools, and relief projects, is necessarily involved in the affairs of the world, the Math remains as the spiritual structure for the erring and afflicted humanity at large.

Now we revert to our narration. Established in the month of October, 1886, the monastery at the dreary and desolate place of Baranagar remained at this place for a period of six years after which it was removed to Alambazar in the neighbourhood of Dakshineswar and thence was finally removed to Belur towards the close of the last century. The history of its growth and development has been fully described in the book referred to and we need not dwell on it at length. Let us now see how the boys began their new life as monks in that weird place, infested with lizards and snakes and surrounded by a jungle-like garden, full of weeds and with a pond at the back "covered with green scum which was a breeding place for mosquitoes." It was in this way that a new era of spiritual renaissance began at that haunted house and amidst conditions beyond our imagination. And nothing but the spirit of the Master could really sustain these consecrated souls confined there. Taken all in all, the life at this new monastery presented to them an acid test to their character and how they surmounted it, is a story often told and we need not recapitulate it here. "The dreary retreat was chosen because of its cheapness, and its nearness to the holy Ganges and the Baranagar burning-ghat where the body of the Master had been consigned to the flame." It was at this place that the young apostles already informally initiated to *Sannyasa* by their Master took formal vows in the presence of one another, and thus came into being the Ramakrishna Order. The story of Baranagar monastery, therefore, "is the story of eleven young men of total renunciation caught up in a fervour of spiritual longing".

A few days after the young monks had settled at the Baranagar monastery, there came an invitation quite unexpectedly from the mother of Baburam (Swami Premananda) to make a trip to Antpur, his native village. The boys, headed by Naren-

dranath, their leader, went there and were cordially received. Antpur, a small village in Hooghly, meant a starting point in the lives of the spiritual sons of Sri Ramakrishna who himself was born in the same district. For, it is here that "the new communion of apostles was founded amid tears of love in memory of the lost Master," as Romain Rolland puts it. And what this "new communion" exactly meant, has been fully explained in the main biography of Swami Vivekananda, from which we give here the following quotation :

"Here the light of their combined spiritual fire blazed up into a tremendous conflagration. Narendra's religious enthusiasm added fuel to the flame ; it seemed as if the spirit of the Master was speaking and working through him. He was intensely possessed of the living vision of the *Sannyasin's* life and would cry out : 'Let man-making be the goal of our lives ! Let us make this our only *sadhana* ! Realization of God is the one and sole thing in life ! That is what Sri Ramakrishna's life represented ! We must realize God !' The boys inspired by these thoughts and fired by oneness of purpose became aware of a sense of unity—a feeling that they were all inseparably connected by some wonderful spiritual power, making them brothers ; and during their stay at Antpur they seemed to grow into one body, one mind and one soul."

But this was not all that happened at Antpur. Much more than that came in the lives of the blessed eleven. There "one night before a huge *dhuni* in the compound of the house, they gathered together and meditated for a long time. There was peace all around, and also peace within. As they stood before the *dhuni*, with the flames lighting upon their countenances, they took the vow of *Sannyasa* before God and one another. This happened on a Christmas Eve. The temple of Tarakeswar was not far off. And they all went there to worship the Lord of Monks and finally returned to Baranagar to lead a life of absolute austerity and renunciation. Thus began a new chapter in the lives of those destined to give to the world what it needed most—Truth and Love. They were to demonstrate that love for God has very little meaning in it, if not coupled with love for humanity ; that religion embraced the suffering humanity and the world within its arms. Thus the spiritual significance of the Baranagar Math held its lamp to light the way of humanity.

## CHAPTER III

### ON THE PATH TO RENUNCIATION

How the spiritual genius of Sri Ramakrishna created a band of new type of *Sannyasins* in India with renunciation as their sheet anchor is known to all though not fully comprehended in proper perspective. The one striking thing that had immensely impressed Kaliprasad ever since he came in close contact with Sri Ramakrishna was the hall-mark of renunciation stamped on his spiritual nature. To him the saint of Dakshineswar appeared as renunciation Incarnate. And to live the life of renunciation became his motto since then. A religious prophet worth his name, truly represents himself through renunciation. At a time when the true significance and meaning of renunciation were almost lost to us, it was he who became the most shining example of it. As days went by in close association with the Master, Kaliprasad came to realize gradually that Sri Ramakrishna was a strange prophet in whom all contradictions in religion as well as in all the fields of human life became harmonized. How was it possible? This question, we might conjecture, must have troubled the mind of the young disciple during his early days of spiritual apprenticeship. Did his practice of renunciation mean philosophy of escapism or world-negation? Emphatically no. The life-story of Sri Ramakrishna reveals to us that he "was a strong advocate of renunciation. The essence of the *Gita*, according to him, was detachment from everything. In latter life, as we all know, he could not touch metal, and even unconscious contact produced shooting pain in his nerves". And this perhaps was the reason that when his young disciples were alone, he would invariably inspire them to the ideals of renunciation, pointing out to them the frailties of the world. All that he wanted was this that his would-be messengers should be torch-bearers of renunciation. Again and again, the Master would inculcate upon their minds the highest ideal of renunciation as the bedrock of spiritual life.

Before the Master fell seriously ill, necessitating his removal from Dakshineswar to Calcutta, it was obvious that Kaliprasad and other young aspirants were being gradually led to the highest



reaches of spirituality by acquiring a new outlook on life which was sanctified by the ideals of renunciation as taught by Sri Ramakrishna. Of the chosen eleven, only three, Kaliprasad, Latu and Sashi were privileged to live there all the time, attending the ailing Master. It was at the Shyampukur house that Sri Ramakrishna took particular care in teaching the boys around him the lessons on renunciation as expounded by Sri Krishna in the *Gita*. It was during this period of two and a half months constant stay with the Master there that Kaliprasad took special interest in reading the *Gita* exclusively and attentively. Ever since he came to be acquainted with the term *Tyaga* or renunciation, he put his entire mind on it with a view to grasping the true import of it in the context of spiritual practice. A copy of *Bhagavad Gita* was his constant companion in those days. One of the remarkable characteristics of Swami Abhedananda was this that he left nothing half done in his pursuit to spiritual realization from even the earliest stage of his association with the Master. He was never a dogmatic or hide-bound scholar, yet he always wanted to enter into the core of things and as such his approach to any issue was direct. When one day at noon he was attending the Master, with a copy of the *Gita* placed on his lap with its pages open, Sri Ramakrishna told him: "what does the *Gita* teach? If you wish to know it, repeat the name '*Gita*' ten times in quick succession—'*Gi-ta*', '*Gi-ta*', '*Gi*' etc. It will sound like '*Tagi*' (*tyagi*), '*tagi*' which has the same meaning as the Sanskrit word '*tyagi*', that is, one who has renounced everything of the world for the sake of the Lord."

This simple and original teaching of the Master was quite indicative to the disciple and it is on record that since then nothing but discourses on renunciation appealed to him most. He wanted to know the core of the teaching of this great book. If renunciation is the supreme word of the *Gita*, Kaliprasad used to argue in his mind, then all our actions and efforts must be turned into an offering to the supreme and universal Godhead. It is this truth that, as he matured into spirituality, found expression first during his stay at Brindavan and then when he returned to the Baranagar monastery. How his days were spent here in sheer renunciation has been very aptly described by Mahendranath Dutta in his biography of Vivekananda. And as we read those accounts we come to know that the ascetic in

him was now getting ready to translate the doctrines of the *Gita* into actual practice. It was then that Kaliprasad was re-born as Abhedananda, after ceremonially taking the vow of *Sannyasa*. Though all of them were fully saturated with the spirit of true *Sannyasa* with *gerua* cloth as their dress, yet it struck to Kaliprasad that in order to be accepted as a *Sannyasin* by the time-honoured *Sannyasin*-sect in India, they must ceremonially adopt it. What happened in the still hours of that Christmas night at Antpur, was just an expression of their mind, but which did not qualify them to be admitted into the apostolic world. One night when the issue was raised, Kaliprasad told his brother-disciples that they must adopt the *Sannyasa* ceremonially. "Is not the vow," argued Narendranath in his own way, "we took at Baburam's village house is enough for us to admit us as *Sannyasins*?" "I don't think so", replied Kaliprasad." And then he continued, "of course, spiritually speaking, we had our actual initiation into the monastic life right at the time when the Master gave us the ochre robes. Yet from the point of orthodoxy, we must formally embrace monasticism what we did informally at Antpur." So it was finally decided that the monastic order of Ramakrishna at Baranagar should be ceremonially consolidated.

But who would help them or who would guide them in this matter? It was a big question no doubt. They knew nothing of the scriptural injunctions. The rest of the story has been narrated in this way by Swami Abhedananda himself in his autobiography: "At last we decided that we should take Orders in accordance with the scriptural injunction. When I was consulted, I said, to adopt the vedic *Sannyasa* we should perform the *Viraja homa*. I had already secured the *Mantras* for this *homa*, and it was with the help of those *Mantras* the *Viraja homa* was performed one day in the shrine in front of the Master's slippers. Naren as our leader poured the oblation, and I then sanctifying the fire, read out the *Mantras* which was repeated by Niranjan, Naren, Sashi, Sarat, Rakhai, Sarada and Baburam. I also poured oblations simultaneously on the sanctified fire. Thus the *Viraja homa* was performed and we became brother-disciples". It is interesting to note here that the date of this ceremony has been given as the 'beginning of *Magh*, 1293, Bengali era' and it is written in the manuscript in the Swami's own handwriting in

red ink. The Bengali date corresponds to the third week of January, 1887, which means that within less than three weeks since their visit to Antpur, each of them took ceremonial *Sannyasa* in which Abhedananda took the role of the mentor (*tantra-dharaka*).

One might ask here as to the source from where Kaliprasad procured the necessary *Mantra* to perform the ceremony. We have already mentioned of his trip to Barabar Hill, near Gaya, in search of a monk who was an adept in Hatha-yoga. There at the foot of the hill he met a monk of the Puri Order of Sankaracharya, from whom he copied out the *Mantras* of *Viraja homa*. Evidently, he used these identical *Mantras* while performing the *Viraja homa* described above. But there are some other important details of this event which need to be discussed here. First, were the names assumed by the monks; secondly, were all the monks of Baranagar monastery present on that occasion? If not, when the other monks who were then absent on pilgrimage, were formally initiated into *Sannyasa*? Here we might refer to the account given in a letter by Swami Sivananda to Gangadhar Maharaj (Swami Akhandananda), then moving on the Himalayan heights. "It is obvious from this letter that the ceremony had been performed earlier; but at the same time he warns Gangadhar: 'you wanted to know our monastic names. I give them below. But please do not address the letters here in these names.'" In his Bengali memoirs, *Smritikatha*, Swami Akhandananda writes: "In the early days of the Baranagar Math, the *Sannyasins*, although they wore the ochre-coloured cloth indoors, used to put on white cloth when going out". He also mentions Narendranath, Rakhai, Baburam, Sarat, Sashi, Subodh, Latu, Gopal, Tarak and Kaliprasad as having performed the *Viraja homa* within two years of the Master's passing away. The account of adopting the ceremonial *Sannyasa* as given in the main biography of Swami Vivekananda, may also be reproduced here to make our narration complete.

"Some time at this period they performed the sacred *Viraja* ceremony and took the vows of lifelong celibacy and poverty dedicating their lives to the realization of God. The old names were changed for new ones to complete their severance from the old world and its association. . . Naren did not assume any permanent name. During his itinerant days he changed his name

several times in order to avoid recognition... Even as the feature of the Order was twofold, that of itinerant monkhood with personal freedom and yet bound by the love of the Master and the inspiration of his divine life to an organization with a definite mission to fulfil, so in the personality of every member, especially Naren, were seen the tendencies at work with each other at times. Loyalty to the Math and its mission was at variance very often with the traditional ideal of monasticism and there were times when it seemed the *Sadhu* tendency would force them to the isolated *Sannyasin's* life in spite of themselves".

In a sense it was a sort of revolution, for by adopting the ceremonial *Sannyasa* the young disciples of Ramakrishna were invested with actual authority to take the path of absolute renunciation. To enter into the Order of a *Sannyasin*, one has got to perform one's funeral service and this is why a *Sannyasin* is called 'a man re-born'. We have seen that after the ceremony was over on that January day in the year 1887 at the Baranagar monastery, Kaliprasad was re-born as a monk of the Ramakrishna Order with the name 'Abhedananda'. Truly he was named as such, for he had perennial delight in following the path of non-differentiation between dualism and non-dualism, between purity and impurity. In fact, at the time of initiating him, the Master himself had inscribed two lines—*suchi-asuchire laye divyaghare subi, dui satine pirit hole tabe Shyama make pabi*", meaning, "Do thou enter into the sanctuary of the blessedness, so that you may transcend the sense of duality between purity and impurity; when the two extremities converge at a point, you will realize the Divine Mother." And when the Master wrote this on his tongue with his finger, Kaliprasad was transformed into Abhedananda. The indication of the words were clear to him, and his life-long spiritual experience and the manner in which he lived and moved as a world teacher, bear ample justification for the name assumed by him after adopting the vow of a true *Sannyasins* since the time of Sankaracharya, but none perhaps to show in his life how he could be an ideal *Sannyasin*—a *Sannyasin* untouched by the world, and yet living and moving in it, just as his great Master had shown. India has seen many a *Sannyasins* since the time of Sankaracharya, but none perhaps stand in comparison to Sri Ramakrishna. Though he had none of the outward marks to identify him as a *Sannyasin*, yet the spirit

of renunciation was so remarkable in his nature that it assigned to him the title of a true *Sannyasin* and it could not be otherwise in the case of his disciples, too. Each was as great and glorious as could be imagined in pursuit of renunciation. Each of them was destined to become a *Sannyasin*, a world-renouncing saint, as prophesied by the Master, but at the same time the spiritual sons of Sri Ramakrishna did not end their lives devoting exclusively to the realization of the Divinity. They lived in the midst of worldly-minded people. They were entrusted with the duty of setting up an example of *Sannyasa* unheard of in the annals of the spiritual history of India. They were to set the example of perfectly Godcentred life, not divested of social consciousness. They were to live in the society as practical illustrations of the possibility of perfect harmony between the life of action and the life of renunciation, between the sane and sober life of a rationalistic and the divine madness of God-intoxicated devotees. In short, they were to demonstrate something which was undreamt of in the time-honoured order of the *Sannyasin* in India. This sort of reconciliation was the need of the age in which they appeared. This was evidently manifested in the lives of Swami Vivekananda and Swami Abhedananda particularly. In fact, Sri Ramakrishna who exemplified in his life all the diverse aspects of spiritual *sadhana*, had set before his disciples a new ideal of *Sannyasa* which differ to a large extent from the traditional one. Thus the principles of *Sannyasa* advocated by his disciples were the highest ever conceived or practised. Thus the monastery at Baranagar was an instrument in importing new ideal of *Sannyasa* into the worldly life to make the world perfect and to furnish the spiritual basis or a socialist order of human relations. It was indeed a silent revolution that occurred at the Baranagar monastery as the young boys confirmed their apostolic life before the sacred fire of the *Viraja homa* which they performed on that memorable day.

Now let us have a glimpse into the life of the young monks' living at the new monastery. The entire atmosphere of that dilapidated sanctuary was changed with the spirit of the Master and it was not for nothing that Swami Vivekananda in his later days used to say quite often: "Baranagar is synonymous with spiritual *sadhana*". And if the garden of Dakshineswar was literally saturated with the divine presence and blessedness

thereof, the monastery at Baranagar was nonetheless so, for there these young men who sat at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna developed, in a great measure, their strength and holiness". There they lived on what chance would bring. We have the most vivid description of the life at Baranagar Math in the main biography of Swami Vivekananda, from which we quote here the following lines :

"They vied with one another in doing the household tasks, even the most menial ones. Many were the days when there was nothing to eat, but the spiritual discourses, meditation and singing went on as though their bodies did not exist. Their only clothes were the *kaupin* (loin cloth) and a few *gerua* pieces ; a mat on the floor sufficed for their bed. Sometimes there came the guardians and relatives of the young monks, hoping to induce them to return to the worldly life, but of no avail. The monks were inexorable. Their renunciation was complete and final".

In this connection one is also reminded of what Swami Vivekananda himself once told to one of his disciples who wanted to know of his life at the Baranagar Math. "We were *Sannyasins*", he said in a reminiscent mood, "we used to live on what chance brought. . . . There were days at the Baranagar Math when we had nothing to eat. If there was rice, salt was lacking. Some days that was all we had, but nobody cared. Leaves of the *bimba* creeper boiled, salt and rice—this was our diet for months. Oh, what days! Demons would have run away at the sight of such austerities, to say nothing of man".

Thus in dire poverty but caring nothing for comfort, sleep, food or proper clothing, the young monks spent hour upon hour in meditation, worship and study. The spirit of Sri Ramakrishna, as it were, flowed through them as a constant and stimulating power, inspiring them at every moment to the path of renunciation which they, as spiritual sons of the Master, were destined to traverse for the benefit of the humanity at large. Indeed, the new monks had to pass through a great fiery ordeal, but they were sustained by the unity of purpose—to become the messenger of their Master, preaching all over the world the universal message of Love and Light.

But no account of the early days of the Baranagar monastery could be completed without a reference to Surendranath Mitra to whose munificence it owed so much. This liberal-minded

householder devotee of Sri Ramakrishna always came to the rescue of the monks whenever he heard of any difficulty. Mitra was also known as Suresh Babu and no less a person than Swami Vivekananda himself has paid his tributes to him in glowing words. Speaking to a disciple once at the Belur Math, he is reported to have made this remark : "you have heard of Suresh Babu's name. Know him to be the source of this Math. It was he who helped to found the Baranagar Math. It was Suresh Mitra who supplied our needs. Who can equal him in piety and faith?" And there was of course another person who also tenderly looked after the monks, helping them with finance as liberally as he used to do during the lifetime of the Master. He was Balaram Bose, the most well-known and kind-hearted householder devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. It is on record that Balaram Babu could never relish rich food when the Master's sons fared otherwise.

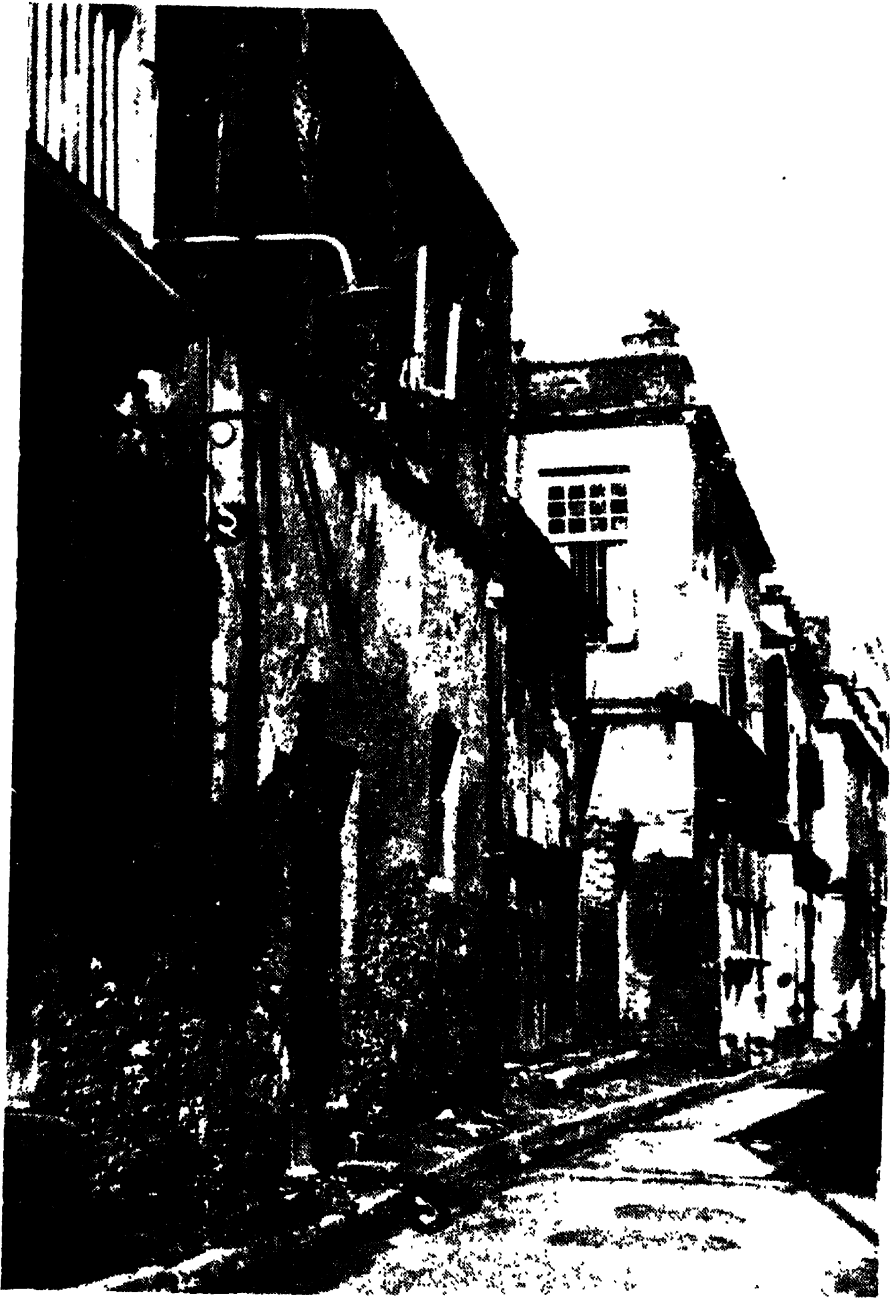
How Kaliprasad passed his days at the Baranagar monastery? Just in the same way as his brother-disciples. But most of his time would be spent in study and deep meditation which brought to him the distinction of being called as Kali Tapasvi and Kali Vedanti. None deserved the epithets as he did. Pure knowledge or *Visuddha Jnana* was what he aspired during this period of his monastic life. It was during this time that he composed in Sanskrit hymns to the Master and the Holy Mother who, on hearing them was so much pleased that she blessed him saying, "May the goddess of Learning reside on your tongue." It was indeed a prophetic utterance as the subsequent life of Swami Abhedananda showed. In the Baranagar monastery, most of his hours were consumed in the study of philosophy and it was from this time that Abhedananda began to develop most original lines of thought indicative of the future teacher. Originality was another trait of his spiritual nature as it was with his other brother-disciples.

The spiritual atmosphere in this place was wonderful insofar as it related to the flowering of the soul of the future Abhedananda and when on the day he received from the hands of the Holy Mother a rosary of *rudraksha*, it at once reminded him of the day when he had the privilege of having the benediction from the Master at Dakshineswar. On the occasion as he received the Mother's grace he saw in it the unseen hands of the

ever-merciful Master. But if he was individually engrossed in study and meditation, none-the-less he became a source of inspiration to the other monks just as Narendranath had become. It is on record that once a brother-monk speaking about the early days at Baranagar and particularly of the austerities practised by Swami Abhedananda, remarked : "It is impossible for ordinary man to bear such rigorous hardships and practise such *tapasya* as some of us did at Baranagar, amidst circumstances none too encouraging. Everyone marvelled at the austerities of Naren and Kali". It was also here that the personality of Kaliprasad just began to be felt among his brother-monks. While others dwelt in a state of ecstasy, Kaliprasad appeared to be reserved as he spent his days exclusively in study and meditation, which remained as the most remarkable trait of his nature for the rest of his life. "Kali was the most studious of us all. He even surpassed me in this respect." This remark of Swami Vivekananda himself tells a lot. His whole existence was, as it were, suffused with two things : knowledge and renunciation. "Who can attain the Master's renunciation and his intense longing for God," so told Kaliprasad one day to a brother-monk, who replied, "why, you seem to be his prototype in this respect, for we always find you spending your time either in study or meditation and practising utter renunciation at the same time." "It is impossible to attain even one-hundredth part of what the Master achieved" this was the prompt reply which the brother-monk received from him. Thus the Master seemed to be very much alive and enthroned in the tabernacle of the Math to his spiritual sons—they would be messengers of his teachings.

If the monastery at Baranagar saw the making of Kaliprasad as an ascetic, it also saw the flowering of his talent in playing musical instruments, too. The account as given by Swami Abhedananda himself in his autobiography, is worth reproducing here : "While staying at the Baranagar Math, Narendranath used to sing classical songs, there would be none to play *pakhoaj* (a sort of musical instrument used as a necessary accompaniment to classical songs) for him. Gapoldada would become invariably his musical accompaniment, but difficulty arose when the former wanted to sing a classical song in which he was a sure master. It was then that I strongly felt to learn how to play a *pakhoaj*. I then went straight to Gopal Mullick, the renowned *pakhoaji* of Cal-





Ancestral Home of Swami Abhedananda  
( 22, Nimu Goswami Lane, Ahiritolla )



Nayantara Devi  
( Mother of Swami Abhedananda



The Group Photo of the brother disciples at Baranagar Math  
( *Sitting Extreme Right Swami Abhedananda* )





Uddyan-Bati  
( Garden Temple of Cossipur )





**Kali Tapasvi**



Swami Abhedananda, Swami Sivananda and Swami Saradananda.



Swami Abhedananda in his Office Room  
R. K. V. Math, Calcutta )

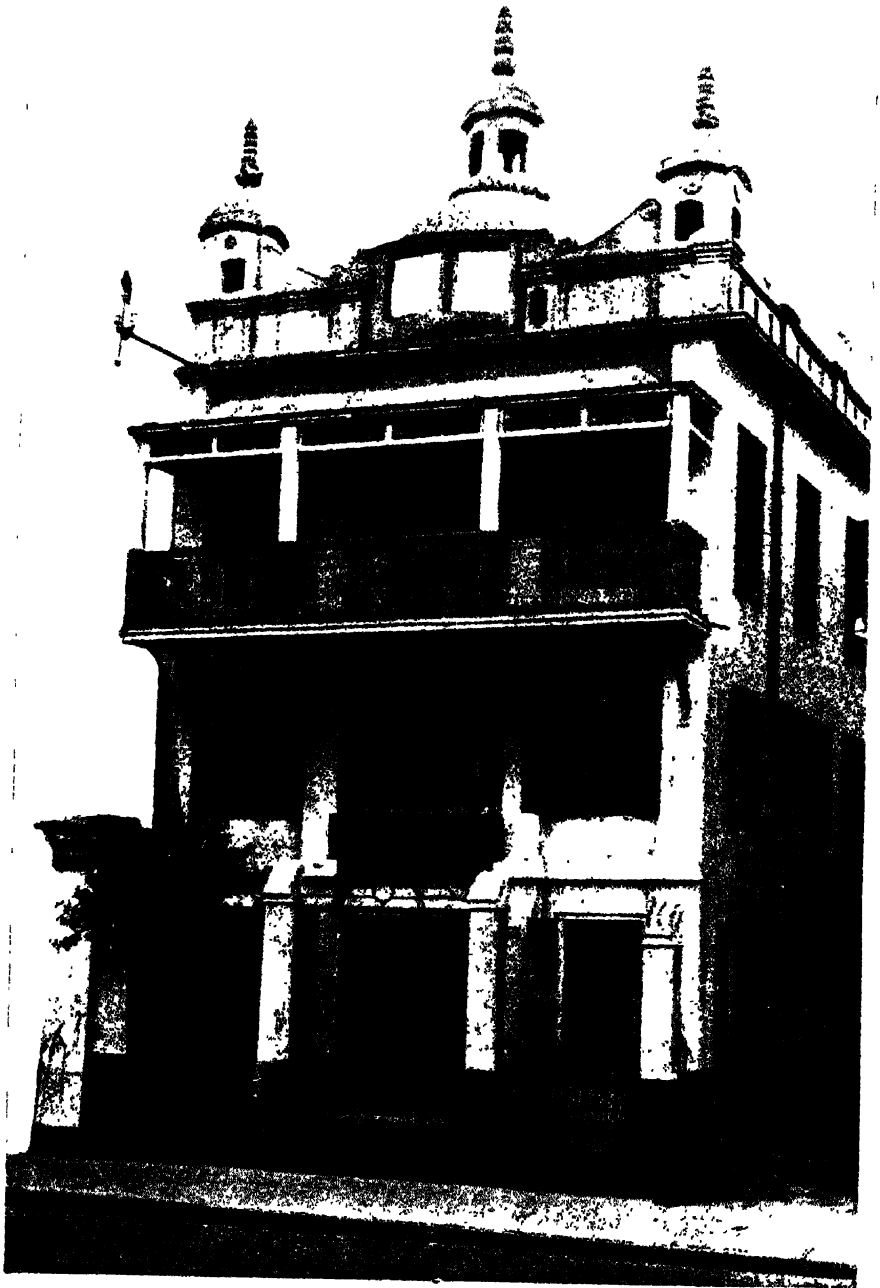
ਸਿਰਜਾਪ

ਸ਼ਾਹੀ ਸੂਰੇਂ ਸਾਫ਼ਾਨ - ਨਿਰਠਾਪਿਓ ਮਿਨ  
 ਆਸਰ ਨਿਰਠੁ ਡੇਸਰਾਮ - ਕੋਠਿ ਮਠਾਤ ਕਾਠਿ  
 ਸਾਫ਼ਾਨ - ਕੋਠਿ ਚਾਹੁ ਆਰਾਹੁ ਨਿਰਠੁ ਸੁਠਾ  
 ਸੁਠਾ - ਏਹੁ ਨਿਰਠੁ ਸਾਫ਼ਾ ਕੋਠਿ ਪਾਠਿ ਸਾਫ਼ਾ,  
 ਕੋਠੁ ਸੁਠੁ - ਆਰਾਹੁ ਮਠਾਤ ਨਾਠਿ ਤ ਆਠਿ  
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 ਸੁਠਿ ਕੋਠਿ ਨਿਰਠੁ ਨਿਰਠੁ ਮਠਾਤ | Electric  
 Battery ਕੋਠਿ ਸੁਠੁ - ਕੋਠਿ ਸੁਠੁ  
 ਕੋਠਿ ਸੁਠੁ - 22 ਡਿ | ਨਾਠਿ ਆਸਰ  
 ਸੁਠਿ - ਆਸਰ ਡੇਸਰਾ 22 ਡਿ  
 ਸੁਠਿ ਤ ਕੋਠਿ ਆਸਰ ਕੋਠਿ ਸੁਠਿ ਸੁਠਿ  
 ਕੋਠਿ ਆਸਰ ਡੇਸਰਾ ਡੇਸਰਾ - 22 |  
 ਸੁਠਿ ਸੁਠੁ - ਏਹੁ *Magnetic current*  
 ਸੁਠੁ ਆਸਰ ਡੇਸਰਾ - ਸੁਠਿ ਕੋਠਿ ਸੁਠਿ  
 ਏ - *current* ਏਹੁ ਸੁਠੁ 22 ਡਿ ਡੇਸਰਾ -  
 ਕੋਠਿ ਆਸਰ 22 ਤ ਕੋਠਿ ਨਿਰਠੁ  
 ਏ - ਕੋਠਿ ਡੇਸਰਾ - ਡੇਸਰਾ ਸੁਠਿ ਸੁਠੁ  
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 ਸੁਠਿ ਸੁਠਿ ਸੁਠੁ 22 ਡਿ ਡੇਸਰਾ ਸੁਠਿ



ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय +८

Q! Mother divine, Thou art the mother  
of <sup>degree and real mother</sup> ~~all animate and inanimate~~ objects  
of the <sup>whole</sup> universe. Thy power is infinite.  
By this power <sup>we</sup> people delude <sup>ourselves</sup> ~~themselves~~  
and forgetting become worldly <sup>and</sup> things.  
Thy blessing <sup>power again</sup> we become free from  
all imperfections and enjoy peace  
and happiness both here and here  
- after. O Mother divine, (May we  
realise that we are Thy Children  
and feel Thy presence everywhere.  
May we live in peace and harmony  
with all). Show us O Mother  
that ~~truth~~ self refulgent <sup>light of</sup> Truth  
which thou hast <sup>kept hidden</sup> ~~covered~~ by thy  
Thy manifold powers. Make us  
realise that we are Thy Children  
and feel Thy glorious presence  
everywhere. May we live in peace  
and harmony with all.



Front View of Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, Calcutta.

cutta in those days, and expressed to him my desire to learn the instrument. He readily consented to my proposal and began to teach me. I used to note down carefully the preliminary lessons at his place, then return to Baranagar and practise diligently. I had of course proficiency in counting all the *talas* or the rhymes, for which Narendranath used to praise me. Then I acquired skill in playing *pakhoaj* within a short time, and thereafter, whenever Narendranath would sing a classical song, I would sit beside him, playing the *pakhoaj*. . . It is needless to mention here that afterwards I also learnt from Gopaldada how to handle the *tabla* and practised it regularly for sometimes. Even I learnt how to play the *mridanga* at the time of *Samkirtana*".

So it was not the study of philosophy or the practice of austerities or deep meditation alone that characterised his days at the Baranagar monastery, they were also spent in aesthetic culture. Thus Kaliprasad passed his days here in meditation, song and study. And if Baranagar was synonymous with spiritual *sadhana*, it was equally synonymous with the cultural upliftment of the young monks who regarded culture as sacred and essential as the practice of religion.

## CHAPTER IV

### REGENERATING FAITH

Readers will pardon if we make a relevant digression in this chapter from the main stream of our narration just to indicate in brief the historical significance of the New Church that was founded by the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna at Baranagar. Some might hesitate to call the Ramakrishna movement a 'Church' in the usual sense of the term, for it has all along avoided the mistake of trying to create a cult of itself. Truly so, but if we look at the movement strictly from historical perspective, it would not be derogatory to call it a Church in the wider and deeper sense of the term. Every prophet leaves behind him both a cult and a Church, and the history of religions of the world spread over centuries bears ample testimony to it. The Ramakrishna monastery which came into being towards the closing years of the last century and which in years to follow gathered momentum, was the New Church of a regenerating faith which the world needed at that time. How this faith in its turn has generated a new type of spiritual fervour amongst the people not only in India, but also in the West, is too portent a fact to be retold. The sole aim of human life is to attain God and human relationship is best expressed in terms of service as worship—this is exactly what we mean by the term regenerating faith which this New Church proclaims and this is what the founders and the followers of this Church have all along sought to preach. Did any faith or doctrine in any age and anywhere in the world proclaim that God-realization can be actually proved by experiment, or that all religions are true, that each man has to approach God in its own way and, finally, that men and women are essentially divine? Let us, therefore, examine to what extent this regenerating faith could be called as a sort of divine dispensation, born out of historical urge and utterly fulfilled in the *sadhana* of Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples.

The multiplicity of churches and creeds one beholds in the world is quite perplexing and embarrassing. Each church gives its peculiar solution to the problem of human salvation; each has its own theory of redeeming and regenerating faith. From

such a heterogeneous mass of conflicting theories, it is difficult to evolve anything like order or unity. In discussing the subject it is therefore safe to avoid altogether controversial questions of polemical theology, and try to proceed upon those general and admitted principles of belief which constitutes the essence of universal and absolute religion, and challenge the assent of every unprejudicial mind. And from these simple and catholic principles only could be educed what appears to be the right idea of regenerating faith.

However obvious and simple the fundamental truth, speculative and practical theism may be, and however supported they may be by common consent, a small amount of reflection will suffice to show that there are some very important points of disagreement amongst those who prefer to believe in them. The fact is, even in regard to catholic and essential truths, religion, as it prevails in the world, admits of a twofold classification, and each system presents peculiar features which clearly distinguish it from the other. The material distinction which exists between those two systems of religion deserves our careful attention. In both these systems we find the same fundamental ideas and truths of religion. Both recognize the one God, and acknowledge His infinite power and wisdom, love and holiness; both admit the moral accountability of man and the existence of a future state of rewards and punishments; both denounce sin, and afford incentives to virtue and righteousness. Yet there is a vast and almost impassable gulf between them. Both spring up originally from the same root, but soon branch off in different and opposite directions. Both of the same parentage, they vary in the course of their development according to the influence they respectively receive. They are one in their main principles, but in the subsequent and final issues of these principles there is great divergence, so much so, that it might be justified in calling the one the religion of the world, and the other the religion of heaven; the one man-made, the other God-made religion.

It is no doubt the interest of the world, and hence its constant endeavour, to confound and identify these two systems with each other, and deny the distinction which subsists between them. It is its interest to ignore heavenly religion, and pass off what as God's truth which is mainly its own fabrication, and this

it seeks to do both by degrading what is heavenly and exalting as divine what is of the earth earthy. This pious fraud requires to be shown up in its true colours, and its evil effect exposed, that it may be universally proscribed and execrated. It is awful to contemplate the gravity and magnitude of the deception itself, and the amount of worldliness and demoralization and moral poverty it has been the means of producing in the religious world.

Now what is the distinction between the religion of the world and the saving religion of God? In the religion of the former, man is his own guide and to a great extent his own saviour. He depends upon his own faculties and powers for the attainment of truth, and for deliverance from sin. Its prayer is that man's will may be done on earth in the name of God. Whereas the prayer of heaven's creed is, that God's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven. In the one, religion is subordinated to man's judgment and wishes, and from the decrees of providence there is always an appeal to human prudence for final decision. In the other, God's will is absolute and immutable law, and His judgment is final and irreversible, as Sri Ramakrishna very often used to say to his devotees and disciples. In the one we see a stereotyped code of moral duties to be performed on the authority of conscience, the viceregent of God in the human mind; but in every case it is the interpretation arbitrarily put upon the code by prudence and expediency which actually rule the heart. In the other, whatever is right must be done, whether expedient or otherwise; the heart offers unquestioning submission to the Divine commands however hostile they may appear to be to its temporal interests, and instead of audaciously endeavouring to accommodate God's moral economy to its carnal requisitions, it seeks humbly to exalt and adapt itself to the requirements of God's law. The religion of the world may also be characterised as the Old Testament creed. It suits man and meets his requirements in the earlier stages of his religious life; it serves him as an efficient guide in the discharge of the manifold duties which he owes to himself and to God; it is an imitatory school of moral discipline, where the infinite Soul is trained to habits of honesty and virtue. But as the soul grows up, in the individual and in the nation, deeper wants are discovered and felt, and expanding experience points to the necessity of a higher and nobler kind of faith, and hence

the necessity of the New Testament religion for the salvation of man. Nothing short of regenerating faith can satisfy the normal necessities of modern man. Ordinary faith leads but to the material achievement, not the achievement to the faith. It is one thing to argue that a recovery of faith in God is necessary for higher spiritual life. It is quite another to put forward sociological and historical facts as the basis for a revival of faith. Faith is not a matter of convenience, nor even a matter of sociology. It is a question of conviction and dedication and both spring from one source only from the belief in God as a fact, as the supreme Fact of existence. This is the great inheritance we have from the ancient spiritual teachers of India. And, again, this is the inheritance from the great saint of Dakshineswar who ushered in a new life—a life of divine holiness which the world's religion cannot give. This finds an echo in one of his lectures which Swami Abhedananda once gave before an intellectual audience of the New World and wherein he is reported to have said : "Let us then alienate our hearts from the religion of the world, to which we are all more or less attached, and trustfully rely upon the religion of God, which alone can give us new life, new light and peace".

What is this new life as distinguished from the life which men ordinarily lead, and how is it to be attained? Obviously, this can be attained when there is a clear turning point in our career. This turning point is Faith. Once brought to this point, the heart of man undergoes a marvellous change—not a superficial change in his outward pursuits of habits of thought and feeling, but a constitutional and organic change in the root of his very being. Now let us proceed to consider what faith is. It has been very appropriately defined to be "the evidence of things not seen, and the substance of things hoped for". What the eye is to things visible, what reason is to things demonstrable, that is faith to the invisible realities of the spirit world. Faith, according to an ancient Indian philosopher, is the eye of the soul whereby it sees spiritual realities, directly and vividly. Nothing, indeed, is so common as to hear men talk of their faith on God, as if it meant the mere rudiments of religious knowledge, which all who profess to believe in His existence are sure to possess. Such faith, however, would appear to be nothing but an intellectual cognition which is the result of reasoning and which rests

on arguments ; such kind of faith is possessed more or less by all those who are not thorough atheists.

But very few have faith in God in the true sense of the term, namely, spiritual perception. Such faith stands on the foundation of divine reality. The modern world learnt from the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna who was an apostle of regenerating faith—and then through the agency of Swami Vivekananda and Swami Abhedananda that God is the source, reason and foundation of all things, the Being which alone makes the idea of existence itself conceivable. This foundation can also be known under the form of the various attributes—goodness, truth, beauty—which are inexplicable in terms of ordinary material experiences. The fullness, the plentitude of the good, the true and the beautiful are in God. Moreover, this order of Reality which is supreme and transcendent and the foundation of everything else is also immanent. “The kingdom of Heaven is within you”. In the depth of our being, at the point of our soul, we are united with the source of Reality. In the words of the German mystic Eckhart, writing in the high Middle Ages, “To gauge the soul we must gauge it with God, for the Ground of God and the Ground of the soul are one and the same.”

The firmest proof of religion is rooted in the nature of reality, in the necessities of reason, in the undeviative character of such concepts as truth and goodness. Since, however, the Western mind has in the last century become more and more accustomed to think of proof in the pragmatic terms of modern science—a thing being ‘true’ if it can be shown to work ; it is perhaps worth remembering that even here in the sphere of pragmatic proof faith and science conform to a similar pattern and claim a comparable validity. The world which science lays bare, in its capacity as weigher and measurer, is one soundless, colourless impulses of energy which under given conditions appear to behave in certain ways. Science can predict up to a point how, under given conditions, this queer universe of energy will behave. Where the claim of science is to lay bare the reality of facts, it is there that religion can help us, for it proceeds with a greater de grace of certitude than science. The saint can say : “This universe I tell you of, in which God’s being and energy and love feel all reality and in which the base of your own soul is anchored in the source of Being, may seem to you very far



removed from the colourful material reality which you meet every day”.

Science proceeds through experiments to arrive at a certain result. It is nonetheless true of religion, for the experiments of a religious life work in exactly the same way. Here the raw materials consist in all too human mind and body which need processing through the laboratory of detachment, humility, prayer and love, and the result will be the explosion into our life of the overwhelming love and knowledge of God. In our time we have witnessed in the sanctuary of Dakshineswar such an experiment conducted by one who has shown us the path to regenerating faith. If science is known by results—and this is in fact where its certitude rests—so, too, are the truths of religion. The experimental tests of religion are more delicate and unstable than those of science, for the raw material the heart of man has not that implicit obedience to the law of its own nature which is observable in metals or minerals or even living tissues. Inconveniently but gloriously, it has a free and unconditioned element. Again and again, in the laboratory itself, the experiment is blotched. Yet where it is triumphantly concluded in a Buddha, in a St. Francis D’Assisi, or in a Ramakrishna, the experimental proof of religion shines forth with a light no less clear than that of science. Speaking of Sri Ramakrishna,—the greatest spiritual experimenter the world has ever seen, no one can doubt the splendour and purity of the summits of his thought, nor question the value of its universal spirit from which emanates the white radiance of regenerating faith. In the light of man’s spiritual history it can be said with emphasis and, of course, without any fear of contradiction that those who seek shall find, to those who ask shall be given, and those who knock shall have opened to them the doors of creation, freedom and spiritual life.

While the Western mind accepts the idea that intellectual truth is the highest verity, the Indian religious thinker knows that all the highest eternal verities are truths of the spirit. The supreme truth is neither the rigid conclusion of logical reasoning nor the affirmation of credal statement, but fruits of the soul’s inner experience. Intellectual truth is only one of the doors to the outer precincts of the temple and it hardly admits the

mind to some faint ray from a supreme Light. One is reminded in this connection of the beautiful words once expressed by Sri Ramakrishna : "There are no true and false religions, but rather all religions are true in their own way and degree. Each is one of the thousand paths to the One Eternal". This gives us a clue to the core of Indian religious thought which placed four necessities before human life. First, it imposed upon the mind a belief in a highest consciousness or state of existence, universal and transcendent of the universe, from which all comes, in which all lives and moves without knowing it, and of which all must one day grow aware, returning towards that which is perfect, eternal and infinite. Next, it laid upon the individual life the need of self-preparation by development and experience till man is ready for an effort to grow consciously into the truth of this greater existence. Thirdly, it provided it with a well-founded, well-explored, many branching and always enlarging way of knowledge and of spiritual or religious discipline. Lastly, for those not yet ready for these higher steps it provided an organization of the individual and collective life, a framework of personal and social discipline and conduct, of mental and moral and vital development by which they could move each in his own limits and according to his own nature in such a way as to become eventually ready for the greater existence. The first three of these elements are the most essential to any religion, but Hinduism has always attached to the last also a great importance, it has left out no part of life as a thing secular and foreign to the religious and spiritual life. Still the Indian religious tradition is not merely the form of a religio-social system, as the Western people imagines.

The fundamental idea of all Indian religions is one common to the highest human thinking everywhere. The supreme truth of all that it is a Being or an existence beyond the mental and physical appearances we contact here. Beyond mind, life and body there is a Spirit and Self containing all that is finite and infinite, surpassing all that is relative, a supreme Absolute, originating and supporting all that is transient, one eternal, one transcendent, universal original and sempiternal Divinity or divine Essence and Consciousness. Soul, nature, life are only a manifestation or partial phenomenon of this self-aware Eternity and this conscious Eternal. But this truth of being was not

seized by the Indian mind only as a philosophical speculation, a theological dogma, an abstraction contemplated by the intelligence. It was not an idea to be indulged by the thinker in his study, but otherwise void of practical learning on life. It was not a mystic sublimation which could be ignored in the dealings of man with the world and Nature. It was a living spiritual Truth, an Entity, a Power, a Presence that could be sought by all according to their degree of capacity and seized in a thousand ways through life and beyond life. This truth was to be lived and even to be made the governing idea of thought, life and action.

This recognition and pursuit of something or someone Supreme behind all forms is the one universal credo of Indian religion which is eternally alive from the days of the *Upanishads* down to the age of Dakshineswar where the experiment conducted by a semi-literate saint proved that the Infinite alone justifies the existence of the finite and the finite by itself has no entirely separate value or independent existence. "Life is no illusion, it is a divine play, a manifestation of the glory of the Divine Mother who is but the concrete aspect of the Infinite". These words of Sri Ramakrishna, in the modern age of science and scepticism, at once point to the fact that self-realization and God-realization are the great business of the living and thinking human being, and that all life and thought are in the end a means of progress towards self-realization and God-realization. The advent of this Apostle of God-realization has established beyond any shadow of doubt that the discovery of the inner spiritual self in man, the divine soul in him, and some said of living and uniting contact or absolute unity of the soul in man with God or supreme Self or eternal Brahman is the condition of spiritual perfection which means seeing the one Self and Godhead in all. This is the highest spiritual Truth that was proclaimed from the hermitage of Dakshineswar and later on translated into action at the monastery at Baranagar from where came out the mighty current of regenerating faith such as we have seldom seen.

Let us now proceed to enquire what is the exact nature of the state of regenerate existence into which faith leads us. What are the characteristics and criteria of regeneration? Regeneration means the elevation of our body, mind and soul. If the

task of religion and spirituality is to meditate between God and man, between the Eternal and Infinite, the task of regenerating faith is much more important, for it brings home the greatness and uplifting power of the spiritual consciousness to the everyday life of man. Regeneration means the death of the individual ego and the establishment in its place of a complete spiritual life in God. It involves two facts—one negative and the other positive, and is capable of two corresponding tests. In order that a man may be regenerated he must destroy his individual ego and also his carnal nature, he must be dead to the senses, to self and to the world. Mere abstinence from corrupt indulgences will not do, there must be an entire annihilation of the sensual, selfish, and worldly cravings and propensities of the heart. To make the matter clearer, the regenerated man is unto the world and its temptations are altogether of dead man. Place before him all the treasures of the world, they do not excite his avarice; ply his senses with the most exciting and enticing objects of sensual delight, his senses cannot even feel their influence; offer him all manner of selfish enjoyments, these have no power over him, for all his senses and carnal affections and self-love are dead, and he is as impavious to temptation as a dead body. Has not the world found in the life of Sri Ramakrishna the utter truth of it? Did he not say that “so long as the individual soul has the slightest attachment to the world of senses and desires, it cannot attain to supreme knowledge?”

But there is also a positive side of the process of regeneration. The soul is not only to be dead to the world, but alive unto God and Truth; it must not only retire from the world, but enter into the kingdom of heaven. The *sadhana* that began at Dakshineswar, thus found its fulfilment not in any sort of negative asceticism or self-mortification which Sri Ramakrishna never considered as the end of human existence. According to him, he is a true ascetic or a regenerated man in whom spirit rises above the body and who desires nothing but the development of spiritual life and are inseparable in the normal development of the soul; they are only two sides, as it were, of the same spiritual fact. The realization of this fact in its entirety and fullness in our life constitutes real regeneration, and is the true criterion by which it is to be tested. To live in God and in nothing else is what the regenerating faith has to offer us.

But what is it to live in God? Look at the phenomenal life of the saint of Dakshineswar and you will understand it properly. Did he not teach us to apply to the soul in its relation to the Divine Mother or God all our ideas of bodily life in relation to the world? If it is true that the body is governed and preserved mainly by instincts, it is equally true that man's spiritual nature is to the same manner governed and preserved by spiritual instincts. When the soul rejoices in God, it is then and then only that it appears to be wholly regenerated. To live day and night in holy and sweet divine communion is the highest aim of spiritual life and regenerating faith. Hence it is that Sri Ramakrishna, whose mission was to regenerate mankind consistently and insistently urged upon his followers absolute surrender of the soul to God, in thought, word, and action. In his religion there is no looking back after holding the plough; no partial reformation, but a putting on the divine life, a perpetual pressing forward towards the perfection of the divine nature. He did not seek to make men virtuous and honest in the world, but to bring them out of the bondage of the world, and make them live in the blessedness of the holy spiritual life in the kingdom of God. He taught mankind how to think of the Spirit and how to live in Godconsciousness to convince the sceptics of the present age that *Atman* is Divine, that Godconsciousness is as true and practical as a scientific experiment in a laboratory, that when one reaches perfection, freedom from all bondage is attained. It was not from any dead book of philosophy that he learnt all this, but directly from his Divine Mother and hence he is regarded as a living example of regenerating faith which leads all seekers of truth to the path of perfection.

And when in the course of history time came for spiritual regeneration of the world, it fell to the lot of India to proclaim her message through the agency of two of her greatest modern preachers Swami Vivekananda and Swami Abhedananda. As one carefully studies their lines one sees that both of them were capable exponent of this regenerating faith based on the lofty doctrines of Vedanta which enkindled millions of hearts in the world. Thus it was not just a monastery in the usual sense of the term that came into being at Baranagar, but historically speaking, it indicated the birth of a future church from the

pulpit of which was proclaimed to the world at large the golden message of regenerating faith. And if we look beneath the surface of the whole Ramakrishna Movement that started during the closing years of the last century and which continues still today, we cannot fail to see the wise and beneficent arrangements of Divine economy for the uplift of the humanity at large.

## CHAPTER V

### THE BROTHERHOOD OF MONKS

God, Light, Freedom and Immortality are, and ever have been, the loftiest aims of man as well as his innermost aspirations. Throughout the ages his urgent spirit has persistently swayed towards these eternal peaks. Yet the present state of humanity only shows how far the modern world has swung from these higher aims and efforts. As though discouraged by constant attempts of his forbears to reach those greater levels, present man has deliberately chosen to plunge into the depths of an obscurity and chaos.

Or, so it would seem to be ; but behind this present trend of apparent degeneration there is in fact a greater purpose, which becomes more evident when we inquire more fully into the general movement of the Nature herself. Here we can see in the wide sweep of evolution that there has always been the same principle at work. The clash of opposites, as the challenge for an ultimate reconciliation, has throughout been the fundamental condition whereby a new status of being could arise. It was in this way that the mobility of life-forms had emerged from the static lifelessness of matter, and by the same means that a purposive wilful consciousness had issued from the blind instinctive urge of life. So it would now seem that the Light, which has thus been for man the living symbol of a higher stage beyond, should itself need the darkest night of obscurity before its dawn can fully emerge into the world of humanity. It appears, amid the clash and opposition of all the diverse forces which characterize the modern scene, that Nature is indeed straining to take the next major step forward to a new dawn. Yet above all, we realize that this clash and the final accord of opposites are in fact the supreme spurs of Nature through which she progressively achieves, and will achieve her final evolutionary goal.

It is as well, however, in the increasing disorder of mankind, to examine the sources of these ancient aspirations, and to see if we can where the Light really is. For if in fact the Light is thus the next higher step for humanity, as well as being the immanent reality it is experienced to be, then it is primarily

that which can alter the surest aid and means to lift man, the mind, out of his ever-thickening darkness. In this endeavour we have fortunately, as a basis and a beginning, the already existing records and footprints of man's successive attempts to reach those heights, such as have been preserved in the most ancient writings of India. It is such remains which belong also to the world's most ancient scriptures, and which represent the early dawn of man's awakening to a higher reality. For, when we take a broader survey of human progress, we cannot with the same finality accept our present-day culture as having emerged exclusively from one or two regional zones only, nor can we claim that the development of humanity progressed as uniformly as is generally supposed from the primitive to the civilized state. It is likely that many dawns of enlightenment had appeared, even in the midst of primitive past, and consequently the lines of cultural development which had produced therefrom should also be taken into account. This is especially so of the Eastern branches of human knowledge, which have hitherto been all too rigorously excluded from the Western thought. Of these, it is particularly the ancient Sanskrit works of India, with their original spirit faithfully preserved, which are undoubtedly the rich sources. They not only represent the earliest known efforts of man to scale the heights, but they are also the most complete existing record of that conscious endeavour. It is significant, therefore, in the widening sweep of modern thought, that men are turning more and more to these ancient writings, in their search for long-lost gleams of hidden truth.

When we regard these ancient scriptures of India, particularly the Vedas and the Upanishads, in their natural perspective, it is more apparent that they constitute no alien and irrelevant source of knowledge for modern men, but belong in fact to the very mainspring of their present endeavour. Thus it is no stray coincidence to find that modern science, while clashing with the current Western beliefs concerning God and the world, has discovered principles that were surprisingly revealed to the penetrative insight of more distant past. When we examine the substance of those poetic utterances preserved in the Vedic hymns, with a more discerning eye than is usually given to them that the ancient Aryans visioned cosmic realities which modern science is now progressively laying bare. Although the real



meaning of these hymns is largely veiled from the Western mind by a pastoral imagery and symbol peculiar to their own times, we can see that the presence of an immortal was clearly observed in all that is mortal, and a secret nature not normally visible to our ordinary awareness was perceived to exist both within and behind the material world. The ancients not only knew an inner nature, but discerned the presence of a higher world of Light and Immortality which itself finds representation within the soul of man. Thus the whole effort and endeavour of the Vedic seers were directed towards bringing about a union of the higher with the lower in which man is immersed, or at least to find out the truth which would effect this. In the Upanishads also we find similar cogent truth revealed.

In the annals of human experience we find that there are records of a more vast and more infinite reality than that the known and extensively unknown cosmic existence. Such is the transcendent one—the pure Spirit-in-itself—the knowledge of which is more familiar to Indian spirituality than to the pattern and outlook of the materialistic West. It was thus the realization of that lofty luminous Reality beyond the universe which at a certain stage of India's development had become the chief central aim of her endeavour, and which had inevitably culminated in producing Sri Ramakrishna who lived in worldly society and yet entirely renounced all worldly ties and attachments to become the lone pursuer of Spirit for its own sake. His was an immense leap into the Absolute as well as of all those intermediary steps which made up the dynamic cosmic Reality, and which also marked out for man the course of his future evolutionary progress. The experiment conducted at the lonely sanctuary of Dakshineswar was indeed a gigantic one—almost undreamt of and also unattempted by anyone in the whole spiritual history of mankind. Beyond the cosmos he looked to the vastness of a world-transcending consciousness, where infinite perfection only the ancients had already observed and unveiled. There what they had revealed, lies the pure spirit itself—the divine ground of all existence; and the universe is but a branching tree like dependency of that supernal Vast. But just one can enter into and live in the cosmic consciousness, so it was found possible also to enter into oneness with that transcendent consciousness and become thereby completely detached and

aloof from the universal activity and movement. It was indeed in that high and lofty vision above the worlds that the ancient seers were able to penetrate into the secrets of the higher Reality, and to realize its relation with the cosmos and with man. If the spiritual experiment at Dakshineswar consisted in attempting to grasp the immensity of the transcendence, it was left to the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, particularly Vivekananda and Abhedananda, to make its practical application for widening the horizon of humanity to enable it to embrace the wholeness of it. If Dakshineswar saw the dawn of Light, Baranagar saw that Light growing. Thus any account of the days passed by Swami Abhedananda and his brother-disciples at the Baranagar monastery must necessarily be the account of their intense spiritual awareness, and viewed historically, those were the days of soul-preparedness when the seeds of the spiritual evolution as well as spiritual revolution were partially sown on earth. Therefore the monastery at Baranagar in its extensiveness was destined to accomplish God's will in the world and those who were chosen to become the instruments of that accomplishment inherited in full the spiritual legacy left by their great Master.

The days of Kali Tapasvi were spent at the Baranagar Math in strict spiritual discipline as laid down by Sri Ramakrishna. This discipline, of course, meant the practice of Yoga which gradually led him to higher reaches of spirituality. As he began to acquire a new outlook on life through intense study, deep meditation and constant worship, he began to realize more and more the true significance of knowledge, renunciation and devotion which the Master once described as 'the glories of illumination'. Giving his early impression of the Math, Swami Abhedananda thus writes in his autobiography: "After returning from Brindavan, I found that the upper storey of the old house of the Munshis of Taki had been hired at a monthly rent of Rs. 11/- and the Math started there by Suresh (i.e. Surendra) Mitra. There were Tarak, Gopal junior and Gopal senior. I too stayed on. Narendra, Sharat and Shashi stayed at home and came off and on. There was no arrangement for the worship of the Master. We sat in meditation or for telling of the beads before the Master's bed, and food got by begging was cooked by us by turns." The all-pervading quietness of the locality with the Ganges flowing by, the leadership of Narendra and the spiritual

fervour in his heart rising to white heat, the monastic life of Kali Tapasvi soon bursted forth. He began to prepare himself for the goal which was indicated by Narendra at Antpur—'Let man-making be the goal of our lives'. And as we enter into the inner recesses of his life, we shall see that from the very beginning of his life at Baranagar, Swami Abhedananda had made this as his only spiritual endeavour. Realization of God was not the only thought that was uppermost in his mind. Gradually his whole existence became surcharged with a spirit of renunciation which seemed to him as the highest ideal in life. The asceticism he practised in those days reminds us of the ascetics of ancient India. It became, so to say, not only a creed but an article of faith with him. All that he aspired now was to become an ascetic in the true sense of the term.

Incidentally we should mention another characteristic of the Baranagar Math without which the life-story of Swami Abhedananda cannot be fully comprehended. It was the bond of brotherhood which had its first inception at Antpur. This bond which subsequently became the bed-rock of the whole structure of the Ramakrishna Order and organization, was perhaps indissolubly forged at Baranagar. "It was one organic cohesion that could escape nobody's notice, and every one was caught in its spell. It could not be otherwise, for the Master who had united them at Dakshineswar, Shyampukur and Cossipur, was still a living presence working through them. He who had lived in flesh and blood as Shri Ramakrishna was now about to re-incarnate himself in this monastery". The future Ramakrishna Math and Mission was in fact nothing but steady flowering of this close bond known as the New Communion of Apostles. The bond was the ideal itself which the young Sannyasins practised with their heart and soul. It was not the *gerua* cloth only that bound them together—essentially it was the well-knit bond of brotherhood that proved as a cohesive factor in the lives of the young disciples at that dilapidated house. And had it not been for this brotherhood, the disciples would not have survived amidst wants, poverty and scanty meals. Centuries ago India had the privilege of witnessing the birth of such a brotherhood of monks first in the Buddhist age and thereafter during the period of Sankaracharya. The ideal was long lost to us and therefore its revival in the closing years of the last century was

infinite forms—the Incarnation of God who has assumed a body to bless his devotees'. In fact his worship knew no limit, it went much beyond the formality. It seemed to us that as if he was still nursing the Lord just in the same manner as we all did when the latter was in his bodily form. We all participated in the food offered to the Master, sitting in front of his image. Most of my time was then spent in an adjoining room in meditation and study".

Thus if Antpur supplied the necessary spark to detonate the magazine of renunciation that Abhedananda along with his brother disciples had become after the Master's departure, it was Baranagar that brought about the historical fulfilment of the brotherhood of monks which was truly conceived out of the ashes of Sri Ramakrishna. Thus the brotherhood which developed through meditation, study, discussion and music and also at times through observation of various festivals, finally reached its spiritual peak from where each member of the brotherhood radiated a sort of influence to guide the destiny of the mankind. In contrast with others, it was sharply and very distinctly noticed in the lives of Vivekananda and Abhedananda, when each of them appeared on the world stage.

## CHAPTER VI

### LIGHT GROWING

“Nobody can write about my life, for there is nothing on the surface.” This remark of Sri Aurobindo, the exponent of ‘Life Divine’ and ‘The voice-Incarnate of India’s soul’, is equally true in respect of those who are universally regarded as world teachers. And among the great teachers of the world in our times Swami Abhedananda certainly holds a unique position. His was no ordinary life of a monk or an ascetic or a philosopher. It was a life of Light and Truth that emanate from the perennial source of the highest spiritual realization. And as such his biography must necessarily be a faithful account of an illuminated mind and a refined soul born of India’s age-long spiritual *sadhana* of which Sri Ramakrishna was the epitome. Events are not all important here and the events that happened one after another and in every successive stage of his life must be viewed and interpreted only in relation to his inner life. And in the course of our narration whenever we are required to touch the outer fringe of his life, we will do so only to make the narration more or less objective. The ideals and aspirations of such lives as those of Vivekananda and Abhedananda should be regarded as the most important, for they constitute the real landmarks of their life. Nothing is so insipid in the historical records of saintly men than to read about their superlative and superhuman excellence without any consideration of their inner life. In short, to get a clear and correct view of such great world teachers as Vivekananda and Abhedananda, we do not need be told if their actions were good, but how and why they came to do such acts. It is not the aim or the intention here to set down the chronicle of Swami Abhedananda’s life, nor to reveal the secret of his life, but only to behold a man in his full glory. His was a dedicated life for a great cause whose magnitude has been seldom realized by us. He knew, as only a few world teachers knew, that “it is not enough to give men things, you must give them yourself”. And all know that Swami Abhedananda as the messenger of his Master’s universal message of Love, Light and Faith, gave himself completely to the fulfilment of the great task for which he was born.

Swami Abhedananda's days at Baranagar monastery were not simply occupied with worship, study or meditation, they were also the days of gathering the rich harvest of self-knowledge which ultimately paved the path of his eminence as a world teacher, immediately after the passing away of his equally eminent spiritual brother and guide, the world-famous Swami Vivekananda. This self-knowledge he acquired through self-education and that began at the monastery. "At that time", writes Swami Abhedananda, "I began to devote myself to self-education and with the study of physics, psychology and philosophy, with Swami Vivekananda. I studied the Buddhistic philosophy as well as the principles of the Advaita or the non-dualistic philosophy of Vedanta. From Sri Ramakrishna I learnt that Advaita or Daulistic philosophy leads to the Visishtadvaita philosophy of Ramanuja, in search after the ultimate truth of the universe, which is One and Absolute (Brahma), and that the search after truth ends in the realization of the oneness of the *jiva* (individual soul), *jagat* (world) and *Isvara* (God) in Brahman as taught in Advaita philosophy of Vedanta, and that they are the different steps in the path of the realization of the absolute Truth or Brahman".

This statement of Swami Abhedananda gives us a glimpse into his endeavour towards the path of self-knowledge which really constituted the background of spiritual discipline that began initially at the feet of his Master. The life-story of Swami Abhedananda reveals to us that he knew that God had given him a word to speak and a work to do. The word was the spiritual message of India. He must have realized fully as Vivekananda did, that since the advent of Sri Ramakrishna, India was rising to shed the eternal message entrusted to her over the world. He also believed that "India has existed for humanity, and not for herself, and it is for humanity and not for herself that she must become great."

Thus inspired with this high mission, Kali Tapasvi now turned into Kali Vedanti, devoting himself whole-heartedly towards self-education and the period spent by him in company with his brother disciples at the Baranagar Math, must have led to a decisive change in his conviction regarding his life's purpose. He knew that his *Guru* was no ordinary *Guru* and he was not that disciple to remain wholly absorbed in silent meditation or

passive inaction to reach the highest state of realization. As he used to sit in his daily practice of meditation, the Master seemed to whisper into his ears : 'You have another thing for you to do and you have got to train up yourself for my work'. As days went by, his spiritual training now developed, not so much a matter of intellectual comprehension, rather as a fact of intimate realization, in which he obtained direct illumination of eternal Truth. The new conviction must have presumably come to him through his discourses with Vivekananda particularly who was also then preparing himself for the great task that awaited him. To spend life in complete retirement or to remain merged into the Supreme Spirit was never the intention of the disciples of Ramakrishna—at least not so in the cases of Vivekananda and Abhedananda. If his days at Baranagar were spent in learning and practising the psychological discipline of Yoga, those were at the same time occupied in the pursuit of self-knowledge that gave him the real strength for his future work and also helped him in perfectly visualising the light growing within him. Thus the monastery at Baranagar proved to him not only as a place for practising austerity, but also it became to him the garden for spiritual culture. Here he laid down for himself a rigidly monastic life, spending the greater part of the day in devotion, study, meditation and discourses on subjects mostly related to Western and Eastern philosophy. Altogether the pursuits were most profitable and enjoyable.

The period, we are now dealing with, relates to the maturity of Kali Vedanti's self-discipline and self-knowledge. 'To grow within'—this was the burden of his spiritual exercises at this time. This inner growth meant to him to find out the right idea and the right way of harmony, to re-state the ancient and eternal spiritual truth of the self, so that it shall permeate and dominate the mental and physical life, to develop the most vital and profound methods of psychological self-discipline and self-development, so that the mental and psychical life of man may express the spiritual life through the utmost possible expansions of its richness, power and complexity, and to seek for the means and motives by which his external life and his society may remould themselves progressively in the truth and spirit and develop towards the utmost possible harmony of individual freedom and social unity.

A traveller in the path of deeper knowledge, Abhedananda, during his stay at the Baranagar monastery, and afterwards as a Parivrajaka, must have conceived the development of man's intellectual power as our essential stage in the evolution of the human spirit in its urge to seek a deeper knowledge which appropriates the interpretation of the intellect and reconciles its distinctions in a concrete and developing unity. This deeper knowledge, according to Swami Abhedananda, is a mode of knowledge by identity which he explains as a form of knowledge in which the experience of knowing is identical with the experience or enjoyment of the reality known. To know God is to experience Him. There is no other way. In all great religious thoughts there has been throughout the ages a conviction regarding knowledge radically distinct from the conception of knowledge employed in scientific and logical procedure. The primary object of spiritual knowledge is God whom man worships—the spiritual power in the universe that transcends man, yet operates in his life and experience. Man cannot know God by the understanding alone, remaining apart from Him as an impartial spectator. He must enter into the union with God. And this union must be complete, including a surrender of the feeling and the will as well as an act of the understanding. As union with the Divine becomes more intimate, God becomes more fully revealed in the increasing richness, worth and power of personal experience.

In endeavouring to elucidate this trend of spiritual thinking on the part of Abhedananda during the second phase of his life, we might infer that, as a true disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, he was never after a narrow religion, a sectarian religion, an exclusive religion, which lives only for a limited time and a limited purpose. In words of his own: "That which we call the Hindu religion is really the eternal religion, because it is the universal religion which embraces all others. This is the one religion that triumphs over materialism by including and anticipating the discoveries of science and the speculations of philosophy. It is the one religion which impresses on mankind the closeness of God to us, and embraces in its compass all possible means by which man can approach God. It is the one religion which insists every moment on the truth which all religions acknowledge, that He is in all men, and all things, and that in Him we



move and have our being. It is the one religion that enables us not only to understand and believe this truth, but to realize it in every part of our being”.

Thus for Abhedananda self-knowledge must emanate from the eternal Truth which must become incarnate in vital and creative experience, and must ever find new and effective expression in the changing conditions of man's life. His self-knowledge taught him exactly what has been expressed by Professor Whitehead: “Religion will not regain its old power until it can face change in the same spirit as does science”. His principles may be eternal, but the expression of these principles requires continued development. And we know that in his later days as the spiritual leader, Abhedananda went beyond the strict interpretations of the scripture, initiating a new spiritual movement which swept the Western world immediately after Vivekananda was removed from the scene due to the latter's premature death in 1902.

What Kali Vedanti actually conceived during the days passed by him at Baranagar and thereafter at the Alambazar Math and also in course of his solitary sojourns for about a decade as a Parivrajaka, was no ordinary spiritual experience. He must have entered into the fuller experience which became manifest in his subsequent activities as a religious teacher and also as a religious preacher. What he actually aspired and finally realized through intense self-knowledge and spiritual discipline during the formative stage of his *sadhana*, was the supreme Truth—a truth of the Infinite, one in an infinite diversity by which he appears to mean a truth of our inner unifying creative principles that has infinite expressions. Thus the Light that began to grow within him was a living reality, not any abstraction, and this was likely for one having his initiation and spiritual training under Sri Ramakrishna. Thus the Light that grew in him steadily and almost unseen by anybody at that time, was about to illumine millions of souls in a manner which stands in comparison to none else, excepting his spiritual brother Swami Vivekananda.

## CHAPTER VII

### SOME REMINISCENCES OF BARANAGAR

As the days went by at the Baranagar monastery through worship, study, meditation and *sadhana*, Kali Tapasvi along with others began to realize more and that "he who sacrificed his life for their welfare, could he have left them for ever?" On many occasions during the still hours of night, meditating in the shrine before the image of the Master, while others slept, did he not feel that he who was the Soul of the souls, must remain the same even in death as in life. Yes, he must have felt so, and the more he remembered the Master's own words—"I am not dead, I have simply passed from one chamber to another"—the more he became aware of the Master's living presence and a spirit of calm resignation gradually descended upon his heart. As he watched at the urn containing the ashes of Sri Ramakrishna, Kali Tapasvi's heart would cry out, saying :

"A life endures in ashes alone

The only persistence is extinction."

Since life is an inter-play of light and shade, we might refer here to some interesting accounts of our hero's life at the monastery in company with his brother-disciples which will at once reveal to us the intimate picture of the new Communion of Apostles that was founded at Antpur and afterwards developed at Baranagar and Alambazar Mathis respectively. We have already said that with the relics of the Master reposed in the monastery in a room set apart for the purpose, where religious services before the picture of Sri Ramakrishna were regularly conducted and with dire poverty facing them, the life of the young monks, garbed in ochre robes, were entirely a different one. Rapt in the memories of the Master and with a desire to follow his injunctions, Kali Tapasvi was naturally spurred by the burning renunciation and intense devotion. In short, "after passing through the travail of a new birth, after answering the challenges of the internal and external nature", he emerged truly as an apostle of a new dispensation. Thus the boy who came to Dakshineswar to learn the Yoga science was now on the pathway to the place where he became the world-renowned Swami

Abhedananda. He who once sat at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna, and who acquired spiritual power and realization within an unbelievably short time was now preparing himself for his future role as a preacher and a teacher too. But it was not the work of a day or a month.

If the days at Baranagar were spent in poverty and starvation, they were also spent in intimate association of the brother-monks who would sometimes indulge themselves in the lighter aspects of life. For instance, we might relate here an incident which happened at Calcutta. It was on an *ekadashi* day when Narendranath accompanied by Kaliprasad came to Calcutta and both of them visited the residences of one devotee after another, but nowhere were they entertained with food or drink as to their expectation. As it was getting late at night, they came to the ancestral house of Narendranath at Gour Mohan Mukherjee Street where conditions were all the more worse. So there also nobody offered them anything nor did they apprise anybody that they had been fasting all the day. It was then winter-time and they had no warm clothings with them. They slept together side by side with nothing practically to wrap their bodies. Narendranath was undaunted and began to smoke and discuss Vedanta. But cold and hunger do not admit the theory of Advaita. Kali-Vedanti then said, "It is impossible to enjoy sleep with empty stomach and in biting cold, Naren". "You are silly," replied the other, "come, let us be close together and you won't feel cold any longer". But even it did not help them much, and the December night was too cold for them to bear, and Kali-Vedanti became all the more restless. It was then dead of night. Narendranath who fully realized his companion's inconvenience, for practically having no food all the day, then got up and said in an assuring tone, "Don't you worry Kali, you just get up and let me prepare some tea for you." Hutko Gopal had already provided them with a tea-pot and tea cups along with some sugar and tea which remained unutilised. Narendranath found out with difficulty a match box and a few cowdung cakes which were lit up with the help of some kerosene oil procured from the lamp. Thus water was boiled and when the tea was ready, it then struck just four o'clock. "Come on Kali, and enjoy this hot cup of tea and get rid of the cold." So saying as Narendranath handed over to his companion the cup containing hot tea, it was already

dawn. "This hot cup of tea seems to me as more concrete than your blessed theory of Advaita, don't you think so, Kali?" said Narendranath in a jesting mood as he sipped the cup to the last drop.

This incident might appear to some as insignificant and the discriminating biographer might dismiss it as not very important so as to be recorded. But there happens at times in the lives of great men such small and apparently insignificant incidents that in their ultimate analysis reveal the magnitude of their life. Does not the small incident recounted here reflect the affection and love cherished by Swami Vivekananda for his beloved brother-monk? Even the small deeds of the great men can sometimes reveal their inner greatness in a manner which is beyond the comprehension of ordinary men. Does not the dew-drops reflect in them the magnitude of sunlight? Vivekananda was like a spiritual lion and his brother-disciples looked upon him as their leader and if his leadership reflected his dominating personality, it no less reflected his affection and fellow-feeling for his spiritual associates. "It was difficult for all of us at times to escape the magnetism of Narendra's unallayed affection"—this remark of Swami Abhedananda is worth-remembering in this context.

Another important incident was the birthday celebration of the Master which was performed by the young monks at Baranagar with due solemnity. The observation of this celebration was first introduced at Dakshineswar after the passing away of the saint. But it actually had begun long before when he was alive and it was then performed by his house-holder devotees only, and his spiritual sons had nothing to do with it then. It was then used to be celebrated at the house of Balaram Basu where all the house-holder devotees would assemble. The memories of those celebrations were fresh in the minds of the young monks most of whom used to participate. The celebration that was performed at Dakshineswar after his death was really attractive in all respects. We have an intimate picture of this celebration given in the Bengali biography of Swami Vivekananda, written by his younger brother Mahendranath Dutta and the inquisitive readers are requested to read that interesting account that on this occasion Narendranath sang enchanting

songs in his inimitable style which enthralled the audience that had gathered at Dakshineswar on that memorable occasion.

So the young monks at Baranagar decided to observe the Master's birthday in 1887 and preparations for it were made with great enthusiasm by them. The whole thing was as simple as could be imagined, for the boys had no means to make it pompous. The room on the upper storey where the picture of the Master was placed and worshipped, was tastefully decorated with flowers and foliages and there the disciples gathered with their minds full of holy memories of the Master, and flower-offerings besmeared with sandalwood paste were made. It was an unforgettable sight. With Narendranath in the middle, the disciples with their gaze fixed at the picture of the Master, would then offer their salutation in chorus, saying: "All glory to Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna!" "On that day," writes Swami Abhedananda, "though indisposed and also worried about his domestic affairs, Narendranath sang for about three hours".

On another occasion when the celebrated dramatist poet Girishchandra Ghosh, who was a great devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, came to see Narendranath and others at the Baranagar Math, the whole atmosphere then assumed a new outlook of serene gravity. The biographer of Girishchandra writes recalling the latter's visit one day to Baranagar: "After the passing away of Paramahamsadeva, Girishchandra seldom went to Dakshineswar, or at any other place in Calcutta that was associated with the memory of the Master. But he made it a point to visit the Baranagar monastery, for he felt an irresistible attraction for the young monks, particularly for Narendra with whom he was very thick and thin since the time when the latter frequented Dakshineswar. Sometimes I would also accompany the dramatist in his journey to Baranagar. I vividly remember the day when we arrived there, the monks were spending their afternoon hours in religious discourses and also on topics associated with the life of Sri Ramakrishna. So we alighted from the hackney carriage which carried us from Bagbazar to Baranagar. Swami Vivekananda at once came downstairs to receive us at the entrance. We were then conducted to the room in the upper storey which was then used as the shrine for the worship of Sri Ramakrishna. All the disciples were delighted to see Girishchandra who was known to them as a special favourite of the Master despite his



# PART THREE

## The Parivrajaka

*“Even if I perish out of this plane, my message will be sounded through these dear lips and the world will hear it.”*

Swami Vivekananda





## CHAPTER I

### THE FIRST PHASE OF HIS WANDERING LIFE

“The monastery was there and the zeal of the monks was ever waxing. Perhaps that was the only thing that sustained them in those days : for otherwise we cannot explain the unthinkable hardship that they willingly faced in their pursuit of Godrealization”. But as days went by, some of them began to feel within themselves the call of the Beyond—an intense urge to go on pilgrimage to fulfil their monastic life, for monasticism in India since time immemorial enjoins upon its adherents to undertake pilgrimage to the holy places without which the life of a Sannyasin is never complete. So after some time the young monks started on their journey, one after another, in different places, excepting Sashi (Ramakrishnananda) who found his life’s fulfilment in the worship of the Master. So he chose to stay at Baranagar with the sacred relics of Sri Ramakrishna. He never went anywhere. Thus the time came when we find the sons of Sri Ramakrishna going to different places of pilgrimage which meant for them not merely sight-seeing but gathering experiences of a new life and also practising spiritual austerities. And thus began the first phase of the wandering life of our subject. Before appearing on the world stage, it may be pointed out here, Swami Abhedananda “travelled throughout the length and breadth of Hindusthan, from the Himalayas down to Rameswaram and from Jagannath to Dwarka, barefooted, without touching money, without thinking of the morrow and with one blanket as his bed and garment”. It is a fascinating as well as rewarding exercise trying to reconstruct Kali Tapasvi’s itinerary in almost all the holy regions of India since the time he first went to Puri in 1887, shortly after the birthday celebration of the Master at the Baranagar Math was over. Of all the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, none perhaps travelled so extensively, both in India and abroad, as Swami Abhedananda as the subsequent account of his life will show. The tendency to travel was inborn with him just as it was with Swami Vivekananda. Modern India has seldom witnessed *Pariwrajakas* like them.

“In the year 1887”, writes Swami Abhedananda. “I along

with Sarat and Baburam started for Puri. In those days the steamer would go only upto Chandbali and thence one had to go to Cuttack by a cart. We did so, and at Cuttack we met with the two brothers of Balaram Babu. They were pleased to learn that we were bound for Puri, and one of them, Hariballabh Babu gave us a letter of introduction in the name of the *Mahanta* of the Emar Math, Puri. This monastery belongs to the Achari Vaishnavas belonging to Sri Ramanuja Sect. The *Mahanta* was very hospitable to us and it was due to him that we had no difficulty in finding accomodation there. We stayed at the Emar Math for six months. In that year we were fortunate to witness the famous car festival from the beginning to the last and also to participate in it."

Puri, better known as Jagannath-Dham, had all along been one of the principal centres of *Bhakti* cult in India. It was the sacred Puri, which Sri Chaitanya, the greatest Incarnation of Divine Love, had made the centre of his unparalleled spiritualising mission during the last years of his bodily life. Sri Rama-krishna, who visited almost all the principal places of pilgrimage, did not however go to Puri, for it is said that he had some sort of premonition that once he went there, he would never return to this world of differentiated existence. We can easily conjecture the mind of the young and ardent Kali Tapasvi when he started from the Baranagar monastery for his destination to Puri. His mind was now concentrated on the Beloved Lord of the universe, whom he was going to meet. He was sometimes immersed in deep meditation and sometimes he looked hither and thither with strange delight. He saw all things with the eyes of love, he listened to every sound with the ears of love, his tongue poured love upon all around him. The whole world was to him full of beauty and new life. It was almost the same state of ecstasy he experienced in Brindavan. He enjoyed the natural scenery on either side of the canal through which the steamer cut its way and his whole being was suffused with joy and ecstasy which can hardly be expressed in words.

We gather from Abhedananda's own account that after four days' journey in the steamer, he along with his other two companions, landed at Cuttack whence the party went to Puri by a

cart. The place at once reminded them of the days of Sri Chaitanya whose spiritual influence was still palpable through the corridors of centuries and which still sanctified the atmosphere of the holy place. Here they used to get the *prasada* of the Lord Jagannath, and spend their time mostly in worship and meditation. Sometimes Kali Tapasvi would retire to the small *gumfas* (place of meditation of the Vaishnava saints) which stood on the sands on the sea-side, to devote the whole afternoon hours in uninterrupted meditation. "We used to bathe in the sea, observing how the fishermen engaged themselves in catching various sorts of sea-fish. We felt delighted as we observed this. One day it so happened that myself and Sarat felt an irresistible desire to know how the sea-fish tasted and we began to devise ways and means to have our desire fulfilled. Baburam was a strict vegetarian, so we thought not to speak to him anything about it. But somehow he came to know of our motive, but he did not prevent us from fulfilling our desire. We then began to find out a lonely place for the purpose and at last we found out one. One day as we all three—myself, Baburam and Sarat—were proceeding along the sea-coast towards Konarak to see there the ruins of the great Sun Temple, and as we looked hither and thither, we discovered the ruins of an wall that seemed to be the part of an old haunted house. The spot behind that dilapidated wall appeared to be really lonely. There we decided to fulfil our desire to taste the fried fish. We had already procured some fish at Puri which we carried in our earthen pot. We had also a match box with us. We gathered some dried leaves and plants with which we lit the fire. The fish was duly fried on the earthen pot. While Baburam kept aloof, myself and Sarat tasted some of the fried fish which seemed to us quite palatable and oily, and it smelt like the *hilsa* fish. Thus ended our desire to taste the sea-fish."

One day all of them went to see the Chilka lake, walking over the sandy beach of the Bay of Bengal. The journey to Chilka was done partly by a cart and partly on foot and they were very much fascinated at the sight of the mirage on the lake. "On both the banks of the lake there were sandunes which appeared like desert. There at a little distance the phenomenon of a mirage suddenly arrested our gaze. We saw, as it were, a tank with shades of trees around it, but as we got nearer to it,

the mirage vanished and all that remained there were nothing but sandunes."

They spent six months at Puri and, during this period, two of his companions Baburam and Sarat were laid down with typhoid and dysentery, and as soon as they recovered, the party left Puri for Bhubaneswar where they put up at the house of a *Panda* (a class of people extremely helpful to the pilgrims). "After spending a few days here", writes Swami Abhedananda, "we felt a strong desire to visit the ancient Buddhist caves at Khandagiri and Udayagiri and so we proceeded towards that place". From the description of this journey as given by Swami Abhedananda we learn that his love for places of historical interest was as genuine as his love for the Divine; the account he has left behind bears ample testimony to it. The whole of the journey lay through thick forest and they had to take the help of a local guide. Soon they reached the foot of the hillocks and what struck them at the first glance were the caves where they arrived after crossing the track that lay through the slopes of Khandagiri and Udayagiri. "We were simply struck with wonder with the beauty of the inside of the caves. Although most of the glorious achievements of the Buddhist era were in ruins, yet they were silently proclaiming the past history. Here in the Elephant cave, the Snake cave and also in other caves, the Buddhist monks used to live peacefully spending their time in meditation and study. I also noticed some Ashoka inscriptions on the Dholi rock, as also inside the walls of some caves in Pali language and some of which we could read. The guide accompanying us informed me that even today there are some Buddhist monks living in this abandoned place, but we could not find out a single one even though we searched very minutely".

Evidently here we find in Abhedananda not only a wondering monk but also an acute observer of historical relics in which he read the past glorious history of India. If he was a philosopher *par excellence*, he was no less an historian and his famous Brooklyn lectures on Indian culture and civilization bears ample testimony to it. Not only this, even we notice some adventurous spirit in him as well as an inquisitive mind which is clearly reflected in the following interesting account recorded by the Swami himself. When they failed to find out a single Buddhist monk anywhere there, the guide informed them of one hermit

who lived inside the deep forest on the top of the hill. This roused their curiosity and they wanted to look out for the hermit. Baburam, however, did not want to accompany them this time and he remained at the foot of this hill waiting for the return of his brother-monks. "Sarat and myself then started for the destination being escorted by our guide. As we reached the hill top, we looked around the jungle and all on a sudden we found ourselves standing before a large cave. We felt a strong desire to enter inside it, but as soon as we reached at the entrance, we found much to our awe and wonder the footprints of a tiger on the sand instead that of a man. The discovery of it sent a shivering shock in our heart, and after advancing a little more we retraced our steps. As we did so, we found at a distance a boy, an inhabitant of this hilly place, gathering something that lay on a piece of stone. Slowly we came to the boy and found him gathering something like frozen milk, which was on the stone, on a leaf held in the palm of his hand. On being asked, he told us that it was the milk of a tigress which was very useful in preparing some kind of medicine and this was why he was collecting it. We also learnt from the boy that there in the very cave inside which we wanted to enter, lived a pair of tiger and tigress and of late the tigress had given birth to cubs whom she fed with her breast milk while lying on this stone slab. And the few drops that fell on the slab were frozen. He himself had seen many a time from a distance as the tigress fed her cubs in this way and this is why he came to collect the frozen milk".

The account as given by the boy aroused their curiosity and both of them, Kali Tapasvi and Sarat wanted to taste the milk of the tigress and they then requested the collector to part with some of it. The boy at once put a cube or two of the milk collected by him on the palm of each of the monks which they tasted and found it emanating a strong and stinking odour which usually emanate from the body of a tigress. Then they came down, collecting a bit of the frozen milk on a leaf just to show it to Baburam who was waiting for them anxiously. As he got sight of his brother monks, Baburam was very much relieved of his anxiety and at the same time he was very much surprised as well as glad to find the rare specimen with them. Thereafter they returned to Bhubaneswar in company of their guide.

Years after when a disciple wanted to know from Swami

Abhedananda as to the mystery of hermits retiring to caves and jungles, living happily in close company of such ferocious animals as tigers and lions — a legendary phenomena in the lives of the Sannyasins in India—he is reported to have told him thus : “Such sights are not uncommon or rare in India and there is no mystery in it. The fact is this that to men of religion all life is sacred. When Truth and Love emanates from a genuine spiritual personality, the entire atmosphere around him undergoes a subtle psychological change. Where there is no feeling of hatred or violence or cruelty to the lowest species of living creatures such things are not uncommon. Where the element of sympathy is strong in the nature of a saintly person, it could be easily experienced by a man of tender heart. A true spiritual life such as we witnessed in the life of the Master, is a life of Love, infinite and universal, Love which unites each with all, Love which opens the spiritual eyes of the individual and exhibits the identity of his self with that of the universe. This is the culmination of *Dharma*”. The whole nature of Swami Abhedananda, as we all know, was suffused with such kind of love and sympathy for all.

The three monks then returned to Baranagar after six months and they were cordially received by their brother-monks. “Who did the cooking all the time?” asked Sashi, and Sarat at once replied : “Kali ; where can one find a better cook than he ? As we study the man, we find that Abhedananda really possessed a many-sided genius which revealed itself not only in his spiritual attainments but also in the daily routine of his mundane life. If he was a great Yogin, practising all sorts of austerity and renunciation, he was no less skilled in various arts such as cooking, mending, dressing, playing musical instruments and even painting pictures. This finer aspect of his nature affords us a study which is worth pursuing, and we shall touch on this point more elaborately afterwards.

So the party returned to Baranagar. Kali Tapasvi then contemplated to undertake pilgrimage to north India. It was just at this time there came the news to this Baranagar Math that Jogen (Swami Yogananda) who was then at Allahabad as a guest at the house of Dr. Gobinda Chandra Bose, had been attacked with small pox. All the brother-monks became extremely anxious at the news and Narendranath at once proceeded to

Allahabad accompanied by Kaliprasad, Swami Sivananda and Niranjan ; there they stayed for a few days, nursing the ailing brother monk. When Jogen recovered, all of them returned to Baranagar which now became the focal point of their subsequent sojourns to and from various pilgrimages. Swami Yogananda, it might be mentioned here, was the fortunate man whom the Holy Mother initiated as her first disciple. Sarada Devi who was now destined to take up the spiritual reins of the expanding brotherhood returned from her pilgrimage to Puri in the beginning of 1889. She first went to Kamarpukur, the birth-place of Sri Ramakrishna and then to her own ancestral house at Jayrambati and among those who accompanied the Mother was Kaliprasad. It is on record that it was from Jayrambati that he decided to make his journey to Varanasi with the consent and blessings of Sarada Devi. We shall now follow Swami Abhedananda in his eventful pilgrimage and peregrination from Jayrambati to various places of pilgrimage in the northern part of India.

## CHAPTER II

### THE WANDERING MONK

Dedicated to monastic life, Kali Tapasvi now seriously took to the life of the wandering monk. Let us now accompany him throughout the pilgrimage of his eventful wandering years which, beginning from 1886, continued for a period of one full decade. The tendency to pilgrimage was almost inborn with him and in the words of John Bunyan it might truly be said of him that his first avowed intent was to be a pilgrim. After the passing away of the Master, the intention became more and more intense. To have a correct picture of Abhedananda as a Parivrajaka, it is necessary to refer first to the accounts recorded by him in his autobiography and secondly to the accounts given by Mahendranath Dutta in his biography of Swami Vivekananda. The full story of his wandering life has yet to be recorded and what we get in these two accounts is a bit incomplete though authentic. His ten years' sojourn, however, was not a continuous one, nor it was performed at a stretch. There were occasional breaks due to his occasional visits either to the Baranagar or the Alambazar Math. From the accounts available to us, it appears that during his long pilgrimage, he covered almost all the important regions all over India, just as Swami Vivekananda did. In fact, both of them were on constant move from place to place and almost at the same period. Besides Vivekananda and Abhedananda, there were other monks of the Ramakrishna Order who were also then travelling from one place of pilgrimage to another. Never in the long religious history of India since the days of Sankaracharya do we come across with such a unique band of young Sannyasins, traditionally clothed but with a different mental make-up, wandering and practising all sorts of austerity and at the same time acquiring a first-hand knowledge of the social, cultural and religious life of the country in which they were born and brought up. They were out as it were to set a new example in this respect, which afterwards assumed a new meaning. Sri Ramakrishna must have discerned that a day will come after he is gone from this world when his spiritual sons, one by one, will go out, travelling barefooted and penniless, all the holy places



and historical sites of India. Religion apart, their interest chiefly would be to see for themselves the actual social and religious conditions obtaining in the country. He also knew for certain that this new band of Sannyasins were to preach to men both in India and abroad. And, as such, they were not supposed to fully concentrate their energy on the search for mystic realization alone, nor "the delights of the inner life made them turn away their eyes from outside". As spiritual sons of Sri Rama-krishna they had a mission to fulfil, a new example to set up and a new message to preach, and it was, therefore, quite natural for them to rise out of meditation and to come out of their abodes of seclusion with a view to obtaining a true knowledge of the soul of India as revealed in her centuries old spiritual, cultural and social traditions and customs. The training and the education they received at the "High School of the spirit" at Baranagar were thus fulfilled afterwards when they went out to different places of pilgrimages. They were not the Sannyasins to spend their lives, indulging "in the idleness of God". They were, on the contrary, destined "to place their intellectual labours at the service" of the humanity at large. Thus when time came to respond to the "call of the forest", they were ready, with staff and bowl in hand as true monks. And perhaps only two of them knew better than the rest that a great mission awaited them. The blessed two were Swami Vivekananda and Swami Abhedananda. When each of them appeared on the world stage in the dignified roles of the preacher and the teacher, they certainly fulfilled that mission. This saga of their lines has now become a part and parcel of our spiritual history.

It was from Jayrambati, the ancestral house of Sarada Devi, that Kali Tapasvi began his real wandering life and his first long journey. He had already planned to proceed first towards Hardwar *via* Varanasi. The brother-monk accompanied him was Tulsi Maharaj (Swami Nirmalananda). He bade goodbye to Narendranath and other brother-monks who were then present at Jayrambati, touched the feet of the Holy Mother and left the place for Varanasi, walking all the way via the Grand Trunk Road. Their plan was to visit Varanasi first and then to cover the entire northern region (*Uttara-khanda*) beginning from Hardwar. It is needless to mention that they were also determined to wander penniless. "While on our pilgrimage", writes

Swami Abhedananda, "we resolved not to touch any coin, even if offered to us by anybody. It is customary with the order of a Sannyasin not to touch fire. So we decided not to have any food cooked by our own hands. We also decided not to pass the night at the house of anybody. Nor should we use shoes and stockings or any sort of clothings other than those required by us. We should take food once a day that could be produced by begging at three or five places. Thus resolving we set out on our pilgrimage having two pieces of loin cloth (*kaupin*), one *bahirvas* (a small piece of ochre-cloth only) one waterpot (*kamandalu*) and a staff with us. Daily we used to cover ten to fifteen miles in the morning and twelve to fourteen miles in the afternoon and thus we began to proceed through the track that lay through Burdwan and Raniganj and through the forest of the Santal Parganas".

Kali Tapasvi was then just twenty-three years old when he set out for this pilgrimage and what the hazards of the journey really meant to a young man of that age is just beyond our imagination. This is why in his latter life, pointing to photograph of his taken at that time, Swami Abhedananda once said to his disciples and followers: "You won't be able to know the real Abhedananda unless you have any idea about my former life when I travelled, barefooted, all over India, as Kali Tapasvi". Truly so. In fact, this period of his glorious life reveals the intensity of a spiritual life wedded to universal regeneration. Such hardships as he experienced during his great *periplus* of ten years throughout India also reveals to us a fine aspect of his nature, his spirit of independence and his burning desire to remain constantly alone with God and the memories of his Master. He also learnt many things from the great Book of Life. Thus his pilgrimage was marked by two sharp features, viz. devotion and heroism; and this perhaps enabled him to sustain such extreme hardships as sleeping under a tree or on the pallets of beggars, without thinking for the morrow. This wandering life also afforded to him an opportunity to experiment some of the teaching of the Master and the best teaching that he had from his mouth has remained engraved in his mind; "Love man, irrespective of caste, creed and colour as you would love God". And thus when he arrived in the Santal Parganas, Kali Tapasvi became at once attracted to the simple life and customs of this nomad people with whom he easily felt at home.

“There were numerous small hamlets of the Santals spread on the fringe of the road. Frequently we went into the interior of the villages, freely mixing with them and talking to them. We also learnt many of their customs. We went on and on through the dense *sal* forest and the jungle containing mahogany trees. Begging was out of question at that time, so we had to remain content with what could be procured on the road such as fried rice, and fried gram ; sometimes we spent our days simply by taking fruits and flowers of the *mohua* tree. At nightfall, we would spread out our blankets under a wayside tree and sleep, using a brick or a slab of stone as our pillow. Our journey would come to a halt as soon as it was dusk when roads were hardly visible in the gathering darkness. And when the night was over, we would be again on the road long before the dawn. The journey at this cool hour of the morning, was naturally pleasant and we could easily cross ten to fifteen miles before it would be ten o'clock. It was then time for us to rest and to have our bath in a nearby tank or river. Then we would proceed towards the adjoining village to collect food and satisfy our hunger. Then resting for a while under a tree we would again commence our journey till it was evening. One day it so happened that as we were trekking our way through the forest of the Santal Parganas, I noticed a stout Santal out for hunting with a bow and arrow held in his hand. I called him and asked him in Hindi where he was going. The Santal replied that he was out for hunting. And what would he hunt ? To this he replied that only peacocks were available in this area. The man appeared to me in a very jolly mood and perfectly healthy. He cast a joyful glance at us as he disappeared behind a bush, laughing all the way. Our destination was Jamtara, but since we were lost on the way we could not find out the right direction to Jamtara. At length a kind-hearted Santal woman helped us in the matter.

At last Kali Tapasvi arrived at Ghazipur where he along with his companion was the guest at the house of one Sisir Chandra Bose, who was a Munsiff there. He was highly proficient in various philosophies as well as in Sanskrit literature and was at that time engaged in translating into English the Panini Grammar and the commentary on Ishopanishad as done by Sankaracharya. So the company of a learned scholar was very much agreeable to him and he spent a few days there which he

utilised in studying again the *Siddhanta-Kaumudi* and the *Mahabhashya* which is a commentary on the grammar of Panini and which is also regarded as a great book containing philosophical discussions. In fact, he had impressed very much his host with his love for a deep knowledge in the Panini Grammar which also proved helpful to Sisir Babu in his English rendering of the *Siddhanta-Kaumudi*. Besides helping him, it is on record that Kali Tapasvi himself actually translated some portions for him.

His journey to and stay at Ghazipur was thus fruitful on more than one respect. Here he got some opportunity to refresh his mind with the study of the two Sanskrit books mentioned above. The example of his host also inspired him to undertake the work of translating into English the gospels of the Master. And Swami Abhedananda, as we all know, was a man who never allowed the grass to grow under his feet. He really meant what he thought and at once he set himself to the task.

“Besides my host”, writes Abhedananda, “there was Ishan Chandra Mukherjee, a house-holder devotee of the Master, who had just then arrived in Ghazipur for a climatic change. He was well acquainted to Sisir Babu and this is why whenever he came to Ghazipur, Ishan Babu would invariably visit his friend at the latter’s residence. I was also previously acquainted with him and so his joy knew no bound when he found both of us—myself and Tulsi — there at the residence of Sisir Babu. Ishan Babu was all the more delighted when he came to know of my attempt in translating the Master’s Gospel into English. Ishan Babu himself had already translated some of the Gospels”.

It was extremely hot when Kali Tapasvi came to Ghazipur and it is here that he experienced for the first time during the noon intolerably hot wind as if from the furnace. Here he also met Hariprasanna, afterwards Swami Vijnanananda, a disciple of Swami Vivekananda who was a P.W.D. Engineer at Ghazipur. Recording his reminiscence of Ghazipur, Swami Abhedananda has related a very interesting anecdote which is worth reproducing here. “One day Hariprasanna” says the Swami, “introduced us to a very well-known Sanskrit scholar of the time who was a dualist and as such, a staunch opponent to the philosophy of non-dualism. Hariprasanna really intended to engage both of us in a sort of debate with this scholarly person on the subject, for he

knew that I was an advocate of Advaita and my sharp intelligence and the method of my discourse were sure to vanquish the said scholar. And that happened actually. When that erudite scholar came to learn from Hariprasanna about my steadfast adherence to the doctrines of monism, he invited me with a view to set at naught my own standpoint. So began the discourse between myself and the Pandit while Hariprasanna and Tulsi sat by me attentively. The Pandit presented an array of reasons and controversial points with a view to establishing dualism and setting at naught the theory of Sankaracharya. I perfectly remember that his main objection was this that Sankaracharya had grossly misinterpreted the *Vedantasutra* of Vyasa. The entire discourse was in Sanskrit and I quashed his each and every argument against Sankaracharya, establishing the authenticity and the reasoned exposition of the latter's unsurpassable commentaries on the *Upanishads* and the *Vedantasutra*. And the rapier like thrust of my counter argument silenced the scholar and all the objections raised by him were fully quashed. After one hour of debating with me, he admitted his defeat, saying, 'you are perfectly right, but I still maintain that dualism is all the more better for everybody'. I then told the Pandit that all the three schools of thought, dualism, non-dualism and qualified monism have their places according to one's receptive faculty, but in ultimate experience there is nothing but Advaita. The scholar indicated his approval with a gesture while both Tulsi and Hariprasanna expressed their satisfaction at my performance ; the latter was so much impressed with my debating power that many years after my return from America when I was staying at the Belur Math, he reminded me of this incident at Ghazipur."

Just as morning shows the day, so this incident indicated the future Apostle of Monism in Kali Tapasvi who, like Narendranath (whose wandering years were also full of similar incidents), possessed the most penetrating intellect and comprehensive outlook on life. And when Kali Tapasvi turned into Swami Abhedananda and Narendranath into Swami Vivekananda, both of them proved themselves during the period of their travels in India and abroad as unparalleled exponents of the Vedantic philosophy of which they were staunch adherents. So the people of India, by and large, came to know that they were no ordinary Sannyasins that usually roam about the cities and holy places of

India. On the contrary, they were the representative of the followers of Sankaracharya and were destined to impart a new hallow to the religious consciousness of the nation.

It was at Ghazipur that Kali Tapasvi also met the famous saint Paohari Baba about whom he had already heard from Narendranath who visited this saint while the Master was passing his last days at the Cossipur Garden house. The saint was called as such, because of the extremely small quantity of food he allowed himself in his rigorous ascetic discipline. And monks in India are called 'Baba' which means 'Father'. Paohari Baba had been lost to the world for many years. He shut himself up in a cave and spent all his time in meditation. "So one day", writes Swami Abhedananda, "accompanied by Tulsi, I went to his place where I found him shut up in a cave and he never came out. Whoever went to him, the saint talked to him from inside the cave. But he talked little. There stood a temple adjoining the cave which was built by Paohari Baba and his younger brother worked there as a priest. Inside the temple there was a fine marble statue of the diety Narayana. The brother also served his elder. Sometimes Paohari Baba would not touch food for a month and at that time the doors of the cave remained closed and the saint remained all the time deeply absorbed in *samadhi*. Nobody went to him at that time. But his attending brother never failed to put some sort of food daily at the entrance of the cave just to find them untouched next day and they would be brought back. The asceticism practised by Paohari Baba was really unique and extraordinary ! . . . . When we reached there, the saint was in a state of meditation inside his cave-abode. As soon as he came to know of our arrival, he called us by his side. We prostrated ourselves and addressed him in terms of exalted respect. When he came to know that we were the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, he was transported with joy and treated us with great affection. As he spoke of the Master as the God Incarnate (Avatara), his voice, seemed to me heavy with feelings. I then discussed with him a few topics about God and religion to which the saint replied slowly by gesture and also in a few words. A man of the highest spiritual attainments, Paohari Baba appeared to me to be a man in a state of constant self-realization."

From this account we might infer that Kali Tapasvi was extremely happy when he met Paohari Baba at Ghazipur, and

the few minutes spent in his association must have been a delightful experience to one who himself was a great explorer, both by practice and by knowledge, in the realm of spirituality. After Sri Ramakrishna, perhaps it was the saint of Ghazipur in whom he found a real Yogin who revealed to him the power of absolute transfixing of individual personality into Divinity which is known as *nirvikalpa samadhi* and which also characterised the spiritual attainments of his Master. Thus his stay at Ghazipur was fruitful in more than one way and the memories of those days must have lingered long in his mind.

Their next destination was Varanasi—the holiest of the holy cities in India and one of the most ancient strongholds of Indian spiritual culture. Varanasi also revealed to him many social inequities side by side with religious formalism and decadence. Yet Kali Tapasvi wanted to look below the surface, with the eyes of his Master who had visited this place long before, only to find out the spiritual treasures it still contained. Varanasi is the only pilgrimage in India where roaming monks belonging to all religious sects experience little difficulty or inconvenience in the matter of food which is available in plenty at various charitable places run by the munificence of some rich and religious-minded persons. These are generally known as *satras* or *sadavratas* where monks are provided with their food requirements. While staying at a house in the Bangalitolā, they accidentally met Jogin, Gopaldada and Dinanath who were already there. Then all of them shifted to a lonely garden on the banks of the Asi river. There was Durgabari at a little distance from where they used to procure their food once a day, spending the rest of the time either in religious discourse or in meditation.

While at Varanasi, Kali Tapasvi met two spiritual personalities, namely Swami Bhaskarananda, the celebrated ascetic of great learning and the great saint Trailanga Swami, who lived, lost to all outward activities, and absorbed in the deepest meditation. According to his own admission, the former appeared to him a man possessing strong reasoning faculty and erudition but without any concrete realization and as such Bhaskarananda did not impress him much. "Since we were fortunate", says Swami Abhedananda, "in attending one (meaning, Sri Ramakrishna) who was the arch-poseessor of all sorts of spiritual realizations, I had the insight to fathom correctly the extent of realization

attained by any Yogin". With Trailanga Swami, however, it was altogether a different experience. The very sight of this illumined soul, reminded him of the Master who had also gone to him long before. Speaking of his reminiscence of Trailanga Swami, Abhedananda writes : "When we went to visit him, we found him lying naked under the burning sun on a stone slab on the steps of the Dasasvamedh Ghat. The steps were so hot that it was impossible for anybody to put his feet on it, but we found Trailanga Swami sleeping there all the while with perfect ease. He was then fast asleep and snoring. We were very much surprised at it. As he was asleep, we returned without talking to him. Next day we found him at his own place which was situated near the temple of Benimadhava. He was then in an introspective mood. A piece of slate and a chalk pencil were there and we were informed that whoever wrote a question on it, the Swami replied to it, writing in Sanskrit. A glance at him impressed me that here was a man of realization. We put some questions in writing about God. He looked at us smilingly and wrote down the replies which satisfied our curiosity and this again reminded us of the high estimate cherished by the Master about the spiritual attainments of this celebrated saint. It was then that once more I realised that one was hardly capable of giving exact answer to questions relating to God unless he truly knew God. We returned after offering our respectful salutations to Trailanga Swami".

Again they were out on the road. They left Varanasi for their destination to Hardwar via Ajodhya and Lucknow. So they walked on foot towards Ajodhya, presently they reached village which appeared to them to be prosperous. It was about 9 A.M. and Tulsi wanted to halt there with a view to obtaining some food to which his companion agreed. They took their bath in a nearby tank and since it was too early to go out for begging, Kali Tapasvi changed his mind and told his companion that it would be better for them to proceed further. "It does not look well for a Sannyasin to wait for plenty of food in this prosperous village ; moreover, we have not walked much this morning, so let us be on the move and see what we can procure at the next village".

But the idea did not appeal to Tulsi who said : "We shall



have to cross at least sixteen miles before we can hope to reach the next village". Moreover, it was not certain whether food would be available there and it would also be difficult to walk in the sun. Then the true monk in Kali Tapasvi came out with this reply : "Tulsi, you must not forget that God always looks after his devotee. Don't you feel the living presence of our Master at our every step? Let us depend on Him and you will find that all arrangements for food will be done by Him. Don't you know that long before a child is born, God provides the mother with her breast-milk? So we are sure to find our food at the next village". Only a true monk can utter such words with such force. And our subject was a monk *par excellence*. He now wanted to test what Lord Sri Krishna had told to Arjuna in the Gita about absolute faith in God. If there is a true self-surrender and an absolute unegoistic faith in the indwelling Divinity, one need not feel worry for his future. If we look deeper into the mind of our wandering monk, we would at once find that never for a single moment did he give up his implicit faith in God as the Master had taught him earlier. It is the soul that thus knows, adores, offers all its workings in a great self-surrender of the being to the Eternal. God is all and all is the Godhead. It knows God as the Father of this world who nourishes and cherishes and watches over his children. It knows God as the Divine Mother who holds us in her bosom, lavishes upon us the sweetness of her love and fills the universe with her forms of beauty. It knows him as the first Creator from whom has originated all that originates and creates its space and time and relation. It knows him as the Master and ordainer of all universal and of every individual dispensation. The world and fate and uncertain eventuality cannot terrify, the aspect of suffering and evil cannot bewilder the man who has surrendered himself to the Eternal. To see nothing but the Divine, to be at every moment in union with him, to love him in all creatures and have the delight of him in all things is the whole condition of his spiritual existence. His God-vision does not divorce him from life, nor does he miss anything of the fulness of life, for God himself becomes the spontaneous bringer to him of every good and of all his inner and outer getting and having—*yoga-kshemam vahamyaham*. The joy of heaven and the joy of earth are only a small shadow of his possessions, for as he grows into the Divine,

the Divine too flows out upon him with all the light, power and joy of an infinite existence.

And we can easily conjecture as we study the growth and development of the spiritual nature of our subject that this sort of thinking must have been inherent in Swami Abhedananda from the very beginning of his religious life, fashioned and formed by his indwelling spirit and Sri Ramakrishna who was a great jeweller knew it better than anybody else when he had first cast his glance on the teen-ager Kaliprasad. Did he not discover in the boy a superb spiritual diamond? Did he not say that the boy was a great Yogin in his previous birth? And it was but natural that the experiences gathered by him in his previous birth must manifest themselves at every stage of his spiritual life in this new birth. The deeper we enter into his life, the more we learn that as a wandering monk, Kali Tapasvi wanted to submit himself to all the rigours of spiritual discipline which radically differs from intellectual discipline. None knew better than he that the way to spiritual knowledge may be rugged, blood-stained, and steep but there is no other way by which man can enter into its light. What seems to us to be of significance about Abhedananda is this that he interpreted what he discovered in the light of his living spiritual experience. It was an experience of great depth which, as we know, was enriched and embellished by the enlightened teachings of his Master. "Whatever I learnt in the early years of my spiritual apprenticeship, came not from the dead pages of philosophy, but from a Master who was living with this Truth". This admission is significant. Thus the illumination he had from his Master, guided every step in his life as a wandering monk; and this is the secret of the uniqueness of Swami Abhedananda's life as a roaming Sannyasin. Thus he reveals to us the truth that he was a Sannyasin in the true sense of the term—Sannyasin who really subjected himself to all sorts of spiritual discipline with absolute faith in God.

Now let us see what happened next as they proceeded towards their destination. The story has been beautifully described by him. "As I resumed the journey, Tulsi followed me through somewhat reluctantly. But the sun became hotter and hotter as we walked on the road on both sides of which there was nothing but wide expanse of dry field, without any tree or shade and to add to this, the road was full of dust which had

then become unbearable due to the scorching heat of the sun. As usual we were walking barefooted and so we were experiencing considerable difficulty at every step. I noticed that the eyes and the face of Tulsi had become extremely flushed and both of us were perspiring. Thus we walked for four hours through the scorching sun and dust and we were thoroughly exhausted when we reached the next village which appeared to us to be a mere hamlet. We were feeling very much hungry and our throat perched with thirst. It was difficult for us to proceed any further. So we took our shelter on the portico of a Siva temple. It was then past two o'clock. We noticed that there was only one shop in the village that belonged to a Marwari. 'Did I not tell you, Kali', said Tulsi angrily, 'that the next village lay at a great distance and it would be difficult to get any food there? Now you realize the truth of it. Hunger has made both of us famished and there is no food here'. I consoled my companion as before, saying, 'why do you feel dejected? I mean what I said—the Master will provide us with the food'. And it actually happened. We spread out blanket under a shady tree and had our rest. We decided that after taking some rest, we would go out in search of food. 'Do as you like', so saying Tulsi slept, but I did not. I was simply having my rest, sitting on the blanket and as I did so, I found, much to my surprise, that a Marwari gentleman came and bowed to me, saying, '*Namo Narayanaya*', standing he asked if we had taken any food and I replied in the negative. He then went away and returned presently with a basket full of food and sweets which he humbly placed before us. Once again we felt the living presence of the Master as also the truth of the Lord's promise in the Gita which then came out of my heart :

*Ananyaschintayanto mam je janah paryupasate,  
Tesham nityabhijuktanam yogakshemam vahamyaha.*

—Bhagavad Gita. 9/22

("I myself bear the burden of those who completely resign themselves to my care and worship me devotedly.")

My companion Tulsi also became overjoyed and was thoroughly convinced of the truth. The food being more than our requirement, we distributed the rest among the village boys who had then gathered around us. As they took it with pleasure, we inwardly felt happy". A true Sannyasin never makes provision

for tomorrow and Kali Tapasvi was true to this time-honoured custom.

As it was getting dark, the monks halted there. They wanted to spend the night inside the temple. They reached Ajodhya on the following day. As they caught sight of the holy city which is the birth-place of Sri Ramachandra, they were overwhelmed with the memories of the distant past centuries and centuries back. Those were the times of the *Tretayuga* when Sri Ramachandra lived and ruled in this city. While at Ajodhya, Kali Tapasvi, true to the tradition of wandering monks, pondered long upon the *Ramayana*, and the great empire of the King Ramachandra who lived in the past in his imagination. He also listened with devotional rapture to the chanting of the Sadhus in praise of Sri Ramachandra. Here he visited all the spots associated with the memories of Sri Ramachandra and also went to some *Akhnas* (abode of the Sadhus) to meet there the Ramait Vaishnavas (i.e. Vaishnavas belonging to the sect which worship Sri Ramachandra). They also had their bath in the holy river Saraju. Ajodhya fascinated them so much that they spent three nights there.

They left Ajodhya and then proceeded to Lucknow. The journey was performed as before — under the scorching sun and through the dust-laden road. Here in this historic city, they were lost in admiration of the splendour of the palaces of the late Nawabs of Oudh, and of the city's gardens and mosques. So it was not spirituality alone, but art and architecture also were of equal interest to Kali Tapasvi. From the account as recorded by Swami Abhedananda himself, we learn that at Lucknow they had met a Hindusthani gentleman who was religious minded and who provided both of them with a third class ticket for their journey to Hardwar.

—How would you go to Hardwar?

—On foot.

—But Hardwar is far away from this place; would you be able to cover so much distance on foot?

—Why not? We have come on foot all the way from Calcutta to Lucknow and we suppose we have already covered half the distance to Hardwar. We are quite capable of covering the rest of the distance in the same manner.

—Sir, if I offer you the railfare, would you mind accepting?

—Thank you, but we never touch coins—that's our vow. So we cannot accept anything of the kind from you.

—Very well, Sir. But if I offer you two tickets, would you mind accepting them?

—We would accept that with gratitude.

This conversation, reproduced from the Swami's own account, speaks for itself. It reveals to us the attitude of a true monk and a true disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. It adds a sort of splendour to his character which remained almost undiminished till the last days of his life. Thus we see that renunciation became not only an article of faith with him but also a creed, at every stage of his spiritual life. He was really a born-Sannyasin to whom the attachment of the world meant nothing, yet at the same time, to whom the world and the regeneration of the humanity at large meant so much. His long wandering days of monkhood have therefore a special significance in the study of his spiritual attainments and this is why we are dealing with this episode of his life in lengthy details. They are not only interesting in themselves, but also of utmost importance to us as we proceed in our study of the character and personality of Swami Abhedananda. As we have already indicated elsewhere that the band of young monks who went from Bengal in the closing decade of the last century, to various pilgrimages and cities of India, were no ordinary persons: all of them came out of the High School of the spirit that was founded in that dilapidated house at Baranagar. Of course, all of them were then nameless Sannyasins, but nonetheless they were the torch-bearers of a new ideal and the messengers of universal doctrine for which not only India but the whole of the world was then crying to the heavens. And they were to re-establish the long-forgotten truth that the history of India is found more in the dedicated lives of spiritual personalities than in books. They are the noble inheritors of the long and effective religious tradition of this ancient and sacred land. Vivekananda and Abhedananda and other spiritual sons of Sri Ramakrishna belonged to this class.

Next morning they reached the Hardwar station. Here they took their shelter in a *dharmasala*. In those days (1889) this renowned place of pilgrimage was neither so populous nor there were so many shops as they are found today. The place was

then full of huts and abodes of Sannyasins belonging to various sects and there were a number of charitable spots (*satras*) from where they collected their free food, which consisted chiefly of bread prepared mostly of maize and cooked pulse of *kalai* variety while curries prepared of vegetables and sweets (*laddu-methai*) would be but occasionally available. "In the first instance we had", writes Swami Abhedananda, "our baths in the Brahma-kunda and thereafter we procured some food from a *satra*. After resting a while, we went out to visit the *Akhras* of the Sadhus with whom we exchanged spiritual conversation and greetings in the true Sannyasin custom. Hardwar, surrounded on all sides by hills dotted with green trees, impressed us as no other holy place so far visited by us did. Those hills are the part of the wide range of the majestic Himalayas. The water of the Ganges at Hardwar was transparent beyond description—so transparent that the pebbles below the waters were clearly visible. The greenish hue of the water was charmingly beautiful. Indeed the half of the beauty of this holy place consisted in the Ganges where water flowed constantly with murmuring sound, and to hear it was to lose oneself in meditation".

The monks spent two days at Hardwar, visiting all the interesting and holy spots here. Thereafter they went on foot towards Hrishikesh and thence to Kedarnath—Badrinarayan via Lachmanjhula and, again, thence to the source of the Ganges and the Jumna, known as Gangotri and Jamunotri, in the pilgrims' terminology. But the journey proved too strenuous for them. "In fact", Swami Abhedananda used to say in his latter days while in reminiscent mood, "the wanderings in the outlying districts of the Himalayas are filled with uncertainties and hardships, besides the apprehension of hunger and thirst". The journey from Hardwar to Hrishikesh lay through deep forest consisting of mighty *shal* trees, which looked as so many sentinels of the surroundings. The warblings of the birds would be heard frequently through them. "Starting from Hardwar at dawn, we reached Hrishikesh by about ten o'clock. We did not feel least fatigued as we crossed the fifteen mile road which was full of natural scenery and which we enjoyed very much. There we took our shelter in the abode of a Sadhu who was hospitable to us". As we read his own description, we are led to conclude that the Swami was in his element here, where the very

atmosphere breathed monasticism. He was glad beyond measure to hear the murmuring of the sacred Ganges that flowed by and see the distant snow-clad Himalayas. No wonder, therefore, that Hrishikesh presented to him an atmosphere of intense prayer and meditation. Since there was no difficulty in obtaining food here, the monks decided to spend a few days here in prayer and meditation, and also in discourses on spiritual topics with local Sadhus whom they visited frequently at their abodes, made of *koos-ghas* (a kind of grass, known as tiger-grass). These abodes were generally known as *jhupri*.

We learn from his own account that while staying at Hrishikesh, Kali Tapasvi himself erected a *jhupri* inside the jungle and on the banks of the Ganges and lived there for a few days in meditation, prayer and study. "Our days were spent in absolute peace and happiness. And the memories of those days are still fresh in my mind, the very recollection of which delights me even today". Thus wrote Swami Abhedananda long afterwards. But the stay at Hrishikesh could not be prolonged, for it was then time to start for Kedarnath and Badrinarayan and when Kali Tapasvi came to know that already the exodus to this two Himalayan pilgrimages had begun, he along with Tulsi decided to start for Badrinarayan first and thereafter to Kedarnath.

## CHAPTER III

### IN THE HIMALAYAN TIRTHAS

It has been said of a remarkable scientist that, when he saw his table, he saw only a mass of ions and electrons and wave-lengths, and not the familiar wooden table as seen by others. Likewise the great spiritual personalities see the Brahman everywhere vibrating through everything in the universe, when they wake up to their superconscious state. They live and love and have their beings in the Infinite. This is true in all the stages of their *sadhana* and even when they live the life of a wandering monk, with the begging bowl in one hand and a *kamandalu* on the other, visiting holy places, they must not be reckoned as ordinary pilgrims. They go to holy places with their mind and heart attuned to the living presence of God and as they look around, their vision goes much beyond the surface and they see and feel much more than what the ordinary pilgrims do not and cannot. Their eyes see not merely idols, but ideals; it is not the externality that matters with them; religion being the very breath of their being, their mind is always in union with the Supreme Self. As we accompany our subject in his sojourn to the most sacred pilgrimages in the heart of the snow-capped Himalayas, we find him happy and peaceful from the moment he left Jayrambati. The solitude, the villages and the towns and shrines, and the meeting with new people, hardships of the continuous travel, no doubt delighted Kali Tapasvi, but what delighted him more than anything else was the feeling of the Infinite in and around him. As he travelled on foot, from place to place, he gathered varied and higher experiences, so his ten years' pilgrimage was in reality a pilgrimage of the soul for intimate realisation of the Absolute. It was *tapasya*, pure and simple.

One morning they bade farewell to the Sadhus of Hrishikesh and started for Lachmanjhula. In those days it was a sort of hanging bridge, made of rope and bamboos and the *jhula* is named as such after the name of Lachman or Lakshman, the illustrious brother of Sri Ramachandra and there is a temple of Lachmanji just by the side of it where pilgrims offer their



worship to the deity before crossing the bridge. Below the bridge the Ganges flows in terrific rush. It was a risky job to cross the bridge, for whole crossing and re-crossing it, the pilgrims felt giddiness, as the bridge swayed. The conditions, however, have changed since then and the journey to Kedarnath and Badrinarayan is no longer so difficult or arduous as it was half a century before.

Crossing four miles on foot from Hrishikesh, the monks arrived near about the temple of Lachmanji where they visited the idol and then carefully began to cross the hanging bridge. There were some pilgrims before and behind them. The way to Badrinarayan lay just on the other end of the bridge, with deep forest on both sides of it. "Thus commenced our journey", writes Swami Abhedananda, "towards Badrikasram with the name of the Master on our lips. We were absolutely penniless. We saw the Ganges flowing at a little distance by the side of the road, with her course towards Devaprayaga. There were only huge boulders and jungle full of trees, on both sides of the road. Down the slope the Ganges was flowing in murmuring sound while the chirpings of the birds were heard from the forest. There were inns at ten to fifteen miles interval, which were the resting places of the pilgrims. They would halt there at noon and evening for food and spend their nights in rest. Cooking materials and utensils were available there including fuels and for this the pilgrims had to pay something. As we were penniless, we had no other means than to beg. We passed our nights on the wayside, spreading our blankets on the ground. Proceeding thus up and down, we crossed thirty-five miles and reached Vyasghat where we spent the night as before. Since we were accustomed to take food once a day, there was no need of our looking out for food in the night. It is said that Vyasadeva did *tapasya* at this place and hence it is called Vyasghat".

Next morning they started for Devaprayaga which lay at a distance of nine miles from Vyasghat. It is a confluence of two rivers—the Ganges and the Alakananda and as such it is regarded by the pilgrims as a very holy place. It is from this point that the Ganges takes her course towards Gangotri and beyond that is located the source of the river which is known as Gomukh and it is from this Gomukh that the Ganges rises and flows towards Devaprayaga where she merges with the Alakananda.

The way to Gangotri lay by the side of the Ganges. "And we had decided earlier", writes Swami Abhedananda, "that at first we would visit Badrikashram and Kedarnath and then would proceed to Gangotri via Trijuginarayana. So we had our oblation in the holy waters of the confluence and obtained our noon-time food by begging from the fellow pilgrims. It is said that the gods used to perform their *tapasya* here. The beauty of the Himalayas is extremely fascinating here".

Eighteen miles up Devaprayaga there is an ancient temple, known as Bilvakeswara (Shiva) temple, which they visited. The entire surrounding looked charmingly beautiful on account of the green foliage on the hill-top. Next they came to Rudraprayaga which is also a confluence of two rivers, Mandakini and Alakananda. Here they bathed and worshipped at the temple of Rudreswara Shiva which was nearby. Here the road has bifurcated in two directions—one going towards Badrikashram via Karnaprayaga, by the side of Alakananda while the other towards Kedarnath via Gupta-Kasi, by the side of Mandakini. One of the notable holy places in this locality is Agastyamuni which is seven miles up Rudraprayaga on the way to Kedarnath. The legend is that the famous hermit Agastyamuni performed great *tapasya* at this place and hence the place is associated with his memory. The pilgrimage of Agastyamuni lay at a distance of thirteen miles from Gupta-Kashi where there is a temple of Visveswara and Annapurna and the deity is Ardhanariswara, that is, half god and half goddess. Besides there is another beautiful spot known as Manikarnika where one notices the flow of the Gomukhi and also one tank, Manikarnika-kunda. "Here we had our bath", writes Swami Abhedananda, "and we also visited the Ardhanariswara deity. The surroundings of this temple on this lonely hill were peaceful beyond description. As we walked three miles up from Gupta-Kashi we found two springs—one hot and the other cold. Here the pilgrims sometimes perform the offerings to the memories of the dead. The next important place on our journey to Badrinath was the Ukhimath which seemed to us to be a small but prosperous hill town and very well laid. It has a post office, a police-station and for the middle class one school, one hospital one *dharmasala*, a market and one *sadavrata* or charitable store. The place is called as such after the name of Usha, the daughter of King Vana and many infer that in the

Paauranic (mythological) age the capital of King Vana was situated here. The love-story of Usha and Aniruddha has been described in the Purana. The *Mohant* or 'Rawal' of Kedarnath mostly resides at the Ukhimath. The doors of the Kedarnath temple are thrown open on the day of *Akshaya-tritiya* in the month of Vaisakha and the temple remains opened for the pilgrims till the *Deepavita* festival in the month of Kartik. The *Mohant* goes there at that time and remain there for some time."

His description of the Ukhimath and the rest of the journey is not only interesting but full of informations which is possible only on the part of a keen observer like Swami Abhedananda. As a pilgrim we find him not only devoted, but equally also observant. His was an inquisitive mind and he had also observing eyes. Thus the scenery and the surroundings meant to him as much as the historical and mythological aspects of each and every place visited by him. A man of profound spirituality, he was bent upon discovering the soul of India and this might be reckoned as the driving force behind each and every step of his eventful pilgrimage. Indeed, the story of Swami Abhedananda's ten years' solitary wanderings throughout India is the story of his inward spiritual experiences which is difficult for a layman to fully comprehend. Even in its outward aspect, it has a lesson for us. Sometimes living in complete isolation and want, sometimes sharing the meals *bhikshas* of the destitute villagers, sometimes being entertained by the Princes and the Pandits, the Swami strode the length and breadth of his country, plumbing the life of the people to its depths, just as his great spiritual brother, Swami Vivekananda did. If the wanderings, therefore, meant for him spiritual progress, it nonetheless meant expansion of his heart. Thus as one follows his itinerary, one is really amazed to see in him the image of a true pilgrim in the time-honoured sense of the term. The closing years of the nineteenth century in India witnessed two great wandering monks—Swami Vivekananda and Swami Abhedananda—who as they went bare-footed from one place to another, saw, as it were, the whole of India—her past, present and future, her centuries of greatness and also her centuries of degradation. And it was during their wandering life that both of them realized that India's only hope was a restatement of the lost spiritual culture of the ancient *Rishis*. And this characterised in a remarkable degree their

mind and spirit before they appeared on the world stage at the end of their phenomenal pilgrimage.

The next phase of their journey as described by Swami Abhedananda himself, began from Tunganath and after crossing several miles uphill and down dale, and stopping at several wayside inns for food and rest, they arrived at Joshi-Math. "As we walked on, we fell in conversation with fellow pilgrims which relieved to some extent the monotony and the hardships of the journey. Gradually we reached the Joshi-Math which had then a big rosary. A large number of magnificent roses in full blossom attracted my eyes. During the winter days when the temple at Badrinath remains closed on account of heavy snowfall, the worship of the deity is carried on here and the chief priest then resides here for a pretty long time. The Joshi-Math was founded by Sankara and it is also known by the name Jyotir-Math. Badrinathdham is nineteen miles from this place. We stayed for one night here and as I looked at an idol inside the Math, depicting Sankaracharya in his childhood days, I was extremely happy. Two miles below the Joshi-Math lay Vishnuprayaga and I was surprised beyond degree to look at some portion of the snow-clad Kailash mountain which was visible from there. The entire track to our destination was covered with snow and we had no shoes on. This is why we were experiencing great difficulty initially as we trudged on".

But they were true Sannyasins and the hardship of the pilgrimage meant nothing to them and by this time they have become somewhat accustomed to it. So they could easily walk barefooted in the snow-covered mountainous road. As soon as they caught sight of the peak of the holy temple, their joy knew no bounds and all the hardships of the journey were forgotten. Their long cherished hope was now fulfilled. Elated with joy, they shouted, saying: 'Glory to Badrivishal! Hail Badrivishal!' The surroundings of the place seemed to them holy and charming. "Two lofty mountains on both sides of the temple touched the sky—one of them named *Nara* and the other *Narayana*. The legend is that both man and God (*Nara* and *Narayana*) performed austere *tapasya* in these two mountains and hence the name of the mountains in their sacred memory. There is a hot spring here where the pilgrims get themselves refreshed by having their bath. Myself and Tulsi spent only three days and three nights

at Badrikashram and everyday we used to worship the deity and get his *prasad*, as usual once a day, by begging, with which we satisfied our hunger. At a little distance upwards there is a spot known as Vyas-guha or the cave of the famous *Rishi* Vedavyasa (who classified the four Vedas) who performed here *tapasya*. But since the place remained totally covered with snow during the winter, it was difficult for the pilgrims to go there. Almost on the top of the cave there is a big waterfall known as 'Basudhara', or 'Sahasradhara' (thousand-branched fall). The waters of this gigantic fall, we noticed with awe and astonishment, falling in terrific current on a huge stone, split in thousand directions, spreading far and wide. The terrific sound of the fall, disturbed as it were, the peace of the surrounding place. Many Sadhus and pilgrims take their bath in that icy cold water. We, however, could not do so; we took out some water and had it sprinkled on our head. A zigzag road lay beside this waterfall which leads to Manas-sarovara. When one of our brother monks, Gangadhar (Swami Akhandananda) went to Tibet, he went there by this road".

We gather from Swami Abhedananda's own account that while at Badrikashram, he had felt an irresistible desire to go to Tibet at that time and he had then also expressed it to his companion, who then pointed to him about the impracticability of the idea for want of sufficient warm clothings with them. So he had to give up his idea of going to Tibet at that time. "But though the idea did not materialise then, I cherished it for ever in my mind and I was determined to see for myself the forbidden country beyond the snow-capped Himalayas". It was nearly three decades after, that Swami Abhedananda could fulfil his desire, when he returned from America in 1922 and we shall refer to this memorable episode in his life at the appropriate place of our narration.

Their next destination was to Kedarnath and for this purpose they had to retrace their journey along with other fellow pilgrims. The way to Kedarnath is also known as the *Mahaprasthan Path*, or 'the road of Great Journey'. In the mythological age, it was through this track that Pancha Pandavas or the five sons of the King Pandu, made their final journey, accompanied by their consort, Draupadi. As the pilgrims heard this story which was recounted to them by the *Pandas* (attendants), their mind

went back to those golden days of the Mahabharata. "We went on barefooted by the side of the river Mandakini to our destination. As we were approaching towards Kedarnath, the track seemed almost impassable due to extreme coldness. We were feeling our knees frozen and almost benumbed and as we walked on, it was getting more and more terribly cold and this compelled us to break our journey at some intervals. On the way to Kedarnath, there is a hot spring, named Gourikunda and there are rows of pine and also other kinds of trees on both sides of this road. But after Gourikunda there are no traces of shrubs or trees, only the long stretch of bare and snow-clad mountains are visible. The last inn where pilgrims have their rest before going to Kedarnath is known as Rambara-chati where hot tea is served free to all pilgrims. One sees from that place innumerable fountains flowing down the snow-clad mountains.

"Gradually we went uphill and as we went higher and higher we began to feel breathing difficulty. Thus trudging our way over the snow, at last we arrived at Kedarnath. There we noticed that the *Pandas* had cleaned the entrance to the temple by removing the heaps of snow that gathered round the place with the help of axe. The place surrounding the temple was still covered with snow, and it was with extreme difficulty that we along with the fellow pilgrims, could manage our way to the inside of the temple. The very sight of the idol of the Kedarnath Shiva, filled our heart with a feeling of reverence. It is not a man-built deity—it is Svayambhu Shiva, that is, Shiva, the Lord who Himself has assumed this stone figure which was still covered with snow. We were delighted to touch the blessed deity. The floor inside the temple was full of water that came out of the melting snow. There was nothing but snow, in and around the temple. We spent a night there with great difficulty and without having a wink of sleep of course.

"The temple of Kedarnath is built of stone and the idol is of black stone. At the first sight, it would appear as if the peak of a mountain has been cut separately in giving shape to the *Shivalinga* which is magnificent, both in its height and width. There are stone images of the Pancha Pandava, Draupadi and Kunti, on the courtyard of the temple, the peak of which is visible from a distance of one mile. The approach to the temple is over a wooden bridge below which flows the river Mandakini.



Sri Swami Dhanaraj Giriji Maharaj  
(Kailash Ashrama, Rishikesh)



A part of the Kailash Ashrama ( Rishikesh ). The place where Swami Abhedananda used to take lesson from Sri Swami Dhanaraj Giri, was in the front of this site, but was washed away by the flood.





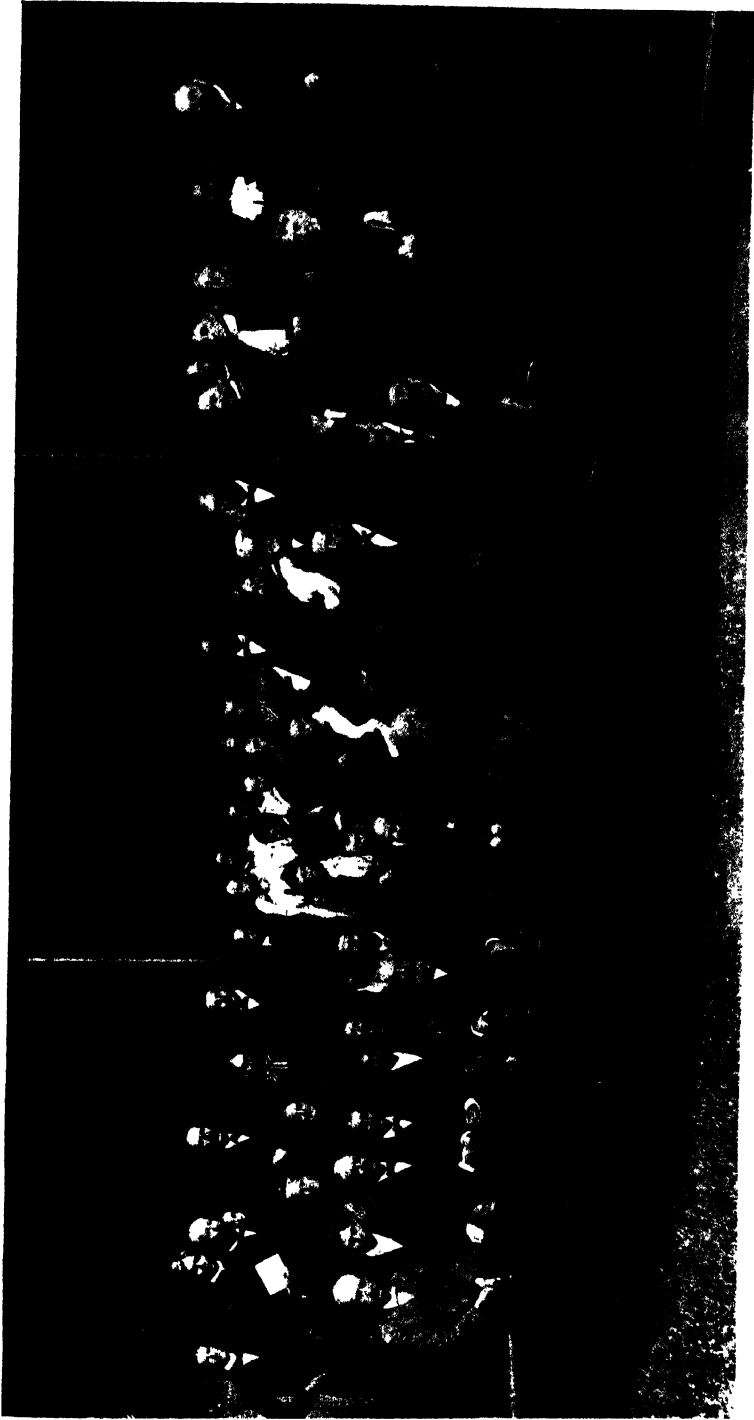
Sri Swami Govindananda Giriji Maharaj  
( Kailash Ashrama, Rishikesh )



Sri Swami Prakashananda Puriji Maharaj  
( Contemporary to Dhanaraj Giri )  
Kailash Ashrama



At Ridgely Manor, 1899  
Swami Vivekananda, Swami Turiananda, Swami Abhedananda.



Professors and Students in America.  
Swami Abhedananda in the extreme left, second to Prof. Jackson.



Swami Abhedananda on the way to Honolulu.



California University (U. S. A.)



Prof. Howison





Prof. Josiah Royce



Prof. William James



Sri Ramakrishna



Sri Sri Sarada Devi





Swami Abhedananda



Swami Vivekananda

There is a beautiful bathing place near about the temple". And here Swami Abhedananda has referred to an interesting account as to the origin of the temple as described in the *Puranas* and the inquisitive readers may well read that in his Bengali autobiography. And this bears testimony to his profound knowledge in our mythologies. This also indicates that to the high priest of Monism and the exponent of the Vedantic doctrine, even our mythologies were regarded as not insignificant which is quite natural on the part of the disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, whose unique spiritual *sadhana* encompassed all scriptures and all doxics.

Their next phase of journey which commenced from Bhatmari chati, was towards Gangotri. The road from this place has bifurcated—one leading to Gangotri and the other to Jamunotri. "At first we took the road to Gangotri. There were some trees on both sides of the road, the dry leaves of which seemed to be intoxicant as we tasted some of them. On reaching Gangotri, I was charmed with the natural scenery which appeared to me as unique. It was terribly cold there. The wide range of mountains on all sides were fully covered with snow. Here we picked up our acquaintance with a Sannyasin who belonged to the sect founded by Guru Nanaka and accompanied by him we went to visit the place known as Gomukhi. This is the origin of the river Ganges. The confluence of seven currents born out of snow is known as Gomukhi from where rises the Ganges. The place remains snow-covered throughout the year. Returning to Gangotri, we spent a night there and to protect ourselves from the cold, we procured some faggots and had them lit up. Our new acquaintance, an *udashi* Sadhu was very much attentive to us.

"Next morning we left the place for our journey to Jamunotri and, again, we had to retrace our steps right up to Bhatmari *chati*. On arriving there, we came to learn that some Sadhus along with some householder pilgrims were preparing for their journey to Jamunotri. We accompanied them and thus commenced our pilgrimage to Jamunotri. The road lay through deep jungle and the climate was freezingly cold. A few days after we reached the destination. We found a large tank full of hot water at Jamunotri which was generally used by the pilgrims for cooking their food. We procured some flour and rice from

the fellow pilgrims which we tied up in a piece of cloth and dipped the bundle in the hot waters of the tank which was instantaneously cooked. The rice thus boiled, however, smelted ; kind of mineral akin to sulphur. It was terribly cold a Jamunotri ; perhaps the coldest region in the Himalayan pilgrimage. Both of us took shelter in a cave nearby where we lit up fire with dry leaves and branches of the trees and spent the whole night in deep meditation. There were hardly any village or human habitation near by. We left Jamunotri next morning and again returned to Bhatmari *chati*, the starting point, after two or three days”.

From Bhatmari the monks went to Uttarkashi which was at a distance of some eighty or eighty-five miles and it took them about three days to reach the destination. Thus ended their strenuous pilgrimage and after spending one night at Uttarkashi they began their return journey, arriving Hrishikesh after a few days, *en route* Dehradun. Here they met some of their old acquaintances, who were pleased to find them safely back to the plane. It has already been told that prior to their journey to Kedar-Badri, Swami Abhedananda had built by the side of the Ganges a *Jhupri* with long grass (which grow in abundance in this region) and little branches of the trees, where he used to spend his days in spiritual practice.

During the long period of his pilgrimage in the Himalayan *tirthas*, perhaps no other place attracted him so much as Hrishikesh as it did to Swami Vivekananda also during the latter's four years wandering. The very sight of the place and its calm and quiet and holy surroundings must have appealed to his spiritual nature and this was why he wanted again to halt at Hrishikesh after the completion of his pilgrimage to Kedar-Badri. “Hrishikesh is the place hallowed by Hindu legend and story. It is a picturesque and secluded spot, situated on the foot of the Himalayas, in a valley surrounded by hills and almost encircled by the Ganges. The whole place is monastic, the very air is pure and holy. Thousands of Yogins and Sannyasins of diverse sects assemble there every year to spend the winter in reading the scriptures and practising Yoga and meditation. In those days it was a jungle, covered with graves, wild plum shrubs, bushes of wild flowers and evergreeners, and dotted here and there with thatched cottages raised by the Sadhus for their habitation”.

Abhedananda and his companion stayed there for sometime, dwelling in a hut. But this time along with the desire to perform severe *sadhana*, there arose in the mind of the Swami to study the Vedanta philosophy along with its commentary by Sankara. "In those days", writes Swami Abhedananda, "the name of Dhanarajgiri, the celebrated Mohant and Mandalesvara of the Kailashmath, spread throughout the northern region. He was not only a profound scholar in the six systems of Hindu philosophy, but was also a true Sannyasin who preferred renunciation and knowledge to anything else. I began to study the Vedanta philosophy under this eminent scholar who was highly pleased at my attainments. I remember that when the Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) went to Hrishikesh, incidentally he asked Dhanarajgiri about me and the latter had praised much about me, saying, 'Abhedananda? He is a man of phenomenal intelligence' (*alaukiki prajna*). He was so much pleased at this remark of the scholar, that on future occasions whenever Swami Vivekananda used to refer this incident to me, he appeared to feel proud. It was a matter of pleasure to him to hear some one praising his brother-disciple". This incident is a clear indication of the true nature of the New Communion of Apostles founded at Antpur in the district of Hooghly, and subsequently sanctified at the "High School of Spirit" at Baranagar.

But his stay at Hrishikesh at this time is notable not only for his deep study, but also for the austere *sadhana* which Kali Tapasvi performed here, while living in the thatched cottage. It was here that he experienced the highest spiritual realisation for which he had been yearning since the dawn of his spiritual consciousness. The story has been very ably described by Swami Abhedananda himself in his autobiographical narration, which we quote *in extenso* :

"In those days I used to spend my time at Hrishikesh in deep study and austere *sadhana*. One day it flashed in my mind that the real knowledge or experience of Brahma or the Absolute lies in the sense of non-difference between sandalwood-paste and human excrete (*chandana* and *vishtha*). So for a few days I engaged myself in practising this sort of *sadhana* and as there dawned in my mind the state of complete non-difference I was, as it were, drowned in eternal bliss. But I did not stop there. It occurred to my mind that physical ailment is the only

touchstone by which it can be proved if my sense of non-difference is conclusive or not. If my mind is indifferent to the excruciating pain due to a disease, remains calm and poised, and fully immerse in the Absolute, only then shall I realize that I have reached the goal of self-knowledge. This is why one day as I sat for meditation, I prayed for some sort of physical ailment. Strange as it might seem, I was really laid down within three days with fever, bronchitis and blood dysentery all at a time and I was completely bedridden. Tulsi became very much afraid and anxious. By the grace of the Master, it was just at that moment that some of my brother monks (Swami Turiyananda and Swami Saradananda) had arrived in Hrishikesh after returning from their respective pilgrimage. They came to know from other Sadhus that we were then staying there and soon they found us out. We were overjoyed to see our *gurbhais* after a long time. Though completely bed-ridden, I was not in the least overpowered by the combined attack of the three kinds of ailments. I maintained my calmness, though at intervals I was losing my consciousness due to high fever."

Thus Hrishikesh witnessed the birth of Swami Abhedananda as Kali Tapasvi passed the acid test of self-knowledge. In that golden hour there dawned in his mind a feeling as it never had dawned before that the phenomenal world was transitory and unreal and that he was a mute spectator like the unchangeable *Atman* of Vedanta which always remains as witness of the phenomena. Thus the young spiritual aspirant who went to Dakshineswar as a teen-ager boy and the ardent ascetic at the Baranagar monastery and the steadfast pilgrim who walked barefooted right up to the source of the Ganges—all these different aspects of a spiritual personality were now fully sublimated to the highest state of transcendental realisation and out of that there came out a luminous spirit which now assumed the name of Swami Abhedananda. Unless one takes into account this metamorphosis, stage by stage, in the spiritual nature of our subject, it would not be possible for anybody to know the life and mind of the person who, true to his name, set a new example in spiritual *sadhana* and in his search for spiritual truth. This brings to our mind the following lines of Sri Aurobindo—one of the greatest spiritual explorers and seekers of truth during the post-Ramakrishna era :

“Spiritual truth is a truth of the spirit, not a truth of the intellect, not a mathematical theorem or a logical formula. It is a truth of the Infinite, one in an infinite diversity, and it can assume an infinite variety or aspects and formations in the spiritual evolution ; it is inevitable that these should be a many-sided passage and reaching to the one Truth, a many-sided seizing of it ; this many-sidedness is the sign of the approach of the soul to a living reality, not to an abstraction or a constructed figure of things that can be petrified into a dead or strong formula. The hard logical and intellectual notion of truth as a single idea which all must accept, one idea or the system of ideas defeating all other ideas or systems or a single limited fact or single formula of facts which all must recognise, is an illegitimate transference from the limited truth of the physical field to the much more complex and plastic field of life and mind and spirit” (*Life Divine*).

Hrishikesh witnessed this inevitable evolution of a soul in a pilgrim who was one of the inheritors of the great spiritual treasure left by Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa—the God Incarnate. His pilgrimage was, therefore, not in vain. And this leads us to the conclusion that as a spiritual personality Swami Abhedananda was not an individual, but a phenomenon which one witnesses once in a century.

## CHAPTER IV .

### THE LAST PHASE OF HIS PILGRIMAGE

“I will travel across the length and breadth of India, bare-footed”. Thus said Swami Abhedananda when captivated by the ideals of the monastic life he set out for his eventful pilgrimage to the four corners of India. His intention was not merely an intention, rather it was his strong determination, or, it might be said that it was an instinct with him, just as it was with his spiritual brother, Swami Vivekananda, who was equally captivated by his vision of the monastic life. To record the full story of his great *Periplus* of ten years is simply impossible and we are just touching the chief episodes. After he became a little better, it was decided that Swami Abhedananda should proceed to Varanasi to recoup his health. It was Swami Saradananda who then made all necessary arrangements, and even provided his convalescing *gurubhai* with a third class ticket for his journey from Hardwar to Varanasi. Arriving Varanasi next afternoon, Swami Abhedananda went to the residence of a lady, known as Annapurna Ma, which was also fixed up by Swami Saradananda. Swami Vivekananda, who was then at Ghazipur visiting Paohari Baba there, hastened to Varanasi on receipt of Abhedananda's illness. It is written in the main biography of Swamiji thus: “The persistent rumours of the illness of Abhedananda compelled him at last to go to Varanasi. This fitted in with his plans, for he had had in his mind for some time the secret desire to practise *tapasya* in the holy city. He hurried to Varanasi as the guest of Pramada Charan Mitra. After making every arrangement for the care of Abhedananda, he settled himself at Pramada Babu's garden and devoted his entire time to the practice of austerities”.

Abhedananda has written that Swamiji himself was then suffering from an attack of influenza. It was from Pramada Babu that he had learnt the arrival of Swamiji and also that the latter was putting up with the former. Since there was nobody to attend the ailing Swamiji and he was not being properly nursed, Swami Abhedananda, who himself had not yet then fully recovered, became extremely anxious to do the needful and expressed



his desire to make necessary arrangements for the nursing of Swami Vivekananda. "But how can you do that, when you yourself have just recovered?—intervened Pramada Babu. But I paid little heed to his words and insisted that I should be taken to Swamiji... He was very much pleased to see me after a long time and expressed his regret at the state of my health. He was then bed-ridden and suffering very much from influenza. At once I began to attend him, though I was forbidden to do so. Attending continuously for two days, I nursed him to recovery".

They were really the spiritual sons of their Master and as one reads their lives, one comes across with many such instances which prove, if any proof is needed, that the brotherhood of monks formed at Antpur was not a sentimental outburst, but a concrete reality. They had left their home and hearth, parents and relations, to become Sannyasins with renunciation as their creed and austerity as their article of faith. And yet it passes our imagination, how could they be affectionate to each other. Was it the touch of universal love that they had received from the hands of their Master that had bound them up with this tie of affection? Yes, it was, for here one sees a band of young Sannyasins, robed in *gerua* and with a staff in their hand, the like of which India has seldom seen. It is not for the intellectuals to take a measure of them.

While Swami Abhedananda along with Swami Vivekananda was at Varanasi, the news of the passing away of Balaram Bose reached him from Calcutta. It was a heart-rending news no doubt, and both of them felt sad at the death of the great house-holder devotee of the Master. It will not be out of place here to refer to the reaction of this news in the mind of Vivekananda which has been touchingly described by his biographers in the following manner: "He was plunged into a sea of grief. The memory of innumerable days of sweet companionship and of staunch friendship that crowded upon him made him but lament the more. Pramada Babu was struck to see a monk, strict Vedantist, so upset by death. But Naren said, 'Please do not talk that way. We are not dry monks. What! do you think that because a man is a Sannyasin he has no heart!' " Has India even seen or heard of this type of Sannyasins who responded equally to the call of renunciation as well as to the call of heart? Perhaps not. The readers of Swami Vivekananda's life will recall that when Sarat

Chandra Gupta (afterwards known as Swami Sadananda—the first disciple of Swami Vivekananda) fell ill, Vivekananda carried him on his shoulders through dangerous jungles. This time also we find the Swami hurried to Calcutta with the intention of bringing solace to the bereaved family of Balaram Bose. If the sons of Sri Ramakrishna carried the standard of renunciation and austerity, they also carried the flag of tenderness of heart such as we notice only in the life of Gautama Buddha. The greatness of spirit exhibited in their life was thus sanctified by the mellow touch of heart which could easily embrace the humanity at large with universal love. Vivekananda was certainly right that they were not dry monks and India was in need of them towards the closing years of the last century.

Now to our narration. His first journey from Puri to Kedarnath and Badri had brought ancient India vividly before the eyes of Swami Abhedananda, eternal India—the India of the Vedas and Upanishads and Puranas. And thus he realized at the first impact the spiritual unity of India. His next pilgrimage to Rajputana and thence towards the western and southern regions of India was equally fruitful. This time his itinerary led him through Agra, Delhi, Jaipur, Udaipur, Khetri, Abu, Girnar, Porbandar, Dwarka, Poona and other interesting places of interest in South India. He travelled to the extreme point of the immense pyramid, where is the Varanasi of Southern India, Rameswaram. From north to south, the ancient land of India was full of gods; yet the unbroken chain of their countless arms formed only one God. Abhedananda, the Parivrajaka, fully realized their unity of flesh and spirit. During this time twice he met Vivekananda who was also then (1891-92) leading the life of Parivrajaka under a different name before his departure for America. From the contemporary accounts we gather that from the north to the south in their solitary flight across India the two Sannyasins, then comparatively unknown, were just getting themselves prepared for the future mission that was awaiting them.

It took him four months to fully recover from the attack of influenza and when Vivekananda left for Calcutta immediately on receipt of the news of Balaram Babu's death; he did not forget to request Pramada Babu to take particular care of Abhedananda. "It was with tearful eyes that Swamiji bade me farewell"—thus writes Swami Abhedananda. But Vivekananda was

so much anxious for him that as soon as he arrived Calcutta, he at once wrote to Swami Saradananda and his disciple. Saradananda was to nurse Abhedananda properly. Soon after his recovery, Abhedananda became once again determined to start for a fresh pilgrimage, though he was particularly requested by Saradananda to stay at Varanasi for a few days more. But as he was bent upon travelling all over India, barefooted and penniless, Abhedananda bade farewell to his brother monk and left Varanasi for Allahabad.

We have already indicated that study, meditation and austerity characterized the life of Abhedananda as a Parivrajaka. There were integral parts of his spiritual nature and perhaps they were necessary for the grooming of the future teacher and preacher. In fact, one can hardly imagine this monk anywhere during his ten years' journey from place to place without seeing him deeply absorbed either in study or in practising austerity. This is why once in the Alambazar Math one of his brother monks had remarked ; "Kali Vedanti means study *plus* meditation *plus* austerity". So on arriving Allahabad we find him in search of a spot which would be favourable to his *sadhana* for which he was feeling a deep urge within. At a little distance from the city and on the other bank of the river Jamuna, he selected a secluded spot, known as Jhushi where many Sadhus carry on their respective *sadhana* by living inside thatched cottages. "So I decided", writes Swami Abhedananda, "to perform *tapasya* by remaining in a thatched cottage at Jhushi on the banks of Jamuna. On arriving there, I found innumerable Sadhus in *tapasya* in their respective shelters. I too, found out one and settled there. Only once a day I would be going out to beg food. I spent almost the whole of the day in study and meditation. I also picked up acquaintances with other Sadhus and occasionally. I entered into spiritual discussions with some of them". It is on record that on one such occasion Abhedananda told a Ramait Sadhu (follower of Sri Ramachandra) that "religion does not consist in learned discussion but in realization. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. Realize it. Without that you can understand nothing". Really he had no kind word for a false monk and would say, "one should renounce only after one has got control over one's mind while still living the domestic life. On another occasion when a monk belonging to the Puri Order

of Sankaracharya came to his cottage in the afternoon hours and asked Abhedananda abruptly if Truth is one or many. The reply he got from him was not pedantic, but very simple, yet nonetheless impressive: "Truth is but one; through *maya* we see it diversely. It is in this way that people get all kinds of knowledge in and through the one undivided Truth, which is beyond time and space. But people are neither aware of this one Truth, nor can they comprehend it. When true knowledge dawns, then you see everything to be but one". Though apparently convinced, the monk threw up another precious question to Abhedananda: "Are there then two kinds of knowledge, Swamiji?" "Yes, there are", replied Abhedananda in a tone that reflected deep conviction, "one has to believe in the Vedas which alone contain the truths experienced by the sages and seers of old who went beyond the range of duality and perceived unity. Take it from me that religion is a matter of experience, and not of intellectual understanding. One must practise it in order to understand it".

Such indications of his debating genius were noticed earlier at the Baranagar monastery where both Kali Vedanti and Narendranath used to indulge themselves sometimes in spiritual discourses. In this connection Mahendranath Dutta writes in his *Memoirs of Swami Vivekananda*—"Kali Vedanti was then studying philosophy day and night; he was then found specially interested in Uberweg's *History of Philosophy*. Narendranath, himself a fine debater and scholar, praised highly about the acumen of Kali Vedanti and predicted that one day he would shine as a philosophic scholar". The subsequent career of Swami Abhedananda bears ample testimony to this prediction. It has also been recorded by Mahendranath Dutta, "While at Varanasi, Kali Vedanti did not spare even the universally venerated Swami Bhaskarananda, with whom he once engaged himself in spiritual discourse, and after hours of debating with that old spiritual giant, he came out with flying colours which pleased even the vanquished Swami". We shall see later on the flowering of this talent in the wandering monk when he went to the West.

"After a few days", writes Swami Abhedananda, "Gupta Maharaj (Swami Sadananda) joined me at Jhushi and I was very much delighted to see him after a long time. He intended to remain with me for a few days with a view to performing

austerity and reading scriptures under me. Because my cottage was little larger in size, both of us had our accommodation there. At noon time we would be going to collect food, sometimes Gupta went alone and both of us shared whatever was thus collected. In the afternoon hours, Gupta had his lessons from me in Sanskrit grammar as also *Vicharasagar* (a book on Vedanta in Hindi). We also used to discuss among ourselves about the Vedanta philosophy. Thus the days at Jhushi went by in study and austerity which brought immense pleasure to me”.

Swami Abhedananda has related an interesting incident of his life at Jhushi which must be told here, just to show to what extent he was capable of relying on merely of the providence as he was advancing towards the path of spiritual enlightenment. “It was then rainy season. Everyday there would have shower and storm. One morning it so happened that it began to rain frequently. One of my neighbours was a Nanakpanthi Sadhu who was also a Hindusthani. He used to accompany us sometimes when myself and Gupta would be going out for the purpose of begging food. So in that morning, as he looked at the sky that was covered with dense clouds, the Sadhu advised us saying—it would be better for us to collect food early, otherwise starvation was inevitable. I smiled at these words of the Sadhu and told him—there was no need in going out that day for food ; we would observe the *Ajagarvritti* (which means that when there is heavy rain, the snakes never go out of their holes). and if God willed the food would come here. Gupta did not exactly follow it and he looked at me vaguely, while the Sadhu repaired to his cottage, apparently bewildered. I really did not move out that day for food and Gupta followed, although he was bit surprised at my firm determination. We came out of our cottage, went to the banks of the Ganges and presently engaged ourselves in study and meditation. And as we were thus engaged, there occurred at the same time a strange incident. The day was then almost over, as I was explaining the *Vicharasagar* to Sadananda. It was just at that moment I noticed a gentleman coming towards us with a basketful of food. As he drew near, I found him to be our well-known Maitra Mahasaya of Baranagar. We were overjoyed to find him there and asked him how did he knew our whereabouts. Maitra told that as he came to Allahabad, he learnt from some one that an ascetic by the name Kali Tapasvi

was living at Jhushi on the banks of the Ganges and, "this must be you and none else, I concluded. Of course, I did not know that Gupta Mahasaya was staying with you here, so I became very much eager to see you and as it is prohibited in our scriptures to visit a Sadhu empty handed, I have brought some sweets".

The rest of the story is simple. The monks returned to their cottage accompanied by Maitra Mahasaya. The food which the latter had brought was in abundance and as he gave a portion of it to that Sadhu, Abhedananda did not forget to remind him of the Lord's pledge in the Gita—*Yogakshemam vahamyaham*, which was so aptly proved on that day. The Sadhu, delighted and astonished, admitted the truth of it and went away to his cottage with the food. 'Don't you feel the living presence of the Master, Gupta?'—was the final remark of Abhedananda.

Back to Varanasi on foot from Allahabad, Abhedananda, after staying here for a few days in the company of Swami Saradananda and Dinoo Maharaj, returned to Baranagar with the object of taking rest for sometime before starting for fresh pilgrimage. Among the inhabitants of the Math he found only Niranjan, Shasi and Tarak who were then carrying on the daily worship of the Master. "It was arranged that a portion at least of the group should always remain at Baranagar, while the other brethren followed the 'call of the forest'. It may be pointed out here that while almost all the disciples went sometimes or other to pilgrimage, there was only one who never quitted the place. He was Shasi, the faithful guardian of the Math". The journey from Varanasi to Baranagar was done by foot as usual and it was only at Bally that Abhedananda requested a boatman to take him on the other side of the Ganges, free of charge.

"The first to receive me at the Math was Shasi who embraced me, as he found me there all on a sudden. Tears rolled down in our eyes and none of us could utter a word at that moment. After a while Shasi asked me: 'Where had you been so long, brother?'.

'On pilgrimage'.

'But I am having my days in the worship of the Master'.

'Shasi, you are the most fortunate amongst us. The Master has showered his mercy on you. Really, you are the faithful guardian of the Math'."

Swami Niranjanananda and Swami Sivananda were also

pleased to find him after a long time and as they all gathered together, they were at once carried to those happy days in the past when days were spent in the association of the Master. The past was thus almost recreated as they fell into the discussion of those days at Dakshineswar, Shyampukur and lastly at Cossipore. Thus reminding over the past memories they felt inwardly so happy that it is not possible to describe it adequately in words.

The conditions in the monastery at Baranagar were, however, not at all prosperous. The daily worship of the Master was carried on somehow while the brother monks had their meals once a day out of what was provided by the householder devotees. Anyway, Abhedananda spent his days happily at Baranagar as usual in study and meditation. But his stay here could not be prolonged for reasons which need not be discussed here and which are none too pleasant to refer. According to his own statement, he had to leave the Math with a heavy heart and also with a determination not to come back. Those were the months of July and August and the weather was as inclement as could be imagined. It was raining heavily, accompanied with thunder, when Abhedananda left the Math and walked all the way upto Gaya where he had his oblation in the river Falgu and where he also visited the holy shrine of Vishnu and the footprints of the Lord inside the temple. He then left Gaya for Varanasi and thence to Allahabad where he did not like to stay.

This state of solitary flight was usual. Walking alone and penniless on the road, and walking continuously, he first reached Agra and then proceeded to Delhi, the city of historical memories. "The crisp air, the grandeur of the place, its memories, its history and its atmosphere filled him with physical and spiritual elation". After spending a couple of days here, Abhedananda visited one by one such places as Jaipur, Udaipur, Khetri, Abu, Girnar and others. While he was touring in these regions, he felt an irresistible desire to meet his spiritual brother Narendranath who was also then travelling in those places under the name of Sacchidananda. The Swami was then staying at Junagad as the guest of the Dewan of that State. "I crossed the river Narmada", writes Swami Abhedananda, "and reached Junagad. On my way to that place, I halted at Porbandar where I was the guest of Sankar Pandurang and it was from him that I gathered about

one English-speaking Bengali Sannyasin, Sacchidananda by name, who had been to Porbandar a few days before. I did not recognize who this Sacchidananda was, but later on I learnt that it was, under this assumed name that Narendranath was travelling in Gujrat and Cutch”.

But the description of the Sannyasin he had from Sankar Pandurang had convinced him that he must be no other person than his beloved *Gurubhai*, Narendranath, and so he became all the more eager to meet him. He thought that he might meet him at Porbandar and thus he stayed for three days there. According to Swami Abhedananda's record, he found in his host, a great Sankrit scholar. Sankara Pandurang was then engaged in compiling and printing *Atharva Veda*. He was so much impressed with the visiting monk as he discussed with him about Hindu scriptures, that the reputed scholar requested him to remain as his guest for a few days more. But as he was then eager to meet Narendranath, Abhedananda left Porbandar and set out for Junagad. And on arriving there he came to know that one Bengali Sannyasin, Sacchidananda by name, was staying at the house of the Gujrati Brahmin Mansukhram Suryaram Tripathi who was the private secretary of the Nawab. The biographers of Swami Vivekananda have not mentioned this incident when Abhedananda met the former at Junagad.

“Because of Mount Girnar, a few miles from the city, Junagad is not only a place of historic interest, but a place of pilgrimage as well. For here are many temples sacred to Hindus, Jains and Buddhists. There are also many beautiful mosques and tombs. Of the Hindu ruins, the caves of Khapra Khodia, used at various times as monastery by monks of different orders, were the most interesting. Swami Vivekananda was in his *sadhana* in a cave of the Khapra Khodia”. Now let us see what happened when both the brother monks met as has been very nicely told by Swami Abhedananda himself and the following passage reproduced here from his autobiographical narration will impress the readers.

“On arriving at Junagad as I learnt of the Bengali Sannyasin who also spoke English and who was staying at the house of Mansukhram Suryaram Tripathi, a Gujrati Brahmin and private secretary of the Nawab, I inferred that the Sannyasin in the guise of Sacchidananda must be none else than Narendranath. And



my inference proved correct when I found him at the place of the private secretary. He became simply overwhelmed with joy as he saw me before him unexpectedly and so for me, I too could not control my emotion and tears rolled down my cheeks to see my beloved *Gurubhai* after a long time. Fortunately as I reached the residence of Tripathi, I found Narendranath engaged with the host in the discourse of a topic related to Advaita-Vedanta. Tripathi was an erudite scholar, well-versed in Hindu scriptures. I was at once introduced to him by Narendranath and Tripathi rose and received me with a salutation and requested me to take my seat. As I sat, Narendranath looked at me and said to Tripathi: 'He is also an Advaita-Vedantist and my spiritual brother. Now he will have discourses with you'. I was simply taken aback at this. I was then dead tired due to fatigue on account of my continuous walking. And moreover, on finding Narendranath after long days, my mind then swelled with emotion. And when I was just thinking to have some intimate talk with him, Narendranath called me to enter into discussion with his host. However, I had to obey my elder and began the discourse in Sanskrit with Tripathi on some aspects of Advaita-Vedanta. It was in the nature of questions and answers and I satisfied him with my answers on each and every point raised by him. As I talked to him, I watched that the face of my *Gurubhai* was also beaming with satisfaction. Panditji, too, became very happy and bowed to me. I found Narendranath overjoyed at my performance".

Thus the success of his brother-monk left an impress on the mind of the leader and, once again, this incident at that far away place reminds us, and convincingly too, that the new communion of Apostles which was founded at Antpur was now about to fulfil its historical mission. The discussion being over, Abhedananda apprised Narendranath of all the happenings at the Baranagar Math, which had compelled him to leave the monastery for ever. "When he came to know all about the happenings at the Baranagar Math, Narendranath heaved a deep sigh and looked at me, saying in a steadfast tone, 'you are a son of Sri Ramakrishna and the Math is composed of you all. Unless you go there, the Math loses all its meaning'. I could not check myself and tears rolled down my cheeks as I heard him speaking to me in this manner. Not only that, he drew me near affection-

ately and consoled me with soft words which I would never forget. I had to yield myself to this affectionate gesture of the leader, and changing my mind I assured him that I would return to the Math again. As I thus said, I noticed that burden was lifted out of his mind”.

But as a leader, Vivekananda had also cherished welfare of his wandering brother-monks in his heart. He knew that Kali Tapasvi, true to his name, had been travelling all the way bare-footed and he considered it very risky. So we find him at Junagad, requested by his brother monk not to travel further in this way. As he looked at the bare foot of Abhedananda, he cautioned him, saying, “you should not travel in this fashion and if you disregard my request, you will have to suffer in the long run”. “It is needless to say”, writes Swami Abhedananda, “that this prediction of the *Mahapurusha* came to be true after a year and a half. I really suffered from an attack of foot-sore when I returned to Alambazar Math after the completion of my pilgrimage”.

From Junagad, Abhedananda set out for Dwarka. “As I bade him farewell, I found tears on the eyes of Narendranath which reminded me of those happy days at Cossipur in the company of the Master. I, too, could not check my tears”. This reminiscence of Abhedananda once again brings to our mind of those memorable words of Swami Vivekananda: “No, we are not dry monks”. This simple utterance of that world conqueror is enough to show us the metal of which he and his brother-monks were built. History has also proved beyond all doubt and petty intellectual jargons that the new brotherhood of monks which was founded on the soil of Bengal and which was sanctified with the ashes of Sri Ramakrishna, was destined to set a new example in the spiritual tradition of India.

Another characteristic that marked the life of Swami Abhedananda as Parivrajaka was his personality which endeared him to everyone. Wherever he went, he left the impression of an erudite monk possessing a fine talent for debating and discourse on spiritual matters. And thus the religious minded people everywhere he set his foot on, would be attracted to him. A serene hallow of renunciation marked his stately bearing in such a remarkable degree that might consider it a rare privilege to be acquainted with his solitary monk, roaming on the roads of

India. A man of few words and of reserved nature, Abhedananda strode like a mighty spiritual personality and it was somewhat difficult for any lay man or monk to become intimate with him unless his metals were sound. Persons of shallow and superficial attainments could hardly get access to this learned Sannyasin. Princes and Pandits alike regarded this wandering monk with utmost reverence. As a true son of Sri Ramakrishna, he fulfilled his ten years' wandering life with such austerity that staggers our imagination.

On arriving at Dwarka, Swami Abhedananda visited the ancient temple of Dwarkaji and there he spent a night. The place appeared to him holy with innumerable memories and legends of Sri Krishna. Next morning he proceeded to Prabhas, one of the most holy places on the shores of sea. Here he halted for a day and decided his next course of journey to Bombay. But how to cross the sea? "As I was thinking about the difficulty of crossing the sea, there suddenly appeared before me a Gujrati gentleman who seemed to me to belong to the merchant class. He came to me and after salutation asked me in Hindi about my destination. When he came to know that I intended to proceed to Bombay, the gentleman offered me some money to purchase a ticket. 'But I never touch coins: I would be thankful to you if you can provide me with a ticket on the lower deck in the steamer'. Sethji consented to it and bought a ticket for me. As he put the ticket on my hands and bowed to me, I felt once again the living presence of the Master. In fact, at every step of his long and hazardous pilgrimage, Swami Abhedananda remembered Sri Ramakrishna with a mind that was full to the brim with utter devotion to him. This is why in his latter days he used to urge on his disciples to have complete faith in *Guru* without which spiritual life is meaningless. He himself set an ideal example of it for his disciples to emulate. A man of stern renunciation, Abhedananda also set a new example as a Parivrajaka and in this regard he can be compared to Swami Vivekananda who was equally a man of stern renunciation as the readers of his biography know.

He reached Bombay on board the steamer and he enjoyed the short steamer journey to his heart's content. After going around the city he went to Mahabaleswar where he met Swami Vivekananda for the second time at the house of one Narottam

Murarji Gokuldas, who was reputed to be a hospitable man. It was only a day before that Swamiji had arrived there. "I was also cordially received by Gokuldasji who showed me utmost respect as a spiritual brother of Swami Vivekananda. Here Narendranath told me, jokingly : 'brother, why do you follow me in this way? Both of us have started our pilgrimage with the name of the Master. It is better that we travel quite independently of each other'. To this I replied, 'you are wrong. Why shall I follow you? I am moving from one place to another just as you are doing and it is not a chance but the decree of the Master that we meet in this way'. 'Certainly', he burst into loud laughter at this. I then told him that it was my intention to proceed to south via Poona, Baroda, Nasik, Dandakaranya and other places of interest. 'You better go to north and there will be no further chance of our meeting again'. And on hearing this, Narendranath again burst into loud laughter". Incidentally it should be mentioned here that it was at Bombay that Swamiji said to his brother-disciple : "Kali, so much energy has accumulated in me that I am afraid that I may burst". This bursting occurred in less than a year at Chicago.

Again he set out on his solitary journey and as he crossed one after another such places as Poona, Baroda, Nasik, the wandering monk was once again in his element. At last he reached Dandakaranya which was full of dense forest. As he touched the soil, his mind at once went thousand and thousand years back to that age known as *Treta Yuga* when India witnessed the advent of Sri Ramachandra, the God Incarnate, and Dandakaranya was the same place associated with His memories. "While remembering about Sri Ramachandra, I also recalled to my mind a day in the past when the Master, lying on his sick-bed with Narendranath standing alone by his bed-side, had said to the latter distinctly : 'He who was Rama and Krishna is now Ramakrishna in this body, but not from the standpoint of your Vedanta'. This incident happened just a couple of days before the final illumination of the Master and by these words did he not indicate to his disciples and also the whole world that Bhagawan Sri Ramakrishna really combined in him the two Incarnations of Sri Ramachandra in the *Treta Yuga* and Sri Krishna in the *Dwapara Yuga*? Strange is the play of the Lord! Only the fortunate can perceive it and witness it. It was due to the

virtue acquired in our previous births that we were fortunate in witnessing the human Incarnation of the Lord in Sri Rama-krishna”.

These reflections in the mind of our subject are worth-pondering. While Narendranath was somewhat slow and sceptic in accepting the saint of Dakshineswar as God-Incarnate, it was just the reverse with Kaliprasad who had accepted him fully as God-Incarnate on the very first day he was privileged to touch his feet. To understand this crest and glory of Swami Abhedananda's spiritual realization, one must study his life deeply and also drink deeply from the fountains of his teachings and utterances when there emerged the world teacher out of the shell of the wandering monk.

In the final phase of his pilgrimage we find Swami Abhedananda touring over the holy places in South India which presented before him a panorama of architectural grandeur which left its mark on the memory of the wandering monk. The Swami, clad in *gerua*, princely as he looked, easily attracted the attention of a number of eminent persons who found in this young Sannyasin a born knower of religion and a remarkable spiritual personality they had ever known. As he set his foot on the soil of South India, the historical sense of the monk became at once aroused in him and he began to observe each and every temple here with the eyes of a historian rather than with those of a monk. “I was simply fascinated with the sculptures of the temples in South India which escaped the Muslim vandalism. None of the temples or idols inside them has been destroyed or disfigured here. The vast courtyards and the *Gopurams* which characterize the temples in this part of India, have added a beauty to them which cannot be adequately described in words”. As he passed from one place to another, he saw, as it were, the ancient India with its hoary culture, civilization and spirituality and for some times the glories of the past filled his mind to the exclusion of every other thought. How to recreate that past? Did the mind of the solitary monk cry out in this way? We can only conjecture that memorable moment of mental illumination in the life of the wandering monk as he went from place to place in the South.

From the accounts of his itinerary as given by Swamiji himself in his autobiography, we learn that he first went to Rame-

swaram, covering the whole track mostly on foot and partly by rail. On the way he had his oblation in such holy rivers as Tapti, Godavari, Krishna and Kaveri, the very names of which sound spirituality. As every religious minded man or woman in India knows, Rameswaram is the Varanasi of southern India. It is the holiest of holy places, immortalised in the Ramayana, in the journey of Rama to Lanka (Ceylon) in search of his abducted consort Sita. The great temple at Rameswaram has its gate one hundred feet in height. The glory of the temple is its great corridors and open galleries. It is said that Sri Ramachandra on his return from Lanka after having defeated and slain Ravana founded the temple and worshipped Siva there. Abhedananda, the Parivrajaka was happy to have accomplished one of the most cherished purposes of his ten years' wandering life.

“Gradually I reached my destination, Rameswaram, just at the confluence of three seas and this added a grandeur to this holy place. I had my bath at the spot of the confluence and then I went inside the temple to worship the idol of Siva. The vast *Natamandira* of the temple stands on one thousand pillars which are skilfully carved. In the mellow light of the lamp the deity, decorated in various sorts of jewelleryes, looked splendid—it presented a sight which eyes can never forget. The very atmosphere breathes spirituality. I stayed at Rameswaram three days and on my return journey on the fourth day, I visited the temple of Meenakshidevi at Madura. This is the biggest temple in the whole of southern India and it excels other shrines insofar as architectural beauty is concerned. From Madura I proceeded towards Trichinopoly walking all the way on foot as usual. I collected my food by begging as I walked on. I found people in this part of India highly respectful to Sadhus and Sannyasins. On my arrival there, I went to visit the famous temple of Sriramgam where I worshipped to my heart's content the holy idol of Sriramganatha.”

The other places he visited in the South included Tanjore. Kumbhakonam, Kanchi etc. At Kumbhakonam he was delighted to meet a South Indian Sadhu who had not spoken for thirty years and who appeared to him to be a man of strict renunciation of discriminating mind. The beautiful temple of Kanchi equally fascinated him as its golden peak dazzled in the sunshine. “The

innumerable pillars made of blackstone that adorned the wide *Natamandira* of the temple impressed me very much. But what struck me most was the chorus chanting in soulful tunes of the vedic hymns of the Dravidian Pandits at one corner of the temple. I was also delighted to see the idol of Nataraja. I also noticed innumerable carvings of various gods and goddesses in and around the temple. As one looks at these fine carvings, is reminded of the ancient times when the beauty and glory of Kanchi were particular in climax. Kanchi is really the Varanasi of the South India and the place is always crowded with pilgrims. One of the characteristics that I noticed here is this that here pilgrims are required to visit the idols in bare bodies. The entire surrounding is pregnant with so much holiness that one feels in his mind a rare sense of delight".

So this was the mind of the wandering monk as he visited all the notable shrines and idols in South India. He was as much after the spiritual tradition as he was a keen observant of the aesthetic beauty of each and every place as it was reflected in various sculptures and architectures. And this is why Swami Abhedananda, after some years at the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Science, while delivering a series of lectures on 'India and Her People', could speak so eloquently on the various aspects of Indian life, cultural and civilization. Both Vivekananda and Abhedananda, as pilgrims of India, not only visited the temples and idols, but also read in the stone-carvings and architectural workmanship, the true history of ancient India. And this marks out both of them as the greatest wandering monks of modern India. We might as well say that every step of their years-long wandering was shadowed by the vision of past India and they also looked from past to the present as they crossed from one place to another. And this is why they could speak with authority about the land of their birth when they appeared on the world stage as the exponents of Indian civilization and culture. They embraced the whole of India as they traversed all over the country.

Swami Abhedananda arrived Madras after completion of his southern pilgrimage which ended in the year 1893. The long journey on foot had physically exhausted him and he was feeling dead tired. "So I thought that it would be better if I now return to Calcutta. The words of Narendranath still clearly

rang in my ears : "You are a son of Sri Ramakrishna and the Math consists of all of us. I now realized the truth of it and I decided to return to my brother-monks and to live with them".

The decision came to his mind one day as Abhedananda stood under a wayside tree. It was just at that moment that a Madrasi gentleman came to him and asked him in English as to his destination. "I then told him that my destination was Calcutta. The gentleman then looked at my face and asked me : 'Do you want to go to Calcutta on board a steamer ? Presently a steamer bound for Calcutta will sail from the Madras port. Do you want to avail of this ?' 'I have no objection', I told him and he was then about to give me some money out of his pocket as passage and when I informed him politely that it was against my monastic principle to accept any gift of money from anyone. But if he can provide me with a fourth-class ticket in the steamer, I would accept that gratefully. The gentleman was pleased at this and he then requested me to follow him to the ticket-room. He went inside and presently returned with a fourth-class ticket which he handed over to me and then he bowed down me respectfully. And once again I was overwhelmed with the boundless mercy of the Master. A few quantity of parched rice that I could collect at Madras before I sailed for Calcutta, enabled to sustain me during the days I was on the steamer".

Landing at the Calcutta port, as Abhedananda was proceeding on foot towards Baranagar, he came to know from a person the Math was shifted to Alambazar. "The information", writes Swami Abhedananda, "delighted me very much, for I had promised that I would never return to the Baranagar Math". Thus his promise was fulfilled, though indirectly, and it did not take him long to realize the hands of the Master behind it.

Thus moving on for years across the length and breadth of India, practically covering on foot all the principal sites of pilgrimage in the whole of India. When the wandering monk returned to the Math he was then a fully spiritually evolved personality who had grown in mental stature, feeling at every moment a strange shining of power within him, just as Swami Vivekananda felt on the eve of his glorious departure to the New World.



## CHAPTER V

### HIS DAYS AT THE ALAMBAZAR MATH

The shifting of the monastery from Baranagar to Alambazar took place sometime in November, 1891, when Swami Abhedananda was moving on from place to place in his long and strenuous pilgrimage and peregrination from Calcutta to Rameswaram. He, therefore, knew nothing of this event. Let us give here some description of the premises of the new monastery where the monk now intended to proceed after his return from the southern *Tirthas*. None of his brother monks, however, knew about his home-coming. The description that follows here in regard to the Alambazar Math is based chiefly on the memory of Swami Virajananda, quoted in *Atiter Smriti*, which have also been incorporated in the book, *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission*.

“The house stood midway between Baranagar and Dakshin-swar on the road running from Calcutta to the latter place. It was a commodious two-storied building on the road leading westward to Lochan Ghosh’s Ghat on the Ganges, and had a long *verandah* with round pillars. The main entrance, however, was on the lane on the eastern side. The house was divided into two apartments. On the ground floor of the outer apartment there were two dark rooms, one of which had the ill fame of being haunted. As such they were seldom used. The first floor had a long hall which was used as a parlour in the daytime and a bedroom at night for eight to ten people. Proceeding from the hall to south along the eastern *verandah*, one would come to the southern *verandah*, to the south of which were the shrine room and three bedrooms, separated by a wide passage. The inner apartment too had a courtyard with covered *verandahs* on three sides, the eastern side alone having a large open terrace. To the south of the shrine there was a small room to store things for worship. On the ground floor there were four rooms and a kitchen. Two of these served as stores, and was used for keeping Ganges water in big jars. The fourth room was occasionally occupied by either Gopal Ma, an elderly lady, or Gauri Ma, both disciples of the Master. There was also a pond. A portion of the lower

*verandah* served as the place for dining. Being haunted, the house was seemed for the paltry sum of ten rupees per month”.

Anyway the new monastery building at Alambazar seemed somewhat better than the previous one at Baranagar. And it was at this place that Swami Abhedananda returned to join his brother monks after the lapse of a long period of recluse sojourn. The disciples had to remove from Baranagar to Alambazar mainly for two reasons. As already indicated, the Baranagar Math solely depended on the munificence of two householder devotees of Shri Ramakrishna, viz. Suresh Chandra Mitra and Balaram Bose, both of whom had died in quick succession by the middle of 1890, and how their death meant acute financial difficulties to the brotherhood had been pointedly expressed in a letter which Swami Vivekananda wrote to Pramada Charan Das at Varanasi sometime in May, 1890, and from which we quote the following lines: “Now there is no knowing as to where his disciples will go with his sacred remains and his seat. The disciples are Sannyasins and are ready forthwith to depart anywhere their way may lie”. Apparently the agony of Vivekananda at that time was concerned not so much as for the accommodation of his brother monks, as it was for a suitable shelter where the sacred relics of the Master could be safely preserved. Though Abhedananda knew about the death of Balaram Bose, he knew nothing about the death of Suresh Chandra Mitra until his return to the new monastery at Alambazar. Incidentally it might be mentioned here that Swami Vivekananda came to the Alambazar Math only after his triumphant return from the West, in the beginning of 1897.

Alambazar was not an unknown place to him and as such Abhedananda had little difficulty in finding out the exact location of the new monastery. “As I entered into it through the main gate I met first Shasi and Sarat when the former embraced me joyously while the latter caught hold of my hand and escorted me to the southern *verandah* on the first floor. By and by others came one by one and asked about my welfare. Shasi, however, seemed to be all the more eager about Narendranath and asked me if I knew his whereabouts. I told him about my meeting with Narendranath, first at Junagad and then at Bombay: ‘Our leader under the assumed name of Sacchidananda, is now travelling *incognito* all over the country. And as they came to learn

from me about Narendranath, all the brother monks became somewhat assured and delighted, for so long none of them had any knowledge about his flight”.

Then he was shown around the new premises of the Math by Swami Saradananda along with Swami Ramakrishnananda. Abhedananda has devoted considerable space in his Bengali autobiography in describing the place in minute details. As he was going around the entire premises up and down, he came to learn that Shasi occupied one of the three rooms on the western *verandah* on the first floor, which overlooked the lane below. A room adjoining to that of Shasi was then allotted to Abhedananda, which he accepted gladly. It is on record that he was all the more glad to find that at last some arrangement had been made for a permanent accommodation of all the brother monks by the grace of the Master. And inwardly he was still more satisfied that the ashes of the Master would now be properly enshrined at the new monastery. As he set his foot on the premises of the Alambazar Math, Abhedananda must have heaved a sigh of relief, not because so much for himself or for his brother monks as particularly for the perpetuation of the memory of Sri Ramakrishna who came on earth to save the Indians from the spell of the wordly glamour of Western culture. What greater regret can there be than this that no memorial in this land of Bengal, in the neighbourhood of the place of his *sadhana*, has yet been raised in honour of him by whose birth not only Bengal but the whole of India has been sanctified with a hallow of spiritual regeneration, unprecedented in history. We might as well conjecture that such thoughts must have swelled in his mind, as it did in the mind of Vivekananda. Abhedananda was shown by Shasi the shrine-room of the Master in the new monastery at Alambazar. Here he was also provided with a writing table and also a table lamp and he was very much delighted to have them for his exclusive use in his room.

“I also found”, writes Swami Abhedananda, “that the conditions in the new Math were comparatively better than those at the Baranagar Math and the arrangement of our daily ration was also satisfactory. Food which was mostly provided by the householder devotees was plenty. Not only that, there was a show of improvement in other matters too. The devotees, as I noticed, had already provided the Math with a new floor-mat and the

previous tattered one was gone. Among other new articles that I found were a small wooden cot and a lamp for the purpose of reading. On the whole, each of us then had a piece of cloth and a *chaddar* to wrap our bodies. It seemed as if the Goddess of Wealth (Mother Luxmi) had opened her stores for our cause here. Tulsi (Swami Nirmalananda) was already there and I found him as a helping hand to Shasi, in the matter of daily service to the Master”.

From this description of Swami Abhedananda, it might be inferred that the overall picture of the Alambazar monastery was to a great extent encouraging than what was previously at that dilapidated and poverty-stricken monastery at Baranagar. So he found the brotherhood at Alambazar somewhat secured and well-placed and the very atmosphere which was no longer rigorous or stringent, seemed to him quite favourable for his own way of monastic life, particularly for study, meditation and *sadhana*—although at that stage of his life, now fully blossomed, he needed very little of either of them.

Now let us have a glimpse of his life at the Alambazar Math. According to his own narration, we find that very soon after his arrival here, the room allotted to him became a veritable sanctuary of study, meditation and austerity. Abhedananda then used to spend most of his time inside the room and he seldom came out. Introspective by nature, he liked to remain wholly immersed in his own spiritual pursuits. The room occupied by him soon came to be known to all, both inmates and outsiders, as ‘Kali Vedanti’s room’ and in the whole history of the brotherhood, this can be regarded as a distinction which Abhedananda only enjoyed. Indeed, among the chosen disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, his figure stands out, marked by some characteristics which were his own and which fitted him in a remarkable degree. “It was then”, writes Swami Abhedananda, “my sole intention to spend the rest of my monastic life devoted to the study and discourse of the Advaita Vedanta thus to build up my career on the basis of its ideals. I then daily used to read, among other scriptures, particularly the Gita along with the commentary of Sankaracharya. As I read each *sloka*, I tried to grasp the underlying meaning and implication of it and so long I could not grasp it, I meditated upon the particular *sloka* and thus when the meaning became clear to me, I then passed on to the next couplet.

I hardly came out of my room and it was only at the meal-time that I did so, otherwise my days and nights would be spent either in study and discourse or in meditation I could hardly perceive then how my time went by—so deeply immersed I was in my spiritual pursuit. Occasionally all the members of the brotherhood, who were then residing there, would assemble together for debate and discourse on matters religious and philosophical, but every one of us had our aim how to develop our lines, following the teachings and directives of our phenomenal Master who, in fact, was all in all of our existence. But it was Shasi who excelled all of us in the whole-hearted service of the Master”.

Why did Abhedananda read the Gita exclusively and why was he attracted to the commentary of Sankaracharya, leaving aside all other commentaries on this sacred book? A study of his life would be incomplete without taking into account the significance of it, which has a particular bearing in the gradual evolution of his epiritual nature. As is indicated elsewhere in this book, the main chord of his inner life was renunciation and its vibrations must have suffused his existence and consciousness as a whole. Did he not learn from his Master at the Cossipore Garden House while attending on him that although the world abounds with scriptures, sacred and profane, none is so helpful to a spiritual aspirant as the Gita which is an ancient scripture like the Vedas and Upanishads. The exact metaphysical connotation of the Gita meant very little to Abhedananda and as he absorbed in each and every *sloka* of this scripture it became clear to him that in the Gita there is very little that is merely local or temporal and its spirit is really large, profound and universal. It can thus be presumed that sitting in his secluded room at the Alambazar Math after his return from long pilgrimage, Swami Abhedananda devoted himself in the study of the Gita. His approach in studying this sacred of all sacred Hindu scriptures was not a scholastic or academical scrutiny of its thought, nor did he attempt to place its philosophy in the history of metaphysical speculation, nor even he dealt with it in the manner of analytical dialectician. On the contrary, his approach to the Gita must have been for help and light and his aim must have been to distinguish its essential and living message, that in it on which humanity has to seize for its perfection and its highest spiritual welfare. We shall discuss more on

this point later on when we will come to discuss the philosophical thoughts of Swami Abhedananda.

Now we proceed to our narration. Mahendranath Dutta in his *Memoirs* of Swami Vivekananda has given a nice picture of the life of Swami Abhedananda when the latter was staying at the Alambazar Math. "On his return to the monastery at Alambazar from the pilgrimage", writes Mahendranath Dutta, "Kali Vedanti devoted most of his time in study and meditation as was characteristic with him. He practically shut himself up in his room where he remained deeply immersed in study and spiritual practice. He was deeply versed in both Indian and Western philosophies and his knowledge of English and Sanskrit was astonishing. Of all subjects he was particularly interested in philosophy and his mood, his trend of thought always reflected it very distinctly, and this marked him out from the rest of the inmates in the monastery. If I remember aright, it was during his stay at the Alambazar Math that Kali Vedanti composed in Sanskrit a hymn to Sri Ramakrishna, and perhaps this is the first hymn composed by anybody about the Master. It was a fine composition and still many recite it. It was customary with some at the monastery to take tea in the morning and those who gathered around the hot cups, used to participate in the discourse of various scriptures. Some one would raise a point which the others attempted in thrashing out, citing various scriptures and ultimately all the brother monks were benefited by it. Many substantial discussions were then held and sometimes it so happened that when a particular point was raised, the discussion went on for several days until and unless it was fully solved. And this led the monks in the study of several religious and philosophical books. Though everyone at the time of debating stuck to his own point, yet there was so much fellow-feeling and sense of reverence among themselves that the whole place would assume with an air of an ideal educational institution; none of them betrayed the slightest feeling of animosity or hatred against any one; they were all inspired debaters to whom nothing meant so much as spiritual talks. One would hear then simultaneously various scriptures from various lips, as if it were a sort of college lecture-room. None, however, could excel Kali Vedanti in debating in which he seemed to me to be a passed master. His expositions were as lucid as they were convincing and which clearly

reflected his scholasticity. I would also never forget the bold thrust of his arguments, combined with vivid phraseology and elegant diction".

Mahendranath Dutta has also referred to an incident which is nonetheless interesting and which we reproduce below just to point out clearly that the interest of this monk lay not only in matters purely philosophical or religious, but also in science, history and antiquity. "One day", writes the author of the Vivekananda Memoirs, "after the discourse was over, the brother monks went together to a bathing place adjacent to the Lochan Ghosh's Ghat. The spot was then known as the 'Kalwallas' Ghat' and there was a big banyan tree on its bank. There under the tree we sat together—myself and Kali Vedanti—and we began to talk about the library of Dr. Rajendralal Mitra. There was a large collection of scientific books in the library of this celebrated antiquarian and a pioneer of scientific research in Bengal, which was then about to be sold by auction. On hearing this, Kali Vedanti told me, 'Had I money enough, I would have then purchased Dr. Mitra's collections which are immensely valuable'". Is it not strange that his strong philosophical reasoning realized the worth of Dr. Mitra's collection of scientific books and he was all the more eager to purchase them? This is quite natural on the part of one who afterwards as a world teacher sought the synthesis of religion and science in all his utterances and lectures extending over a quarter of a century in Europe and America.

While his days at the Alambazar Math were thus being happily spent in study, meditation and discourse, Abhedananda fell ill by infection of foot-sores which made him bed-ridden for several months. This was the inevitable effect of his long travelling bare-footed in the regions of Ajmere, Pushkar and Rajputana and it has already been told that Abhedananda was particularly cautioned about the possibility of this infection by Swami Vivekananda when the latter met the former in one of those places years back. From the accounts given by Swami Abhedananda himself as well as by Mahendranath Dutta, we gather that a few months after his arrival at the Alambazar Math sores began to erupt below the foot and his whole body began to swell terribly and he was completely bed-ridden. The brother monks got alarmed at this. Soon the boils began to melt one by one and

out of them there appeared long, fine threads of white colour and as one attempted to remove them by pulling out, they were found to be torn at the roots. Gradually the infection spread all over the body. The first physician to attend the ailing monk was Dr. Baidyanath Mukherjee of Baranagar who, however, could not diagnose it correctly. Then some eminent physicians from Calcutta were sent for who examined the soars carefully and found them as due to worm infection—a rare type of disease mostly found among the people belonging to the region of Rajputana.

“Seven times I had to be operated upon”, writes Swami Abhedananda, “and I remained completely bed-ridden for four months, I cannot adequately record how Sarat (Swami Saradananda) nursed me day and night in those days of my strange illness. As he constantly attended on me Sarat had to sacrifice his sleep and even he would remain at my bedside without having any meals. Niranjana was then away from the Math for some days and as soon as he returned and found me ailing, he too devoted himself in nursing me. It is impossible to forget the selfless service of my brother-monks during those fatal days of my monastic life”.

Mahendranath in his *Memoirs* has given a very touching description of the method of nursing carried by Swami Saradananda which is worth reproducing here. “As the patient lay on the bed, with his legs held stretched in a raised position on two pieces of planks and tied with string, the legs had to be kept covered with a soft cover made of feathers. And with what devotion did Sarat Maharaj nurse his ailing brother disciple! He used to wash daily the soars and as he did so, he would allow nobody to come near the patient, lest the infection might catch him. Sarat Maharaj was not afraid of himself and he gladly took the risk as he engaged himself in nursing day and night his beloved brother monk. He served Kali Vedanti in this manner for about three months and this he regarded then as his everything—study, meditation and *sadhana*. It is impossible for anyone to speak adequately about this unique nursing done by Sarat Maharaj which reflected a mother’s affection and concern for her ailing child. It was he who then displayed the spirit of service which afterwards became one of the outstanding characteristics of the Ramakrishna Mission”.



We need not comment any more on this, for it is above any intellectual comment. All that it shows is the truth that the New Communion of Apostles was not founded in vain. India was yet to realise that what was founded at Antpur was in the long run destined to bring about a spiritual regeneration which India needed most.

The illness really proved fatal and inspite of prolonged treatment and motherly nursing of Swami Saradananda, it had incapacitated him to such an extent that Swami Abhedananda lost all his strength to walk by himself. Mentally strong as he was, he however did not give in, rather he was found to resign himself wholly to the will of the Master. "If I am to remain a miserably decrepit for the rest of my life, it will mean very little to me. The Master's will be done". He is reported to have made this remark one day to a brother monk who was attending him.

We gather from Mañendranath's account that due to constant stretching out of the legs in a raised posture the blood circulation was disturbed, resulting in the thinking out of the patient's leg-muscles to such an extent that the legs looked like a pair of sticks. The physicians then advised that the patient must be made to walk by any means, otherwise he might become a cripple for good. And it was done accordingly and daily he would be taken out, resting on the shoulders of two brother monks and was forced to walk in that manner for sometimes in the garden path of the monastery. "One day it so happened", writes Mahendranath, "that Sarat Maharaj helped Kali Vedanti with a piece of stick and asked him to walk down the steps and presently they came in the courtyard where the former began to talk to the latter very tenderly. All on a sudden Sarat Maharaj left the place and ran upstairs, leaving Kali Vedanti alone with the stick held in his hands. Thinking himself absolutely helpless and quite unable to walk, he began to entreat and cry. Sarat Maharaj, on the other hand, showed an indifferent attitude to all his requests and threw a few harsh words to him, apparently with the intention of provoking Abhedananda who was left all alone. As nobody paid any heed to him. He became furious and then he stood up on his legs and soon he was found to come upstairs all by himself while Sarat Maharaj, Tulsi Maharaj and Shasi Maharaj began to laugh heartily. It was then that Sarat Maharaj drawing near to Kali Vedanti, told him affectionately :

'Brother Kali, don't you be angry with me. I have done it for your sake. The physicians advised thus'. And it was from that time that Kali Vedanti began to walk by himself with a stick in his hand".

Before we close this chapter, we might as well refer to another interesting incident of the Alambazar Math which has direct bearing on the study of our subject, "One day", writes Mahendranath, "it was about 9 or 10 in the morning and Kali Vedanti was found standing quietly in front of the door adjoining to the kitchen while others were busy in managing the vegetables. The conversation gradually drifted to the memory of Balaram Bose and everyone was full of praise in regard to him. It was probably Baburam Maharaj who raised the topic and said that they should remain grateful to Balaram Babu who while he was alive helped them generously. The other monks, too, were of the same opinion. Kali Vedanti who stood silently and who was listening to them, did not join in their conversation. Suddenly he became little vexed and burst forth in a stern attitude : 'Yes, we ought to show our respect to Balaram Babu for he was a devotee of the Master. I can understand that. But I refuse to bow down my head to anybody just for the sake of a few grain of rice. But your case is different—you are all flatterers to those who provide you with food and hence you are all in praise for Balaram Babu. I am a Sannyasin ; I cannot bow down my head just for the sake of a morsel of food which is easily available by begging'."

We also need not comment anything on it, for it speaks for itself and it reveals to us the metal of which the character of this true monk was built. It was not the strength of character alone, rather it was the logical consequence of a mind bent on renunciation. Indeed any assessment of Abhedananda's monastic life would be inadequate unless we take into account this aspect of his spiritual nature which was shaped and formed by one who himself was the high priest of renunciation. Abhedananda was born with it and it was the very breath of his life.

Almost all the brother monks returned to Alambazar Math one by one from their respective pilgrimage and the group then consisted of Swami Brahmananda, Swami Nirmalananda, Swami Turiananda, Swami Ramakrishnananda, Swami Saradananda, Swami Premananda, Swami Abhedananda and others, when the

monks were passing their days happily at the monastery, there came the news of Swami Vivekananda's signal success at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago, America, which filled their heart with delight. A wave of joy, as it were, flowed over the Alambazar monastery and how Swami Abhedananda rose to the occasion in demonstrating the triumphal success of Swamiji across the Atlantic is another memorable episode in the life of this monk during his stay at the Alambazar Math. Unfortunately, neither the main biographers of Swami Vivekananda, nor the author of the *History of R. K. Math and Mission* has mentioned anything about the role played by Swami Abhedananda, following the news of Swamiji's success at Chicago. Since the life-story of this great monk cannot be complete without any reference to this episode, we are going to relate it in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER III

### THE TOWNHALL MEETING

WE gather from Swami Vivekananda's biography that just on the eve of his departure for America to join as a delegate to the Parliament of Religions which was to be held at Chicago in September, 1893, he was feeling a strange stirring of power within him. This was evidenced in two of his utterances. We have already referred to what he said to Swami Abhedananda when he met the latter at Bombay : "Kali, so much energy has accumulated in me that I am afraid I may burst". It is also on record that "when, on the eve of leaving for the West, he (Swami Vivekananda) was met near Mount Abu by Swami Turiyananda, who asked him about his spiritual realization, the Swami replied : "Brother Hari (Turiyananda). I do not quite understand what spirituality is?" He paused for a while, his countenance expressed a deep sorrow, and then he added with assurance : "But my heart has expanded very much, and I have learnt to face. Believe me, I feel intensely indeed".

How this feeling and the strange stirring power within that "man of genius, energy, heart, vision and realization" ultimately burst forth in a distant land across the Atlantic is well-known to all the readers of Swami Vivekananda's life and we need not repeat it. What we are concerned with is the repercussion of his success in his land of birth. "The effect was tremendous. So far as the mental attitude of the nation was, it was turned overnight from one of despondence to youthful buoyance. In a word, India was awakened, never to sleep again, though she had still to start on the way to a new successful career of spiritual and social regeneration." And what was the reaction in the minds of his brother-monks at the Alambazar monastery as they came to know through newspaper reports of Vivekananda's unparalleled triumph? They were simply transported with joy. "So for the the brotherhood at Alambazar, though they could not at first recognize their Naren in the Swami Vivekananda of American fame, they were naturally proud of this Hindu monk ; and when a letter from him, months later, set all doubts at rest, their elation knew no bound". So their beloved leader has literally fulfilled the prophecy of the Master

by thus shaking the world to its foundation. But there was one among them, who though exultant inwardly, was somewhat reserved and careful not to allow this enthusiasm to spend itself in mere sentimental outbursts. He was Swami Abhedananda who now rose to the occasion.

Readers of history need not be told that in those days following the news of his signal success at Chicago, there were persistent and insistent anti-propaganda against Swami Vivekananda in some places in India. The propaganda, however, assumed an intensity in Calcutta since the return of Protap Chandra Mazumdar, the eminent Brahmo leader of the time, who had been to Chicago as a delegate to the Parliament of Religions on behalf of the Brahmo religion. Although since the session of the Parliament news was pouring into India of his unparalleled success in America and although the Indian journals and magazines were filled with the American reports of his great address at the Parliament, yet what disturbed Swami Vivekananda were the frequent reports of anti-propaganda against him as carried by some interested persons. He then wrote letters to his Madrasi disciple Alasinga Perumal and also to his brother-monks at Alambazar Math (till then he did not know anything of the Alambazar Math for the shifting of the monastery took place from Baranagar to Alambazar when he was on pilgrimage and it was at that time that he went to America without informing anything about his departure to any of his brother-disciples) requesting them to organize meetings at Madras and Calcutta, appreciating his activities in America. It was to Swami Ramakrishnananda that Vivekananda first wrote a letter requesting him to organize a meeting in Calcutta and to pass resolutions praising Dr. Barrows (who was the President of the Parliament of Religions), whose sympathy and cordiality had made the mission of the Hindu monk in America somewhat easier. This was necessary for Swami Vivekananda not so much for the anti-propaganda against him in the land of his birth as it was necessary to tide over the tirade launched against him by a section of Christian missionaries there in America. It was only the celebrated Professor N. Ghosh who day in and day out wrote article after article in his famous weekly journal *Indian Nation* in support of Swami Vivekananda and Narendranath Sen, younger brother of Keshab Chandra Sen, also wrote favourably in his *Indian Mirror*.

As Swami Abhedananda read those articles, he consulted Swami Ramakrishnananda about the future course of action regarding organizing a mass meeting in Calcutta. In this connection it is worth-recalling what Mahendranath Dutta writes in his *Memoirs of Swami Vivekananda*: "At last Swamiji wrote to Shasi Maharaj to organize a meeting in Calcutta where resolution should be adopted felicitating Dr. Barrows, Swamiji and the American Society. This, he wrote, was essential for him in the event of the vilifications of the Christian missionaries. Shasi Maharaj then took Kali Vedanti by confidence, who had by this time fully recovered from his illness, and together they began to devise ways and means to accede to the request of Swamiji".

"No time should be lost ; what is to be done, should be done immediately"—Swami Abhedananda made this remark. He then left Alambazar for Calcutta where he put up at the residence of the late Balaram Bose. Not only he, but several other householder devotees also met him here and after sometime Swami Saradananda too joined him at Calcutta, and all of them now set themselves to the "sacred task", to use Swami Abhedananda's own words. How the brotherhood at Alambazar first came to know about Vivekananda's presence in America, has been related by Abhedananda in the following manner, which, we believe, the readers will find interesting. "When we were passing our days", he writes, "quite happily at the Alambazar Math, the brother-monks as well as other householder devotees were all the more anxious as regards whereabouts of Narendranath whom I met for the last time at Bombay. Since then there was practically no news about him. Then one day in October, 1893, came across in an English daily (the name of which I do not exactly remember now) an article entitled *Swami Vivekananda*, written by one American lady named Marwin Mary Snell. There was also a reference of Sri Ramakrishna's name along with that of Swami Vivekananda in that article. All of us read that article, but we could not identify the person with the name 'Swami Vivekananda'. When I had met him at Bombay, I then knew that he was roaming all over India under the name 'Swami Sachidananda'. So as we read the activities of the person Swami Vivekananda in America, we could on the whole guess that he must be our Narendranath. At first we had thought that the said person must be a Madrasi gentleman. But soon

we came to recognize him as our beloved brother-disciple and none else, and we further presumed that he must have gone to America with somebody's assistance with the object of preaching Indian philosophy and religion. Then our exultation knew no bound and we felt proud of him. We prayed to the Master for his welfare and success".

It was after a few days of this that they received the letter already referred and that cleared everything to them. Swami Abhedananda has also mentioned in his narration about the anti-propaganda carried against him by Protap Chandra Mazumdar as well as by the Christian missionaries in America. His success at Chicago had then crossed the shores of America and spread far and wide. Naturally this was an occasion for the brotherhood of the Ramakrishna Order to feel elated. Now something must be done to prove that he was really a representative of the Hindu religion and so long this was not being done, the bickerings of the missionaries could not be silenced. So thought Swami Abhedananda as soon as the letter from Vivekananda had cleared the mist. There was no time to lose, and how he threw himself whole-heartedly in organizing a meeting in Calcutta represented by the highest and the most eminent persons of the Hindu Society, has been told by Mahendranath Dutta in this way :

"Since his arrival in Calcutta, Kali Vedanti began to work out his plan with great enthusiasm, and for this purpose he went from house to house, meeting some of the distinguished persons and also persuading them to join with him in the matter of the proposed meeting. Not only he went to the Bengalees, but he also went to see some Marwari gentlemen. One evening when Kali Vedanti along with Manomohan and others came to the place of an well-known Marwari gentleman in Burrabazar and explained to him the object of his visit, the gentleman remarked that everything seemed to him to be derogatory. Evidently the person who had crossed the seas and gone to the land of the *Firinghis* (meaning English-speaking Christian people) and who took their food there, must be a fallen one and so forth. Kali Vedanti then realized that it would be impossible to prevail on him through logic and yet there was all the more necessary of his presence in the meeting. Manomohan Mitra, who knew very well about the ways of the Marwaris, suddenly said, 'well Sethji, your name has already been included in the Committee'.

It worked miracle, for to a Marwari gentleman to have his name thus included was considered as a honour and also a privilege, and the moment the said Marwari gentleman came to know of it, he changed his mind and extended his helping hand. Next came the task of selection of the President. Among those whose names were suggested by Manomohan Mitra and Nagendranath Mitra, were such eminent persons as Bhupendra Nath Bose and Charu Chandra Bose, while some went to the place of the Hon'ble Gurudas Banerjee to request him to preside over the proposed meeting. Sir Gurudas Banerjee was preferred by others, particularly for his esteemed and respectable position in the Hindu Society. In fact, he was then the most distinguished person in Calcutta and his name carried weight. But Gurudas Babu did not entertain the request, but showed his indifference to the whole affair. When Kali Vedanti entered into persistent discussion with him, Gurudas Babu told him that he had the authority of a great Sanskrit scholar who opined that the name 'Swami Vivekananda' had not been conferred upon him by his Master and according to Hindu scriptures a *Sudra* (a person who is not a Brahmin and who belongs to the lower order of the Hindu Society) has no right to become a *Sannyasin* and also it was derogatory for a *Sannyasin* to go to the land of the Christians. Finally Gurudas Babu told them: "I refuse to associate myself at this old age to any controversial issue related to social or religious matter". Then a hot discussion arose between them but of no avail. Finally some of them went to see Raja Peary Mohan Mukherjee at his Uttarpara residence and requested him to preside over the proposed meeting to congratulate Swami Vivekananda at his success in America. Evidently he did not know much about Swamiji and his activities in America and, therefore, wanted to have the details. He was then showed some cuttings from the American newspapers and as he read those he became interested. But as soon as he read this particular line in one of the cuttings: 'After having him we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation', the Raja Bahadur became so much elated and enthusiast that he gladly consented to the proposal and said to the visitor: 'you need not tell me anything more. India should remain eternally grateful to him for the highest honour accorded to him in America as a representative of the Hindu religion'".



Swami Abhedananda was very much impressed with the words: "India should remain eternally grateful to him" as spoken by Raja Peary Mohan Mukherjee and in his later days when in a reminiscent mood he used to refer to this beautiful remarks made in respect of his great spiritual brother, Swami Vivekananda. "How true the Raja Sahib was, when he made this remark to me as I went to his place in my thirties!"—he once said this to a disciple. In this connection it would not be out of place to remark that Hon'ble Gurudas Banerjee, who was a staunch Hindu, was certainly wrong in his estimation of Swami Vivekananda. It is curious to find that his conservativeness did not stand when he presided over the meeting which was organized to welcome the Brahma leader, Protap Chandra Mazumdar who also participated to the Parliament of Religions held at Chicago. The Hindu Gurudas Banerjee also considered Mazumdar's participation as an act of pilgrimage. It is therefore somewhat strange to find him showing altogether a different attitude towards the fellow-delegate of Mazumdar, Swami Vivekananda whose resounding success at the World's Parliament of Religions had subsequently become an object of jealousy with the old Brahma leader. This incident shows that time was not yet ripe in India, nor the Indians were still fit to realize fully the historical significance of Swami Vivekananda's emergence in that historic congregation of this Hindu monk of India. The people of Bengal should know all about the glorious achievements of this Hindu monk and this sort of thinking must have stirred the mind of Swami Abhedananda who was then very much anxious to organize a meeting worth its name to record the appreciation of his countrymen for what one of their brother-disciples had done almost single-handed in America. Yes, the leader must be vindicated and his extra-ordinary performance in a far off land must be recognized and appreciated by his countrymen. It must find an expression in a public meeting the like of which Calcutta has not expressed since the days of Keshab Chandra Sen. Indeed the impact of Vivekananda's achievements at Chicago was so great and deep in the mind of Swami Abhedananda that he knew no rest in that hectic time till the Town Hall meeting was appropriately organized to pay suitable honour to one who has really shaken the world. So long, since the passing away of the Master his young disciples were looked upon as mere wandering vaga-

bonds in *gerua garb*. having no fixed aim or purpose in their lines and they became in the eyes of most of their countrymen as objects of ridicule. But then the scene was changed and a big explosion occurred on the platform of the World's Parliament of Religions and its vibrations crossed the waters of the Atlantic. It was time that his countrymen should fully realize the impact of this explosion. This was the motive power behind Swami Abhedananda's almost single-handed effort to organize the meeting in honour of his leader. Was not this noble gesture of his a distinct expression of the New Communion of Apostles which was founded at Antpur ?

From the contemporary records and also from the accounts given by Swami Abhedananda and Mahendranath Dutta we gather that the meeting which was held on the 5th of September at the Calcutta Town Hall, was a very great success. By lowest estimation no less than four thousand people had assembled on that memorable day and the audience consisted of all the celebrities of the city including representatives from various religious sects. Hundreds of enlightened and liberal minded persons were present at the meeting and none felt so happy at this as the organiser of the meeting Swami Abhedananda did. The *Indian Nation* reporting on this memorable meeting wrote : "The city of Calcutta will remember for ever the meeting which was held in the Town Hall on September 5, 1894, to thank Swami Vivekananda and the American people. The success of the meeting which was largely attended by people of all shades of opinion, it must be admitted, was mainly due to the efforts of Swami Abhedananda, a spiritual brother of the Swami. It was presided over by Raja Peary Mohan Mookherjee, C.S.I. and among those present were such distinguished persons as Pandit Madhusudan Smritiratna, Kamakshyanath Tarkabagish, Umacharan Tarkaratna Tarapada Vidyabagish, Ambika Charan Nyayaratna, Justice Gurudas Banerjee, Ganesh Chandra Chandra, Surendranath Banerjee, Kumar Radha Prosad Roy, Rai Jatindranath Choudhury, Rakhil Chandra Chowdhury of Lakulia, Barisal, Manmathanath Mallick, Bar-at-Law, J. N. Banerjee, Bart-at-Law, Narendra Nath Sen (Editor, *Indian Nation*), Bhupendranath Basu and many others". Swami Abhedananda in his Memoirs has written that later on Sir Gurudas Banerjee changed his opinion and attended the meeting and his presence was hailed as very significant.

As he heard the lectures delivered on this occasion by such prominent persons as N. N. Ghosh and Surendranath Banerjee, we can conjecture, a great wave of spiritual enthusiasm must have swept over the mind of Abhedananda as the minds of the audience were swept away with a similar feeling.

We need not prolong any more with the account of this historic meeting and we now proceed with our narration from which we are drifted. But one thing more needs to be mentioned in this connection which concerns the expenses of the meeting. "In order to hold the session of the meeting", writes Swami Abhedananda, "and to make it a success considerable amount was spent which we—myself, Sarat, Shasi, Harimohan Babu and others—procured by collecting from door to door. And when the proceedings of the meeting together with resolution and the letter of welcome reached Swami Vivekananda in America, he returned his thanks and gratefulness to us particularly and to the citizens of Calcutta in general". In a separate letter to Abhedananda, Swami Vivekananda wrote touchingly: "Well done Kali! May the Master bless you all". Once again Abhedananda felt happy. As we recall this incident of this distant date, we can well infer that none felt so happy as Abhedananda did when he came to realize that his beloved leader Narendranath, who was so long an unknown monk has, now blossomed into a world-figure.

The heavy work for days and nights again told on his health, and his brother-monks requested Abhedananda to take complete rest. "I again felt a keen desire", writes the Swami, "to set out for fresh pilgrimage and accordingly I left the Alambazar Math at the beginning of 1895 and went to Nainital where I stayed for a few days and then retired to Almora. I wanted to spend some months at this solitary place, practising austerity". He was extremely fascinated with the magnificent natural scenery of the surroundings and though the nearby hills were full of dense forest, yet the charm of the distant snow-clad mountains which kissed the sky, filled his heart with a sense of renunciation. As usual he had with him a few English and Sanskrit books which he studied as he spent his days in meditation and austerity.

When he was thus spending his days in the solitary surrounding of Almora, one day there came to his hands an English journal, the *Brahmavadin*, which had come into existence on the 14th of September, 1895. As he glanced through the pages of this reli-

gious and philosophical journal, his mind was filled with joy. From the prospectus he came to know all about the journal. As he read those lines : "Under the advice and with the encouragement of Swami Vivekananda, it is proposed to start a weekly journal to be named the *Brahmavadin*. The main object of the journal is to propagate the principles of the Vedantic Religion of India and to work towards the improvement of the social and moral conditions of man by steadily holding aloft the sublime and universal ideal of Hinduism", we can imagine that the mind of the solitary monk must have been filled with a feeling of extraordinary spiritual delight. It did not take him long to correctly envisage how the mind of his leader, now on the other side of the Atlantic, was working. To preach the truth and proclaim the ideal had also been all along regarded by him as a work of great value.

It was now time for the turning from a *Parivrajaka* to a preacher and at the first indication of it, Swami Abhedananda wrote an article entitled, *The Hindu Preacher*, which he then sent to the editor of the said journal and it was duly published in *The Brahmavadin* in its issue dated 23rd November, 1896, under the name 'A Swami'. "This was my first article", later on Abhedananda told to his disciples, "I ever wrote long before I had any idea of coming to the West". This article might as well be regarded as the blue-print of the next glorious phase of Swami Abhedananda's eventful life which we shall now follow. But before that it would be appropriate to discuss briefly about his memorable article which may be regarded as the corner-stone in this subsequent life of Swami Abhedananda.

"A great want of this age was a religious order of the Hindus, which well-equipped with modern learning in science and in philosophy, possessing a knowledge of the world, and acquainted with the spirit of the times will undertake the propagation of the Hindu religion in all countries, and bring into existence the reign of peace and harmony in the midst of warring sects and religions. The fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of men are both surely independent of the religious garb we men wear from time to time." Thus wrote Swami Abhedananda in course of his article, *The Hindu Preacher* in the *Brahmavadin*, which deserves'

to be carefully read. Any proper assessment of this great Vedantist preacher will fall short unless we take into our consideration this article which is also a clear indication of his mind at that time when the news of Swami Vivekananda's success at Chicago reached him. Was he then preparing himself for the new task that awaited him? After successfully organizing the Calcutta Town Hall meeting, when Abhedananda retired to the solitary hills at Almorah, it can be presumed that his mind then was not solely occupied with either meditation or study; evidently it was drifting to another direction—he was seriously thinking of the utter necessity of preaching the Hindu religion abroad. And the more he began to ponder over his leader's unexpected advent on the world stage, the more he came to the conclusion that the *Sadhana* that began at Dakshineswar was now about to have its historical fulfilment. The world was waiting to listen to the universal message of the Master, in whose life was noticed the restatement of the ancient truth of all principal religions of the world. Did it ever occur to the wandering monk that one day he would be called upon to assist his leader in this sacred task? Perhaps, otherwise he would have never written and published the article referred to. The mind of the future Hindu preacher has been very clearly reflected in this article. And to him preaching meant nothing short of a restatement of the lost spiritual culture of the ancient *Rishis*.

It is necessary for the readers of Swami Abhedananda's life to have a fuller understanding of his mind when he wrote that famous article, following the impact of his leader's success at that historic congregation at Chicago. To him Swami Vivekananda now appeared as the mighty apostle of resurgent India and in order to gather the full history of the Parliament of Religions, Abhedananda, according to the account given by Mahendranath Dutta, collected some money with which he procured the report of the proceedings of the Parliament as well as a short account of it as written by Marwin Mary Snell and others who were behind the whole affair since its inception. As he read the report and the short account, he became more and more convinced that time had come when India should speak to the world, but her great spiritual tradition of which the Master was the inheritor and which was later on bequathed to his disciples, some of whom were destined to propagate it abroad. Thereafter came the first

issue of the *Brahmavadin* in his hands which was sent to him at Almorah by Swami Saradananda from Alambazar. The very appearance of this fortnightly journal stimulated Abhedananda's mind to such an extent that he, too, like Vivekananda, felt an inner urge for an organised method of preaching. Incidentally it should be noted that without a full study of this journal which ran for about a decade since the time of its first appearance in 1896, one cannot follow the course of the Vedanta movement in the West, first under the leadership of Vivekananda and later on under that of Abhedananda. Why Vivekananda felt the necessity of having such a journal two years after his arrival in America? The answer to it will be found in the following extract taken from the Editorial Notes that appeared in the first issue of the *Brahmavadin* :

“Europe and America are slowly making out today that the ultimate and the essential teachings of the Vedanta are in complete accord with the most advanced scientific thought of modern time . . . . Western science, poetry and philosophy are all pointing today to what is in many respects very much like the Vedantic solution of the problem of man and the universe as the one solution which is consistent with the truth of things . . . . To us, therefore, belongs the duty of placing before the world our ancient Vedantic ideal of life—an ideal so true and so full of promise to humanity even today—clothed in language suited to the understanding of modern man. . . We are fully convinced that the steady application of the principles of the Vedanta to the practical life of man will not only enable him to obtain for himself an excellent and truly ethical self-culture, but also tend to remove largely the injustice and unnatural inequalities more or less incidental to all forms of social organisations”.

We can conjecture that sitting alone in his secluded abode at the Almorah hills, as Swami Abhedananda read those lines, he must have been fired with imagination as his mind looked backward and forward, spanning the bygone centuries and at the same time looking ahead. As he glanced over the pages of the journal there must have flashed in the mind the picture of Dakshineswar which was the seat of Sri Ramakrishna's self-discipline and realization. Here a child of the Mother possessed “a colossal spiritual capacity by which he mastered in an incredibly short time the truths, himself having practised them, of every

religion and of every form of spiritual discipline, and drove straight to the divine realisation, taking as it were, the kingdom of heaven by violence". Decidedly, his was a finger of Light that painted India onward along the timeless path of the Spirit by which only could she arrive at the goal assigned to her by the dispenser of her destiny. According to the Master, life has no meaning if it cannot be an expression of the Spirit. The truth of life, therefore, lies in the discovery by man of his own divinity. Thus historically speaking, it was Dakshineswar which provided with the real ignition that ultimately helped the explosion which took place towards the closing years of the last century in a far away land which received the Hindu monk of India. As he read with avidity the reports of the Parliament and Snell's short account of it, did the solitary monk at Almorah envisage the Vedanta movement in the West? Did he anticipate in his leader's utterances that in the near future India was to play a significant role for the spiritual uplift of mankind at large? Perhaps he did.

Long before his emergence as a preacher and also as a world teacher, Abhedananda knew that religion was essentially an important element in India's greatness in the past. It was then a thing of experience. But having tied to a fixed social system, it could not grow with time so as to be able to satisfy the growing spiritual aspirations of man and what is worse, faded towards externalism which so dominated in the days of its decline that no enlarging of it or no revival of its true spirit seemed possible. Religion in India, more than in other country, tried to take hold of man's parts of life and draw them Godwards, and thereby to reconcile the spiritual truth with the vital and material existence. Then the advent of Sri Ramakrishna brought to our mind that man must grow by the inner light of the spirit which is the down-fire of a new age for mankind, an age of subjectivism, whose promise in India was shown by the efforts that were made about the close of the last century, indicating that the race is still capable of giving a good account of its old capacity for inward pursuits which brought to it this much-needed experience. But the far deeper meaning of it is that the truth of the integral ideal for which India has stood through the ages, was seen and possessed by Swami Vivekananda who was destined to show the path by which humanity will be led to realize that ideal both in his indivi-

dual and in his collective life. India was destined by her conscious efforts to carry on greater summits of achievement—the spirit she has inherited through the five thousand years of unbroken success. India of the ages is not dead. She lives and has still something to do for herself and for human progress. Did a new vision of India then arise before the solitary monk at Almorah? Yes, it arose and we have the clearest expression of it in his maiden composition, *The Hindu Preacher*.

“Without the institution of preaching no religion can withstand the immoral influence of degeneration or retard the progress of corruption”. Here Swami Abhedananda has given a clear indication of the working of his mind when it was almost ready to be blossomed. That India in her days of spiritual supremacy laid emphasis on the need of preaching has been very clearly stated by him in this article and according to him, the “inspired sages and their chosen disciples were the real preachers of *Sanatana Dharma*, the eternal faith”. His historical instinct has found appropriate expression in the analysis he has given here and his conclusion that “Hinduism was a propagandist religion” all along, is almost irresistible. In his later mature writings, he maintained the same standpoint with all the more emphasis. When he was wandering all over India barefooted, he had felt how Hinduism has “suffered much owing to the want of proper preacher”. It was not for nothing that he levelled his charges against the degeneration which he happened to notice among a class of hemp-smoking Sadhus who claimed themselves a Sannyasins: “Though the Sannyasins were formerly the real preachers of religion in India, most of them now have become illiterate and luxury-loving in their habits, and do not feel the practice of renunciation and the teaching and practising of religion to be their daily duty”. This was no vague inference, but the direct experience of a monk who had the rare privilege of knowing the true condition prevailing among the Sannyasins of India. As we have already stated, the band of Sannyasins which Sri Rama-krishna had created was not just a prototype of what already existed in India; on the contrary, initiated of highest ideals of renunciation and service to all; his spiritual sons were destined to set altogether a new example in the long history of India’s religious evolution. When Abhedananda wrote: “It is now high time for us to send Hindu missionaries like Swami Viveka-



nanda to distant lands for diffusing widely the highest doctrines of the Hindu religion and for bringing men of all creeds under its benign influence", he certainly then had this picture in his mind that the sons of Sri Ramakrishna had a greater and nobler mission in their lives than just to remain content with study, meditation and worship. They were not to stick to any hidebound theory or views for bringing about the much needed spiritual regeneration. The leader had set the ball in motion and it was upto his brother-monks to maintain the continuity of that motion which had the sanction of history as well as the age-long tradition of India behind it. All of them were destined to contribute their mite for spiritual awakening in the Western world and Vivekananda's triumphant success at the World's Parliament of Religions unmistakably pointed to that direction.

Thus the leader's achievement at Chicago must have appeared to Abhedananda in his solitary abode at Almorah, as the starting point "to preach the Vedanta, or for the matter of that, to preach any worthy religion at all is to preach the need for self-improvement and social reform". Gone were the days of mystification and sectarianism as essential parts of any religion. And as he pondered more and more over the issue, it became all the more clear to the future preacher that "truth is truly like a torch, the more we shake it, the more it shines". To any serious reader of Abhedananda's life it would, therefore, appear that by a historical process the budding of the future preacher was complete when the call came to him from his leader to join him in his mission. The wandering monk now took to the mission of a preacher.



## PART FOUR

### The Preacher

*Without a Vivekananda, without an Abhedananda, how far outside India could have travelled the gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, is a question we cannot answer.*

Sister Sivani



## CHAPTER I

### JOURNEY TO LONDON

Seldom has an eminent spiritual personality been conscious of his place in history than was Swami Abhedananda. The year 1896 remains memorable in his life, for it was during the closing months of this year that we find him for the first time in the role of a preacher, following the call from his leader who was then in London. But let us begin the narration from the beginning. We have stated already previously in this book that after his recovery from that fatal illness which kept him completely bed-ridden for four months, he had devoted himself in organising the Town Hall meeting. Then in the early months of 1895, he left Alambazar Math for the final phase of his pilgrimage. His stay at Almorah could not have been more than a few months according to his own statement. "I never thought", writes Swami Abhedananda, "as I wrote the article in the *Brahmavadin* that I would ever have to cross the seas and go to the West for preaching religion at the call of the Swamiji. However, after spending a few months at Almorah, I returned to Alambazar Math, walking all the distance by foot". He must have returned to the monastery not earlier than January, 1896.

Now let us follow the itinerary of Swami Vivekananda since he left New York on April 15, 1896, for his second visit to London. Before sailing for London, he had written to Swami Saradananda at Alambazar, requesting him to proceed to London and accordingly he reached there long before Swami Vivekananda had arrived there. "For several years he had not seen any of the *Gurubhais*. So his meeting with Swami Saradananda was an event of great joy. Swami Saradananda brought all the news from India. He told his brother-monk about the monastery in Alambazar and of every one of the *Gurubhais*. The Swami was full of plans at the time which he communicated to his brother-monk who was lost in wonder at his indefatigable energy and his apostolic fervour".

We also gather from the reports as were sent by Saradananda and published in the *Brahmavadin* that Vivekananda had made a good beginning in London. His work here had begun in

the beginning of May and continued almost at a stretch for a period of six months. Clubs, societies and drawing-rooms opened their doors to him. Students also grouped themselves to hear his lectures. In short, the Swami worked indefatigably in these days, even more than he had done during his previous visit. He was in the highest spiritual mood during his stay in London. But, according to his principal biographers, the Swami's work in London was more spiritual than organised. "He conferred the spirit leaving the form to be organised later". He often said of himself that he was not an organiser, but a preacher. The man who was destined to give perfection to Vivekananda's work in England and America was none else than Swami Abhedananda who alone combined in him the capacity and genius of both, a preacher and an organiser.

Swami Vivekananda's second visit to England was full of tremendous activities and exhausted with work, and he now needed rest. The same time when he was busy with his work in London, he had to look back across the Atlantic, where the demand for a Swami was persistent. So at the end of June, 1896 Swami Saradananda was sent there along with Mr. J. J. Godwin, a distinguished European disciple of Swamiji. Here it should be noted that before he left New York for London, Vivekananda had consolidated his American work by organising the Vedanta movement into a definite society and by issuing his teachings in a book form. Thus came into existence 'The Vedanta Society of New York' of which he was the founder. It was a non-sectarian body with the aim of preaching and practising the Vedanta philosophy, and applying its principles to all religions. It invited members of all religions, creeds and institutions to become its members without changing faith. Toleration and acceptance of all religions were its watchwords: such were its general character. Its members became known as Vedantins and met regularly at appointed times for the purpose of carrying on cooperation and organised work, and for the study and propagation of Vedanta literature. The Society which came into being in the beginning of 1896, reflects the genius of Swami Vivekananda as a preacher, and though initially it was as humble as could be imagined, yet it destined to form the nucleus of the mighty Ramakrishna movement that started under the able leadership of Swami Abhedananda not long after his advent there.

But as Swami Vivekananda's mind was wholly pre-occupied with his work in America and as there was none to look after the newly established Vedanta Society, he thought of sending Swami Saradananda there. When planning to send Saradananda to America, Vivekananda had foreseen the need of such an other able lieutenant to assist him in his work in London. Accordingly he wanted one from Alambazar, and his cable from London was categorical in this respect. Exhausted with the strenuous exertion of his London work the Swami left London in the last days of July for a tour and holidays in the continent. Before starting for his continental tour which lasted for six weeks, Vivekananda had sent a cable to Swami Ramakrishnananda (Sashi Maharaj) which stated : "Send Kali immediately to London to assist me in my work here. I am arranging his passage". Swami Abhedananda who had then just returned from Almorah, was at once shown the cable and by common consent he was chosen. At first there was some hesitation in his mind. Then he sat in deep meditation in the shrine-room of the Math and we can presume that as he sat there alone before the picture of his Master Sri Ramakrishna, pondering over the call of his leader from the other side of the sea, there must have flashed before his mind that time had come for him to emerge out of the obscurity of the wandering life and to take upon himself the sacred task of propagating Hindu philosophy and religion abroad in the lines already laid down by his Master as by his leader ; yet, he had to stand by his side so that India of the ages could once again assert herself as the spiritual leader of the world. But there were other considerations also that had then weighed in his mind. Would he be able to undertake the task for which the leader had called him ? While he was an erudite scholar in Sanskrit, he thought, his knowledge in English, as compared to Vivekananda, was certainly not so high as to embolden him in his journey to the West. The brother-monks, however, encouraged him, saying. "You need not worry Kali, the Master will guide you as he had done when Narendranath went alone and almost penniless to attend the World's Parliament of Religions at Chicago. His will must be done".

Thus encouraged, Swami Abhedananda resolved to respond to the call of his leader, and determined to start for London. The unknown Hindu Sannyasin who had been travelling so long across the length and breadth of India, barefooted, living a life

of severe austerity, in constant meditation and deep study, now prepared himself to make his appearance on the world stage as a preacher and teacher. Thus his life took a new course when the call came from his beloved leader to help him in his work in London. He threw away the loin-cloth of the wandering monk, dressed himself in coat and turban and sailed for England. It is on record that the whole Brotherhood at the Alambazar monastery rose to the occasion to make the necessary preparation for the voyage of Swami Abhedananda. It was in the middle of July, 1896, that a hackeny carriage which was provided by a householder devotee, wheeled out of the premises of the Math towards the Outram Ghat, carrying within it Swami Abhedananda and other brother-disciples. As he entered into his cabin on Board the S. S. Golkonda, the brother-monks bade him a hearty goodbye, uttering, *ayamarambha shubhaya bhavatu*, which meant, may this beginning prove propitious. And how it proved propitious will be seen as we come across the subsequent history of his life as a preacher and a teacher which extended to a period no less than a quarter of a century. Indeed, it was the glorious period of Swami Abhedananda's eventful life and it can stand in comparison only to that of his worthy leader.

He was nearing thirty when Abhedananda left India for England, while Vivekananda was thirty-two when he left India for America. He arrived in London in September, after Swami Vivekananda had finished his continental tour. The voyage was completed in course of five weeks and during this time, he had to remain bed-ridden for a few days due to sea-sickness. When the ship 'Golkonda' anchored at the London port, there was none to receive him, and this distressed him to some extent, as the place was utterly unknown to him. Fortunately, he met with a Bengali gentleman at the jetty and it was from him that Swami Abhedananda gathered that the whereabouts of Swami Vivekananda would be available at the house of Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee. This name was familiar to him, for he was not only a legal luminary of his time, but was also the first Congress President. When he arrived at his place, Abhedananda introduced himself as a spiritual brother of Swami Vivekananda and it is needless to mention that the stranger was cordially received by Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee. He had been staying in London since a long time and he had also occasions to attend some of the public lectures



of Swami Vivekananda in London. It seemed to Abhedananda that Bonnerjee who himself was a native Christian, was full of praise for the work done by Vivekananda. After staying with him for about half an hour, Abhedananda left the place and went to a flat at 14, Grey Cost Gardens, Westminster, where Swamiji was then staying since his return from the continental tour. He was very cordially received by his leader. "I sent the urgent call to help me in my London work. I am very glad that you have come". As he heard those words from Swami Vivekananda, Abhedananda felt very happy. Indeed, as he stood before his leader, there was happiness for both.

—Where is Sarat ?

—I have sent him to America in the company of Godwin.

—Has he been properly groomed for the task ?

—Certainly, I have given Sarat all possible instructions into the manner and matter of the preaching that he would be called upon to take up. You see, Kali, there were repeated requests of my American disciples and students of Vedanta in America ; so I had to send him to New York. He left London at the end of June last.

—How is he doing there ?

—Fine. The reports I have so far received from America are all in his favour.

Then Swami Vivekananda enquired about the situation at the Alambazar Math and when he was apprised of the details by Abhedananda, he seemed to be very happy. "I found Swamiji in the highest spiritual mind during his stay in London"—Swami Abhedananda had made this esteemed remark some years later. One month passed by since his arrival in London and by this time Vivekananda did all in his power to educate the new comer in the responsibilities of his new life. Day after day he trained him so that Abhedananda would be able to carry on the work successfully following upon his own departure for India. For he had already thought of sailing for India at the end of the year and was, therefore, anxious to leave behind a worker, fitted both spiritually and intellectually for the responsible position of a preacher of Indian culture, religion and Vedanta in London. Abhedananda was also introduced to Mr. E. T. Sturdy, to Mr. and Mrs. Sevier and also to other distinguished English disciples of Swamiji. One day he was also taken to 39, Victoria

Street where Mr. Sturdy had engaged a large room for the lectures of Swami Vivekananda. "As I heard one day Swamiji's lecture. I was struck with wonder at his eloquence and exposition of Hinduism", thus said Abhedananda many years later when reminiscing about his early days in London. He was equally amazed to see the progress of his leader's work in London, which was growing apace and the classes were becoming bigger as they went on. One day in the silent evening hours, while discussing of his future plan of work, with his brother-monk, Swamiji told him: "I am hopeful and enthusiastic that with twenty earnest-minded and capable preachers of Vedanta I can convert the West in no time". Abhedananda then realized for the first time the vast importance of his leader's work and also of the responsibility that awaited him. Did he at that time also realize the importance of Swamiji's work in England so far as its influence on the Indian public was concerned? Perhaps he did, for when he heard from his leader that "one blow struck outside of India is equal to a hundred thousand struck within", we can presume that Abhedananda had become fully conscious of the new task he was called upon to undertake.

Thus passed one month and the grooming of the future preacher was complete. Then one day it so happened that Swami Vivekananda while handing over a printed notice to his brother-monk told him: "Kali, you will have to give a lecture at the Christo-Theosophical Society".

"But you were supposed to speak there".

"I am feeling tired; so I have designated you to speak in my stead. Your name has been printed as the main speaker".

"But I have never lectured. It is impossible for me".

"Did I know anything about lecturing when I stood on the platform of the World's Parliament of Religions? Whatever I have achieved, is all by the grace of the Master. Have faith in him and you will blossom as a fine preacher".

So any further argument with him was useless and the future preacher had to submit to the wish of his leader. Then came the memorable day, the 27th October, 1896, in his life as a preacher when Abhedananda gave an excellent address on philosophy and Religion of the *Panchadashi*<sup>1</sup> before the learned audience

<sup>1</sup> A famous work on the Vedanta philosophy of the Vivarana school.

of the Christo-Theosophical Society at Bloomsbury Square, London. Swami Vivekananda was present on that occasion and was highly pleased at the success of his spiritual brother. "Even if I perish out of this plane, my message will be sounded through these dear lips and the world will hear it"—these were the beautiful words with which Vivekananda had expressed in appreciation of the performance of the young preacher. The subsequent career of Swami Abhedananda bears ample testimony to show how prophetic was this utterance.

The following extract from the earlier edition of Vivekananda's major English biography will be read with interest by the readers of Abhedananda's life, for it brings to our mind a complete picture of his brilliant performance on that memorable day at Bloomsbury Square: "One of the events which satisfied the Swami immensely, was the success of the maiden speech of Swami Abhedananda, whom he had designated to speak in his stead at a Club in Bloomsbury Square, on the 27th of October, 1896. The new monk gave an excellent address on the general character of the Vedanta teaching; and it was noticed that he possessed spiritual fervour and possibilities of making a good speaker". A description of this occasion, which affords a beautiful glimpse of the Swami's personality and character, has been written by Mr. Eric Hammond and we quote the following from his report as incorporated in the biography of Swamiji:

"At the club in Bloomsbury Square, which invites and gives reception to the preachers of different creeds and hears what they have to say, Swami Abhedananda appeared. His countenance lacked naturally that expression of interrogation which is often inseparable from the faces of the clerics of the West; an embodiment of calm, of sagacity, of assured attainment, and certainly enwrapped him garment-wise. One, had, in his presence, a sense that he knew. Of his smile one retains glad remembrance. It had in it a kindly radiance, a love deep and steadfast, a something so subtly exquisite that no word but ineffable can be found for it".

From this description we can easily infer that Swami Abhedananda gave ample evidence of his genius as a Hindu preacher in the very maiden speech that he had the occasion to deliver on that memorable 27th of October, 1896, in London. It was an occasion also for his leader to make a prediction which speaks in

a few words though we know a lot about the latent power of this preacher. From Mr. Hammond's account we further learn that "an overwhelming joy was noticeable in Swami Vivekananda in his scholar's success. Joy compelled him to put at least some of itself into words that rang with delight unalloyed. It was the joy of a spiritual father over the achievement of a well-beloved son, a successful and brilliant student. The Master (Swami Vivekananda) was more than content to have effaced himself in order that his brother's opportunity should be altogether unhindered. The whole impression had in it a glowing beauty indescribable". Mr. Hammond also informs us how after the meeting was over and people were passing out of the house, Swami Abhedananda, with them, was besieged by questions and by kindly praise and thanks.

It was thus with great confidence that Swami Vivekananda left the entire charge of his London work to Swami Abhedananda before sailing for India in December, 1896. Left alone in the field, Abhedananda held regular classes, delivered public lectures, and devoted much time in answering questions and queries arising either from the lecture on the position of Vedanta generally. From the contemporary report we gather that Abhedananda ably carried out the Vedanta work in London during the absence of Swami Vivekananda. And when he was thus working hard to give a permanent footing to the London Vedanta Society, all of a sudden a call came to him from the other side of the Atlantic. It is recorded in the original edition of Swami Vivekananda's English biography that the Vedanta movement both in England and in America was carried on successfully by Swami Abhedananda and Swami Saradananda respectively. As regards the former's work in London, it has been stated: Swami Abhedananda who had taken charge of the classes in London, continued them ably, and daily added to his own power as a teacher. He also conducted classes in Wimbledon and other places and began a series of lectures from January 12th, after the Christmas and New Year's holidays. His exposition of Vedanta was very lucid and instructive. The plan pursued was rather different from that formerly followed. One lecture given early in the week in the morning was repeated to a different audience assembled on another evening; a portion of this evening and the whole of another morning was given to questions and objections.

When Swami Sarādananda was called back by Swami Vivekananda to help his work in India, the work in America needed an able preacher and so went the directive from the leader in Calcutta to his brother-monk in London, to proceed to New York. There were also urgent and repeated calls from the Vedanta Society of New York, for a Swami to take charge of the centre. Thus when he was becoming more and more popular in London, Abhedananda was obliged to leave for America in the latter part of July, 1897, after working for some ten months in London.

## CHAPTER II

### THE VEDANTA MOVEMENT IN THE WEST

Before we proceed any further with our narration, we propose to present the readers in this chapter with some historical account of the Vedanta movement in the West, which forms the real background of the lines of both Swami Vivekananda and Swami Abhedananda, when they went out as the spiritual ambassadors of India. Their lives are so vitally connected with this movement that no account of their life-story would be completed without any reference to this movement which started with the advent of the first Hindu monk of India on the world stage towards the end of the last century. Let us, therefore, try to follow the trend of the Vedanta movement in the West which was first organised by Swami Vivekananda and then brought to its historical fulfilment by Swami Abhedananda who really gave to it the content and form as well as the direction and purpose in course of his twenty-five years of incessant work in the continents of Europe and America. To know the history of the Vedanta movement, therefore, is to know the real activities of Swami Abhedananda, the great Hindu preacher of modern India.

It is known to the readers of Vivekananda's life and also of the Ramakrishna Vedanta movement in modern world that from the year 1893 to 1897 when he visited America for the second time, his life was a period of sustained activity insofar as it was related to the Vedanta movement in the Western countries. The history of the Vedanta movement is nothing but the record of the unfolding of the classical old faith known as Hinduism to the people of America and Europe who had but shallow idea and almost scanty knowledge about it. Even though one can trace Hindu influence on Western thought in such thinkers as Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer and Emerson. Yet the Americans as a whole had no clear knowledge about the real truth of Hinduism or the universal doctrines underlying it. The memorable nineteenth century forms a record of remarkable awakening and unfoldment—nowhere more so than in India. In social, moral, political, cultural and religious reform it marks the period of India's renaissance. The time has come for the devout student

of history to understand and appreciate the play of spiritual forces that brought it about. What is genius but a living focus through which moral, social, cultural and spiritual forces radiate? In fact, social or moral reconstruction is but the natural outcome of this concentration of forces in outstanding personalities or geniuses.

Such a genius was Swami Vivekananda who, from the closing years of the nineteenth century, became the dynamic centre of the Hindu revival movement, purely based on the universal doctrines of Vedanta. To study him and his predecessors is to study the time-force or time-spirit and its dispensations for the uplift of humanity. To weed out what is temporal, adventitious and unessential and to get to the real substance of the man and his message, is worth the quest of every earnest seeker of truth and freedom. And when that is done, the conviction is overwhelming that the concentrated force that was Swami Vivekananda and after him, Swami Abhedananda, is more really alive today than it ever was. It is futile to attempt a study of Swami Vivekananda the preacher regardless of his moral and spiritual ancestry. The first of his immediate predecessors, was Raja Ramohan Roy who can be called as the spiritual grand-father of modern India. The Raja is truly regarded as the father of the Indian renaissance of the nineteenth century. He is also a great path-finder. There was not one major avenue of progress which his herculean activity did not traverse. He stood in solitary grandeur in the midst of utter darkness and sent forth his clarion call to freedom of thought, freedom of action, freedom of worship, and freedom from all forms of abuses. India was not then ready to accept the catholicity of his ideal or his cosmopolitan ideal of worship. Anyway, a beginning or a revival was made and the foundation of universalism was laid by him.

Then appeared the second path-finder and the greatest universal mind of modern India—Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. According to the estimate of the great men of both East and West, Sri Ramakrishna "was a rare combination of individuality and universality, personality and impersonality. Indeed, he was a new message of the soul, the symphony of India. From the Himalayan heights, never achieved by any prophet, Sri Ramakrishna brought to humanity the greatest bliss and harmony. A living embodiment of the Sanatana Dharma, his life demonstrated

Why was it felt necessary by some thinking mind at the close of the last century that the religions of the world should be brought together? Did the real motive for organising the Parliament ever enter the minds of those who were at the forefront of it and who were mainly responsible for it? "Whatever the divine motives may have been, the human motives lying behind the organization were mixed". In the opinion of Swami Vivekananda, the Parliament of Religions at Chicago was organised with the intention of proving the superiority of Christian religion over other forms of faith and it was intended for a 'heathen show' before the world. Vivekananda was never wrong in his assumptions, nor he was unfair in this judgment of the Congress which introduced him to the western world. A close reading of the accounts of both the preparations and the proceedings leaves one without a doubt that the parliament at Chicago was permeated with the Christian prejudice. "That Christianity would gloriously and unequivocally prove its superiority was a foregone conclusion in the minds of many of its promoters"—this remark of Marie Louise Burke is worth-remembering in this context. But the mind that first conceived the grand idea was far above such narrow thinking. What Charles Carrot Bonnes, the liberal-minded lawyer of the time, wanted through such gathering was nothing but an opportunity for promoting understanding and goodwill among all seekers of truth. It can be said in his own words: "I was thus led to believe that if the great religious faiths could be brought into relations of friendly intercourse, many points of sympathy and union would be found, and the coming unity of mankind in the love of God and the service of man be greatly facilitated and advanced". Dr. John Henry Barrows who was Chairman of the General Committee and who was mainly responsible for giving shape to Bonney's dream, also held similar views.

But Swami Vivekananda was farsighted and intelligent enough to look beyond and to him when he made his appearance there, such patronizing complacency had but little meaning. To him the historical forces were important and he knew for certain in his heart when he first came to know of the contemplated congregation, that as the nineteenth century was drawing to a close, it was destined to close with a bang, indicating the doom of rampant materialism. The world was ready to march on the



path of spiritual enlightenment, and the sense of universal brotherhood was about to dawn. That was the decree of the historical process which he alone could realize. And because of this, "despite the obvious and strong prejudice of a large portion of the Christian ministry, and despite the rampant materialism of the age, thousands of men and women trustfully looked to the Parliament for the fulfilment of the first and broader objectives laid down by the Committee". And no wonder that following the momentous gathering, "there was in America a sincere and open-minded search for spiritual truth and an eagerness to welcome it wherever it might be found". Gone were the days of bigotry and there began to appear slowly but perceptibly a new consciousness which indicated the path to inward tranquil peace and universalism. And when the Hindu monk had declared from the platform of the Parliament of Religions that this path could be found only in the doctrines of Vedanta, the highest conclusion of Indian thought, the people of the New World listened to him as they had never done before. But that is another story and the readers of Vivekananda's life are certainly familiar with it.

Subsequent history has unmistakably shown that the preachings of Swami Vivekananda, since his first appearance at Chicago gathering, had one effect which has been very beautifully expressed by Romain Rolland in his book, *The Life of Vivekananda*. Romain Rolland said: "It would be matter of deep interest to know exactly how far the American spirit had been impregnated directly or indirectly by the infiltration of Hindu thought during the nineteenth century; for there can be no doubt that it has contributed to the strange moral and religious mentality of the modern United States. . . . The thought of the United States, fermenting and working for half a century was more ready than any in the West to receive Vivekananda". We also gather from the contemporary reports in the American press that hardly had he begun to preach to the men and women a thirst for his message came flocking to him. They came from all the walks of life. We all know that "in America, Vivekananda undertook a series of apostolic talks and lectures with the object of spreading over this immense spiritual stretch of fallow land the Vedantic seed, and watering it with Sri Ramakrishna's in of love". And the sprouting of the seed took place very soon—sooner than he had probably imagined—in the shape of

growing interest noticeable in the minds of a large number of religious minded but intellectually alert men and women. As he was a master-preacher, it did not take him long to realize what should be done to intensify that interest and also to give to it a permanent basis. Thus came into being a sort of movement that subsequently came to be known as the Vedanta movement.

Dr. Annie Besant recollecting her impression of Swami Vivekananda's presence and performance at the Parliament wrote long afterward: "The dignity and inborn sense of worth and power still were there, but all was subdued to the exquisite beauty of the spiritual message which he had brought, to the sublimity of that matchless evangel of the East, which is the heart, the life of India, wondrous teaching of the self, enraptured the huge multitude hung upon his words; not a syllable must be lost, not a cadence missed". Now what was this message that captivated the religious minded people of America? It was the message of universal love and tolerance and was with the golden touch of it that Vivekananda was successful in rousing the American mind to a sense of higher spiritual values. The burden of his talks, class-lectures and discourses in America were predominantly spiritual, and the readers of his life knew how he had to remove the Western prejudices that initially barred the way of his spiritual message. But was it the message of the Hindu monk that brought the movement into existence? More than that, it was the historical process which was instrumental in ushering the era of spiritual enlightenment in the New World. A few words in this context to explain this intangible thing—historical process will not be out of place here.

The life of a nation like that of an individual, is an unbroken series of experiences whose final object is the development of the inward nature or character. In the Christian civilization of the Western world, cycles form and close with marvellous rapidity, all seem to move with the lightning speed. This is specially the case since the close of the thirteenth century of the era when the gigantic power of the Roman Catholic Church reached its climax and set on its downward march. There and then the impetus of civilization became tremendous and centuries of progress crowded in a few years. Was that great impetus and rapid progress due to the fact that the Church was

being subdued? Certainly not. It was due to the fact that the new rising power was that of the Legist and the Banker, that the lawyer had replaced the priest, that gold had replaced God, that the mighty era of commerce and industry, the parent of materialism, had set in. In the mad rush for wealth, system after system, scheme after scheme was devised, adopted and worked out and cast away.

In the evolutionary phase of a new system which is the constructive period, the minds of the people are full of buoyancy and hope and new ideas and new creations intoxicate men with delight and freshness. But when the climax is reached and when the constructive powers are exhausted and disintegration sets in, then the buoyance and the hope of the people come to a stop, and feeling of sadness, doubt and weariness creep over them. It is the phase of transition in that cycle. The throbbings of the great national bosom, therefore, indicates the beatings of the hearts of men. This transitional period is always characterised by religious and philosophical revival. Men realize that material interests and hopes are as deceptive as they are alluring and consequently they turn to spiritual knowledge and permanent consolation. Religious and philosophical thoughts and ideas, theories and doctrines spring up all around and a wave of spirituality sweeps over the land.

The Western world towards the close of the last century, as we all know, passed through one of those phase of transition, and the minds were then eagerly seeking for some consoling truths. The gospel of Christ was read by many who hitherto denounced it as a mass of absurdities, and all the great religious teachers of the past found themselves enshrined in the hearts of a large number of people. Among the religious and philosophical ideas that came before the public investigation, those of the Orient occupied a prominent place. The teachings of Buddha and other spiritual teachers became more and more familiar and appreciated. But there was one religious system which powerfully appealed to the earnest seekers of truth and that was Vedanta. All those who heard it, expounded in a clear and lucid manner, rendered homage to its lofty, boundless, inspiring spirit. To the intelligent who, in necessity, had rebelled against the limitation of a dualistic system of religion, Vedanta with its all embrac-

cing thoughts and all-inclusive principles threw out a fascination which was irresistible.

The visit of Swami Vivekananda to America and England had demonstrated that there existed a thoughtful educated body of people in those countries which had only to be found and properly approached to benefit very largely from the life-giving stream of Indian thought. How is it that following the preachings or teachings of Swami Vivekananda the Western mind was able to make application to its own system of religion of the Vedanta teachings? In this connection, it is perhaps worth-recalling what a western disciple,<sup>1</sup> of both Vivekananda and Abhedananda (from the former he got his initiation (*diksha*) and from the latter, *sannyasa*) has recorded in his book, *With the Swamis in America* and we quote the following from the last chapter of the book: "What Vedanta has really done for us is not always clearly understood. It has been a great factor in liberating the Western mind from religious bondage and to clear the atmosphere of superstitions. This, however, science had also done. But the work of science was entirely of negative nature. In a religious sense it was destructive. It left the West stranded as far as religion is concerned. Except, of course, with her devotees, religion got a bad name in the West. The word religion became a stigma. Then came theosophy, Christian science and New Thought—all trying to bridge the gulf between belief and unbelief. But the scientific mind was not satisfied—new superstitions replacing old superstitions, was the verdict. And then at last came Swami Vivekananda with pure Vedanta. The liberals could accept or reject, but they could no longer sneer. Scientists would demand further proof, but they could not condemn. Those who were religiously inclined, but could not follow the Church, found a new opening. Here was religion, philosophy and science combined. Heart and intellect could both be satisfied. There was no necessity of tearing from old traditions altogether. One could remain true to the old faith, but that old faith was reinterpreted and cleansed of its later growths. In short, it was a reconciliation, a middle way".

Thus Vedanta carried a message of hope and security, a message that outraged neither religion, nor philosophy nor

<sup>1</sup> Swami Atulananda.

science. Evidently when the people of the new world America and also of Europe listened to this universal message from the life of the Hindu monk, they must have realized that it embraced all that was best in the culture of the West. "Vedanta was the heaven that leavened the thought-world in the West. And when the mantle of Vivekananda fell on Abhedananda, the leavening process continued to assent its influence as the subsequent history reflects".

When the Vedanta movement came into being following his triumphant success at the Parliament and as it began to gain ground, Swami Vivekananda as the originator and leader of the movement, was conscious of the need of its influence on individuals. This question of the individual takes an important place in both his and his immediate successors life's work. "And those who have watched closely the work of the Swamis in America and elsewhere, can testify to the fact, many lives have been changed through the self sacrificing efforts of the Swamis". And this was the crowning success of Swami Vivekananda as a religious teacher and a spiritual leader. The most tangible result of the Vedanta movement was as though the soul of American which had long asked for spiritual sustenance, had been answered. Their whole existence had become saturated with living spirituality that Vivekananda embodied.

In the long history of human civilization we have seldom come across with such a religious movement as the one we are discussing here. Indeed the Vedanta movement in the West which was originated by Swami Vivekananda, is characterized as something unique in so far as its spiritual appeal is concerned. Hitherto many learned scholars have attempted to make some assessment of the significance of this movement, but none of them have viewed it in its proper perspective. Was it purely a religious movement in the accepted sense of the term? Certainly not. It was something else which the rising generation of the twentieth century needed most. Europe and America have made out today that the ultimate and essential teachings of Vedanta are in complete accordance with the most advanced scientific thought of modern times. Western science, poetry and philosophy are all printed today to what is in many respects very much like the Vedantic solution of the problem of man and the universe as the one solution which is consistent with the truth of

things. India where the light of the Vedantic wisdom was first lit, was destined to become the guiding light of all mankind. So thought Rammohan as early as the twenties of the last century and by a historical process it took more than half a century to realize the truth of it. The genius which realized it was Swami Vivekananda. Of course there were others who went abroad before him, but none of them ever thought of placing before the world our ancient Vedantic ideal of life—an ideal so true and so full of promise to humanity—clothed in language suited to the understanding of modern man. Vivekananda and his successors in the West had the talent to adopt the critical comparative and historical methods of looking at things in preaching the sublime thoughts of Vedanta in the West.<sup>1</sup>

In this connection we are reminded of a classic utterance of Swami Abhedananda to whose constructive genius and untiring labour of the movement owed its success. "Truth is like a torch", said he in course of one of his public lectures in America in 1897, "the more we shake it, the more it shines. The sublime rationality of Vedanta can allow the roughest handling of it, without the slightest injury to itself. The fiercest light of day may be made to beat upon the Vedanta, and there will not be found a single ugly feature or dark spot exposed to view". And when to some of his western critics Swami Vivekananda repeatedly asserted that: "You say that it is a secret and hidden religion. In submitting to this charge, I would like to point out that the vedanta religion is secret and hidden only in the sense that it is other than the plain and the patent forms of ritualistic religion and worship, in the sense that it is wholly based upon self-restraint and self-culture—upon each individual realising his God

<sup>1</sup> And it will not be out of place to mention here a fact that being a direct and ardent follower of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the new Prophet of the mankind, Swami Vivekananda (and even Swami Abhedananda) did not preach at first even his Master's sublime life and teachings before the Western people, because he (Abhedananda to) knew that the then Western country was not prepared enough to grasp or appreciate the loftiest ideals of life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, and so he (Abhedananda also) preached at first before the Western country the sublime thoughts and ideal of Vedanta which knows no ideas of sectarianism and bigotry, rather which absolutely maintains an unifying outlook and universal love for all, irrespective of caste, creed and colour. And it was for this reason that Swami Vivekananda delivered the lectures on life and teachings of his Master, Sri Ramakrishna (which was published in book form by the name *My Master*), both in England and America. in the later days.

in himself. Not only the Kingdom of God but also God Himself is within you. This is the grandest mystery of all mysteries, and the only one that the religion of Vedanta ever consciously proclaims". This was, in short, the attitude of the whole Vedanta movement in the West, and this is why it could so easily gain ground there unless there were historical forces behind this self-imposed task of Vivekananda and his successors and it is very much doubtful whether their efforts would have met with success. Were they—Vivekananda and Abhedananda—preachers by accident? No, they were not. If one reads carefully the latter's article *The Hindu Preacher* it would be abundantly clear to any lay reader that at least so far as, Swami Abhedananda was concerned, the course of his thinking was towards one direction—to preach Hinduism and the Vedantic thought abroad and as he was conscious about the new changes in the world order, he too, like Swami Vivekananda, was perfectly aware of the new methods of preaching when he went out with that mission, at the call of the leader.

It was an Herculean task on the parts of both Swami Vivekananda and Swami Abhedananda to make the movement a success. It took a long time for the seeds sown by them to bear fruit. How an westerner viewed Swami Vivekananda's work in America could be best understood from a letter to the editor of the *Brahmavadin*, and we reproduce below some extracts from this letter which is dated New York, January 12, 1896 and which was published in the *Brahmavadin* Madras, in its issue dated February 15, 1896: "The wonderful success, which the Swami Vivekananda achieved in spreading the religious and philosophical ideas of the Hindus in our country, may lead one to the erroneous conclusion that this happy result is due to a coincidence of favourable circumstances, rather than to the extraordinary ability of the agent chosen by destiny to carry out this difficult task. It is only by studying the *fin de secle* condition of our country, by taking cognizance of the antagonistic forces that had to be coped with, and considering the numerous difficulties to be overcome in this attempt, that we came to fully appreciate the grandeur of the work accomplished, and to realize that the great success accompanying it is solely due to the personality of the agent, to his extraordinary moral, intellectual, and spiritual endowments, and to his exceptional energy and will-power and to no other

all his theology would be crushed under the weight of western civilization, western philosophy and western science. So sure were they of their triumph that they invited him, in New York, to lecture before their society, anxious to show to their numerous followers how easily religious claims can be refuted by the powerful arguments of their logic and pure reasoning. I shall never forget that memorable evening when the Swami, accepting the challenge, appeared, single-handed, to face the matodoses of materialism, all arrayed with their heaviest armour of law, and reason, and logic, and all the stock phrases calculated to awe and terrify the ignorant mass. Imagine their surprise and consternation when they found that, far from being intimidated by these big words, he proved himself a master in wielding their own weapons, and as familiar with the arguments of materialism, as with those of the Advaita philosophy—he showed them that their much vaunted western civilization consisted principally in the development of the one to destroy their fellowmen, that their western science could not answer the most vital question of life and being, that the very idea of matter was a metaphysical conception, and that it was the much despised metaphysics upon which ultimately rested the very basis of their materialism. The powerful effect of this lecture could be seen on the following day, when numbers of the materialistic camp came to sit at the feet of the Hindu monk and listen to his sublime utterances on God and religion”.

Thus Vivekananda had first to clear the ground and lay a deep foundation for the grand edifice to be built. The same correspondent gave in his subsequent despatches from New York the accounts of the rapid progress of Vivekananda's work there and from these accounts one can have a clear idea of how the Vedanta movement in the west started and how it gathered momentum when Swamiji left the entire movement to the charge of his able lieutenant, Swami Abhedananda. We shall have occasions to refer to this movement again as we come to relate the story of Abhedananda's life as the preacher of the Vedantic gospel in the New World which began towards the end of 1897. The Vedanta movement in the West has been characterized by Wendell Thomas, the author of the book, *Hinduism Invades America* as the 'Ramakrishna movement in America'. Truly so. For, in the larger context of history it can be very appropriately



said that the *sadhana* that began at Dakshineswar and the phenomenal experiment of spiritual synthesis that was carried out by Sri Ramakrishna, ultimately found their logical fulfilment in the movement which was initiated by Swami Vivekananda and consolidated by Swami Abhcdananda, who were the most beloved disciples of the Master, and who were particularly trained and taught and commissioned by him to become the spiritual messengers of India to the West. They were not merely visionaries, neither they were so-called religious missionaries, they were, on the contrary, the chosen tools of destiny.

## CHAPTER III

### THE NEW PREACHER

Now we come to the most spectacular period in the life of our subject. Indeed the life of Swami Abhedananda as the new preacher in America is so crowded with memorable incidents and interesting episodes that it would require volumes to describe them in full. To appreciate the glory of his mission and the greatness of his achievements as a Vedantist preacher, one should first look at his personal diaries which Swami Abhedananda used to maintain regularly since he went to America in 1897. Next in importance is the voluminous press-cuttings of the period which he used to collect and preserve methodically as records of his manifold activities in the West. Any study of his activities in America spreading over a quarter of a century would, therefore, be incomplete unless one looks at these valuable records. His diaries, it may be noted here, are of perennial interest to those who love and value the civilization and culture of India. They bring to our view many a sealed page in the history of the Ramakrishna movement abroad, while the year-to-year press-cuttings provide us with such informations as are indispensable for proper appraisal of Abhedananda's role as the leader of the Vedanta movement and builder of the Vedanta society in America. We shall, therefore, refer to in our subsequent narration his diaries and the press-cuttings which reflect distinctly the attitude of the American mind toward the Vedantic gospel.

There is also another book which gives an authentic account of the activities of Abhedananda in America. We are speaking of Mrs. Mary LePage's (Sister Shivani—a disciple of Swami Abhedananda) book entitled *Swami Abhedananda in America (Apostle of Monism)*, which was published shortly after the passing away of Swamiji Maharaj. We gather from the publisher's Note incorporated in this book that the authorities of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Math at Calcutta for several years were eagerly expecting a published volume of Swami Abhedananda's achievements and activities in the West by one of his able American disciples. The book, though not a very big one, is full of interesting accounts based on the author's first hand knowledge

and a glance through the pages of it would enable the readers to see the Swami in various phases of his magnificent character as the Hindu preacher and also an able exponent of Vedanta. "It also reveals the Swami as a loving Master healing the wounds of many souls that came upto him from far and near". The book is equally valuable to some extent in so far as it throws light upon the history of the Vedanta movement in the West. And along with Mary LePage's book, mention should also be made of Wandell Thomas's highly informative book, *Hinduism Invades America* which has been already referred to in the previous chapter. No account of Vivekananda or Abhedananda's life in America and their respective roles in propagating the Vedantic doctrine in the West would be completed without any reference to this book, which, according to its learned author, "is simply a study of the amazing adventure of an Eastern faith in a Western land. . . . It is an account of the serious impact on American life of Hindu Philosophy and culture especially in the form of organized religion". So Mr. Thomas's book is also of primary importance to a fuller understanding of Swami Abhedananda's activities in America. Historically speaking what Vivekananda, or his successors did in America, was not merely the propagation of Vedanta. It was more than that, it was in the sense the spiritual conquest of the world by India, ridden by materialistic thinking which characterised the closing decades of the last century and the early decades of this century. Therefore to understand the spiritual as well as the historical implications of the Vedanta era in the New World, we have to look as much to Abhedananda's personal diaries and the files of press-cuttings as collected by him as to the books mentioned above.

The Bloomsbury Square speech of Swami Abhedananda must have left Swami Vivekananda with the impression that his choice of his substitute was destined to prove correct. It was clear to him that his brother-monk's religious attainments and ethical scholarship would stand him in good stead and if he was sent to America where the work was then gathering force, Abhedananda would certainly prove suitable for the work. It is on record that Vivekananda was of firm conviction that his brother-monk, Abhedananda was a born preacher, and wherever he would go, he would succeed. In this connection one is also reminded of what Swami Vivekananda wrote in a letter to one

of the monks at the Alambazar Math : "Kali delivered his maiden speech yesterday at a friendly Society's meeting. It was good and I liked it ; he has the making of a good speaker in him, I am sure". The subsequent life-story of this young preacher has proved beyond doubt that Vivekananda was neither wrong in his estimate, nor he made any exaggeration about the capabilities of his beloved brother-monk on whom, later on, his mantle fell. It would be helpful to us in appraising the full meaning of the life and mission of one of the greatest son of India, if we remember what an American proper described of Swami Abhedananda in those words ! "Swami Abhedananda is a philosopher by profession, a lecturer by choice and a poet by nature". And as we proceed in our narration, we will find in him the combination of all these traits in a remarkable degree which distinguished him from the rest of the preachers after Swami Vivekananda.

The Vedanta era in the West virtually commenced on the very day and at the very moment when Swami Vivekananda delivered his historic speech at the Parliament of Religions in 1893. and with the dawning of the era came the movement when the Vedanta Society was established in less than two years at New York, with a view to prepare a permanent platform for the propagation of the lofty ideas of the Vedanta philosophy. The activities of the Society however gathered momentum, with the advent of Swami Abhedananda in 1897. Both Swami Vivekananda and Swami Abhedananda had but one mission in their respective lines—to place before the world India's ancient Vedantic ideal of life—an ideal so true and so full of promise to humanity—clothed in language suited to the understanding of modern man.

A brief account of his life in London in company with Swami Vivekananda would not be out of place here. The few months that Abhedananda had the opportunity of living in London with his leader were not in vain. During this period he had the advantage of learning and unlearning many things that proved helpful to him when he went to America to take charge of the Vedanta Society there. The new preacher had so much impressed his English audience by his first speech that his leader was quick to take notice of it and later on he made this remark to Abhedananda : "You have a resonant voice which has

carrying powers". Indeed it was so. Just as morning shows the day, so his London, Bloomsbury Square speech had all the indications of a future successful preacher. This was the characteristic of his oration which developed in course of time to such an extent that he came to be regarded in America as the most powerful and profound Vedantist preacher and thinker next to only Swami Vivekananda.

At the Great Court Garden residence in London they all lived together—Vivekananda, Abhedananda and Goodwin. Mr. Goodwin was indispensable to Swamiji in taking down the notes of almost all his important lectures since the time this brilliant Englishman dedicated himself at the feet of Vivekananda. Vivekananda was really fortunate in having in this disciple a faithful and intelligent recorder of his speeches which are now regarded as the gems of philosophical and cultural thinking. Abhedananda had no such Goodwin to record his speeches which were thousands in number. This perhaps is the reason that what is available to us today, is but a fraction of his lectures and discourses spreading over a quarter of a century. Mr. Goodwin used to do the shopping while Abhedananda looked after the domestic affairs including the cooking of food. The Court Garden establishment had no servant or maid-servant and each member performed his own washing and other works. Sometimes Vivekananda helped his brother-monk in cooking. His English friends would be frequently invited to taste the Indian dishes prepared at his London residence. At the instance of Abhedananda once it so happened that Mr. Goodwin tried his hands in cooking without success. It was on this occasion that Vivekananda is said to have made this humorous remark: "How can one adept in taking notes of my lectures hope to shine in other vocations?"

There were occasions when the young preacher would accompany his leader to various places where the latter was scheduled to deliver lectures, and he would listen minutely each and every cadence of his delivery and the magnificent style of his oration. It is not unlikely that though Abhedananda had his own way of making speeches, yet he must have imbibed some of the traits of his leader's public speeches or private discourses. It so happened that sometimes the Swami would become so much inspired that hours would glide by before he finished his speech. But the after effects were damping to his health and he had to

single remark shows the high esteem in which Swami Vivekananda was held by distinguished person of Europe in those days.

We can imagine that his association with such eminent thinkers must have afforded to Swami Abhedananda an opportunity to study the mode of thinking prevailing in the European mind at that time, regarding Indian religion and philosophy. His stay in London was equally fruitful in seeing for himself the true import and character of his leader's work in England and the interest it created there. "His work seemed to me to be more spiritual than organised"—so remarked Abhedananda later on. As he had occasion to accompany Vivekananda to various public meetings, it became more and more clear to Abhedananda how even distinguished clergymen were caught up in this grandeur and freshness of the thought Swamiji sent forth. He also saw for himself how distinguished intellectual and society people were captivated and how the great moment was about to be born in the name of the Master. "He centred the spirit, leaving the form to be organised later, in whatsoever way it might be possible"—the implication underlying this remark of Swami Abhedananda is worth-remembering when we come to consider his life as a preacher of Vedanta. This task of organising the movement on a sound footing, as we all know was left to Abhedananda who himself was an organiser, a preacher and a monk all combined into one ; and it is in this sense that his work in America must be regarded. It may well be said that his grooming as the new preacher of the Ramakrishna Order was almost complete when Vivekananda left for India, leaving the charge of his London work to Abhedananda.

Regarding his work in London during the absence of the leader, we quote the following from the earliest edition of the principal English biography of Swami Vivekananda : "Turning now to the Vedanta movement carried on in the West during the Swamiji's absence, we notice that Swami Abhedananda who had taken charge of the classes in London, continued them ably, and daily added to his own power as a teacher. He also conducted classes in Wimbledon and other places and began a series of lectures for January 12th, after the Christmas and New Year's holdings. His exposition of Vedanta was very lucid and instructive. The plan pursued was rather different from that formerly followed. One lecture given early in the week

in the morning was repeated to a different audience assembled on another evening and the whole of another morning was given to questions and objections arising either from the lecture or the Vedanta position generally. This new plan gave great satisfaction, and several positions and difficult points were heartily worked upon and much light was thrown upon them. There was no doubt that he was becoming more and more popular”.

It was just at the beginning of his popularity in London, that Abhedananda had to respond to the urgent and repeated calls from the Vedanta Society of New York, and he was obliged to leave for America in the latter part of July, 1897, after working for some ten months in London. The entire Brotherhood now rose to the occasion to preach to the world the Master's message of universal love and truth. Vivekananda, Saradananda, Abhedananda, Turiyananda and other members of the Brotherhood now dedicated themselves to this great task and through it there emerged, after many years, India as the spiritual teacher of the world which then stood at the crossroads of materialism and science.

## CHAPTER IV

### ABHEDANANDA IN AMERICA—EARLY PHASE

“We have to grow like the flowers, close to the earth, in beauty and simplicity; then the fragrance will do its work like the fragrance of the flowers”. These words of Swami Abhedananda reflect to some extent the true character of his life as a Hindu preacher. A close study of this part of his life reveals to us that it actually grew like a flower, close to the earth, and the process of its growth went on spontaneously for a period of twenty-five years, spreading all the while its fragrance all over the New World and Europe. That fragrance has left its lasting effect on the minds of the religiously inclined people in those two continents as well as in the land of his birth, and history has accorded to him a niche in the Hall of Fame as the most remarkable Vedantic thinker and preacher. The fragrance came out of the innermost recess of his soul from the very moment he appeared on the world stage. Thus it was inevitable that the young preacher who landed at the Port of New York on that sixth day of August, 1897, was destined to fulfil a mission that was sanctioned by history and sanctified by the age-long spiritual tradition of India. Before going abroad when he wrote: “It is now high time for us to send Hindu missionaries like Swami Vivekananda to distant lands for diffusing the highest doctrines of the Hindu religion”—was he then thinking in his mind about the role that awaited him? It is not unlikely. And the young preacher who set his foot on the soils of America, was fully equipped, as the subsequent story of his life will reveal to us.

“On Friday, August 6, 1897 A.D., at 3-30 p.m. after sailing from Southampton by S. S. ‘St. Paul’ of the American Line, I landed at the port of New York, the commercial capital of the United States”, thus begins the American diary of Swami Abhedananda. The first difficulty which he had to encounter on landing there was with the Customs authorities in respect of a box he was carrying with him. The box contained a few Sanskrit books on the Vedas, Upanishads and the six systems of Hindu Philosophy, which he brought from India at the request of his leader. They demanded an exorbitant duty on those books,



but he had no such money to pay. Naturally he was in a great fix as he was alone and no one was there to receive him because the steamer had arrived at the port before scheduled time. "At last after long consideration they decided to let me go free of all customs duty for these books".

Abhedananda was penniless when he landed at the dock and, therefore, he had to wait long though all the passengers had left the place. None came to receive and welcome him and after useless waiting for hours he took a Hansam cab with his luggage which then drove up to Miss Mary Phillips' house at 19 West 31st Street, the address he had fortunately with him. Here he alighted from the cab and pushed the electric bell at the main door. Presently the door opened and there stood at the doorstep a young lady who seemed to be a maid-servant.

"Is Miss Phillips in?"

"Yes"

"Would you mind giving this to her?"—so saying Swami Abhedananda handed his visiting card to her. The maid-servant went in while he kept waiting inside the door. Miss Phillips hurried down from upstairs and was very much surprised to see Swami Abhedananda alone at the door.

"Why are you alone? Where are Mr. Van Huagen and others who went to meet you at the dock? Did you not meet them?"

"No, I did not meet anybody although I waited at the dock for a long time after all the passengers of the steamer had gone away."

"So you were alone all the time?"

"Yes. Fortunately I had with me your address, and hiring a cab, I drove up straight here."

"Your courage and presence of mind is really admirable. Swami. Please come upstairs."

Then he went upto the fifth floor of the house with Miss Phillips who showed him a small room which was arranged for his stay. Miss Phillips was a student of Swami Vivekananda and was the Secretary to the infant Vedanta Society of New York which was started by Vivekananda at the request of some of his students there. Mr. Van Huagen was a Dutch, and since he came to be acquainted with Vivekananda and attended some of his lectures, became interested in the teachings of the Vedanta.

He called himself a Brahmachari disciple of Swami Vivekananda. He was about twenty-five and was not married. At the beginning this Dutch youngman was Abhedananda's companion and guide. Mr. Van Huagen, Miss Waldo and Mr. and Mrs. Goodwin were the early members of the Society which was then housed at the boarding house of Miss Phillips at 19 West 31st Street. Abhedananda found in this old unmarried lady not only a great admirer of Swami Vivekananda but also a genuine seeker of truth while the other members of the Society were equally eager to come across the teachings of Vedanta.

The first week after his arrival was spent in going round and seeing all places of interest in New York in company of Mr. Van Huagen. What most interested the young preacher was the newly invented Electroscope and Photograph which he saw in the evening at the Savoy Theatre. "I also saw", writes Abhedananda, "through the big telescope the full moon as a globe brought so close to our eyes that I could see the mountains and valleys of the moon in minute details." Very soon he was acquainted with Mr. Leggett and Miss MacLeod, the two great admirers and friends of Swami Vivekananda. It is on record that a fortnight after his arrival in New York that Miss Phillip invited her friends to meet Swami Abhedananda. A grand reception was arranged for him in her spacious drawing room. "She introduced me to her friends and I gave an informal talk about my work in London. In that meeting were present all the students, friends and disciples of Swami Vivekananda. They were delighted to welcome me at New York and were pleased to have me in their midst as an accredited teacher of Vedanta and a spiritual brother of Swami Vivekananda. They admired my simple manners, good voice, faith in God, childlike purity of heart and love for truth. All of them liked my lucid explanation on various subjects connected with Raja Yoga and Vedanta philosophy".

Here we get a true picture of Swami Abhedananda, the preacher as depicted by himself and how this picture grew brighter and brighter in colour and extraordinary in perspective and dimension created in the twenty-five years of his career and becoming an esteemed Hindu preacher. But before that we would like to refer to a letter which he wrote to his leader in Calcutta. Before leaving for India, Swamiji had foreseen that though Sarada

dananda was then working in America at his instance, yet the day was not far when Abhedananda would also have to go there. So he arranged his passage and kept it with one of his English disciples in London with a clear instruction to hand it over to Abhedananda when he might need it. So he considered it his first duty to apprise the leader of the new situation, he was now put in. Let us quote the following from his diary”.

“On my arrival at New York I wrote a letter to Swami Vivekananda in which I requested him to write to his American friends to come forward and help me in my new field of work. In reply Swami Vivekananda wrote to me from Calcutta that I must not depend on his friends, that I should get my new people to help me and that I should stand on my own feet and struggle”.

“To stand on his own feet and struggle”—only Swami Vivekananda could write this. The first reaction of this advice, we gather, was surprising, but he felt little discouraged. “I was inspired with grim determination to depend entirely upon the will of one Lord and to go on working with the resolute heart of a brave soldier neither thinking of the morrow nor of the results of my work”.

• “To work with the resolute heart of a soldier”—only Swami Abhedananda could think in this way. The monk who wandered for ten years across the length and breadth of India, barefooted and penniless, now in the role of a preacher faced with the wide world with the same mental nerve as was evinced in the life of his leader, who also once came penniless and a stranger to this distant land only to conquer by dint of his extraordinary courage and spiritual approach. Abhedananda then remembered the saying of Lord Krishna in the Gita: “To work thou hast the right and not for fruits thereof”, and as he remembered this, his mind became full of courage and there came out the resolute urge: “I shall prove by my work that I am a true Karmoyogi and a real Sannyasin”. This was Abhedananda, the preacher and we shall see later on how he fulfilled this in letter and spirit. It has been recorded in the principal biography of Swami Vivekananda that “since the arrival of the Swami Abhedananda in New York, the interest in the Vedanta Philosophy received a new impetus”. His life in America during the early years of preaching is nothing but the story of this new impetus which was more

or less due to the efforts of a determined soul of a brave soldier of Vedanta.

We gather from his diary that at the end of the month since Abhedananda arrived in New York, he visited Philadelphia, Washington, Virginia and New Paltz. From September 29th he established himself in New York, holding regular classes at the Vedanta Society, and giving public lectures on Sundays to audiences that went on steadily increasing in number. He lectured also once every week from November in Montclair, and earnest calls for classes came from Brooklyn and other places, which he was then unable to undertake for want of time. One memorable incident during this period was his meeting with Swami Saradananda who came from Boston to New York towards the end of September. It has already been mentioned that Saradananda preceded Abhedananda and he was sent to America from London by Swami Vivekananda at the request of Mrs. Ole Bull of Cambridge, Mass, a suburb of Boston, just before Abhedananda reached London in 1896.

It is on record that Swami Saradananda since his arrival in America was busily occupied in Cambridge, Boston and its vicinity and could not be spared to take charge of the New York centre, which was looked after for the time being by Miss Ellen Waldo, known among the Brotherhood as the Sister Haridasi. She was a disciple of Vivekananda and she had assimilated the teachings of her Master profoundly. Though Saradananda's stay in America was not for a long period, yet from the contemporary press reports we gather that he played an important part in preaching the gospel of Vedanta and his lectures were regarded as "thoughtful and scholarly". It was at the end of October, 1896, that he delivered a beautiful lecture at the Brooklyn Ethical Association on "The Ethical Ideas of the Hindus", Abhedananda who was apprised of his brother-monk's activities was therefore eagerly waiting to meet him since his arrival in New York. Let us give here a description of this meeting from the pages of his American Diary.

"This was the first time I met him (Swami Saradananda) after he had left India nearly two years ago. I spent the whole day with him talking on different subjects and especially on the works he was doing in America. It was a great delight to me

to meet my beloved *Gurubhai* after such a long time in a foreign country. It reminded me of the days when we lived together and served our Divine Master Sri Ramakrishna in Cossipore garden house and after then *Mahasamadhi* of our Lord how we lived together with Swami Vivekananda who used to call us Kelua and Bhulua, for we were his personal attendants as well as his staunch followers in our struggles for spiritual attainments at Baranagore Math...how the Swami Saradananda nursed me with the greatest brotherly love that I have never heard of, for four months at the Alambazar Math when I had seven operations on my left foot on account of an attack of Guinee worm which I had caught in my foot while travelling bare-footed through Gujarat to Dwarka and Pravash Tirtha, on pilgrimage. All these and many other incidents of our spiritual lives together in India became vivid in my memory when I met Swami Saradananda in New York. It was a day of unbounded joy and peace which I can never forget".

As we read these lines our mind naturally goes back to that memorable Christmas Night, 1886, at Antpore where the New Communion of Apostles was founded. Subsequent events reveal to us that the Brotherhood of monks was not in vain and the unseen forces of history worked behind it in such a manner that within less than a decade, Sri Ramakrishna's thought began to be translated into living action under the leadership of Vivekananda who originated a new spiritual movement in the West and the work of which was systematically carried on by some of his ablest brother-monks of whom Abhedananda was the most remarkable. It was not the memory of the by-gone days alone that swelled up in his mind when he met Saradananda. There were other emotions that were simultaneously surging in his mind, which have been beautifully expressed by Abhedananda in the following words: "I felt that by the will of our Great Master we have come to New York after travelling over twelve thousand miles and crossing many seas and the Atlantic ocean on the same mission to preach the gospel of Sri Ramakrishna among foreign people of christian faith like the ancient Buddhist monks who preached the gospel of Buddha from Siberia to Ceylon and from China and Japan to Egypt. I felt within me the adventurous spirit of a modern Christian Missionary who travels all over the world to preach the gospel of Christ among

heathen nations, going through all kinds of privation, suffering and hardship”.

Here we have a perfect glimpse of the young preacher's mind and we can well imagine that Abhedananda, too, was ready to undergo “all kinds of privation, suffering and hardship” to fulfil a great mission.” It is well nigh impossible to compress within a few pages a full and systematic description of the widespread propaganda carried on by Swami Abhedananda in course of twenty-five years of his stay in America. Any attempt to give a cursory view of it will fail to convey to the readers our exact idea of the extent of the work and the ever-growing influence it exerted over the minds of numerous men and women who thirsted for the new and satisfying light from the East. We will only touch on a few salient episodes, which must be in the way of a mere index to his missionary career.

Abhedananda began his real work in America with a series of lectures at Mott Memorial Hall, New York, which was rented by the Vedanta Society for the purpose. Beginning from September 29, he used to deliver here on every Sunday lectures on Vedanta—the subject announced was: What is Vedanta?—and this initial shot paved the path of the future preacher. Mott Memorial Hall—that delightful refuge for all wandering cults had seen many orators, but none compared to the one it saw now in the person of this young Hindu preacher. Edward Emerson, a close relative of Ralph Waldo Emerson, the celebrated American poet and Philosopher, presided on the first day of his lecture here which was attended by some forty persons.

The following lines quoted from the book, *With the Swami's in America* will be of interest to the readers. “The following Sunday afternoon found me amongst the audience at the Mott Memorial Hall, in the expectation of hearing Swami Vivekananda. The hall was not large, it could seat perhaps three or four hundred persons. And even then the hall was not quite filled, so it was easy to secure a good seat. I had heard much in praise of Swamiji. My expectation was, therefore, turned to a high key and I looked forward with pleasure to the fulfilment of a long cherished desire. Punctually at three o'clock a Swami entered the hall. He was dressed in robe and turban of orange colour. He went straight to the platform and without a moment's delay began to deliver his lecture. He opened with a

shlōka in Sanskrit : “*dvā suparnā sayujā sakhayā samānam*” etc. This he gave also in English : “Two birds of beautiful plumage, ever mates, perched on the self-same tree : one of the twain eats of the luscious fruit, silent its mate looks on”. And then he began to explain the deep significance of this beautiful simile from the Upanishad. The discourse was lucid, convincing and impressive. There was not much flourish, not much eloquence, hardly any gesticulation. It was a straight forward, and well-reasoned-out exposition of the Vedānta philosophy, delivered in a calm dignified manner. He had his subject well in hand. And his voice was clear and sonorous.

“Young, tall, straight, good-looking, the Swami had his appearance in his favour. His attitude, though not awkward, was a little stiff for a public speaker. There was not effort for effect. The speaker was natural and sincere, but there was not the ease and grace of manner so characteristic of American speakers. It was evident that the Swami had not done much platform work, though speaking seemed to come easy to him. After the lecture an opportunity was given to the audience to ask questions. The Swami answered all questions without the least hesitation. Then he came down from the platform and was immediately surrounded by a number of people anxious to meet him personally and to exchange a few words with him.

“I waited in the back of the hall and saw the Swami pass out to the street. I was very happy to have found a preacher from the land where Vedānta has taken its birth. My expectation has been high and I was not disappointed except that I had not found the eloquence and fine delivery for which Swami Vivekananda had become famous. I wondered how the Swami had earned his reputation as an orator and I doubted whether the speaker was really Swami Vivekananda. So I approached a gentleman in charge of the hall to satisfy my doubt. And then I was told that the Swami I had listened to was Swami Abhedananda, another disciple of Sri Ramakrishna”.

The writer of these lines Mr. Heybloom was initiated to the Order of Sri Ramakrishna by Vivekananda and afterwards he had his initiation into Sannyasin from Abhedananda at the Belur-Math in 1921. He has further recorded his experiences of Abhedananda’s class lectures which constituted another aspect of his regular work in America on every Wednesday. “There was

a small gathering", writes Swami Atulanand (as he became known afterwards), "perhaps not more than twenty persons. The room was cosy, incense was burning on a small table with pictures and flowers. The Swami was already seated and the hostess offered me a seat near him. After a few minute the Swami opened the meeting with a prayer in Sanskrit. I think it was the well-known invocation at the beginning and at the end of some of the Upanishads: 'May He protect us from all evil! May the teacher and the taught enjoy together the blessings of the Lord! May whatever we study be well studied and may it enlighten us! May dissension be far from us! Om Peace, Peace, Peace. Hari Om!' How beautiful, how impressive sounded the ancient Sanskrit prayer as it was chanted by the Swami in his deep, melodious voice. How exquisite the intonation.

"This was followed by a few minutes of silence. The Swami sat erect, perfectly still, with his hands folded and his eyes closed. We all followed his example and meditated for a while. Then came a few remarks on the law of *karma* and we were invited to ask questions. The questions were not systematic; all kinds of subjects were touched in. . . . The meeting lasted for an hour or more. After the meeting I was introduced to the Swami. He was courteous. He asked me a few questions and hoped I could come again. I told him how very much I appreciated his lectures and how helpful they were to me. He seemed pleased. 'Practise a litte', he said. 'the secret of success lies in meditation. Come here regularly and when you are in doubt or you need any help, come to me'. I thanked him and promised to do so. This was the end of our first meeting".

The above description gives us a correct picture of the methods adopted by Swami Abhedananda both in his public lectures as well as in the class lectures. It was in this way that he was able to bring about a spiritual awakening in the minds of a large number of religious-minded American men and women and draw a band of sincere students of Vedanta around him. Somewhat reserved by nature, Abhedananda did not mix with his students as freely as some of his other brother-disciples who had gone to America with the same objective have done. He, however, held social meetings where the students could freely talk and mix with him and it is on record that he gave one hour



each week to meeting personal enquiries. If by nature he was more or less reserved, it is equally true that in private life he was not easily accessible. He insisted and not without reason of course, on a certain amount of privacy. "This was probably wise and necessary on his part", so writes Swami Atulananda. The preacher who gave himself heart and soul to his work, certainly needed hours of solitude to prosecute his studies and to prepare his carefully thought-out lectures free from outside disturbance. But, according to the testimony of some, one could always be assured of his ready assistance, his sympathy and encouragement when one made it a point to approach Swami Abhedananda. It was in this way that ultimately he was successful in giving the Vedanta movement not only the form and content, but also enlivening it with purpose and direction which it was initially lacking. As all the New York papers carried the notice of his Sunday lectures and class lectures held on every Wednesday and Saturday, the number of audience began to increase gradually and the movement gathered its momentum. Thus the ripple started by his predecessor soon developed into a high current which in course of a short time attracted all the truth seekers.

Here is a description of Swami Abhedananda as given by the *Boston Evening Transcript*: "The Swami Abhedananda is a young man of charming personality. He is a full-blooded Hindu, and has been away from India only three years. He speaks English fluently. He delivered lectures in London for ten months previous to coming to America where he was invited by the Vedanta Society of New York, soon after Queen's Jubilee in August, 1897. Swami Abhedananda is a man about thirty years old, perhaps, above the average height, with clear-cut features and a high forehead. He dresses in a flowing black gown, festooned tightly about the throat, and when he speaks in public he wears a graceful white turban. His English shows barely a sign of foreign accent and his voice is soft and penetrating. He is a man who would attract attention anywhere".

One of the earliest and most significant of this lectures in America was the one which Abhedananda delivered in a New York church on December 27, 1897. The subject matter was: 'A Hindu's View of Christ'. This lecture was elaborately reported in a number of important papers such as *The Sun*, *The*

*Literary Digest* and other episcopal journals which also printed his photo. We quote the following from *The Literary Digest* of January 15, 1898 :

“The Swami Vivekananda has been succeeded in America as lecturer of Vedanta philosophy by the Swami Abhedananda. The latter recently delivered a very interesting lecture which was attended by a large number of clergymen belonging to all churches. The Swami advanced the theory that Christ was a yogi which surprised the audience. Here are some of the illuminating lines from his lecture : ‘To Understand Christ’, the Swami said ‘one must understand the Hindu conception of the soul and the universe, for Christ, although a Jew by race, was in every fibre of his character a Hindu or Vedantist, and when the Christian looks at his Saviour from the Hindu point of view he will not only get a more beautiful and sublime conception of Christ, but he will receive a much better opinion of himself and his fellow men. All that Christ did and said, will become vastly more interesting to him, for he can himself confidently hope some day to become a Christ. The beauty of the Vedanta view of Christ is to be able to realize from experiences that you and I and all of us will some day, on this very earth, clothed in blood and flesh, become Christ, for in every one of us is the pure and sublime soul that shows forth from them on the Mount of transfiguration. It needs only to be set free, to connect itself with the cosmic intelligence that stands behind and direct evolves and projects all those gross forms of matter that we see. In every one of us is a spark of this universal intelligent energy that is moving toward freedom. In Christ, in Buddha, and in many of our Hindu sages this cosmic energy was set free”.

This particular lecture of Abhedananda had won for him a good deal of admiration from the Christian world of America and on another occasion he was again invited to speak on the same subject. We quote the following from *The Sun*, New York, which devoted full two columns in reporting his lecture which was delivered in a Catholic Church on the New Year's day, 1898 : “When a few days ago I was invited to give a talk on the subject, I had some hesitations in my mind as to its reception. Now I feel encouraged to day that the Hindu view of Christ as I explained the other day, has roused some interest in you. What do you see in ourselves? First the body, then behind it the

mind, and behind that something that is conscious of them both. In a perfect man like Christ the mind stuff has been purified, culminated in the absolute renunciation of all earthly desires. He was able to connect his own soul with the cosmic Soul or God, and he then exclaimed : 'I and my Father are one'. When a Vedantist reaches that state he says : 'I am the Brahman', when a Mohammedan Sufi reaches that state he says : 'I am He'. Every perfect man realizes that he is a part of this universal intelligence which we call God, or the Brahman, and when he is able to make the connection with it through his purified mind he partakes of its omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence. If a minute history of India for the last six thousand years could be written, we are assumed that there would be descriptions of many miracles performed by the sages as remarkable as any credited to Christ. What is the significance of Christ's death? Christ foresaw that his life and death would fix the mind of other men upon Him and this would help them to realize the divine nature within us all—our oneness with God. It is by such concentration of the mind that one is able to separate the soul from the mind and free it from the bondage of matter. His face on the cross is a shining example of complete resignation to God : which reveals at once the spiritual greatness of Christ." The people of the New World has seldom heard such illuminating interpretation of the life of this Saviour, as given by Swami Abhedananda.

Right from the beginning Abhedananda had put his heart and soul to the Vedanta work, holding regular classes at the Vedanta Society, and giving public lectures on Sundays to audience that went on steadily increasing in number. He lectured also once every week in Mountclair and earnest calls for classes came from Brooklyn and other places, when he was unable to undertake for want of time. During the month of January, 1897, he gave twelve lectures drawing large and intelligent audiences. Considering the importance and the newness of the subjects of teaching to the majority of them, several of his lectures were by special request repeated even a third and fourth time, in order to enable them to have a clear comprehension of the principles involved. Besides these, he opened *Gita* classes in New York and Brooklyn and aroused so much interest that not a few of his students began learning the Sanskrit language with a view to gain a first-hand

knowledge of the *Gita* and also of other ancient Hindu scriptures yet untranslated. It might be mentioned here that over and above his erudition in Sanskrit literature and philosophy, Swami Abhedanand's careful studies in Western Science and philosophy gave him an additional advantage in demonstrating the fact that Vedanta was much in harmony with some of the most advanced ideas of modern science. By this way he created a respect for his teachings and enlisted such adherents as would not be convinced unless shown that Huxley, or Tyndal, or Spencer, or Kant, agreed in substance with a particular view advanced by Vedanta. He opened moreover, regular classes on Yoga and meditation, which were filled earnest students who began to learn and practise *pranayama* with great zeal and devotion.

During this first phase of his work, Abhedananda met many representative thinkers in the world of art, science and religion, both in private life and in social gatherings and by his unfailing courtesy and readiness in answering questions he awakened their friendly interest in his mission and teachings. One of the most liberal and enlightened of New York clergymen even went so far as to distribute his lecture programmes among his congregation, advising them to go and listen to his teachings. This was somewhat unthinkable during the time of Swami Vivekananda to whom they were more or less hostile.

Numerous invitations to lecture in clubs came in and Abhedananda accepted as many as he possibly could. Thus before the end of February, he had spoken before the Twentieth Century club and the Metaphysical Club of Brooklyn, and the Twilight Club of New York. The *New York Tribune* of March 6, 1897, in the course of reporting his lecture and his work wrote -

" \* \* His face is fine-chiselled and with universal intellectual strength shows the singular dignity, gentleness and repose of his people. His hands are no less individual and expressive of high character. As a speaker, Swami Abhedananda is self-contained and attractive, and his lectures are clean, original explanations of philosophic subjects related to practical living. His command of English is as perfect as is his pronunciation, with rarely a slip in accent, which adds to the charm of a pleasing delivery. . . . To an occasional attendant the growth of interest was unmistakable in steadily increasing audiences of intelligent persons.

many of them members of orthodox churches, with a representation of well-known persons in public life”.

With the month of April the present session of work in New York came to an end. In all, it is gathered from the records, Swami Abhedananda had delivered eighty-six lectures in Mott Memorial Hall alone. As the foregoing chapters will show, he made a splendid record of arduous work well done and secured the lasting esteem of all who had come within the sphere of his influence. Several of the best journals of the State published throughout appreciative accounts of his teaching and personally, such as, *The Sun*, *The New York Tribune*, *The Critic*, *The Literary Digest*, *The Times*, *The Intelligence*, and *Mind*. On the other hand the occasional criticisms in religious journals, only showed the deep influence that the Vedanta was making for itself in church circles as well as among liberal thinkers and the recognition it was forcing from Western theologians. Thus the untiring labours of Swami Abhedananda, following upon those of his predecessor, Swami Vivekananda resulted within a short period in the firm establishment of the Vedanta as well as the Society in New York. The former had also the Vedanta Society incorporated duly under the laws of the State of New York. In this connection, *The Critic* of March 19, 1898, wrote: “The Society published considerable literature of the Vedanta philosophy, after it became a regularly incorporated body under the leadership of Swami Abhedananda. Pamphlets and books published by the Society, covered a wide range of subjects, including American lectures and translations from Indian classics and English magazines on the subjects published in India.

It may be noted here that immediately after its incorporation, a booklet, entitled “The aims and objects of the Vedanta Society” was published, from which we quote the following lines. “The main objects of the Vedanta Society are to explain through logic and reason the spiritual laws that govern our lives; to establish the universal religion, which underlies the various sects and creeds of special religion”. Thus began the reorganisation of the Society under the presidency of Francis H. Legette. Among the subsequent office bearers or honorary members of the society we find such names as Herschell C. Parker of Columbia University, Dr. R. Heber Newton, Prof. Charles H. Lanman, Prof. Hiram Corson and many other distinguished intellectuals

of the time. "The activities of the society spread so much that by 1898 there were five centres—one in Brooklyn, two in California, one in Washington and one in New York for teaching Vedanta in America. \* \* even the children began to learn Vedanta and the Children's class of the Vedanta society was very successful. In this connection the *New York Herald* of March 4, 1900, published a lengthy report showing some of the New Yorks Juvenile Vedantists along with Swami Abhedananda. We quote the following lines from this report :

"Not least among the extraordinary things of these times is the realization that India is sending missionaries of the Hindu religion into the very core and heart of our Western civilization. Here in New York such monks have banded together a Society for the propagation of their religion and philosophy, which is taking such deep root and spreading so rapidly that children in this city are being received and trained in the faith of Brahmā and are sent every week to sit at the feet of the Eastern Mahatma to learn wisdom and grace. Every Saturday afternoon a class of young boys and girls gather together in the room of the Vedanta Society, in East Fifty-fifth Street, to speak an hour or so with the Swami Abhedananda and drink in the teachings of the Hindu philosophy which is expounded to them in a most fascinating way. He would read before the children stories from the *Hitapodesha* chiefly and he also discussed the life and teachings of Jesus". This was a singular achievement no doubt. It was therefore not for nothing that the *Evening Mail* of New York wrote : "Swami Abhedananda is undoubtedly the most interesting part of Vedanta".

Here is an interesting account as given by the *Evening Mail* of how Abhedananda conducted his 'services' at the meeting : "At the appointed hour you see a man of middle height, clad in a long belted tunic of reddish purple, enter in steady manner, and seat himself to a highbacked chair at the front of the stage. After the audience has become thoroughly quiet he rises, stands looking upward a moment, and begins reciting in resonant Sanskrit an invocation to the Universal God. The words, which are sung rather than spoken, are delightfully musical and good to listen to, though not one of them be understood. The Swami then repeats the invocation in English. A man of Oriental tact and grace, with a knack for meeting people's natural curiosity

about the most inconclusive and ambitious of all philosophies, the Swami never treads upon any one's theological corns. Beginning his lecture straight away after the invocation, he talks for a full hour extemporaneously or apparently so. At the close of the discourse he announces that he will answer questions concerning it which are passed up in writing while the contribution box goes around ; and these questions—when they were not too vague or foolish for comprehension, he does patiently and luminously answer. Then he calls upon the audience to rise, and deliver a benediction in Sanskrit, which also he translates in English. His discourses are extremely clever elucidation of the deepest Indian philosophy”.

And about the character of the Society, the same paper wrote : “The Vedanta Society of New York has some of the characteristics of a club. The members pay twenty five dollars down to become life-member. For this they get class instruction in Yoga, or the path toward the Eternal Goal, in the house where the Swami lives. They get the privilege of daily meditation under a Swami's guidance. They also get the privilege of reading Vedanta books at the headquarters”.

Eventually the work of the Society grew until it was found, desirable to bring the Swami Nirmalananda, a youngman (a disciple of Vivekananda) from India to assist Abhedananda in his work. And since then the propagation of Vedanta went on with increasing activity. Later on, he was assisted in his work by Swami Turiyananda, a brother disciple, who went to America along with Swami Vivekananda, in 1899. How active was Swami Abhedananda in preaching the gospel of Vedanta in the United States almost from the very beginning of his arrival there, would be evident from the following account as incorporated in the original edition of the Vivekananda-biography, published in 1915, writing about the early activities of Abhedananda, the authors state :

“The season ended, the Swami Abhedananda went to Washington for a rest, but so interested became the people to hear about the Vedanta that he gave several addresses there in parlours and studios, and two public lectures, one in the People's Church and the other in the Institute of Practical Christianity. He was introduced to President McKinley and was kindly received,

with friendly enquiries about himself and his country.<sup>1</sup> He also met the Hon. John G. Boady, Governor of Alaska, and was the guest of Dr. Elmer Gates, the celebrated scientist and psychologist. He next went to Boston lectured in the Free Religious Association of America. Through the kindness of Professors James and Royce, the Swami had the privilege of being present at the class lectures in philosophy of the Harvard University. Prof. William James at the end of his class lectures invited the students to hear the Swami's lecture on the following day, and suggested to him that subject be, "Unity in Variety". Prof. James, as also Prof. Leuman, the great Sanskrit scholar, were present at the lecture which was received with marked attention and favour. The Swami received during his stay many friendly attentions from professors in Harvard and was the guest of several in their homes. Then he spent some days in Mendford, Newton Highlands and Salem, and lectured in those places.

"After returning to New York he went to Montclair, and on invitation from the official board of Unity Church he conducted the Sunday Service and addressed the congregation on 'The True Basis of Morality' (This was one of Abhedananda's famous lectures during this period) to the great satisfaction of all. From there he went to various places and lectured and taught nearly all of them till the end of July. The next month he spent at Eliat, Maine, where he discoursed on Vedanta at the sessions of Monsalvat School for the comparative study of Religions. After four weeks' work at Greenacre the Swami was finally able to enjoy a well-earned rest at the White Mountains in New Hampshire, and later at the country homes of his friends in the Catskill Mountains. He was invited to stop at Newport on the way. The Rev. R. Heber Newton, D.D., one of the most liberal and highly esteemed episcopical clergymen, entertained the Swami at

<sup>1</sup> Swami Abhedananda has written this account in his *Leaves from My Diary*: "On May 19th, at 11 A.M., I went to the White House with Mr. Urgan, a member of the House, who introduced me to Mr. McKinley, the then President of the United States. The President was very busy in giving diplomatic instructions to the military officers about the Cuban War. The President McKinley gave me a cordial reception and asked me several questions about the Vedanta Philosophy on which I was lecturing in the city, and showed his interest in the political condition of the people of India under British rule. I was the first Hindu of India who was introduced to the President of the U.S.A. My predecessor Swami Vivekananda never had the opportunity of being introduced to the President in the White House in the capital of the U.S.A."



his country residence in Long Island, where he gave an informal talk on the Hindu view of Jesus.

“The New York work began in November in a longer and better hall situated in a more central position, and continued throughout except for the Christmas and New Year holidays, making itself felt more and more as a power for good. There is no need of repeating the similar course of teaching work carried on by the Swami with renewed vigour as in the preceding year, but with an added experience of American life and its spiritual needs and difficulties. On the occasion of the meeting of the Vedanta Society on March 31st, 1899, there was a large attendance who listened with delight to the account of life in India given by Mrs. Bull, who had just returned to America after a year’s stay in India. . . . On Easter Sunday, the Swami Abhedananda initiated four Brahmacharins. During the summer he left New York to visit Worcester, Boston, Cambridge and other New England points and met many able and influential persons. Among others were Mr. Edison, the great inventor ; Joseph Jefferson, the famous actor ; William Dean Howells, the novelist ; and professors in Cornell, Iows, Yale and other Universities. Before leaving New York, the Swami had addressed the Sanskrit classes in Columbia College of the City, and also one of the best social and literary clubs—Barnard—giving in each an account of the religious ideas of the Hindus. The citizens of Worcester after hearing him twice, urged him to give a course of lectures. This was not possible owing to engagements elsewhere. On April 25th, he lectured on the Vedanta philosophy before the Northshore Club at Lynn, a club composed of cultivated women. The next day he spoke in Waltham a noted club in Psychomath. On 27th he lectured in Cambridge before the Episcopal Theological School. On April 30th before the Cambridge conference he spoke on the Religious Ideas in ancient India. Prof. William James and other eminent members of Cambridge as well as ministers of Churches were among the audience. He gave many other lectures in the vicinity of Boston throughout May. These summer tours of the Swami played an important part in disseminating the Vedanta teachings in widely separated sections of the country”.

Thus one finds that the seeds sown by Swami Vivekananda on the American soil went on ever growing vigorously as days

passed, striking other roots deep down into the heart of the nation. In these six years since the advent of Vivekananda in the New World in 1893 one sees the growing influence of the gospels of Vedanta and other Oriental philosophies in America in the subjects comprised in course of lectures, in sermons preached in some of the best known churches, in the publication of an increasing number of metaphysical and philosophical magazines and in the rise of the Vedanta Societies—all setting forth the principles and practices of Vedanta, under many names and in various ways—and the most prominent of these names were that of one about whom we are discussing. And the satisfaction of Vivekananda knew no bounds when he personally witnessed the efforts of his beloved brother-disciple—Abhedananda during the time he visited America for the last time.

It was in September, 1899, that Swami Vivekananda accompanied by Swami Turiyananda arrived in New York en route London. Swami Abhedananda who had been away from the city on a lecturing tour at the time of Swamiji's arrival was soon wired by him to come and meet him ; in order to report concerning the New York work. Swami Vivekananda was then staying at the country-home of Mr. and Mrs. Leggett, which was situated about one hundred and fifty miles from New York. It might be mentioned here that this second visit of Swamiji was more on account of health than to undertake any public work. Abhedananda stayed with Vivekananda for ten days and it was with great satisfaction that the latter learned from the former that the Vedanta Society had now acquired permanent quarters. It was during this time that Vivekananda is reported to have made this remark to his brother-disciple : "Thrice I knocked at the door of New York but it did not respond. I am glad that you have established permanent headquarters. This is the first time I have found our own house in New York". The remark itself is significant ; it is a clear testimony to the achievements of the young preacher. He then insisted Swami Abhedananda to stay in America at least for ten years, saying : "I leave the work entirely to you, I have brought Turiyananda from India, henceforth he will assist you in your work here. Later on Swami Turiyananda was in charge of the Vedanta movement in California where he did some excellent work, Vivekananda left America towards the end of July, 1900.

The extent of his activities during the early stage of Abhedananda's preaching in America will be realised from the following programme of his Sunday afternoon lectures from January to April, 1900 :

- January 7 — Religion for the Twentieth Century.
- January 14 — What is Yoga? Its scope and practice.
- January 21 — The science of breathing.
- January 28 — How to obtain self-control.
- February 4 — Effects of concentration and meditation in spiritual life.
- February 11 — How a sinner reaches perfection.
- February 18 — Religion of Jesus and Ethics of Vedanta.
- February 25 — Evolution and Immortality.
- March 4 — The word of the son of God and the Cross in ancient India.
- March 11 — Who creates our destiny?
- March 18 — Does God hear our prayer?
- March 25 — Divine Love and Freedom.
- April 5 — Life of a Divine Man.
- April 12 — What is Vedanta?
- April 19 — Religious Ideas of the Hindus.
- April 26 — What India has to give to America.

The initial success achieved by Swami Abhedananda, it should be pointed out here, was due to catholicity of his mind which ultimately enabled him to win the heart of the American people. The following instance bears an ample testimony to it. He observed in a true christian style the Christmas in 1899. *The New York Herald* of December 25, 1899 writing under the caption 'Hindoo Santa Claus of Vedanta Society' reports: "Happy indeed were the children who went last evening to the Christmas celebration of the Hindoo Swami Abhedananda, who celebrates the festivals of all religions. Although he teaches that the Being who was born in Bethlehem nineteen centuries ago, was only one of the Christ. The Swami always has a christmas tree and distributes presents. He teaches that the first incarnation of the supreme Being was that of Krishna, who was born fourteen centuries before the Christian era, clad in a long and clinging robe of red, the Swami sat last evening in the back parlour of the house at No. 146 East, Fifty-fifth Street where the Vedanta

Society, of which he is the head and front, has its headquarters. The Swami spoke in a low conversational tone, sitting close to the Christmas tree which glowed and pluthered by means of fifty candles, he explained his belief by means of classic stories which had their origin far back in the days of Vedanta and before our ancestors began wondering for the Asiatic plateaus. Above the Christmas tree was a reproduction of Hoffman's portrait of the Christ".

Everywhere he spoke on the philosophical thought and the fundamental principle of religion in India as explained in Vedanta. At one place, for instance, comparing the teachings of Christ with that of Vedanta, Swami Abhedananda said in course of his lecture before an enlightened gathering : "Vedanta teaches the truths which Christ taught and brings light to dispel the darkness of ages and to make clear the real spirit of his teachings. It is not built around any particular personality, it does not depend on any particular book, but embraces all the scriptures of the world. Going beyond toleration and brotherhood, it recognises God in every soul and God immanent in all nature. It teaches how we can realise the true meaning of Christ's saying, 'I and my Father are one'."

With the dawn of the new century, Swami Abhedananda resumed the work in New York with right earnest. The classes were held and public lectures were delivered on Sundays as usual. The speeches and writings made such a profound influence upon the minds of American people that he was frequently invited to speak before the Societies, Churches, Associations, Clubs and Universities. We gather from the pages of his own diary that during the session of 1901 Abhedananda spoke on invitation at the following places : The council of Jewish Women in a synagogue on the festivities of the ancient Hebrews. The cremation Society, spiritualistic Societies, Free Religious Association of America, Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Science, the Universities of Harvard, Clarke, Berkley and Columbia. As the years passed, the audience grew in number everywhere. For instance his speech at the spiritualist Camp, Chesterfield, drew as many as ten thousand people. According to the report in the *Anderson Daily Bulletin*. "It was a record breaker—the biggest day ever known in camp chesterfield". The speech which Abhedananda delivered before such a vast concourse of intelligent persons was hailed as "an able and scholarly presentation of the religion of the Orient".

His third lecture at the Spiritualist Camp was on 'Reincarnation' and he put up a strong argument in support of the theory of reincarnation. In course of this memorable lecture, he discredited the "Law of Heredity" and quoted instances to show that children were born with the mental characteristics which they did not inherit from their parents or ancestors. "Mozart could play the piano when he was a baby. At four years of age he composed music. At eight he wrote an opera. This influence shows that the soul of an advanced musician was born in Mozart". He concluded by remarking that "reincarnation was in harmony with the laws of evolution".

Another interesting lecture he was invited to deliver during the first year of the new century was on "The Jesus of History and Tradition", Commenting on the speech, the *Boston Evening Transcript* wrote: "Swami Abhedananda who attended the 34th Annual convention and festival of the Free Religious Association of America which was held at Boston museum and which was presided by Dr. Lewis G. James, President of the Association gave a very interesting lecture. It was a large gathering and thoughtful addresses of eminent speakers graced the occasion. Swami Abhedananda was of opinion that Christ taught no new religion, it was the Persian conception of religion that Jesus taught, as it had been taught by Buddha, two centuries before Christ. The Buddhist missionaries preached in Palestine and made many converts. The result of their teachings have been described by Josephins while John the Baptist was plainly a Buddhist monk, for his ascetic life and teaching prove this. The fundamental life of Jesus was founded on the principles taught by Buddha, and his ethical teachings were purity, self-control, brotherhood, meekness and love such as had been practised for centuries by the Hindus".

Thus it will be evident from many of his lectures that Swami Abhedananda with his vast erudition and culture, was able to impress the American mind in a way which is unparalleled. The following extract taken from an editorial article under the caption: 'An Evangel from the Orient' in the *San Francisco Evening News* of August 1, 1901, appears to be a glowing tribute to the genius of Abhedananda as the Hindu preacher in America: "A Pundit of unusual erudition and culture is with us in the person of the Swami Abhedananda, who arrived from New

York last Monday, after a pleasant trip across the Continent. The Swami is reported to be a very wise man. He is reported to speak in epigrams, a sample of which is offered in the sentence, 'Everything comes in time: exercise patience'. It has been hinted that Swami Abhedananda has come preaching in the Occidental wilderness and that he intends to proselyte all who are awake to the light that dawns eternally in the East".

"If the Swami Abhedananda comes to teach us the doctrines of brotherly love, he will find us fellow ploughed but unseeded. Perhaps the Swami has a few sacks of the seed of brotherly love in his doctrinal luggage. Let him scather the seed—some of it may fall on fertile ground, much of it will necessarily be washed on barren places. But the Swami will not be discouraged. He will have a pity on us. He will understand that we have been so long out of the light that shines in the East, groping in shadows. Our vision has become dim and our understanding fullest. He will know that our heart have never been properly attained to the Divine harmonies that sweep from the great heart of the universe. The Swami will know this, and by knowing he will forgive.

"There are many things which the Swami will find in need of radical reform. He will find us steep in sordid commercialism, greedy for empires, eager to profit at the cost of our fellow men, even though women and children of the nation may cry for bread and shiver naked in the disolute highways. He will find us, welded to forms with fasting conventions, and countless vanities. If it is his purpose to lift us away from these mere human interests into the high-light of Buddha's countenance, we hope that he will succeed. We have lost hope and faith in our own selves, and we are yearning for the power of some glad evangel who can turn us from the brutal highway of selfishness into the right way of righteousness".

This is a clear indication of the American mind at the turn of the century and the subsequent activities of Swami Abhedananda, who is looked upon as a prophet and an angel of light and hope, has turned the American people from the path of selfishness to the highway of righteousness. The story of his preaching is, in fact, the history of the upliftment of the New World by the invasion of Vedanta, as invasion that has been seldom witnessed anywhere in the world.

## CHAPTER V

### THE PASSING AWAY OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

While the Ramakrishna movement in America was gathering momentum under the leadership of Swami Abhedananda, events were moving fast on the other hemisphere. It is, therefore, necessary here to mention some of the events that happened in the monastery at Baranagar, from where Swami Abhedananda started his journey to the West at the invitation of his leader, Swami Vivekananda. Since his return from the West, Swamiji was seriously thinking of establishing the Math on the bank of the Ganges just opposite to Dakshineswar and for this purpose a large plot of land known as Nilambar Mukherjee's garden house, was procured in Belur on the western bank of the Ganges. In the early part of the year 1898, Vivekananda purchased this large plot, about fifteen acres in extent, together with a building. He had to pay a big sum for it, most of which was given to him by his Western disciples, particularly by Miss Müller.

It has been recorded in the biography of Swami Vivekananda that 'the purchasing of this particular site was somewhat in the nature of the fulfilment of a prophecy, for long before his going to the West he had said to some of his Gurubhais, whilst standing on the Baranagar ghat and when there was yet no thought of a site for the monastery, 'something tells me that our permanent Math will be in this neighbourhood across the river'. Though the property was purchased at the beginning of 1898, it did not become the permanent headquarters of the monks until January, 1899." Later on when Vivekananda received a large sum of money from Mrs. Ole Bull that the building of the monastery at Belur could be completed. The celebration of the Belur Math was fixed for December, 1898, though the monastery could actually be housed there only from January next year. On December 9, Swami Vivekananda in presence of his other brother-disciples who had by this time returned from different centres where they were engaged in different works, worshipped the vessel containing Sri Ramakrishna's ashes and himself carried it from the Nilambar Babu's garden-house to the new premises, remarking on the way to a disciple, "The Master

once told me, "I will go and live wherever it will be your pleasure to take me, carrying me on your shoulders, be it under a tree or in the humblest cottage!"

Soon after the Belur Math was established as the central seat of the monastic order, the Ramakrishna Mission Association ceased to function as an independent organisation, and the Math authorities themselves carried on the philanthropic and social work originally undertaken by the Mission Association which was founded by Vivekananda two years earlier. Along with the establishment of the Belur Math, it should be noted here, a great social revolution took place silently for so long India had not many organisation serve her during her ever recurring woes. The institution was finally given the name of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission to which Vivekananda gave shape and substance before he decided to go to the West again. The organisation he left behind him was undoubtedly his positive achievement. It has been rightly said that "the dream of Vivekananda was well on its way to fulfilment, proving that he could not only feel and think but could also act and that vigorously".

Along with the establishment of the Belur Math, Vivekananda also felt the necessity of having an organ of the institution in Bengali language and the year 1899 saw the birth of the Bengali fortnightly *Udbodhan*, mainly under his initiative. It aimed at propagating the new message of service to the humanity. The journal was subsequently converted into a monthly and ultimately it became the nucleus of a publication centre of the Ramakrishna Math. The English organ of the Mission, *Pra-buddha Bharat* (Awakened India) had appeared just one year earlier, from Almora where Swamiji had founded an Ashrama on the ideal of monism and named it as the Advaita Ashram on March 19, 1900. Thus before he left for the West, Vivekananda had achieved his chosen objects such as the establishment of the Math, a centre at the heart of the Himalayas and two organs.

So much for the Indian events. On his arrival in America in August, 1899 Swami Vivekananda was delighted to hear of the success of Swami Abhedananda who was already apprised of these achievements. "So you have been able to arouse the dormant spirit of the nation and direct it along constructive channels. I feel proud of your success". Abhedananda is said to have uttered these words when he met his beloved leader and



Gurubhai after more than three years". "I am also equally proud of your achievements here, Kali. You have done excellent work". This appreciative remark of Swamiji in respect of Abhedananda is significant. They also discussed at the time of their meeting at New York, about the Rules and Regulations of the Math and Mission. "I have made considerable changes in the Alambazar Math Rules on broad principles and have included some democratic procedure in the management of the monastery. I have asked Rakhai to send a copy of the new rules to you."—When he heard all about the activities of Swamiji, Abhedananda felt considerable delighted and he recalled to his mind the prophecy of the Master: "Naren is a living dynamo of work". But he equally felt sad at the state of Vivekananda's health.

"You feel very much run-down, Naren. Pray, have some rest here. You have done enough work". When thus entreated by Abhedananda, Vivekananda, it is on record, said to his brother-disciple, "Well, brother, my days are numbered. I shall live only for three or four years at the most". These words of his leader must have touched the heart of Swami Abhedananda who must have then thought inwardly: Has Vivekananda forebodings that he will not be spared on this mortal plane for long? He must have also shuddered to think it. A world without Vivekananda was impossible to imagine. It is practically beyond the power of anybody to fathom the mental agony of Swami Abhedananda when he heard those pathetic words from Vivekananda—my days are numbered.

And what a prophetic utterance: His days were really numbered. Returning to Belur Math from his European tour in January, 1901, Vivekananda whose health had considerably deteriorated, set himself to an important task without any further delay. He thought of vesting the central Math with legal authority to manage property and take care of all other matters connected with the growing organisation. After considering several alternative plans, he at last fixed upon making a Debottar Trust of the Math, and the Trust Deed was executed on January 30, 1901, and registered on February 6. By this Deed Swami Vivekananda vested all the Belur Math properties in a Board of Trustees consisting of all disciples of Shri Ramakrishna. "After the execution of the Trust, Vivekananda stepped down from the

Presidentship of the organisation in favour of Swami Brahmananda, thus divesting himself of all authority. After this he lived for one year and four months only.

“The last two months which the Swami passed on earth were full of events foreshadowing the approaching end, though at the time these events passed by unsuspected by those about him. . . . As days passed by, he felt more and more the necessity of withdrawing himself from the task of directing the affairs of the Math, in order to give those that were about him a free hand. At last came the fateful day of the Mahasamadhi.” It was on Friday, the 4th of July, 1902 that Swami Vivekananda passed away at the Belur Math. A cable was sent by Swami Saradananda to the New York Vedanta Society, communicating the sad news. Almost all the American papers carried the news in a prominent position and with a bannerline, heading: “Swami Vivekananda, Apostle of Vedanta cult, is dead”. When the news of his death reached Chicago, it was so unexpected that some could not believe it. Some of his close admirers wrote letters to Swami Abhedananda to ascertain the truth about the death news; the latter was not present in New York at that time.

Thus passed away on the wings of meditation Swami Vivekananda to whom, as Romain Rolland has rightly indicated, religion was synonymous with universalism of the spirit. The sudden death of his leader was just like a bolt from the blue to Swami Abhedananda then far away from the monastic headquarters at Belur. Gone was the man who wanted to impart into future religion a dynamic urge calculated to benefit the individual as well as humanity as a whole at the same time. Extinguished was the flame that burnt so long with the motto: “*atmano mokshartham, jagaddhitaya cha*”—for one’s own salvation and for the good of the world. Past memories crowded over his mind—memories of those days at Dakshineswar, Shyampukur, Alambazar and also at some pilgrimages. As he sat alone in his room at the headquarters of the Vedanta Society in New York with silence of the night around him, brooding over the past days in company of his beloved leader. Swami Abhedananda’s mind, it might be conjectured, was overcast not with any sense of sorrow, but with a sense of greater responsibility to carry on with unflagging zeal the sacred task of preaching the gospel of Vedanta in the West.

## CHAPTER VI

### ON THE MARCH

Among the notable Indians with whom Swami Abhedananda came in contact in America were Protap Chandra Mazumdar, the celebrated Brahmo preacher and Bipin Chandra Paul, the renowned political leader. It was in 1900 that he met both of them when they visited America and both of them have highly spoken of the excellent work done by the young Hindu preacher. Bipin Chandra Pal has recorded in his *Memoirs*: "When I went to visit the United States of America, I learnt with great satisfaction about the missionary activities of Swami Abhedananda, a direct disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. He had been there for about four years with the object of preaching the universal message of Vedanta which was initiated by Swami Vivekananda. If I remember aright, it was sometimes in January, 1900 that I came to New York to meet personally Swami Abhedananda and to gather from him some information regarding his activities in America. I met him at the Headquarters of the New York Vedanta Society. I was cordially received by him and we talked for an hour or so. It seemed to me that the gospel of Vedanta would never have travelled outside India without the efforts of the two great Hindu preachers—Vivekananda and Abhedananda. I was also taken by surprise at the interest evinced by Abhedananda regarding the political situation in India at the time. I had a long discussion with him about the future political changes in India. Three months after I again met him at Boston where a session of the Liberal Congress of Religion was held at the premises of the First Unitarian Church. Both of us were invited to deliver lectures at that memorable gathering. Rev. Heber Newton, the Chief Clergyman of New York was one of the speakers on the first day. Abhedananda spoke on the third day. The subject matter of his lecture was "The Religious Conceptions of the Hindus". The vast audience present gave a tremendous ovation to Swami Abhedananda as he rose to speak. A good orator, he was no doubt with a command on English. I was very much impressed in the way he presented his thesis which showed that he was an

erudite scholar. Next came my turn and I delivered a lecture which was more or less a comparative study of Hinduism and Christianity'.

Protap Chandra Mazumdar who was then staying in America as the guest of Heber Newton, was also anxious to meet Swami Abhedananda and he was delighted to see him when one day the latter came to the place of Mr. Newton to meet the great Brahmo leader who was one of the delegates at the Chicago Parliament of Religion. Abhedananda spent the night there in company of Mazumdar, discussing with him various matters relating to the spiritual awakening in the New World. Abhedananda paid his compliments to the Brahmo leader for his work in America. "I have read your *Orient Christ*, Mr. Mazumdar. I consider it a privilege to meet you and talk to you". These words of Swami Abhedananda, as recorded in the biography of Protap Chandra Mazumdar, are significant.

Another memorable incident during the first five years of his preaching in America was the celebration of the birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna. We gather from the *Brahmavadin* (April, 1902) that Swami Abhedananda observed the auspicious birthday celebration of his Master on March 12, 1902. It was, it should be pointed out, celebrated not only in India, but also at London, New York, San Francisco and California. It was in this occasion that he discussed for the first time the Life of the Master before a selected gathering at the Headquarters of the Vedanta Society. This was one of his important and impressive lecture which the Swami delivered during the first five years of his work in America. The inquisitive readers will do well to turn the pages of the *Brahmavadin* in order to get the full narration of this interesting incident which ended with worship, meditation, recitation and distribution of flowers.

Reporting on Abhedananda's lecture on Sri Ramakrishna on this occasion *The Sun* wrote: "On March 12, the Hindu preacher, Swami Abhedananda delivered a soul-stirring lecture before a distinguished gathering at the Vedanta Society's house. The occasion was the birthday celebration of his Master. The Swami said in course of his lecture: 'This saint of Dakshineswar, the greatest teacher world has ever come to know, was the embodiment of Vedanta philosophy realised with uncomparable charm and power the splendid symphony of the universal soul. In the

teachings and life of Sri Ramakrishna one finds a unique thing scarcely to be found in the world. History has no record of such a saint who stood for the harmonization of religions. We err not when we say that he was the Messiah of spiritual democracy. None but Abhedananda could say this.

We have already mentioned that Swami Abhedananda was not present at New York at the time when Swami Vivekananda passed away, as he had to leave for Europe at the beginning of August, 1902. Hence no memorial service could be arranged at the time. As he wanted to have some rest after continuous work for five years, Abhedananda decided to go to Europe where he stayed for two months visiting Liverpool, Glasgow, Manchester, Edinburgh, London, Paris and Geneva. We gather from his diary that this short trip to Europe braced up his health. At London he met Mr. Sturdy and other old friends. Returning from his European tour, Abhedananda's first duty was to hold meeting in memory of Swami Vivekananda. The meeting was held under a solemn atmosphere at the premises of the New York Vedanta Society. There was a large gathering consisting of several friends and admirers of the Swamiji and many distinguished persons were also present at the meeting. A portrait of Vivekananda was placed below that of the Master and they were beautifully decorated with flowers. Swami Abhedananda inaugurated the meeting and read first the letters of Swami Saradananda and Swami Premananda written from India, conveying the details of the passing away of Swamiji. Then he spoke on the life of his beloved brother-disciple. It was a brief speech pregnant with emotion. As he spoke, the audience noted that it became difficult for the speaker to subdue his feelings or to control himself; emotion surged up in his mind and it was with great difficulty that Abhedananda could restrain himself. In the testimony of an audience, it was a living homage to a great soul, a simple but soul-stirring speech which moved one and all. Describing Swami Vivekananda as a great preacher, Abhedananda is reported to have uttered the following memorable lines wherein only he could say: "Swami Vivekananda who was my beloved brother-disciple and the most favourite of the Master's disciples, was the choicest product of the age. Viewed from any angle, he was one of those distinguished sons of India, who are bound to appear time after time for keeping up the

spiritual dignity of the land of sages. He was nature's device for the readjustment and reinviogaration of the Indian national life. In him we have a singularly powerful embodiment of the renaissance Indian ideal. As a messenger of Sri Ramakrishna it was his mission to spread the light of truth and love to humanity 'at large'.

The memorial meeting was presided over by Mr. Herschel Parker who was the President of the Society. Among others who spoke on the occasion offering tributes to the memory of Vivekananda were Mr. Goodwin, Mrs. Ole Bull, Miss MacLeod, Dr. Street (Yogananda) and others. After the meeting was over, some resolutions were adopted, expressing sympathy at the bereavement felt by all the brother-disciples, friends and admirers of Swami Vivekananda. In another resolution it was urged to hold memorial meetings at the public halls in other places of America and to raise a suitable fund to perpetuate the memory of the founder of the Vedanta Society.

Before proceeding further with our narrative following the death of Swami Vivekananda, a few words should be mentioned here about the Green Acre Seminar referred to in a previous chapter. Vivekananda was first to address the Green Acre Conference in 1894, before a group of earnest students. This beautiful spot situated in New England has remained memorable in the history of the spiritual awakening in America in the wake of the Vedanta movement towards the close of the last century. There was a large pine tree under which Vivekananda sat, delivering his lecture on the Vedanta philosophy, while the students sat around him in oriental fashion. Since then the tree became known as 'The Swami's Pine'. Two years later, Swami Saradananda was invited here and next came the turn of Swami Abhedananda in 1898. Thus the Green Acre became associated with the memories of those three Sannyasins who went to the New World with a new mission. Of the Green Acre School, Swami Abhedananda himself wrote afterwards :

"Since the time of their inauguration the liberalizing and unsectarian spiritual teachings of the Vedanta philosophy have taken a prominent part in shaping the ideals of the Green Acre movement. The teachers of this philosophy have come from India and have represented it almost every year. Swami Vivekananda was first among them. In 1896, his successor Swami

Saradananda came to Green Acre and took classes for two successive seasons. In 1898, Swami Saradananda was followed at Green Acre by the writer of the present article. During that season he gave one lecture on "Science and Religion" in the largest hall before the general audience".

Incidentally it should be mentioned that Abhedananda's famous lecture on "The True Basis of Morality" was delivered at Green Acre in September, 1898, for three days and it was highly appreciated. In this lecture he discussed the question with a thoroughness and familiarity along with historic development of the subject. According to *Boston Evening Transcript*, "it was an address of universal value".

The Green Acre movement, it should be noted here, was established in 1894, following the Chicago Parliament of Religions, with the express purpose of bringing together all who looked earnestly toward the new day and who were ready to contribute their best thought. The movement in the form of philosophy was the immediate result of Indian culture and thought preached to the West and Abhedananda played a very important role during the period of his long stay in America to give shape and substance to this movement.

We must also mention here by way of elucidation a few words about Swami Abhedananda's famous speech which he delivered in 1901 before the Philosophical Union of the University of California. This speech is memorable and historical one, and covers all the central idea and discussions on the Vedanta philosophy of India. This academic body was founded by Professor Howison who was also its Chairman. He taught philosophy at the said University and he was a noted philosopher of his time. Announcement columns of old newspapers indicate that the lecture was scheduled for a special meeting of the Union in a lecture room of the Philosophy Building of the University of California at Berkeley on September 6, 1901. We gather from the accounts left by Swami Abhedananda that one afternoon he went to the California University to hear Prof. Howison's lecture accompanied by Prof. Logans. The lecture being over, he had a talk on Vedanta with Prof. Howison. Impressed with the earnest discussion of the Swami, Prof. Howison requested him to deliver a lecture on "Vedanta Philosophy". Abhedananda accepted the invitation and month later delivered the said

lecture. Only distinguished persons had the privilege to address this academic body. From the Reports of the Philosophical Union which was a unique creation of Prof. Howison, we gather that many eminent scholars such as Prof. Joseph Royce, Prof. William James and others delivered their respective lectures, from time to time. On September 6, 1901, when Swami Abhedananda came to deliver his lecture, there were assembled about four hundred noted professors from different universities while Prof. Howison was in the chair. It was a memorable evening in the life of the Hindu preacher when he appeared by special invitation before the 'talented audience' to speak on the doctrines of the most ancient system of philosophy in the world. Incidentally, it should be mentioned here that while the American press was very liberal in publishing his speeches and lectures from the beginning of his missionary work in the New World, no report of this particular lecture before the Philosophical Union appeared in the press, since it was on this very day that President William McKinley was assassinated and, consequently, the newspapers were too much preoccupied with the news of this event. After the lecture was over, Swami Abhedananda was warmly congratulated for the brilliance of the speech which continued for more than one hour. Of all his lectures in America, it should be pointed out here, this particular speech remains as the most original and convincing too. The claim of Vedanta was never put forth so ably as on this occasion. It also served to dispel doubts about the sublimity of Vedanta philosophy and this particular speech of Swami Abhedananda delivered before a distinguished gathering went a long way in paving the path of the future Vedanta movement in America and more and more intelligent persons were drawn to it. Here in course of his illumined speech Abhedananda said: "On one side, Vedanta philosophy gives expression to the highest ideal of all philosophy and on the other, it gives a foundation to a system of religion which is the most rationalistic of all systems and it harmonizes with the ultimate conclusions of modern science and philosophy". Then the learned audience were fully convinced about the supremacy of this ancient Indian philosophy.

The year 1905 was perhaps the most crowded year during the first phase of Abhedananda's work in America. In 1903 again he had been to Europe and remained there for about five months.



beginning from the month of May. It was more or less a sight-seeing tour and he covered almost all the important places of the Continent. This time he was particularly delighted in visiting the northern Switzerland and enjoyed the natural scenery to his heart's content. He was particularly fond of climbing the mountain top—a habit he had developed earlier while sojourning the Himalayan Tirthas in India. He returned to America from his European tour in October and took up the regular works of the Society from November. It was at this time that there came from India a young Sannyasin, Swami Nirmalananda by name—a disciple of Swami Vivekananda—to assist him in his work. Since Swami Turiyananda was recalled to India in June, 1902, it was left to Abhedananda to conduct the work of the Society, all by himself besides his public engagements which were then increasing. He therefore wrote to Swami Brahmananda to arrange sending an assistant and the latter deputed this young Sannyasin, Swami Nirmalananda, to proceed to America. Of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna five went to America—Vivekananda, Saradananda, Abhedananda, Turiyananda and Trigunatitananda and those who came after were mostly the disciples of Vivekananda and the first of the latter batch was Swami Nirmalananda, who on his arrival in New York began to conduct the Sanskrit classes.

What was the secret of Abhedananda's success as a preacher in so short time? The answer is provided by the Swami himself. Once he said, at the Unity Club, Los Angeles, where he was given a reception by the Ministers of all churches, "My only propaganda is the propaganda of truth and I teach that no people, no place or thing have a monopoly on truth but all have truth in the degree that we live the life and unfold the spirit from within and that spirit leads us into all truth". Thus wherever he went, he left a spirit of love, harmony and a greater feeling of unity and peace and this is why he could stay for more than two decades in America.

In January, 1905, Abhedananda was invited to deliver lecture at Barnes Hall, Cornell. The following account as reported by *The World* of January 27, 1905, will be read with interest: "Those who heard the celebrated Swami Abhedananda's lecture at Barnes Hall last evening on 'Vedanta Philosophy and Religion' were deeply impressed by the appearance and ability of the

speaker. They had expected a man of foreign mien, but when Prof. Hiram Corson introduced a person clad in genuine Hindoo attire, with brightly coloured turban and tunic, the spectators were somewhat startled. The turban was of orange coloured silk, wound around his head a number of times. The tunic was long, reaching to the knees, and suggested an overcoat. It was also of the hue of ox-blood, as was the brilliant sash that encircled his waist. The Swami surprised the audience by his marvellous command of English. It was the unanimous testimony of those who heard him that seldom has an American speaker at Cornell displayed such fluency and polish in using his native tongue as did this Hindoo preacher. He discussed the famous philosophy of the Brahman cult with rare sympathy and power".

It was in the same month that the Vedanta Society held a meeting at No. 62 West Seventy-first Street, to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Society. The proceeding began with a Memorial Service for the founder and it was followed by religious meditation and prayer. An illustration appearing in the evening daily, *The World* on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Vedanta Society showed Vivekananda and Abhedananda side by side with the caption: 'Old and New Leaders of Vedanta'.

While on a lecturing tour in the month of July, he went to Vancouver, Alaska, Los Angeles and the city of Mexico. There happened an interesting incident. He was travelling on the Pacific Express of the Canadian-Pacific Railways, when interviewed by a reporter of the Evening Telegram, the Swami referring to the missionary work in India declared in his sure and certain manner that it was all a mistake and that teachers of science rather than the preachers of gospel were needed in India. He further said, "The oriental ideals and temperament are so different from Western ideals that to attempt to impress the people there with Western conception of religion, is wasted energy. The great difference between the people of the East and the people of America is that in America commercialism is the ideal while in the Orient the ideal is spiritualism".

To the reporter of the Telegram, Swami Abhedananda also revealed his own reaction about the Tibet expedition which was then being undertaken by the Government of India. Flinching a long tirade against the way England was managing affairs in India, he declared, somewhat excited, that the expedition into

Tibet would result in no good to any nation, that the cost of the expedition had been immense and that it would have to be paid wholly by the people of India. He claimed that no effort whatever was being made to enlighten the people of India and that the result was that instead of India taking a place as a great nation, she was merely a dependency teeming with ignorant million.

Such was Abhedananda. Though essentially a religious preacher, he never lost sight of the problems of India and whenever necessary he was critical of the alien administration. If he was a Sannyasin, he was nonetheless a patriot.

The year 1901 saw the birth of the Publication Department of the Vedanta Society along with the monthly Bulletin which contained the activities of all the societies that came to existence by this time. The need for Society's own publication department was felt by Abhedananda almost from the beginning of his work in America. By 1905, the Vedanta movement under the leadership of Swami Abhedananda had gathered so much momentum that its impact was felt by the editor of a well-known paper in New York who opened a special column in the paper. Explaining the purpose of the column, the editor by way of appreciating the Swami's work, wrote: "We propose to reproduce in this section—'Swami Abhedananda through his work in the West'—short lectures of Swami Abhedananda, review of his books, and appreciations about him, published in the American and London newspapers as well as letters addressed to him by the men of light and leading of the day. They will give the reader in full and clear idea of the aspects of the history of the Vedanta movement in America and the great work done by the Swami there. In fact no information about this work has as yet been available to the public in India, and coming as it does, for the first time, will, we are confident, prove highly instructive and interesting to our readers".

When Vivekananda had first set the ball in motion, very few could then imagine that there would dawn a new era in America—an era of lectures mostly by the Sannyasins of the Ramakrishna Order. Lady Gay, a noted columnist of the period, wrote in 1905: "Following the World's Fair at Chicago in the year 1893, a new era dawned in the life of the American people. The lecture habit was at its height then. There were lectures

on clothes, on bathing, on face treatment, on everything under the canopy of heaven, all the aftermath of the World's Fair in Chicago, where women had held great meeting and gotten saturated with all sorts of grand notions on advancement and improvement". This Lady Gay was a columnist in the Toronto Saturday Night and when Abhedananda visited Toronto in 1905, she met him and was so much impressed with the charming personality of the Swami that afterwards she wrote a number of appreciative articles on the activities of Abhedananda in America which indirectly helped in spreading of the Vedanta movement. "In fact", wrote Lady Gay, after Abhedananda had visited Toronto, "Swami Abhedananda of India by his lectures has roused the interest of the American people to such an extent that he has become a part and parcel of our religious life". Here it should be mentioned that, while in America, Abhedananda used to write letters to many religious-minded and intellectual persons and he always used to sign all letters as: 'Swami Abhedananda of India'.

Apart from giving public lectures and attending to private discourses, Abhedananda was frequently invited to contribute articles in a number of papers. He was so much engrossed in his work that he could find time only at night to write these articles which also fetched him decent remuneration. Though written hastily, these articles are no less indicative of the remarkable power of his mind. Indeed, as a writer of philosophical and religious articles Abhedananda stands in comparison only to Vivekananda. For instance, we quote here an excerpt from an article contributed by Abhedananda in the March 1905 issue of *The Intelligence*, a noted philosophical journal of New York on "The Attributes of God, and Man's Relation to Them". "This article affords an interesting illustration of what seems to us to be a confusion of thought characteristic of Oriental philosophers when they attempt to deal with religious problems by logical processes". Thus commented the paper about this article which begins with the assertion that all people have the same conception of God :

"All scriptures unanimously declare that God is Spirit, infinite eternal, and unchangeable, true and one. If you ask a Christian, a Mohammedan, a Parsee, a Hindu, or a follower of any other sect or creed, what is his God, each one will quote

passages from his scriptures, giving this same answer as to what God is. The attributes of God are with each exactly the same. The Catholic priest who bows down before an image of Jesus and prays to him, burns incense, and lights candles, will give the same answer. A protestant clergyman, who does not believe in any image, will give the same answer. There is no difference between the God of a Christian and that of a Mohammedan or a Hindu, but still a Christian calls one Hindu and Mohammedan heathens, and they quarrel with one another, though they give the same attributes to God, their eyes are blinded with ignorance, superstition, bigotry and fanaticism. They cannot see that everybody worships the same God. He is infinite. Let us understand clearly what the word 'infinite' means. That which is not limited by time, space and causation ; that which has no other cause, is infinite. God is above time and space and all limitations that we can imagine. He is absolute. The infinite must be one ; otherwise it is finite. If there be any other things besides that infinite, then it is no longer infinite ; it is limited by that thing, consequently it has become finite. If we admit that God is infinite and one, we deny the existence of any other thing besides God. If we say matter is separate from or outside of God, we have made God limited by that matter, we have made him finite, we have made him narrow. The confusion of thought that prevails in the Western world is more or less due to its ignorance or limited knowledge about the real attributes of God".

Instances of many such articles contributed by Swami Abhedananda could be cited and which bear ample testimony of the clarity of his thinking and the precise nature of his expression. What the people of America appreciated most was the Biblical simplicity of his language. Thus when about this time (1903) he was invited by the editor of *The Outlook*, a scientific journal of New York, to contribute an article. Abhedananda chose for his subject : "Science and Religion". After comparing the one with the other, Abhedananda concluded that both are bound to converge. "Although some think that science challenges the authority of religion. To me science and religion are both universal and basically very similar. We very often forget that the day is not far off when both science and religion will converge. How ? Both scientific laws and religious principles have one thing in common. That one thing is faith. We all are aware of the

essential role of faith in religion. But faith is essential to science too. While the basic need and nature of faith is seldom reorganized, can anybody deny that faith is absolutely necessary for the scientist even to get started, and deep faith is necessary for him to carry out his tougher tasks?" It is surprising to note that what Abhedananda assessed at the dawn of this century, has now come to be accepted universally.

Thus during the first ten years of his stay in America, Abhedananda succeeded so much in achieving his mission that it will be no exaggeration to say that if Vivekananda electrified the Western world, it was Abhedananda who put in more voltage in the electrification started by his predecessor. The propagation of the universal gospel of Vedanta, according to Swami Abhedananda, owed much to the constructive genius and endeavours of Swami Abhedananda. A man of rare power and unquestioned sincerity, Abhedananda who worked all the years quietly and modestly, was the burden bearer-in-chief after the death of Vivekananda. What were the secrets of his success? According to a correspondent of the *New York Tribune*, "The Hindu Sannyasin, Swami Abhedananda who is doing much good work in this and other Occidental countries for the past ten years, is now regarded as a much sought after person. His mission is peace, knowledge and truth. The Swami does not mix with politics. His set aim is to bring spiritual upliftment and regeneration to all humanity. A man of winning personality, he has free access to the social and domestic life of the American people who fondly calls him 'Prince Abhedananda'. True, he has no princely kingdom, but a spiritual teacher of his stature is really a prince of men. It is his loving attitude to all and smiling countenance that have won for him an enviable position as a preacher". We also gather from similar accounts given by many other distinguished persons who had the privilege of coming in close contact with Swami Abhedananda that he was all humility and at the same time he was all strength. Whenever he talked to any body, he talked with fire and enthusiasm and he would lose himself entirely in his subject, forgetting everything else for the time being. He impressed everyone who heard him and all classes of people felt attracted towards him. Everyone regarded his company as precious. As a preacher Abhedananda had some higher qualifications—gifts or powers that he

developed through a long period of self discipline and mental control. There are innumerable instances that whenever anybody asked him any question, he would at once answer not from the intellect, but from within. In answering a question, he used to speak just a few words which could give so much satisfaction to the questioner. And how effective were his answers ! None but a person being highly trained and of concentrated mind can perform this miracle. Many students of Vedanta have admitted that Abhedananda who possessed rare insight, always used to keep his eyes to the questioner and his answers would come like flashes of illumination. This was always the case with him, whether answering questions from the platform, or in the class-room. Once it so happened that someone asked Swami Abhedananda after his lecture, why he had answered a certain question in the way he had done. "Because it was the answer you needed"—thus replied Abhedananda. And this accounted for his phenomenal success as a preacher in America.

## CHAPTER VII

### HIS BROOKLYN LECTURES

In order to fully appreciate the work of Swami Abhedananda in America and to correctly estimate his achievements there, it is necessary for us to refer to his famous Brooklyn lectures which may be regarded as his crowning glory as a preacher. They, no doubt, prove the height of his genius. In fact, the importance of Vivekananda's Chicago speech at the Parliament of Religions was to some extent surpassed by the Brooklyn lectures of Abhedananda. In his above lecture, Vivekananda chiefly expounded the doctrines of the Vedanta philosophy and preached the religious philosophy of Hinduism. Abhedananda delivered in 1905, at the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Science, a series of lectures on philosophy, religion, society, government, education and culture of India. Judged by any standard, it was a challenging lecture meant for the whole Western world. No other Indian of his time had vindicated the cause of India as Abhedananda had done. His Brooklyn lectures, therefore, bear ample testimony to the fact that apart from being an ardent and successful preacher of the Vedantic gospel, he at the same time was the most formidable champion of Indian culture and civilization. It also marked a new starting point in his subsequent career as preacher, for one notices a change of outlook in all his writings, public speeches, class lectures and private discourses, after the first phase of his work in America. The patriot emerged out of the preacher and, since 1905, he fought almost single-handed with unabated zeal and undaunted heart for the cause of India in the face of vehement opposition, bitter criticism, racial prejudice and the sectarian jealousy then prevalent in America.

It should be pointed out here that Swami Abhedananda is particularly indebted to Ramesh Chandra Dutt, a great son of India, whom he happened to meet in London in the year 1897, and from whom he received a copy of the *History of Civilization in Ancient India*, the *magnum opus* of Ramesh Chandra Dutt which was published in 1894. Abhedananda read this book with interest. He also read Dutt's two other famous works, *The Economic History of India* and *India in the Victorian Age*. No



doubt he was benefitted by numerous valuable facts and data contained in these books and he himself has expressed his indebtedness for this to Ramesh Chandra in the preface of his book, *India and Her People*, delivered in the Brooklyn Lectures in 1905-06. Of course, he brought his own scholarship to the subject when he delivered those lectures. No other Indian author was so much successful in mapping out the chronological outlines of the history of ancient India as Ramesh Chandra was at that time, and in this respect he was regarded as one of the best exponents of Hindu civilization and culture to the West. Abhedananda's interest in ancient Indian civilization and culture thus owed considerably to Ramesh Chandra, and he himself had acknowledged it. That he devoted his time and talent in dispelling the ignorance of the Western mind in respect of the past glory and greatness of India, is itself an indication of the patriot in him. And it was this patriot who stood before the distinguished gathering at the Art Gallery of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Science in 1905. This particular lecture of Abhedananda had evoked so much interest that it was noticed in almost all the contemporary papers with such comments as "unique lecture by a famous Hindoo" and "a brilliant exposition of the Indian life and culture and religion". His previous lectures in Brooklyn, (particularly the one "The Universal Religion of Vedanta" which he delivered in 1904) were enthusiastically received by the people here.

*The Brooklyn Eagle* of March 14, 1904, wrote: "Speaking on the evening of the 13th March to a large audience at the Assembly under the subject 'The Universal Religion of Vedanta,' Swami Abhedananda (who speaks English rapidly and fluently) asserted: In substance the Vedanta is the name of the most ancient system of philosophy in India. The word itself means literally, 'end of all wisdom', and the philosophy to which this is applied explains what the end of wisdom is and how it can be attained. Having survived many years, it has not only given an unshakable foundation to the religion of the Hindus, but has also permeated Western thoughts, furnishing the chief source from which men such as Emerson have drawn their inspiration".

This lecture was so impressive and listened to with so much interest that the Director of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Science invited Abhedananda to deliver a series of lectures from

the middle of November, 1905. "In these discourses, he challenged the so-called truthful Christian missionaries and their worthy adherents—the Indian converts, contradicted their scathing and sweeping remarks on the social and religious conditions of the Hindus and silenced the detractors by his clear and forceful replies. The Americans for the first time came to know the real conditions of India from a native of the soil who keenly felt the wrongs and sufferings of his own people and many had to revise their general impression on the subjects".

It was in November 13, 1905, that Abhedananda opened his series of lectures before an audience of several hundred people who listened with close attention to the comprehensive exposition given by the Swami. This learned series comprised of the topics: *The Prevailing Philosophy of Today*; *The Religion of India Today*; *The Social Status of the Indian People*; *Education in India—Their System of Castes*; *The Political Institutions of India*; *The Influence of India on Western Civilization* and *The Influence of the Western Civilization on India*. To be invited to lecture under the auspices of such an august body as the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Science was itself a rare privilege, for it gave a scholarly secured standing and prestige and also an audience of professionals, critics and serious students. In his first lecture on *The Prevailing Philosophy of Today*, Abhedananda said: "India has always been the fountain-head of systems of philosophy. In 200 B.C., philosophers' conventions were held under the auspices of the monarchs and kings, priests, commanders, merchants and educated women of the higher class, all took part. These ancient philosophers discovered the laws of thought and of the universe. Their minds were absolutely free from limitations of creeds and dogmas. The toleration of the Hindus towards all forms of truth was said to be unrivalled in other parts of the world. Even these earliest philosophers had worked out their theory of the laws and processes of evolution in form to correspond with the modern India".

The *Brooklyn Standard Mission* of November 22, 1905, reporting on his second lecture wrote: "Swami Abhedananda spoke on the 'Religion of India' in his Brooklyn Institute lectures at the Art Gallery last evening, second in a course on 'India and Her People'. He explained with clearness and intense interest the great and the minute differences of the sects in India, and

told of the manifestations of the Eternal One which are thought to be many by the people of that section, in contrast to the one manifestation in which the Christian believes.

“India has as great an area as the whole of Europe with the exception of Russia, and it holds many races and many religions—followers of all the important forms of religious beliefs may be found there. Its population is said to be about 300,000,000, of these what are called the Hindus form about 250,000,000 or about three times as many as the population of the United States.<sup>1</sup> The name Hindu was given at the time of the incursions of the Greeks and Persians, who crossed the Indus river, called by the population of its banks the *Sindhu*, and this the invaders made Hindu. The people call themselves the Aryans, and are of the same Aryan family as the Teutonic and Latin races. They call their religion the *Arya Dharma* or the Eternal Religion. This was fully developed when other nations were without a pure religion.

“Brahmanism was said to be like a huge banyan tree, spreading its branches over various sects and denominations. It is based upon the grand idea of universal receptivity, and its belief is in one Supreme Being and many manifestations. It was also compared, in beautiful language, to a huge mosaic inlaid with various beliefs about God, and it was said that he who would study the history of the evolution of conception of God should go to India, for it may be studied in all its steps in the religions there.

“It was said that the religion of the Aryans or Hindus is not Brahmanism; it existed long before Brahma appeared. The Eternal Religion can be classed under three heads—Dualistic and Monotheistic, Qualified Dualism, and Monotheism. The masses of the people are either Vaishnavas, Saivas or Saktas. The omnipresence of God is represented by Vishnu who has two aspects—personal and impersonal. In the one he dwells in heaven, and in the other pervades the universe, and from time to time incarnates on this earth and other planets to establish pure religion. It is thought that if but one incarnation be allowed, the Eternal One, that limits him, makes him finite. Rama was a manifestation conceived to be that of the Redeemer of the world, and he fills a place in India which cannot be filled by any other manifestations of God, not even by the Beloved Krishna,

<sup>1</sup> As per statistical account at the time of the statement.

the story of whose life is much like that of Christ. The spiritual essence of Rama and Krishna is the same though the manifestation are different.

“Saiva represents the ideal of renunciation, God has also manifested himself in feminine form and is worshipped for his feminine attributes by followers who call him the ‘Mother of the world’. So all women are the representatives of the Divine Motherhood. The powers of evil are recognised and have their what may be called worshippers, who believe that evil is the dark side of good, and that wrong and unrighteousness exert a dynamic power for uplift in the last analysis, or perhaps that they represent a stage through which human society must pass for purification.”

When speaking of the statues of the manifestations which are placed in temples as helps to peculiar modes of worship, concentration and meditation, the Swami said that many missionaries had made the mistake of believing them to be idols, worshipped in themselves, and not set up as incentives to worship. But those are the ideals and not idols that are worshipped in India. He said that he had seen more idolatry in Italy than anywhere else, where, it is said, the Italians of the lower class beat the Bambino when their prayers are not responded to. The Swami spoke several times of the misunderstandings of the missionaries in regard to the native religions, especially with regard to Hanuman, whom they term ‘the Monkey-God’.

So the Western world heard from the lips of Swami Abhedananda with all the emphasis at his command that “India worships ideals, not idols”, and when he declared this, according to the report of the *Brooklyn Times*, everybody present at the meeting appreciated it with thundering claps. *The Brooklyn Citizen* acclaimed this particular lecture of Abhedananda as “unique and highly instructive and original”.

The lectures on the political institutions and educational systems in India were a strong arrangement of English rule in India, although Abhedananda evinced a sincere desire to give England the full credit for the good she has brought to India. But perhaps it was Abhedananda’s fifth lecture on ‘Education in India’ that drew considerable appreciation from the audience. That a religious preacher could concern himself with this subject is itself an indication of the fact that the future of India was his

special preoccupation. On this particular speech, *The Daily Standard Union* of December 13, 1905, reported :

“ ‘Education in India’ was the topic of Swami Abhedananda’s lecture at the Art Gallery last evening. He said the missionaries were the pioneer teachers of the Western learning, the East India Company having discouraged all learning, and now in India there are five universities. The Swami gave the missionaries all credit for the standard of the schools which they established but blamed them for their failure to understand the Hindu nature and history. ‘The trouble with the missionaries’, said the Swami, ‘is that they condemn everything that is outside their standard. They are too narrow and bigotted to see any good outside their own belief. They think all who think otherwise are going to perdition, and they are anxious to save their souls. They do not think for a moment that other peoples have saviours and prophets of their own. Why should they give them up for a Saviour and prophet of the Semitic race? Not the Hindus who have produced many Saviours, each whom was as great as the Hebrew Saviour, according to the Hindu belief. The Christian missionaries ought to convert the Jews first’.”

Such plain speaking one could only expect to hear only from the lips of Swami Vivekananda, and as a successor of his leader, Abhedananda too proved himself no less critical to the missionaries. In the final lecture of this series Abhedananda as a historian traced the dawn of civilization breaking on the horizon of India and from there spreading to Greece, Rome, Arabia and Persia and also delineated the influence of India on the Western civilization. At the same time he described the crippling effects of England’s governmental policy in India, the set-backs suffered through British rule upon Indian culture. It was indeed one of the most revealing lectures which he ever delivered in America and which the Americans appreciated the most.

Discussing the political emancipation of India Swami Abhedananda said in his another lecture of the same series : “The people of India are loyal and peace-loving, but they are discontented and impoverished after carrying for one hundred and fifty years the burden of an unsympathetic alien government. Referring to the autocratic rule of Lord Curzon, he said in an outspoken manner, which even the Indian Statesman of the time could not but say, that : “Lord Curzon was the most unpopular Viceroy

ever in India. His policy was one of interference and distrust. He was no believer in free institutions or in national aspirations. He took away the freedom of the press, which was speedily gaining weight and importance, by passing the Official Secrets Act. He wasted the resources of the country on the vain show and pomposity of the *Durbar* while millions were dying of famine and plague. He condemned the patriotic and national spirit of the Indians, and lastly he carried out the Roman policy of divide and rule by partitioning the province of Bengal, simply to cripple the unity of the educated natives, as also of seventy millions of inhabitants. . . . . If the people of America wish to know what would have been the conditions of the United States under British rule, let them look at the political and economic condition of the people of India today". India should remain grateful forever to Swami Abhedananda for this particular lecture which he had the courage to deliver in America, ignoring the consequences.

In short, the Brooklyn lectures of Abhedananda revealed untruthfulness in regard to Western impression that Hinduism is an entirely metaphysical and a worldly system dreaming of things beyond, oblivious of the now and here ; a depressing sense of the unreality of life or an intoxication of the Infinite turns it away from any nobility, vitality and greatness of human aspiration and the earth's labour. He pointed out, as no other Indian of his time had done, how wrong the Western critics were when they said that India's philosophy may be sublime, her religious spirit fervent, her ancient social system strong and stable, her literature and art good in their own way, but the salt of life is absent, the breath of will-power, the force of a living endeavour. These magnificent lectures, with their variety and range show Abhedananda at his best and they bristle with the impulse of a great renaissance even today.

Following the Swami's lectures before the Brooklyn Institute there was a request for a centre in Brooklyn and Swami Nirmalananda opened and conducted a Yoga class there and held a weekly reception. This was the direct outgrowth of the lectures before the Institute. And it may equally be said that, following these lectures, Abhedananda became a living force in the spiritual life of America and a much was sought after him. Thus after Vivekananda, it was none but Abhedananda who

presented India in her true light to the West. And this was truly his crowning achievement during his first ten years stay in the New World.

Incidentally it should be mentioned here that these lectures had aroused so much interest in the minds of the people of America that there was a persistent request to have them published in a book form. Accordingly Abhedananda responded to this request and the book under the title *India and Her People* came out in June 1906, just on the eve of his departure for India, under the auspices of the New York Vedanta Society. In the book he added a separate lecture on "Woman's place in Hindu Religion". The dedication of the book was nonetheless significant: "To the people of India with deep fellow-feeling and earnest prayers for the restoration of their ancient glory and national freedom". It was an indication of his burning patriotism and in this respect Abhedananda stands in comparison only to Vivekananda.

Below we give an extract of the review of the book as it appeared in *The Vedanta Bulletin* along with an introductory comment by the Director of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Science. "These lectures contain precisely what the Americans want to know about India". The Editor of the *Bulletin* wrote: "Swami Abhedananda was a deep student of Western science and philosophy before he came to us. He promises, therefore, the exceptional advantage of being able to look upon his own country almost from the standpoint of an outsider and to handle his subject forced from both foreign and native prejudices. It is evident that his heart is with India, but he does not allow his individual feelings in any way to blind his fair judgment; and every statement he makes, is supported by quotations from recognised European, American and especially English authorities. ... In treating such branch of his subject, the Swami draws a clear picture of the conditions prevailing in ancient India, of the effect of each successive invasion, and of the present state of the country." Viewed from any angle, we might conclude that the publication of this book of Swami Abhedananda during that momentous period in the history of India should be regarded as an event of far-reaching importance. This book was not only favourably reviewed by a large number of the leading papers in America, but also enthusiastically received in India.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SOME INTERESTING EPISODES

Years ago when Swami Vivekananda left London, he knew that the work there would go on well, as he had found his beloved brother-disciple Swami Abhedananda in every way capable for this arduous and responsible task. The first ten years of Abhedananda in America had amply proved that the confidence was reposed on a strong shoulder. He proved to be a successful preacher and Vivekananda had the satisfaction of witnessing this when he visited America for the last time. As a preacher of Hindu religion on the basis of the universal gospels of Vedanta, Swami Abhedananda always held the banner of his mission as high as could be imagined. He had the courage and inflexible purpose as he followed the footsteps of his beloved leader, Swami Vivekananda, whose heroic personality always served the inspiration for his successor. If Vivekananda was successful in silencing the Christian critics who raised the cry on heathenism and pagan worship when speaking about India, Abhedananda's performance was equally brilliant when he established the supremacy of Vedanta even at the den of the hostile Church authorities in America during the early period of his missionary work there. We might as well cite here some instances.

Sister Sivani (Mrs. LePage) writes in her book, *Swami Abhedananda in America*: "Before the spiritualists' convention, the Swami named their spiritism ancestor worship, which in reason and in truth is, and they responded with ovation to the man of India. To the Theosophists he scorned their Mahatmas, warning them against psychic figments of the brain, bodyless entities. Of the Christian scientists he denuded their mysteries of healing, declaring spiritual healing the gift of enlightened reason known for centuries in India. And before the Swedenborgians where he was the guest-speaker of the pastor of the Laxington Avenue Swedenborgian Church at a dinner given by the New Church Club in January, 1900, he delivered a lecture and patiently explained that the Vedanta tenets in answer to Dr. Smythe showing how the dualistic Swedenborgian conception



was only the beginning of religion in Vedanta includes the Swedenborgian conception as part of its universal teaching”.

We find in the *Vedanta Bulletin* that great interest and admiration were manifested in the Swami's brilliant defence of his position that day and let us now refer to his performance before the New York Churchmen's Association. We quote this memorable incident as it was reported by *The Vedanta Bulletin* in its first issue which came out in April, 1905. "The New York Churchmen's Association invited Swami Abhedananda to deliver a lecture. The meeting was arranged in March 1905 at the Hotel Vendome where the Swami was a guest of honour. About forty prominent clergymen of New York and vicinity were present, and listened with close attention to his address on 'The Relation of the Soul to God'. The President of the Association, Rev. D. Parker Morgan introduced the Swami amidst loud applause. The lecture followed the luncheon. Everybody present heard him with rapt attention. At the close of the address one clergyman rose and said, 'we have heard a profound exposition of the highest form of natural religion, but our religion of course is supernatural or revealed religion'. To this the Swami replied in substance: 'India is the home of revealed religions. The idea of revelation first came from there. As to the distinction between natural and supernatural religion, that is purely arbitrary, depending entirely upon one's conception of nature. If that conception be narrow, then everything beyond the limit of that circle is accounted supernatural. Extend the circumference of the circle, however, and what was supernatural becomes natural. If, therefore, the conception of nature, as in Vedanta, is extended until it includes infinite space, then nothing remains outside and the natural has brought within its fold the whole realm of the supernatural. Thus the natural religion of Vedanta includes not only the supernatural religion of Christianity but all sects and creeds'. All the clergymen including the President of this august body expressed their satisfaction on the excellence of the speech."

It was, in this way, that Abhedananda proved himself to the West as the champion defender of Indian philosophy and religion. The dominating theme of his lectures everywhere was monism which swept clean the camps of the opposing school wherein he found lack of wisdom and security against

sectarianism. A few words about *The Vedanta Bulletin* might be mentioned here. The Bulletin was started by Abhedananda just a year before he left for India. The small organ gave new interest to the activities, served to acquaint all members and students with schedules, programmes and projects of various centres of the Vedanta Society—there being altogether six by this time. Thus the *Bulletin* came into being on the eve of the tenth anniversary of the Society. It also became a medium for the early publication of the lectures enabling those at a distance to read and share the teaching.

Not only in his lectures and discourses but also at any interview with anybody, Swami Abhedananda always maintained his own standpoint and he had yielded to none. He carried his own conviction everywhere. For instance we reproduce *an extenso* from the *Toronto News* the following conversation which took place on February 2, 1905, between Swami Abhedananda and a visitor in a hotel. In February of that year he was invited by the Canadians to deliver a lecture before the Historical Society of the University of Toronto. While there, the Swami also made a public address in one of the large halls of the city. According to newspaper reports published during the same time, this lecture was attended by many leading ministers and university professors. So keen was the interest roused by these lectures that Abhedananda was solicited to remain and establish a centre in Toronto.

About the interview with a visitor which took place at Toronto on February 1, 1905, the *Toronto News* of February 2 writes: "The place was the King Edward Hotel and the time was morning, February 1. Swami Abhedananda who has come to visit Canada was staying at this hotel. A visitor knocked at his door.

—Who is there?—called a man in a rich musical voice as a knock came to his door at the King Edward Hotel this morning. Not knowing the Hindu custom, the news reporter did not open. The Swami came to the door, stood in the aperture and said he would prefer being interviewed in the rotunda.

—My room is not just proposed for visitors.

Without his hat the Swami came down, simply dressed in a black suit, with a closed buttoned tunic and a white collar, with no cravat.

—Are you a Mahatma? You know Swami, that we have

heard a good deal about these Mahatmas that sit without eating for days and gazing into space and seeing things. You are not—

—No, no. I teach men to be Mahatmas, but not like that. I am no visionary. I believe that every man may be practical Mahatma.

—Don't you find New York rather a hard proposition to science, Swami?

—No. Quite the contrary. We have societies there and in many large cities. Americans are practical people that we want for Vedantism.

—Well, what is Vedanta any way?

—*Veda* means truth; and *anta*—the end. The Rig Veda is the book of truth.

—I see, the Hindu Bible. Well, you don't believe in the Christian Bible as the greatest book?

—No; there are many Bibles. There is the Koran and the Zend-Avesta also.

—You believe in Buddha?

—Yes, as one of the greatest religious teachers like Christ.

—Well, suppose you wanted to make a Vedanta out of a man like Pierpant Morgan or Rockefeller, how would you give him his first lesson?

—He would have to obey instructions; to think above truth to be simple in his thoughts and pure in his habits; to take exercises which I would teach him for the body and sometimes to sit alone in silence a good while so that he might see the truth.

—But all that time to Mr. Morgan or Mr. Rockefeller means heaps of money—fifty dollars a minute. Can a man make money, and be a practical Mahatma also?

—Yes, if he makes it honestly.

—And what are the exercises—breathing mostly?

—A good deal is in the breathing. The breath 'spiritus' comes from God. How to breathe well is how to live well.

—How about eating? Are you a dietist?

(The Swami looked too healthy to be a crank on fasting).

—I am a vegetarian. I like fruits and vegetables, and cereals, and milk and eggs.

—Then you are not a gloomy ascetic sighing about prophecies and seeing visions in the daytime.

—I like shuffleboard luminously. Life is a great sport.

—But not horse races, Swami ?

He shook his head (after a pause).

—And I find none so good as Vedantism. It teaches man truth is the good of life, and that self-control is its law. By philosophy men become simple in their habits. They idealise one another, and become force in action and thought without being licentious. They recognise the divine idea in every man and that the soul is the great fact, not the body, which is only the instrument.

—Then you believe in a heaven ?

—Yes. There are many heavens. Heaven is the place where a man's desires are fulfilled. We must begin heaven on earth.

—Do you believe in conventionalistics at all ?

—Yes, but we regard them as realities. When I raise my hat to a lady it is not a mere form, but my recognition in her of the divine principle of motherhood. It is so with all forms. They have a soul meaning. We do not believe in trances, but in practical everyday philosophy—yes, in quietism sometimes, generally speaking to be contented.

—So that even if you were deadbroke you could still see beauty and truth all around ?

—Yes ! Yes ! There is no mystery about this. It is plain sense teaching. Yes, we believe in art, in poetry, painting, music and oratory. The seven tones in the musical scale came from the Hindus to the Greeks. The Chinese have only five."

During his first ten years' stay in America, Abhedananda had to encounter many such interviews and the interviewers always found this preacher 'a hard nut to crack', to quote a university professor. He was as impressive on the platform as he was convincing in such interviews. He rode like a colossus and everyone had to bow down before his towering personality. Simple in dress and behaviour he seemed more like a lionised personage than a meek preacher. His magnificent brilliant eyes, his musical voice, his majestic bearing and beautiful features—for these were parts of him that no circumstances could hide—all served to bestow on him a special glamour. A distinguished student of the Vedanta society of New York has recorded : "When I saw Swami Abhedananda for a few minutes standing on a platform surrounded by others, it flashed into my mind—

what a giant, what strength, what manliness and what a personality! Everyone near him looked so insignificant compared with him."

Such appreciating remarks could be cited in numbers. Wherever he went he drew much tributes from those who came in his contact. What was it that gave him such distinction and what were the reasons that next to Swami Vivekananda he was the most revered of the Sannyasins belonging to the Ramakrishna Order who visited America during the last decade of the last century? It was the expression of his well-chiselled face, fastened in Grecian style, than anything else. He was a lion amongst men and yet at the same time he was sweet and gentle. It was the divine touch of Sri Ramakrishna, followed by a long period of renunciation, study, austerity and religious practices that really contributed towards the making of this uncommon personality. Only such great teachers came once in a cycle to regenerate the world like the spring that brings forth new fruits and flowers.

## CHAPTER IX

### A BRIEF VISIT TO INDIA

After ten years' of hard work in Europe and America Abhedananda felt an urge within himself to visit his motherland for a short period. It was now four years that Vivekananda has passed away and the surging national life of India at that time, particularly, was looking forward to have in its midst one who was doing so much work in championing the cause of India in the same manner just as Vivekananda had done. The year 1906 was momentous one particularly in the history of Bengal which was then experiencing a great political awakening as a result of Swadeshi movement, following the partition of Bengal. And the cause of Bengal being India's cause the leaders of the Indian National Congress had come forward to stand by Bengal. When the reports of Swami Abhedananda's Brooklyn lectures<sup>1</sup> reached India, they created a sort of enthusiasm almost akin to that which followed the Chicago lecture of Swami Vivekananda. This perhaps was one of the reasons why there was a persistent demand from India for the return of Abhedananda even though for a short time.

It has already been stated that when Vivekananda came to America for the last time in 1899, Abhedananda was particularly requested by the former to stay here at least for a period of ten years. True to his promise, he stayed and worked here for a decade without practically knowing any rest ; even his European tour during this time was full of heavy engagements. It was quite natural for him that he should feel himself tired after ten years of continuous work and this might be another reason for his home coming. Moreover, Abhedananda must have been then anxious to meet his dear brother-disciples at the new monastery at Belur and to learn the various activities of the reconstituted Ramakrishna Math and Mission of which he was appointed as one of the trustees by Vivekananda prior to his death. He was equally anxious to meet Swami Brahmananda, the new President of the Math. And above all, he was extremely anxious to touch the

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<sup>1</sup> *India and Her People.*

dust from the lotus feet of the Holy Mother and to receive her blessings. On the other hand his brother-disciples at Belur were equally looking forward to see him once, for the news of his remarkable success as a preacher in the West had all along been a source of delight and encouragement to them. So the hero of thousand platforms had to come back, though for a short while, after a decade of triumphant missionary work carrying on almost singlehanded in America and Europe. The whole of India then felt immensely interested in Swami Abhedananda, and so his return to India in 1906 was hailed with the same delight as it was in the case when Swami Vivekananda returned to India in 1897. There was universal jubilation at the news that Swami Abhedananda was coming back to India and it stirred the wake of emotion everywhere.

As regards his achievements in America during the first ten years, it has been stated in the *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission*: "Swami Abhedananda particularly was meeting with signal success in New York and round about, and the circle of his friends, admirers and students was widening everyday, till he became recognised as a noted preacher, philosopher and writer. By 1901 the lectures of Swami Abhedananda became so popular that the audience rose to six hundred at times. In addition, there were classes on Raja Yoga and other subjects. From 1902 onward, he also began to pay occasional visits to England and the continent. Besides, he opened classes for children in which work he was helped for a time by Swami Turiyananda. In addition, the number of his books went on multiplying. The work having thus increased and opportunities for further expansion having opened up, the authorities at Belur sent as his assistant Swami Nirmalananda, who reached New York in November, 1903. In January, 1906, a Vedanta centre was opened at Brooklyn. In May of that year Swami Abhedananda left for a sojourn in India. His return to India was an occasion for great public rejoicing and enthusiasm for Vedanta."

It was on May 16, 1906, that Swami Abhedananda sailed from New York to England and thence by the P & O Steamer *S.S. Multan* for Colombo in Ceylon where he landed on June 16, 1906. The feeling of profound gratitude out of the hearts of the many to whom he brought new light and peace, found appropriate expression in the farewell address presented to him

by the Vedanta Society on the eve of his departure from New York. The Maharaja and the Maharani of Baroda were present when the farewell address was presented to him. Below we give some relevant excerpts from this address :

“For nine years you have laboured tirelessly among us, enduring hardship, opposition, even enmity, yet pushing on your course undaunted and unchecked. When you came to New York, out of all those who had gathered so eagerly around Swami Vivekananda, you found scarcely a handful of earnest students. With these you began your labour. True to your Sannyasin spirit in the heart of this commercial metropolis, asking aid of no one and with the infinite wisdom, patience, courage and tenacity which have characterised your efforts at every step, you began to build stone by stone, the solid structure of the Vedanta Society as it stands today. Only those who knew the conditions of New York can appreciate how great have been the difficulties and how noble is your achievement. You have been to us an ever-wise and ever-loving Master and Teacher. Many of us who came to you ill in body and mind are today strong in limb and full of new life. Not one had come to you in vain. Everywhere you have brought hope, gladness, strength and spiritual light. Never can we pay the mighty debt we owe to you.”

Two days after this farewell function Abhedananda left New York. In his absence the work there was left in the charge of Swami Bodhananda who had then arrived from India. A month later he set his foot in a neighbouring country, Ceylon, where a right royal reception awaited him. To what extent the enthusiasm on the return of Swami Abhedananda to India after a decade of stay in Europe and America had been then created throughout India was indicated by numerous receptions that were then freely accorded to him from Colombo to Bombay. To begin with, “great excitement prevailed in the city of Colombo when his coming was made known. Placards announcing it were to be seen in the streets, lanes and other public places. Everyone was joyously awaiting the arrival of the Swami”. From the contemporary records it can be gathered that the people of Colombo were ready with a grand preparation befitting a king, to receive Swami Abhedananda who had conquered the soul of America. Even the excitement was so keen at the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission that Swami Brahmananda



thought that there should be present some representatives of the Mission to receive Abhedananda and, accordingly, directives were sent to Swami Ramakrishnananda and Swami Paramananda, the youngest disciple of Vivekananda, both of whom were then in Madras, to proceed to Colombo. Abhedananda, however, was not aware of this and, therefore, his surprise knew no bounds when he found one of his brother-disciples on board the ship. "My dear Kali, what a great preacher you are now"—with these words Swami Ramakrishnananda embraced Abhedananda with his outstretched hands. "Glory to the Master—it is all due to His grace, Sashi (Ramakrishnananda)", such was the reply. Then he was garlanded by the President of the Reception Committee and the first person to welcome him as he stepped on the land was the reputed Buddhist Anagarika Dharmapal who was a fellow-delegate with Swami Vivekananda at the Chicago Parliament of Religions. Years before, Colombo had the privilege of witnessing similar reception which was accorded to Vivekananda on his return to India in 1897. This time again it fell to the lot of the Hindu residents of Colombo to extend similar reception to Swami Abhedananda who was presented with an address of welcome which incidentally mentioned the name of Swami Vivekananda and this must have touched the heart of Abhedananda to such an extent that in course of his reply, he said, with subdued emotion as was his characteristics :

"One thing I noticed in the address, you have mentioned the late lamented Swami Vivekananda, who is not dead but is living. He is here with us all. He is in you and in me. He is not in the body. the body physical in which we have seen him. He is spiritual and invisible before us. He is more powerful now, a thousand times than when he was in his body. . . . It was he who first called me to England ten years ago. I worked in London for one year, and the next year I was invited to New York. I went there and worked continuously for nine years. Nobody can appreciate what Swami Vivekananda had done for the good of humanity."

On the 18th of June Abhedananda was received by the members of the Vivekananda Society at their Society house where he gave a short speech. Here he was delighted to meet Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy who later on became the greatest exponent of Indian arts and crafts. During his stay in Colombo, Abhe-

dananda visited some of the temples of Colombo, at each of which he was formally received by the priests of the temple and by a large crowd of enthusiastic devotees. While at Ceylon he visited Candy, Jaffna and Anuradhapur, everywhere he was given an address of welcome when in every place he had to give suitable reply. He left Ceylon for India on the 28th of June accompanied by Swami Ramakrishnananda, Swami Paramananda and several others by a Swadeshi steamer.

He first arrived in the port of Tutocorin where a hearty reception was accorded to him in the Cosmopolitan Club where four thousand people had assembled. Here his lecture which was first delivered in English and then translated into Tamil, was highly appreciated. To commemorate his presence in Tuticorin, a society under the name 'Vivekananda Society' was founded. Next he came to Tinnevely where also he was presented with an address of welcome. On July 4th the party arrived at Madras. A very warm reception was given to Swami Abhedananda and a lecture was delivered by him on "Vedanta—the Universal Religion". Many questions about Vedanta work in America were asked and the Swami's answers were most convincing. So followed his triumphant tour to other places of South India. Inquisitive and a complete information about this tour may be gathered from the book *Lectures and Addresses of Swami Abhedananda in India*. Everywhere it was the same story—warm reception and high enthusiasm which were almost reminiscent of those days when Swami Vivekananda returned to India after four years' preaching in the West. Everywhere he received address of welcome and at every place he made suitable replies, sometimes also giving lectures which were mostly attended by a large number of intellectuals. To what extent, since his arrival in India his lectures had aroused a keen interest, was beautifully expressed in the welcome address presented to Swami Abhedananda at Mysore which he visited on the first week of August next. Among other things the address said: "The learned and highly-inspiring lectures which you have been delivering ever since your return to the mother country, have done more than a library of books on Vedantic literature can ever do, in arousing in the young minds of the rising generation, a real and keen interest to seek after truth and know it." A notable feature of his reception at Mysore was this that a reputed Hindu scholar of the Mysore

Sanskrit College wrote a beautiful Sanskrit verse in honour of him.

It was in Mysore that Swami Abhedananda said in one of his lectures : "I look upon India as the *Punya Bhumi*, for, it is here that the Eternal Truth of Vedanta rose, like a torrid sun, to dispel spiritual ignorance and darkness all over the world. Swami Vivekananda carried the torch-light of Vedanta from India to America and Europe, and we shall encircle the whole globe with the light of this Eternal Truth." We might mention here an incident that happened in Mysore. The local Christian Missionaries were not at all pleased with all these affairs of ovation and reception accorded to the Swami and they made some adverse and uncharitable remarks in their organ *The Harvest Field*. *The Mysore Herald* of August 9 came out with a stray editorial in course of which it wrote : "our contemporary says : 'Swami Abhedananda has been received from Tuticorin to Madras with garlands, addresses and triumphal processions. In colour, in noise and in magnitude nothing has been wanting. What sincerity and abiding strength lies under this outward show? We assure our contemporary that it is real sincerity and regard that have found expression in demonstration of such reverence.'"

While in Mysore, Abhedananda visited Sringeri Math established by Sankaracharya. The most memorable lecture which he delivered during his visit to Mysore was the one which the Swami gave before the students and what he said on that occasion still holds good. Here are some of the excellent advices which he gave to the students and which the students of our time can well emulate. Abhedananda said : "Morality is at the very foundation of your character. If you want to attain the highest ideals of life, then first follow the principles of the moral law. Try to realize the purpose of life by means of *viveka* which means 'discrimination between the eternal and the non-eternal'. You must be pure in heart. Obedience is a great virtue. It is a virtue very much wanted just now in India. This is a national asset and a national characteristic. Without it each one is selfish and a selfish man is no more a helper in national life. Unselfishness means an eye for the welfare of our fellows, sympathy for our neighbours and friendliness to all creatures. Practise humanitarianism. Extend your love, charity and sympathy to your fallen brethren and make them like yourself. Love God by loving all

creatures. This is religion. Be fearless in all the walks of your life. Fearlessness is very much desired today in our young men for the up-building of the Indian nation."

Another interesting episode should be mentioned here just to indicate that Abhedananda was equally loved and respected even by the Mohammedans. A Maulavi Darvesh of Mysore was so much fascinated with his teachings that at a meeting held in honour of the Swami, he openly declared : "Swami Abhedananda is an extraordinary being. His wonderful intellectual gifts and his brilliant powers of expression of the highest truths in their simplest forms speak for themselves." Incidentally it should be mentioned here that the presence of Abhedananda at Bangalore after his visit to Mysore, enabled the Ramakrishna Mission to build a large Mission House there and make it the centre of an elaborate scheme of religious and charitable work in Mysore.

From Bangalore Swami Abhedananda accompanied by Swami Ramakrishnananda and Swami Paramananda proceeded to Puri *en route* Madras, covering a distance of eleven hundred miles. At several stations people came in large numbers to have a glimpse of Abhedananda. They brought fruits, flowers and other offerings as their token of love and veneration for the great preacher. Swami Brahmananda, the President of the Ramakrishna Mission, along with other members of the Order, was then staying at Puri. He came to the railway station accompanied by the Swamis of the brotherhood to receive Swami Abhedananda. It was a sight never to be forgotten. A week of complete rest and retirement at Puri came as a delightful break after the ten weeks' arduous work and journey from Calcutta. It has been stated in the book *Lectures and Addresses* that "a group of disciples of Sri Ramakrishna met there and lived as they had done in the early years of their monastic life, just after their Blessed Master had left them ; this reunion was a truly happy one for Swami Abhedananda." The Bengali residents of Puri took the opportunity of Abhedananda's visit and they presented him with an address of welcome on September 7, at a local school premises. It was on the night of the following day that the party left for Calcutta.

In fact, this was the real home-coming of Swami Abhedananda. As the train arrived at the Howrah station on the morning of the 9th September, they found an enthusiastic crowd of about a thousand gentlemen, headed by Narendra Nath Sen, the

editor of the *Indian Mirror* and Jatindra Nath Roy Choudhury of Taki, waiting to welcome them. Abhedananda stayed for a week in Calcutta as the guest of Justice Sarada Charan Mitra to fulfil his engagements in the city which included his grand reception at the Town Hall on the evening of the 12th September. It was one of the memorable gatherings in the history of Town Hall which has witnessed many a historical assemblage. It was his formal reception by the city of his birth and it was not only a large but also thoroughly representative meeting. Babu Narendra Nath Sen was on the chair. In course of his address, he referred to the manifold activities of the Swami and finally remarked : "That he has been a fit successor to the late Swami Vivekananda is amply satisfied by the invaluable services which he has rendered to the cause of Hinduism, Swami Abhedananda is a true Sannyasin, and he is known in New York as the man who works for nothing. He has built up that great organisation the Vedanta Society of New York". After the President's lecture was over, the Address of welcome, brightly illuminated on country-made silk, bearing a beautiful gold border and fringe was presented to Abhedananda who gave a suitable reply, speaking for more than one hour. It was in course of this lecture that paying his tribute to the memory of Vivekananda he declared before the vast audience in an unflinching tone :

"Swami Vivekananda was not an ordinary man. He was the patriot-saint of modern India ; he may be called an incarnation of divine wisdom in this age of commercialism. It was he who turned the table of commercialism in a foreign land like America. .... He was the pioneer, the first preacher, the first Hindu Sannyasin who went to the United States, carrying his Master's message and the gospel of Truth as taught by our ancient Rishis. Vivekananda represented the Vedic religion, the *Santana Dharma*, which we may call a universal religion. He achieved great success because he preached nothing but the Eternal Truth".

This esteem tribute paid to the memory of his leader, indicate that Swami Abhedananda was particularly keen in reviving and projecting the glory that was Vivekananda just in the same manner as Sister Nivedita had done earlier. By acknowledging him as the pioneer and preacher of this age, Abhedananda had in his mind to impress on the minds of his countrymen the historical significance of this patriot-saint of India. This also

reflects his implicit allegiance to his beloved leader. In his reply to the Town Hall Address, Swami Abhedananda also dwelt on the various aspects of the work that had been done in America by the preachers belong to the Order of Sri Ramakrishna. In fact this was one of the finest speeches that he delivered during his short visit to India. A summary of this memorable lecture appeared in almost all the dailies of Calcutta.

Abhedananda delivered another lecture on the following day which was chiefly intended for the youngmen of Calcutta. It should be noted that ever since he set his foot on the soils of India, his attention was always directed to the rising generation where life he wanted to mould and which was one of the most cherished dreams of Vivekananda. What we felt in his heart was the state of denationalization and demoralisation amongst the youngmen who seemed to have lost their moorings. The essence of his advice to the youngmen of Calcutta was almost the same as spoken to the students of Bangalore.

Swami Abhedananda spent five days quietly at Belur in company of his brother-disciples. While at Belur, he did not forget to make a pilgrimage to Dakshineswar where he had his first meeting with his Master and his subsequent initiation under him. The memories of those bygone days must have swelled in his heart as he entered the temple of Bhavatarini, the deity worshipped by Sri Ramakrishna. This holy place remained a part and parcel of his spiritual existence. "During his short stay at the Math, the Swami revised the constitution of the Ramakrishna Mission which was not then registered and proposed in a meeting of the Trustees that Swami Brahmananda should remain the life-long President of the R. K. Mission. And this motion was accepted unanimously. On the 23rd of September, Abhedananda went to Chandurnagar to deliver a lecture on the occasion of the anniversary of the *Sat Samiti* (later on known as the *Pravartak Samgha*). The French Mayor presided. "The speech was full of sparks", so remarked Matilal Roy who went to Belur to fetch Abhedananda to Chandurnagar on behalf of the *Sat Samiti*. The following lines taken from his Chandurnagar speech indicate :

"Let us stand up and cultivate the Truth that we are the Atman, birthless and deathless and, therefore, we must be fearless and brave anything that stands in the way of realizing our highest ideal. . . . It is necessary today that we should train youngmen to

be spiritual teacher. Spiritual teachers are those who have sacrificed all their self-interest upon the altar of humanity. . . . Today we need more Sannyasins who will be ready to give up everything, to give up their body if necessary for the good of others”.

This was the *summum bonum* of Abhedananda's advice to the younger generation of India during the first decade of this century. Each and every word that fell from his lips during his short visit to India seemed to remind everyone who heard of Swami Vivekananda in this regard. The educated class of India noticed the same fire and same glow in every utterance of his spiritual brother Swami Abhedananda. It was surcharged all through with the same warmth of heart and also the same feeling. And this perhaps was one of the reasons why Abhedananda on his return to India was so enthusiastically received by the people all over India. It was not for nothing that Swami Brahmananda had told to Swami Abhedananda at Puri : “Kali, it is all the play of the Master. When Naren left us, we thought that our work in the West will suffer a set back. But your whole-hearted performance has convinced us that Naren is very much alive in you”. Could any befitting compliment be paid than this—and this from no other person than Swami Brahmananda, the magnificent pillar of the Ramakrishna Order.

It was the season of autumn in Bengal when he was staying at Belur where the Durga Puja festival which was initiated by Vivekananda, was duly performed and Swami Abhedananda participated into it. After the ceremony was over, he was invited one day at the Oriental Seminary to deliver a lecture. He had his schooling in this institution. He was also accorded a reception by the peoples of Ahiritola, the place of his birth. His stay in Calcutta came to an end on October 5 when Swami Abhedananda accompanied by Swami Paramananda and Amulya Brahmachari (now Swami Sankarananda) left for Patna where on the following evening he delivered a lecture in the Town Hall. Varanasi had become by this time one of the chief centres of the Mission and so Abhedananda visited the holy city on the next stage of his journey from Patna. He was delighted to see that through the active efforts of Swami Sivananda, the Ramakrishna Sevaram (the home of service) with its school for boys, was doing excellent work at Varanasi. Service to humanity was one of the cherished dreams of Vivekananda and we can well imagine

his satisfaction at the Mission's activities while at Banaras, he did not miss to visit Saranath where exists the relics of the Mrigdeva Vihara and the ancient relics of the Buddhist *stupa*. The rest of his journey included such places as Allahabad, Agra, Alwar, Ahmedabad and Bombay. Everywhere he was received with great enthusiasm, followed by addresses of welcome and everywhere he made suitable speeches, in which he discussed not only religion, but also some of the burning topics of the day. From the first day of his landing to India to the last phase of his journey, it was indeed a triumphal tone which was reminiscent of those days when Swami Vivekananda toured the whole of Northern India after his return to India in 1897. So in course of less than a decade India had the privilege of witnessing the spectacular tour of two of the greatest Sannyasins of the Rama-krishna Order—Vivekananda and Abhedananda. On November 10, Swami Abhedananda accompanied by Swami Paramananda, sailed for London by the P & O S.S. Marmora.

Thus during his brief stay in India, Abhedananda was able to create a new wave of enthusiasm amongst her people which was then very badly needed. He was successful in infusing new life and new hope which India was then lacking following the sudden passing away of Swami Vivekananda. At this distance of time when we look at the events of those six months, we might regard the home coming of Swami Abhedananda as a great event in the history of modern India, for all India rose to do him honour, and with him came a reinvigoration of the whole Indian spirit. They even can only stand comparison to the one that happened in 1897 following the return of Swami Vivekananda, that Arch Apostle of Hinduism. From all accounts available to us, we find that Abhedananda's coming was awaited in the same manner as it was the case when Vivekananda returned to India. Evidently new forces of history were at play ; the manner in which Abhedananda was received in India and the numerous lectures delivered by him during those six months at different places visited by him, bear ample testimony to it. The whole of India as it were, rose to pay homage to the great teacher. It is impossible to describe in details the story of those six months which is nothing but an account of ovations, receptions, processions, addresses of welcome and Abhedananda's replies and lectures. From the dusty pages of the newspapers one can gather that the



cynosure of all eyes, Abhedananda while in India in 1906, appeared in the midst of processions everywhere he went, like a conqueror returning from the battlefield, crowned with glory not a conqueror of earthly dominions, but a conqueror of hearts, not only in the contemplative East, but in the materialistic West. But ovations, processions and garlanding meant nothing to Abhedananda. His mind was, we can well imagine, fully absorbed with the thoughts relating to the future of India. In the light of his western experiences, he wanted the rising generation of India to become strong in character, strong in mind, so that the future of India might be built up on a solid foundation as desired by Swami Vivekananda. A close analysis of his lectures and addresses in India during those six months will convince anybody that they created a profound impression in the minds of the younger people particularly on whom Abhedananda counted much as it was the case with Vivekananda.

As we have already indicated that India at that particular period was passing through a period of national regeneration. A change was coming on with the growing tension. A new spirit of self-reliance had then began to gain ground. In short, the year 1906 was a landmark in Indian history in all respects, and it was quite in the fitness of time that Swami Abhedananda returned to India, though for a short period, to provide her with an impetus and a new outlook which she needed then most. His appeal to the younger generation to emulate national ways and national ideals and to cultivate national virtues, was not in vain. And to what extent this spirit permeated the entire nation has been proved by the subsequent history of India. Thus the high priest of Monism proved himself to be a great leader of the nation.

## CHAPTER X

### ABHEDANANDA IN AMERICA: LAST PHASE

Swami Abhedananda, accompanied by Swami Paramananda, returned to New York on December 22, 1906. The young Swami Paramananda had met him at Colombo and followed him throughout his entire Indian tour. We have seen that during last ten years the Vedanta movement had spread wide in America. Before the end of the first decade of this century it had been deep-rooted into the soil of the New World. This was a remarkable achievement. From Texas to Canada and from Atlantic to Pacific, there was hardly any region or State from where the New York Vedanta Society did not receive any enquiry or requisition of its publications. More than a lakh of leaflets had gone forth from this centre. In the first instance Swami Abhedananda came to New York from England towards the end of 1897 and from that very day the Vedanta movement obtained an importance which began to increase every year, creating widespread interest. Recording the story of his ministry and apostleship in America during the first phase of his stay there Swami Abhedananda has said: "I travelled extensively all through the United States, Canada, Alaska and Mexico and delivered addresses on various aspects of the Vedanta philosophy in all the principal cities of those countries". The history of the activities of the Vedanta Society during this period is also the story of his own life as the Hindu preacher and the successor of Swami Vivekananda.

But here it should be noted that the activities of the Society did not remain confined to the preaching of Vedanta alone. It also looked after the Indian students who were then in America, studying in different colleges and universities. We learn from an account given in the *Vedanta Bulletin* of August 1906, that it was during the first decade of this century that a large number of Indian students had been in America for higher education and most of them received considerable help from the society.

Abhedananda had two major achievements during the first ten years of his preaching career. Firstly, he was able to establish the Vedanta philosophy as a living faith among the

Americans and secondly, he held aloft the banner of Swami Vivekananda very efficiently. It has been rightly observed by one of his American disciples: "If you can imagine a St. Paul without the fanfare and emotionalism of his ministry, a St. Paul without the dramatics of a colourful and fervent apostleship holding to the determined issue of placing self-revealed truth firmly and persistently in the hearts of men—you will then have some small conception of the immediacy and the reality in the message of Vedanta as taught by Swami Abhedananda in the early years of the twentieth century".

As regards the development of the Society during the early stage, here it should be mentioned that a notable work was also done by Swami Turiyananda who came to America with Swami Vivekananda in the year 1899, Turiyananda, or Hari Maharaj, as he was known in the Order, did some excellent service. In the estimation of Vivekananda himself Turiyananda was the embodiment of the teachings of Vedanta. He had a great love and regards for Vivekananda and was senior to him by one year. Essentially being a Sannyasin of contemplative mood, Turiyananda at first was not willing to go to the West. But when Vivekananda made a touching appeal to him to extend his help in the work of preaching Vedanta, Turiyananda instantly agreed and accompanied Swamiji to America in June, 1899. They came to New York, via London, in the month of August. Turiyananda was more or less afraid of his lack of efficiency in Vedanta work and hesitated to come forward to lecture—lecturing was not a liking in his nature. But Vivekananda told him, "You need not lecture. Just live the life and forget India". And Turiyananda was perhaps the only person who achieved considerable appreciation without giving a single lecture. His only asset was his intense spiritual life. That was his outstanding characteristic also. It was Swami Turiyananda who founded the Shanti Ashrama, or the 'Peace Retreat' was the first Vedanta Retreat in the West and which afterwards became one of the patent spiritual centres in America. The history of the Peace Retreat is as follows:

After working for nearly one year in New York and Montclair, Swami Turiyananda went, at the request of Swami Vivekananda, to California in July 1900, to start a Vedanta Retreat in the San Antonio Valley where a homestead (160 acres of free

government land) had been donated by a member of the Vedanta Society of New York. At first, the Swami went to Los Angeles and stayed there for a few weeks. Even in such a short period he became a great influence, and there was a request to him to stay and work there. But this the Swami could not do. From Los Angeles he went to San Francisco, where he met with an enthusiastic reception. After a few days' stay there, he left for the San Antonia Valley on the 3rd August, 1900. It was here that Turiyananda founded the Shanti Ashrama with a dozen students. Initially it was a completely isolated piece of hilly land, far away from human habitation, and fifty miles from the nearest railway station. There was only one old log cabin, and hence no fit accommodation for sleeping. There was no water near by; it had to be brought from a long distance. Even Turiyananda felt disheartened at the situation and the hardship was too much for the students also. But the inspiration of the Swami and the ideals of Vedanta gave them courage and strength. It was against such a bleak background that Vivekananda made a great experiment through the agency of his brother-disciple—an experiment which was unique in conception and successful in execution. Gradually the place was made habitable and the students applied themselves to intense spiritual pursuits. Swami Turiyananda worked only for two years at Shanti Ashrama and the place was more or less his handiwork. It actually came into being in August, 1900, with only twelve students. It should be noted here that the land was a gift from Miss Minnie C. Boock, a student of Swami Abedananda in New York. All records go to show that the spiritual force generated by the teacher and students of the Shanti Ashrama of those days continued for a long time to hover over the Vedanta centres in California, putting faith, hope and energy into every soul and leading then to greater and greater advancement every day." In short, what Abhedananda achieved by lecture, Turiyananda achieved the same thing by his intense silent teaching. After Turiyananda had left for India, Abhedananda occasionally visited the Peace Retreat, and looked after its works.

Now to return to our narration of Abhedananda's activities after his return from India. The next fifteen years of his work in America was mainly confined to the task of expansion and consolidation. He returned to New York *en route* London where

he stayed for two weeks and met many of his English friends who were deeply interested in Vedanta, and who wished to have a centre established in London. And a centre was established there through the untiring efforts of Abhedananda at that time ; his subsequent visits to England helped considerably in the matter of the development of the London Vedanta Society. According to the report which appeared in *The Observer*, London, Abhedananda while inaugurating the London Vedanta Society, delivered an excellent lecture on the Vedanta philosophy. In course of that lecture he said : "Vedanta is the name of the system of philosophy which has been in existence in India from the Vedic period, or at least, 2000 years before Christ. It teaches that the truth is one and universal but that the means of attaining it are many, and it gives a scientific foundation to the universal religion which is free from doctrine, dogmas and needs. Vedanta, in fact, may be said to embrace all the special religions of the world and its universal character is emphasized by the fact that it is not built round any particular personality." The paper described the Swami as "belonging to the Order of Sannyasin, the oldest Order, of spiritual teachers in India and his Master Ramakrishna, whose life and teachings have been published in this country by Max Müller".

The thirteenth anniversary of the Vedanta Society and celebration of the birthday of Swami Vivekananda was held at the Society House on January 14, 1907. Swami Abhedananda conducted the meditation. Swami Paramananda recounted incidents of Swamiji's life and character. Afterwards Swami Bodhananda who had been so long in charge of the society during the temporary absence of Swami Abhedananda, read and expounded passages from *Upanishads* of which Swami Vivekananda was especially fond. In the evening Swami Abhedananda made an address reviewing the work, and showing how Vivekananda, by organizing the Ramakrishna Mission, had made a link between East and West".

In the month of March the birthday celebration of Sri Ramakrishna was duly observed. Reporting this function the Society's *Bulletin* wrote : "Since his return to America, Swami Abhedananda gave one of his finest lectures on Sri Ramakrishna. He spoke many times on previous occasions on the same subjects, but this time this speech was very illuminating. In course of his

lecture, the Swami said : ‘The keynote of the life teachings of Buddha was active self-sacrifice, while the mission of Krishna to the world was to teach divine love. The great work of Ramakrishna was to bring message of harmony. He came not to reform but to unite. He pointed out the wondrous fact that the religions of the world are not antagonistic in themselves, but that they are essentially one. Behind all religious doctrines and dogmas the Master discovered one grand eternal truth. History has no record of such a saint’. It was from this time onwards that Abhedananda made it a point to present Sri Ramakrishna and his teachings to the western people without any touch of supernaturalism. In his next phase of Vedanta work in America, he projected the sublimity of this spiritual character in a manner which was consistent with the scientific era.

The year 1907 saw the birth of the Vedanta summer House in Berkshire hills. Reporting on the Summer House, The New York *Evening Journal* of September 14, 1907, wrote : “Up in the Berkshire Hills, not far from the picturesque little village of West Cornwall, Connecticut, and near the Massachusetts there is situated a most interesting colony of wealthy New Yorkers. Seeking seclusion that would be absolute and complete for the furtherance of the meditation that goes far to the achievement that their creed desires, there men and women, have sought as lovely a place as could be imagined. But this is not all about the colony in Berkshire Hills.

Here it should be mentioned that the Vedanta movement in America was then being conducted by six Sannyasins belonging to the Ramakrishna Order. Three of them were working on the Atlantic coast while the other three in the Pacific coast, since his two assistants to help him in his work in connection with the New York Vedanta Society, Abhedananda made some changes in the works and activities of the Society. As he took up the charge of the London Vedanta Society from the year 1907, he left the affairs of the New York Vedanta Society to Swami Paramananda, himself visiting London once a year and delivering a series of lectures on Vedanta. Swami Bodhananda so long in charge of New York Centre, was now spared for work in other fields. Accordingly he took up the charge of the Pittsburg Centre. Thus the New York Centre was left to the care of Abhedananda and Paramananda. Before his short visit to India, everyone con-

nected with the New York Vedanta Society had been feeling the necessity of having a secluded place where spiritual training could be provided to the aspirants in an undisturbed manner, which was not possible in the din and bustle of the city life. This is why on his return from India Abhedananda set his heart to this direction. It was about this time that the question of having an exclusive building for the society came to the forefront. At last in the month of March, 1907 a new house for the Society and land for the proposed retreat was acquired. It was a five-storey house situated at No. 105 West 80th Street with two rooms on each floor. The rooms in the ground floor were converted into one which served as the lecture hall. Some of the rooms were let out which fetched some income which was then necessary for the maintenance of the establishment. The Society moved to the New premises on April, 25.

It was almost at the same time a far-house at Berkshire, situated four miles from West Cornwall Station, Connecticut, amidst scenic grandeur, was acquired. It served as a retreat for Vedanta Students. The place lay at a distance of one hundred and seven miles from New York and it took about four hours time to reach there from New York. The New retreat at Berkshire Hills resembled Shanti Ashrama to some extent. Both Vivekananda and Abhedananda had in their minds to establish replicas of Indian forest retreat on American soil. The new Peace Retreat on Berkshire hills consisted of 350 acres of land surrounded on all sides by high hills. The old farm-house had eleven rooms. The Berkshire Retreat was duly inaugurated by Swami Abhedananda in March, 1907.

Here is a picture of the New Peace Retreat as given by sister Shivani in her book, *Swami Abhedananda in America* (An Apostle of Monism): "This Ashrama in the Berkshire! Three hundred and seventy acres of rolling pasture lands and hills, a brook and several springs. Two old New England houses needing only renovation and some remodelling barns, carriage house, sheds, all made to fit the purpose Swami Abhedananda had in mind. The place within a few years was self-supporting; feed for stock raised on the place. Fruits of many kinds and a splendid kitchen garden kept the table well-supplied for summer guests who came and went the season long. The place was kept very plain, everything simple and the Swami's routines for the workers

mainly voluntary and in line with the training and aptitudes. There always was to be found among the students some one who had training as carpenter, or knew something of the trades. The place was kept in good repair without hired labour. Always there was hard work to be done, always some addition being made, some project under ways nothing ever finished. Season after season the works went on. If ever Karma Yoga maintained a school for study such was here”.

Some of his early women disciples had their initiation at Berkshire Retreat. Sister Shivani was among them. Mr. LePage, one of his disciples was for sometimes in charge of the place. On one occasion it so happened that the local minister in West Cornwall asked Swami Abhedananda, if he believed in a personal God. Replying in the positive the Swami added “and also in an impersonal one”. This silenced the prelate. He requested the Swami to attend his services in the West Cornwall, but as the said minister did not attend the Swami’s services at the Ashrama, Abhedananda sent his delegates to hear the minister preach. This was Swami Abhedananda, strong, independent and upright.

But no description of the Berkshire retreat would be complete without any reference to Swami Abhedananda’s own records. In *Leaves of My Diary*, that impressive record which covers the years from 1900 to 1921, Abhedananda speaks of the Ashrama in these words: “The Ashrama looks like Fairyland: It is impossible to guess at this distance of time the amount of labour which he put to build up the place. He worked almost tirelessly and selflessly to make that wilderness productive, then beautiful. Indeed the Berkshire Hill Ashrama had fulfilled one of his fondest dreams.

Another Vedanta centre came into existence in Boston, where Swami Paramananda went early in 1909 on the invitation of a friend and started classes on Vedanta. From Boston he started later on a magazine called *The Message of the East*. Thus it will be seen that in course of less than seven years since the passing away of Vivekananda, the Vedanta movement was in full swing. By this time a large number of Americans—men and women—were drawn to this movement. The dimension or the magnitude the movement had then acquired was all due to the leadership of one man—Swami Abhedananda.



In June, 1907 Swami Abhedananda left New York for London, leaving the charge of the Society to Swami Paramananda. As the latter was not proficient in English, Abhedananda had to engage tutors for him. He wanted every worker to be independent—that was his method and this was the reason why he placed the responsibility on the shoulders of young Paramananda. In his temporary absence, Paramananda had to look after the affairs of the Summer school at Berkshire hills. Sister Nivedita was then in London and as soon as she got the news of Abhedananda's arrival there, she came to see him. He began his lectures on Vedanta from the second week of July, at different places in London. During his stay this time Abhedananda taught lessons on Yoga to many aspirants and among them was Sir Henry Graham. The Maharaja of Alwar was then staying at the Hyde Park hotel where Abhedananda was invited by the Maharaja. Sister Nivedita used to come to his place frequently and discussed with him about the problems of India. He stayed at London till the end of August when he left for America from Liverpool.

Arriving at New York, he busied himself with the work of his 'Fairyland'—the Ashrama at Berkshire hills which he wanted to build up perfectly according to his plan. He also took up the entire responsibility of the *Vedanta Bulletin* which he wanted to make as useful a publication as possible. The informations relating to the activities of different centres needed wider circulation amongst those who were being drawn to the Vedanta movement in large numbers. It did not take Swami Abhedananda a long time to realise that the Vedanta era was now in full swing in America and it was his plan and programme to make that era a living force. The ripple that rose at the platform of the Chicago Parliament of Religions has now assumed a tidal wave and the wave must rush on—that was what he desired now.

Amidst all this multifarious works, Abhedananda had to deliver lectures on different subjects at the Brooklyn Institute. Henceforth the Sunday lectures were conducted by Paramananda. Towards the end of November Abhedananda went to Lake wood accompanied by Professor Parker where he enjoyed a picnic by the banks of Lake House. His lecture engagements became now so heavy that frequently he had to go to various places outside

New York to deliver lectures and thus to create new interest among the Americans towards Vedanta. One of the memorable lectures that Abhedananda gave in the New Year at the People's Forum at New Rochelle was on "India under the British Rule". This lecture was delivered on January 6, 1908 at the Theatre Hall of New Rochelle and it was attended by a large number of audience. It was in fact his major political lecture in America. He spoke for about two hours and everyone present was spellbound to hear the fiery harangue from the lips of a religious preacher. It was altogether a different Abhedananda when in course of his lecture, he vehemently criticised the misrule of the British Government in India. Quoting authority after authority, both English and India, he exposed the hollowness of the British rule in India. Time and space were entirely forgotten as Swami Abhedananda uttered in his inimitable way these memorable words: "Recently I went to India on a short visit and what I saw there in my own eyes was nothing but a political ferment and widespread discontent among the people of India against the unrelenting oppression and tyranny of the alien rulers. India since the days of the East India Company has been bled white to make England prosper. The present day political discontent in India is the result of decades of economic drainage. The British rule has no doubt conferred certain good on the people of India, but the wrongs and evils perpetrated by it outweigh that good in a shameless manner".

As a result of this lecture, a meeting was arranged at the local Bar Association for the welfare of India. It was at this meeting that Swami Abhedananda came to be acquainted with such eminent persons as Dr. Cuthbert Hall, Dr. J. T. Sanderland and the unitarian clergyman Dr. Wright who were highly impressed with the personality of Abhedananda. Here it might be mentioned that years later when Dr. Sunderland wrote in the pages of the *Modern Review* a series of articles on India which was subsequently brought out in the book-form under the title *India in Bondage*, he acknowledged that it was Swami Abhedananda's lecture on India that had inspired him to write this book. It was about this time that Abhedananda's book *India and Her People* was temporarily banned in India. Since his lecture at the People's Forum at New Rochelle, it is on record that Abhedananda had held discussions with many leading per-

sons of America on Indian situation, when the news of his political utterances reached Belur, there was some repercussion amongst some of his brother-disciples, particularly Swami Brahmananda who did not like such political meddling on the part of a prominent member of the Order as he did not like sister Nivedita's association with Indian politics, following the death of Swami Vivekananda.

Abhedananda again left for London towards the end of January at the persistent request of the members of the Society there, leaving the entire charge of the New York society to Paramananda. From February 13, he began his systematic lectures and on the first day he spoke on the 'Wisdom of the East'. While at London Cyril Scott frequently came to meet Abhedananda. Sister Nivedita, too, was at that time in London where she had come to collect funds for her school in Calcutta. She also met Abhedananda and discussed with him about the progress of her school which was then passing through a financial crisis. Abhedananda promised to send her some money after his return to New York. On the 4th of March, he observed the birthday of the Master. After observing fast for whole of the day, he read out in the evening passages from his book the *Gospel of Ramakrishna*. The ceremony was performed in a befitting manner and those who participated in it were impressed with the devotion of Abhedananda towards his Master. There was no speech. Here a few words should be stated about the book, the *Gospel*.

Ever since he came to America, Abhedananda had in his mind to bring out the teachings of the Master in English for the benefit of those aspirants who wanted to acquaint themselves with the religious ideas of a saint who had declared that "religion is nothing if it is not realization". About the origin of this book, Abhedananda himself writes: "For the first time in the history of the world's great Saviours, the exact words of the Master were recorded *verbatim* by one of his devoted disciples. They were taken down in the form of diary notes in Bengali by a householder disciple 'M' (Mahendranath Gupta). At the request of Sri Ramakrishna's sannyasin disciples, these notes were published at Calcutta during 1902-1903 A.D., in two volumes, entitled *Ramakrishna-Kathamrita*. At that time 'M' wrote to me letters authorizing me to edit and publish the

English translation of his notes, and sent me the manuscript in English which he himself translated, together with a true copy of a personal letter which Swami Vivekananda wrote to him. This letter shows that the words of the Master were accurately recorded by 'M'.

Abhedananda edited and remodelled the larger portion of the English manuscript, himself translating the remaining portions from the Bengali edition of the notes, adding marginal holdings and foot-notes and dividing the 'Gospel' into fourteen chapters. The book was first published in December, 1907, by the Vedanta Society in New York of which Swami Abhedananda was then the President. In the Preface to the American edition he writes : "The completed work is now offered to the Western world with the sincere hope that the sublime teachings of Sri Ramakrishna may open the spiritual sight of seekers after Truth and bring peace and freedom to all souls struggling for realization". The book opens with a learned introduction from the pen of Abhedananda in course of which he writes : "Sri Ramakrishna's mission was to proclaim the eternal Truth that God is one but has many aspects, and that the same one is worshipped by different nations under various names and forms ; that He is personal, impersonal and beyond both ; that He is with name and form and yet is nameless and formless. His mission was to establish the worship of the Divine Mother and thus to elevate the ideal of womanhood into Divine Motherhood. His mission was to show by his own example that true spirituality can be transmitted and that salvation can be obtained through the grace of a Divine Incarnation. His mission was to declare that psychic powers and the power of healing are obstacles in the path of the attainment of God consciousness".

None but Abhedananda could interpret his Master's mission in this way. As regards the merit of the translation, it would be enough to say that the genius of Swami Abhedananda showed itself in its highest when he set himself to translate his Master's Gospels in English, retaining the basic simplicity and beauty of the original. The concluding paragraph of the Introduction is worth reproducing here on account of its underlying appeal to the real seekers of Truth anywhere in the world. "The days of prophecy", writes Swami Abhedananda, "have passed before our eyes. The manifestation of the divine powers of one

who is worshipped today by thousands as the latest Incarnation of the Divinity, we have witnessed with our eyes. Blessed are they who have seen him and touched his holy feet. May the glory of Sri Ramakrishna be felt by all nations of the earth ; may his divine power be manifested in the earnest and sincere souls of his devotees of all countries in all ages to come, is the prayer of his child and servant”.

This is how Abhedananda had all along presented himself to the world—“Child and servant of Sri Ramakrishna”. This book since its publication paved the path of the Ramakrishna Movement in the West to a considerable extent as no other book has done. It was noticed and reviewed in many journals. This was for the first time that the people of America had an access to the lofty gospels of Ramakrishna. Its sublime contents became a source of spiritual inspiration to many earnest seekers of Truth in Europe and America. The popularity of the book was tremendous and a London paper hailed the *Gospel* as the spiritual literature to be ranked with the *Imitation of the Christ*. A Spanish edition came out in 1915, from Buenos Aires in south America and a Portuguese edition soon followed in Brazil. In Europe the book was translated into various languages, Danish, Scandinavian, French and Czechoslovak. But this is not all the story about this great book. It inspired the great Austrian painter, Frank Dvorak of Prague who later on became a great admirer of Abhedananda who also inspired him to make two immortal paintings—one of Sri Ramakrishna and the other his spiritual consort the holy Mother, Sarada Devi. More about this paintings will be discussed afterwards. The Indian Edition of the *Gospel* came out in 1939, just four months before the passing away of Abhedananda.

On March 10, Abhedananda delivered a lecture on *Relation of the Soul to God* at the King's College, London. It is considered as a signal honour to be invited to give lecture in this institution, where only the select few were invited occasionally. From the reports of the contemporary papers we gather that this particular speech of Abhedananda which was attended by a galaxy of learned scholars, was widely appreciated in England. “Since the days of Swami Vivekananda”, wrote the *London Observer*, “we have not heard such brilliant exposition on such an important subject. The speaker, Swami Abheda-

nanda who is a brother-disciple of Swami Vivekananda and who is now at present leading the Vedanta movement in both the continents of Europe and America, is no less remarkable in appearance than he is intellectually. His face is full of gentleness, dignity and repose, and shows his high mental and spiritual development. He has not come to this country as a missionary to win converts to any particular sect, nor does he intend to antagonise Christianity. The aim of his teachings is to help mankind apply the principles propounded by all great religious teachers, to its spiritual, intellectual and physical needs. The lecture the Swami delivered recently at King's College before a distinguished gathering impressed everyone. The scene was reminiscent of those days when his predecessor Swami Vivekananda spoke in the same fashion".

Another London paper wrote : "The Swami Abhedananda is not only the most learned but the most fascinating Hindoo who ever graced the platforms of London. His magnetic personality and the charm of his manner are recognised by all. As an expounder of Hindoo philosophy to the West he stands second only to Swami Vivekananda who visited this country about a decade ago".

Many such evidence from the contemporary press reports could be adduced to show that as the leader of the Vedanta movement in the West, Swami Abhedananda attained remarkable success on both sides of the Atlantic. But the degree of his success, however, was noticeable more in America than in Europe which was due to the reason of his larger stay and prolonged activities in the New World where the field was somewhat larger and where the people were to some extent responsive. The real secret of his success, of course lay elsewhere. It was not his intellectual equipment alone or the charm of his personality that brought laurels on his head. He was the embodiment of the teachings of Vedanta and this accounted for his phenomenal success as a preacher and this is why he could establish the universal message of the Vedanta as a living faith among the people of Europe and America. The preaching of Vedanta was to him like a sacred mission and he never felt himself proud for the success attained by him, almost single handed. Thus when one of his brother-disciples told him at Belur during the time of his short visit to India, "Kali, you have attained a great

success in the Vedanta work in America. Were Naren alive today, he must have congratulated you on your stupendous achievements". Abhedananda simply replied: "It is all by the grace of the Master. I am just an instrument in his hands". Only a child and servant of Sri Ramakrishna could say this.

Now to resume our narration while at London, besides lecturing, Abhedananda gave to the aspirants practical lessons on Yoga. The aspirants included university students and some members of the nobility. The Leggettes and Miss Mcleod were also then in London and he was frequently invited by them to supper. On July 2, he went to the Lyseum Club where he participated in an interesting discussion: 'What is the Man? India's Answer'. Here at this club Abhedananda once again had the privilege of meeting R. C. Dutt whom he presented with a copy of his book, *India and Her people*. Later on, it is on record. Dutt wrote him a letter in which he expressed his high opinion about this book: "What I have not been able to achieve so long, you have been able to achieve that in this small book. Every Indian should read this book". The Vedanta Society was inaugurated on July 22 at Conduit Street. Sister Nivedita made the opening speech which was followed by an excellent talk of Abhedananda on Vedanta philosophy. The London Vedanta Society, it should be noted here, had this time paid his passage and also arranged for his lodging and boarding. He also met one day Pandit Shyamji Krishna Varma, the renowned scholar and patriot who was then permanently living in London. Abhedananda was very much impressed with the colourful personality of Shyamji Krishna Varma and highly praised him for his welfare activities for the Indian students studying in London.

In the first week of August he made a short trip to France where he delivered a lecture on *What is Vedanta?* which later on was brought out duly translated in French. After the lecturing season in London was over, Abhedananda sailed for New York on board the S. S. Lucitania and arrived there towards the end of August. This time his trip to London was very fruitful and the Vedanta work there was fully organised and placed on a sound footing. According to the report appearing in the *Daily News*, it is apparent that his lectures in London had evinced considerable interest among the intellectual class who

hailed him as the best exponent of the universal message of Vedanta which was first preached in England by Swami Vivekananda. One day while Abhedananda was lecturing in the Caxton Hall, narrating chiefly his American experience, he referred to an interesting incident which the audience appreciated very much. "Once I was asked in America, whether India has ever produced any philosopher like Emerson. To this I replied—America has produced only one Emerson, but in India there is an Emerson at every five miles".

After the lecturing season in New York was over, Abhedananda along with some students of Vedanta went to the Berkshire Retreat. After spending a few days here, Abhedananda returned to New York from where he first proceeded to Chicago to see the place where the Chicago World Fair was held, and then to Denver. Here he stayed for a few days and gave lectures on different subjects relating to science and religion and philosophy. As the year 1908 closed, one of his disciples, Sister Avavamia, founded a Vedanta Society at Sydney Australia, with the blessing of her *Acharya*. The Boston Vedanta Society also came into existence towards the closing months of the same year and the affairs of this new centre were conducted by Paramananda. He used to look after the affairs of both the centres at New York and Boston.

The New Year (1909) opened with the birthday celebration of Swami Vivekananda. Abhedananda returned from the Berkshire Ashrama on the middle of January and stayed till the third week of February, giving Sunday lectures and conducting the Yoga classes. He left for London on February 29 at the invitation of the London Vedanta Society and after staying there for a month Abhedananda went to Paris. Here a Vedanta Society was founded by him with eight members. He stayed here for one month to give proper shape to the new centre and left Paris for London on May 6. On the following day there came to the Society house Frank Dvorak the celebrated painter to meet Swami Abhedananda. The painter was very much impressed with the majestic appearance of Abhedananda and expressed his keen desire to draw a sketch of him. The Swami agreed and next day he came to the residence of Fránek Dvorák where the Swami was received with utmost cordiality and deep respect. "I feel myself extremely happy in drawing the sketch



of such a majestic appearance as yours"—Dvorák is reported to have made this remark to Abhedananda at that time. This time his stay in London was up to the middle of June and during this time besides conducting the meditation and the Raja Yoga and the Gita classes, he used to teach breathing exercises and give practical lessons on the Raja-Yoga to private aspirants. One day he went to a suburb to visit the house of Mathew Arnold, the celebrated poet; here he was received cordially by the daughter-in-law of the poet. He evinced considerable interest as he went round looking at the library and the study room of the poet. On another day he went to the residence of Alfred Russell Wallace, the famous spiritualist where he saw for himself the slate-writing and spirit-photo. It was from this time, it may be pointed out here, that Abhedananda interested himself in the scientific study of the subject and later on he wrote a book, *Life Beyond Death* which is acclaimed as one of the best books on spiritualism, free from prejudice and myth. In the opinion of many, Abhedananda has been successful in throwing some new light on the subject.

He returned to New York towards the end of June. Here a letter was awaiting him. It came from Swami Adbhutananda (Latu Maharaj) and it contained a request to him for some monetary help. The letter touched the heart of Abhedananda and at once his mind flew back to those days when he used to pass his days in company with Latoos whose service to the Master was exemplary. He felt the touch of affection of his beloved brother-disciple in that letter and remitted to him ten dollars. Here it should be noted that Abhedananda also made several remittances to Sister Nivedita for her school.

Here we would like to make a little digression from the main stream of our narration, just to convince the reader how the Vedanta philosophy and the Vedanta movement were looked upon by the West at the time under the leadership of Swami Abhedananda. Below we give an extract from the *Evening Star*, Dundin, of March 20, 1909 from which the readers will gather the views of the western mind about it:

"Mr. J. S. Warner writes to us: In regard to the Vedanta movement I enclose a general outline of Vedanta as expressed by Swami Abhedananda, the present head of the Vedanta movement in the Western world, successor to the late Swami Viveka-

nanda, who first introduced this teaching although it had existed for thousands of years in India, to the western world at the World's Congress of Religions at the World's Fair in Chicago, U.S.A. in 1893.

"Many people have the erroneous idea that by Vedanta philosophy is meant a philosophy confined exclusively to the Veda, or the sacred scripture of India ; but the term *Veda*, in the present case is used to signify not a book, but wisdom', and *anta* means 'end'. Vedanta, therefore, implies literally 'end of wisdom', and the philosophy is called Vedanta, because it explains what that end is and how it can be obtained. All relative knowledge ends in the realization of the unity of the individual soul with the ultimate truth of the universe. That ultimate Reality is the universal Spirit. It is the infinite ocean of wisdom. As rivers running across thousands of miles ultimately end in the ocean, so the rivers of relative knowledge, flowing through the various stages of phenomenal universe, ultimately end in the infinite ocean of existence, intelligence, bliss and love. The entire vedanta movement has for its creed this truth. When the Hindu preacher, Swami Abhedananda says that to realize this, unity must be the aim of all true religion—it is not difficult to understand what he exactly means by it. Evidently the Swami means : Upon this fundamental truth rests the whole structure of Vedanta teaching. Vedanta indeed, establishes a universal religion, which embraces all the special religions of the world. It is a system of religion as well as a system of philosophy. And what is more, as we have learnt it from the preachings of Swami Abhedananda, it does not ask anybody to accept or believe anything which does not appeal to reason, or which is not in harmony with the law of science, philosophy and logic. Vedanta, as the Swami asserts in course of his repeated lectures, is in strict accord with the ultimate conclusions of modern science, it also recognises the varying tendencies of different minds, and guides each along the way best suited to it. We were really delighted to learn from the Swami that Vedanta accepts the teachings of all the spiritual teachers of the world and recognises them as the incarnation of Divine Spirit, and leaves room for those who are yet to come for the good of humanity. We owe to the Swami a deep debt of gratitude for the light and wisdom he has brought to us and which he has bestowed on us unreservedly by his tire-

less preaching. When all is said and done, the fact yet remains that the influence of Vedanta on the West as a whole is tremendous and the movement that has made it possible is the crowning success of a religious teacher who has been working in this country for the last twelve years. The spiritual awakening that we notice today in the West is all due to the Vedanta movement which is spreading day by day and which is also attracting more and more adherents. This should be regarded as an eventful development of the western civilization. To spend a few hours at the Vedanta headquarters of New York or elsewhere is just to feel the warmth of the universal doctrines of Vedanta which alone can lead us to light and immortality”.

So this was the attribute of the West before the end of first decade of this century when the Vedanta movement had its roots in the soil of Europe and America mostly due to the efforts of Swami Abhedananda. This is but one testimony and hundreds of such could be adduced to show his influence on the preacher and the leader of the movement, for a period of more than two decades at a stretch. For instance we quote the following which appeared as an editorial column in a London Weekly sometimes in 1908: “We recognise with joy and deep thankfulness to the one only source of Divine Truth, the many generous and noble indications of sincere and profound reverence for the sacred scriptures of which Swami Abhedananda’s eloquent writings and speeches afford so many striking examples’. When the Sweedenborough Society presented Abhedananda with a few volumes of the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborgh as a mark of its respect to him, the former accepting the gift had made a very moving speech on spiritual fellowship which was heartily appreciated by the Chairman and other members of the Society.

As we look back to those days when Swami Abhedananda was busily engaged in the west in preaching the doctrines of Vedanta as well as Indian civilization and culture, we are reminded of those days when Keshab Chandra Sen the renowned Brahmo preacher went to England. Long after the death of Keshab Chandra, the eminent scholar and divine J. Estlin Carpenter said: Never again has England heard from the East a voice like that of Keshab Chandra Sen. Here was a voice of rare power, eloquence and charm. His dignified presence in

the fulness of his manhood, the glow of faith in his face, his courage, his passionate sincerity, his conviction of the reality of the presence of God, all made a deep impression". The same adulatory remarks might as well be very appropriately applied to Swami Abhedananda who went to the west with a similar mission and who conquered the two continents with love.

Love, that is the one word that fully expresses all that was incident to Swami Abhedananda's visit to the west; Love—connoting the two ideas that constituted the mainspring of his life, the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man. Love to God and love to man were the two poles of the axis on which his whole life-work turned. This love took Abhedananda to the West where he went in the three capacities of a learner, a missionary and an advocate. The realization of God as taught by his Master, was the one constant aim of his life in initial stage of his spiritual apprenticeship under the feet of Sri Ramakrishna and this, he maintained, was the destiny of every individual man. When he went out to the west at the call of his beloved leader Swami Vivekananda, Abhedananda carried with him the ancient spiritual heritage of India of which he was the best exponent after Vivekananda. He believed, as Vivekananda did, that while other nations that are now in a state of refinement and civilization were sunk in ignorance and barbarism, India possessed a very high order of civilization. That was at bottom a spiritual civilization reared on the basis of a direct communion with God practised and enjoyed by the Indian Rishis of old. As an eastern missionary to the West, Abhedananda preached that "the presence of God is really a great school of discipline", and in lecture after lecture, he preached to the thousands who assembled to hear him of the Living God, of Loving God, of rejoicing God. The west had hardly anything like meditation or solitary contemplation and it was Vivekananda, and then Abhedananda who taught the religious aspirants of Europe and America the real significance of meditation towards the unfoldment of one's spiritual life. Really Abhedananda stood before the West as an angel of light and wisdom, of faith and love, of purity and simplicity.

Abhedananda's mission was, in a sense, two fold as it was the case with Vivekananda. First, he was deeply concerned with finding a practical and unified answer to the many problems

facing the modern world. Second, being the appointed messenger of Sri Ramakrishna, he was equally concerned with the spreading of his Master's teachings (which was only half done by Vivekananda) in their most pristine and also most complete form. He taught nothing that was not of Sri Ramakrishna. The combination of these two objectives into one mission had involved, on the one hand, a thorough and persistent knowledge of the interwoven and enormously complicated struggles of an age which at the end of the nineteenth century had only just begun, and on the other hand a thorough understanding of every aspect of a divine personality of infinite scope. Had Sri Ramakrishna been less than he was—a complete and universal being, combining within himself every mode of God and every ideal of man—it would have been more difficult, if not impossible, for Abhedananda to equate his universal Vedanta with his Master's life and message. As it was, he sewed the two as one and inseparable. And because of this, it was easy for him to achieve success in his mission.

What was the upshot of Swami Abhedananda's message and mission, "I am an instrument and He is the operator", thus wrote Abhedananda once to a brother-disciple apropos of his mission in the West. "Through this instrument He is awakening the spiritual consciousness in thousands of hearts in the Western World". And viewed from any angle, it can be safely concluded that it was a divine mission which kept Swami Abhedananda engaged for more than two decades and it is almost impossible for anybody to realise fully the extent of impact generated by his tireless preaching. History will certainly accord to him the place of honour as the greatest preacher of Vedantic doctrine in the West, for all times.



# PART FIVE

## The Teacher

*“My message will be sounded through these dear lips and the world will hear it”.*

—Swami Vivekananda





## CHAPTER I

### THE SPIRITUAL HARVEST

Swami Abhedananda's preaching in America was no ordinary work. It was, in fact, the scattering of the spiritual harvest of Sri Ramakrishna which was initially garnered by Vivekananda. We have seen how the iceball put in motion in 1893, grew to be larger as it rolled on till the end of the first decade of this century. It required the constructive genius of Abhedananda to translate the ideas and aspirations of his predecessor into actuality. We have seen how the master-mind of the Hindu preacher succeeded in giving shape and form to the dreams of the Hindu monk, in creating a serene spiritual climate in the New World. As a matter of fact, Abhedananda did not spare himself in discharging the sacred responsibility that was entrusted to him by his leader. History will one day record that the entire story of the Vedanta movement in the West is the beautiful and inspiring saga of the lives of two self-sacrificing Sannyasins; one played the role of a conqueror while the other played the role of a discoverer, for if Swami Abhedananda did anything, he discovered the soul of the people of America and thereafter he saturated it with the highest ideals of universal truth. As one surveys the history of his work, one finds Abhedananda, like his predecessor, "moving through the West as some mighty, glorious and effulgent light. If Vivekananda was looked upon by the people of the West as 'The Lordly Monk', it is no less true to say that his successor, Abhedananda was similarly hailed as 'The Loving Monk', as the American papers spoke of him. What really, therefore, accounted for the remarkable success of his mission was his attitude which was always assertive, but never aggressive or antagonizing".

During the latter part of his work in America covering the period from 1911 to 1921, Abhedananda was a mature man and as one follows carefully all his lectures and discourses at this time one is sure to find in them a good deal of mature thinking. This qualitative change is discernible in some of the lectures that he was invited to deliver at various places. One also notices that since his Brooklyn lectures, Abhedananda preferred more

to make the glory of the ancient Indian culture and civilization as the central theme of his propagation than anything else. India was then passing through a momentous period of national resurgence and it was therefore quite appropriate on the part of the Hindu preacher to give expression of it before the people of America. India's religious supremacy was no longer debated, it was then an accepted fact. So Abhedananda devoted his time and talent to focus Indian culture in its proper perspective, wherever he found opportunity to do so. This was, in fact, his special contribution during this period and unless one takes into account the significance of it, one cannot correctly follow the trends of his preaching during the period we are now speaking of. And viewed historically, this was almost inevitable in bringing the entire Vedanta movement there to its logical conclusion.

For instance, when in the middle of 1911, Abhedananda received an invitation from the President of the Brooklyn Ethical Association—a distinguished religious-cum-cultural body—to deliver a lecture on India's gift to the world, he readily accepted it. Fifteen years ago it was the privilege of Swami Vivekananda to appear before this august body and he also then spoke on the same subject, and judging from the records one should say that it was Swamiji's one of the memorable lectures in America. History sometimes repeats itself, but it seldom repeats with such remarkable coincidence as we find in the lives of Vivekananda and Abhedananda delivering lectures on an identical subject and before the same body, at an interval of fifteen years. A votary and also a defender of Indian culture as Swami Abhedananda was, he delivered on this occasion one of his finest lectures which covered not only religion and philosophy, but also science, literature and art as they flourished in ancient India. It was not a religious preacher that spoke on that occasion, it was a historian that stood before the distinguished and selected audience, who were impressed with the speaker's integral vision in history.

“Unless one views”, said Abhedananda in this particular lecture, “the early history of India, most of which are shrowded in obscurity, in its proper perspective, one cannot be said to have known India correctly. If she is great in philosophy, she was nevertheless great on other spheres such as mathematics,

astronomy, music and art and literature. Even in the opinion of some eminent Indologists, in literature, our epics and poems and dramas, rank as high as those of any language. They have a kind of perfection—a perfection that is one with the sustained and complete seriousness for which they are unique, and which we miss in Homer or Virgil. It requires special attitude and aptitude to fully comprehend the distinctive creative genius of ancient India in all spheres—religion, philosophy, art, literature and science. The richness of Indian art and music is seldom understood in the West. Her greatness stands on her great traditions which are inherently profound. Time was when India not only achieved great things, nay the greatest, both in the inner and outer fields of her activity, but the exalting sublimities of her culture and thought have been for ages the perennial source of inspiration to many a people for all their strivings after a high degree of refined existence. The West must acknowledge her debt to India which is the motherland of all races. Did not an eminent American thinker say that mother India is in many ways the mother of us all?"

At the close of the lecture, Swami Abhedananda answered a number of questions in regard to the ancient heritage of India. He also answered several questions in regard to the social customs of India about which there were still some wrong notions prevalent among a section of people in America. According to the reports appearing in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, this particular lecture of Abhedananda was enthusiastically received by the audience and warmly appreciated. "He was frequently and heartily applauded. With him on the platform sat the President of the Association" wrote the paper. From a close study of this lecture one can find some coincidence with the views of Vivekananda, expressed more than a decade ago. Evidently the minds of those two great preachers were attuned to the same scale. They were so much alike in their content and expression that sometimes it becomes somewhat difficult on the part of a lay observer to distinguish between their respective utterances in support of Indian culture and civilization. Here both of them stand on the same plane and speak almost in the same vein, for both of them appear to us to be of the same cast of mind when they appeared in this particular role.

Professor Benoy Kumar Sarkar who was then in America

and who sometimes met Swami Abhedananda, has rightly observed: "If Vivekananda placed India on the spiritual map of the world, Abhedananda did no less in putting her on the cultural map of the world. It was he who finally established the cultural supremacy of India during his prolonged stay in America and this might very well be regarded as the final upshot of the whole Vedanta movement there. His signal contribution in this regard has never been fully assessed or understood. He was India's first cultural ambassador to America".

Here it should be mentioned that it was about this time Swami Abhedananda took an initiative in the welfare of the Indian students coming to America for higher study which eventually took shape in the Indo-American club which was founded under the auspices of the New York Vedanta Society. Besides promoting the Indo-American cordiality, the main object of the club was to look after the Indian students in the State and to help them in all possible ways. Dr. Bhupendra Nath Dutt, the younger brother of Swami Vivekananda, who was advised by Sister Nivedita to go to America, has left a record from which we gather that Swami Abhedananda put his heart and soul for the welfare of the Indian students in America, most of whom had participated in the national movement and also suffered hardships. "It is perhaps not known to many in India that it was more or less due to the initiative of Swami Abhedananda that there came into being in New York, a residence for the Indian students known as the 'India House'. When Swami Abhedananda met in London, Pandit Shyamji Krishna Varma, he was very much impressed with the 'India House' that was founded by Shyamji as early as 1905 and since then he was thinking of having a similar institution in New York for the benefit of the Indian students, when I met him at the headquarters of the Vedanta Society of New York. I was very much impressed with Swami Abhedananda's keenness about the prospect of more and more Indian students coming to America for higher study. 'Why should they go to England and seek admission in Oxford or Cambridge when there are a good number of colleges and Universities in America where students are provided with excellent facilities for education—I recall these words of Swami Abhedananda". Thus wrote Bhupendranath long after his return to India. Among other notable Indian students in America at

that time was Dr. Taraknath Das who also came into contact with Swami Abhedananda. Dr. Das also bears similar testimony as to Abhedananda's interest in the welfare of the Indian students and in an article which he wrote after the passing away of the Swami he has recorded his impression of Swami Abhedananda, paying glowing tributes to his extra vedantic activities in America during the second decade of this century. There must have been some salient reasons for it. The picture that India presented herself at the turn of the century was first realised by Swami Vivekananda who had cherished to the inner recess of his mind a sort of regeneration for his country, but he was not spared by the Providence to have his intention fulfilled. Abhedananda who knew the mind of his leader more than anybody else, had similarly placed high faith on India's regeneration which then depended to a large extent on the rising generation of young Indians and this is why he particularly interested himself in the affairs of the Indian students who then went to America for higher studies. It is on record how such students were helped by the Vedanta Society and in a number of cases they were presumably recommended by Swami Abhedananda which earned for them easy admission in some well-known colleges and universities. This is but another proof of his wide popularity in the academic circle of America.

Now we will enter into one of the most crowded years in the life of Swami Abhedananda. During his long career as a preacher, he delivered some of the excellent lectures in 1913. His continuous work left no time for rest which he needed then most. So in the early month of 1913, he went on a sea voyage for rest and recreation to the port of Fernandina, as the guest of his friend and pupil, Captain Hergan. He stayed there for a week and we gather from the *Fernandina News Record* of February 28, 1913, that "during the whole period of his stay there, Swamiji who was well received and welcomed by the people of this small port town spoke to a large audience gathered in the Methodist Church, Grand Theatre, Library Hall and at the school building. Everywhere the subject of his lectures was universal religion that comes within the teaching of all denominations. He was very convincing in his arguments". The paper also described him

as a historian and as a fluent and eloquent speaker. From here he went to Jackson villa where he delivered several addresses in explanation of his system of universal religion.

The year 1913 saw him scathing the spiritual harvest in abundance and in a number of cities. The intensity of the lectures delivered by Swami Abhedananda during this time differed from his earlier lectures though the pattern remained much the same. Here we would like to give some samples just to convey an idea as to Abhedananda's depth of expression. A close study of these lectures would at once reveal that he described not only the Vedanta philosophy, but all the different religions of the world of which he was a great scholar, showing their common aims and their varied creeds. For instance while lecturing at the Carnegie Library, Atlanta, under the auspices of the Atlanta Psychological Society, on March 3, Abhedananda summarised the aim of the Vedanta philosophy by saying that "it sought to understand the one unchangeable Reality—Spirit which exists everywhere and throughout all eternity, and of which our souls are merely one inseparable part. Our spirits are like the waves or eddies in the great endless ocean of ether. Essentially a wave looks like something different from the ocean itself, but internally they are one and the same. So our souls are merely a manifestation of the all-powerful spirit of God".

In the headquarters of the New York Vedanta Society there were various symbols of worship which had evoked considerable inquisitioners amongst the members of the Society. On an occasion before a select gathering, Abhedananda said, explaining the symbols: "Let me first explain to you the significance of the Altar which we call the Vedanta Altar. It stands for the altar of the heart and is dedicated to the Supreme Spirit, which is the soul of our souls and where nature is absolute existence, intelligence and bliss. It is dedicated to the self-effulgent light of the sun of infinite wisdom, which dispels the darkness of ignorance in the human heart. It is not meant for any individual spirit, but for the infinite Spirit which is the source of all personal manifestations and Divine incarnations. A worshipper of Christ should think of Christ upon the altar, a worshipper of Buddha or Krishna, Shiva, Jehovah or Allah should think of his ideal as seated upon this symbolic altar of the heart. In every case it should be remembered that the altar stands as the symbol of the

heart of the worshipper. Names and forms are merely manifestations of the one nameless and formless infinite being to whom the Vedanta altar is dedicated.

“The light of the candle is the symbol of the light of the intellect. It is the light of the pure intellect that reveals the spirit seated upon the altar of the heart. Purified heart and intellect must be united before spiritual realization is attained. Flowers are symbolic of the good thoughts and pure feelings which should be offered to the supreme spirit, and when fruits are offered, they stand for the fruits of our works”.

In another lecture at Los Angeles, Abhedananda explained the Divine Motherhood about which the Western people had no idea. We quote the following lines from the *Los Angeles Tribune*: “Divine Motherhood is the special gift of India’s spiritual tradition. The worship of God as Mother is unknown to the West, but the Hindus from prehistoric times have worshipped the eternal creative Energy which is emanent in nature as the Divine Mother of the universe. The more we comprehend God as emanent in nature the more clearly we understand God as our Mother as well as our Father. In modern times, it was Sri Ramakrishna who revealed this truth to us”.

We knew that in England both Professor Max Müller and Professor Paul Duessen were impressed with Abhedananda’s knowledge of Sanskrit and also of Philosophy. In America, too, he met many whose names stood at the forefront in the world of education such as Prof. Royce, Prof. Lanman, Prof. William James of Harvard, and Prof. Jackson, to name only few of them. During this period he was invited on several occasions to lecture before American universities, including Columbia, Cornell, Harvard and the University of California. From the themes and the pattern of lecturing during this phase it would appear that Abhedananda virtually played the role of a dignified teacher.

Again, on numerous occasions, while lecturing in various Churches Abhedananda often found Bishops among his audience, including the well-known Bishop Potter of New York. On these occasions his theme was Hindu idea of Christ. Once he, by special request, lectured before forty of the chief ministers of the various denominations in New York. He also expounded his doctrines before the Parliament of Religions held at New York and Boston. It will thus be seen that the life he led during the

year 1913 and the years following it, were of immense activity which practically left him with no time for rest. Thus a new spiritual climate was created by his untiring efforts while Vedanta flourished with the freshness of a spring flower. The whole movement grew larger and larger and the ripple created by Vivekananda now assumed the dimension of a tidal wave that eventually swept the American mind. In fact, it was in the Abhedananda era in the field of religious preaching in America. And what was true of America was equally true in the case of Europe. He crossed the Atlantic not less than seventeen times during the whole period of his stay in America, and travelled throughout France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Australia, Italy and Switzerland. Likewise in America he was constantly on the move, passing through the country from Alaska to Mexico and from Quibec to Vancouver. In the estimation of Professor Horschell C. Parker of Columbia University (who was one of the earliest admirers and friends of Swami Abhedananda), he worked like a giant for popularising and preaching the gospel of universal religion. "His mission as a preacher was purely educational and philosophical", thus wrote Professor Horschell. Thus it would be no exaggeration to say that in the elucidation and dissemination of the Vedanta philosophy to the people of the West, Swami Abhedananda, of all the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, stands second only to Swami Vivekananda.

The year 1913 saw Abhedananda delivering some important lectures at Atlanta which he visited in March of that year accompanied by Prof. Herschell C. Parker who was then President of the New York Vedanta Society. The first lecture was delivered before a distinguished gathering at a meeting of the Ethical Association where such eminent persons as Dr. Felix Adler and Dr. J. W. Lee were present as speakers. Swami Abhedananda was specially invited. The subject matter of his lecture here was "The contribution of India's thought to Social Ethics", which according to the reports of *The Constitution*, Atlanta, was highly appreciated. Here in Atlanta he also delivered a series of seven lectures at Unitarian Church every afternoon for a week under the auspices of the Atlanta Psychological Society reporting his arrival in the city *The Atlanta* wrote: "Clad in scarlet robes and flaming turban, Swami Abhedananda, the recognised leader of Vedantism, arrived in the Piedmont hotel last night (March 5,



1913). Abhedananda succeeds Vivekananda the great, who was for many years the leading exponent of this philosophy". Thus it will be noticed that most of the American papers always mentioned the two names—that of Swami Vivekananda and Swami Abhedananda—in connection with the Vedanta movement there and always these two figures loomed large before the gaze of the American people. The other important lectures that he gave here were at the Carnegi Library. Here his first lecture was on Vedanta philosophy and the other was on *Realization of the Soul*. Both the lectures were elaborately published in this *Atlanta Journal*.

Speaking about the Vedanta philosophy, Abhedananda said : "Vedanta is at once the most ancient and the most modern of philosophies. Vedanta stands for no special creed, philosophy or religion, but teaches the accumulated wisdom. It stresses the Delphic oracle of Socrates : 'Know Thy Self', and that it teaches that all progress is the evolution of the God involved in man. Evolution presupposes involution". When one of the audience asked him, "what is your philosophy"? Abhedananda at once replied smilingly, "my philosophy is most striking in its scope and the most salient point about it, not only harmonizes all religions, but harmonizes religion with all the sciences". In fact, this was one of his oft repeated epigrams. An interesting incident happened on his arrival at Atlanta, which should be mentioned here. He was hailed as 'Prince Abhedananda'. And in a class lecture here, he is reported to have made this remark : "They call me a prince among men, though I have no princely kingdom but a spiritual teacher, is a prince among men".

Here we should relate another memorable incident in the life of the Hindu preacher which happened when he visited Down South, Los Angeles, California in April, 1913. Here he gave a course of eight lectures at the Unitarian Church. All his lectures were largely attended by interested and sincere seekers after spiritual truth. Here the Unitarian and Universalist Ministers invited Abhedananda to fill their pulpits and to give sermon on a Sunday morning. According to the reports published in the *New Thought News*, this sermon was so interesting that every one heard it with his eyes fixed on the person who stood on the pulpit. "This will go down", the paper added, "in the lives of those who heard it as an hour of inspiration and uplift".

No other preacher belonging to the Order of Ramakrishna during this period or before, was ever invited to deliver sermon from the pulpit and this instance is but a testimony of Abhedananda's wide popularity in America as a preacher.

But it was his Fairyland—the Ashrama or the Vedanta School on the Berkshire Hills that engaged most of Swami Abhedananda's time and attention since 1910. The full story of this second Peace Retreat in America has been told by one of his American disciples, Sister Shivani in her book, *Swami Abhedananda in America* and the inquisitive readers might well do to read particularly the chapter 'Ashrama Thresholds' which is the most absorbing portion of this highly interesting book. In his training of the disciples here, Abhedananda always brought home to them the assurance of the Self in its supremacy. He had the peculiar way of penetrating into the hearts of his disciples, hauling them back into some semblance of commonsense and sanity. He could easily redirect the reason of many a stubborn disciples and turned their follies toward wisdom'. "Such a beloved Master, such a tender *Guru*. one can hardly expect to come in contact. His very radiant smile could change many stern heart and direct them to sober path". Thus writes Sister Shivani. The Ashrama was the special gift of his talent. It was not exactly a replica of the Shanti Ashrama or the Peace Retreat of Swami Turiananda. It was a place of retreat where those who wished to renounce the world, could find refuge under suitable conditions.

On one occasion stressing the importance of meditation Abhedananda said to his disciples, "The followers of Vedanta who live upto their professed creed should spend half an hour everyday in meditation. Meditation is the most important and absolutely a necessary step in spiritual progress". Among the disciples who lived in the Ashrama, there were many who loved Abhedananda in the best way they knew. All were 'great souls' to him and he bestowed his care and loving-kindness equally to all. They left their ways to follow where he led. Some had book learning, some knew the world—all brought their service and their love, none there were who did not bring him honour. In the testimony of some of his close disciples, while spending his days at the Ashrama, Swami Abhedananda walked the lovely way, saw no evil but only incompleteness. As a true Acharya-

he removed the shams, the blunders and, the inmates of the Ashram-men and women, reasserted their own restoration.

This was the life in the Connecticut Ashrama which was a very beautiful acreage covering wooded hill and dale, an utterly ideal setting for a philosophical and religious retreat. There were several springs and a flowing stream watered the rolling pastures. Two large cottages, Peace Cottage and Lotus Cottage and a few single cabins, ample barns and sheds. Here congregated resident workers, students, disciples and also visitors for longer or shorter periods of time as befitted their release from town, job or profession. Judging from all available records we might say that the Vedanta Ashrama on the Berkshire Hills was the crowning success of Swami Abhedananda. It was this Ashrama which in course of time assumed the focal ground of spiritual harvest. And it was the historical fulfilment of the entire Vedanta movement. It was the dream of both Vivekananda and Abhedananda to establish a slice of Tapavan as it existed in ancient India, on the soils of America, where a synthesis was reached between spiritualism and materialism, between the Vedantic doctrine and the doctrine of everyday life of a modern man, and finally, between science and religion which is the need of the twentieth century.

## CHAPTER II

### HIS TRIUMPHAL RETURN

Swami Abhedananda returned to India after planting in distant lands the banner of Eternal Truth as expounded in the Vedanta philosophy. It was indeed a hero's return. His spirituality, imaginativeness, faith, enthusiasm and asceticism—all combined to produce a deep impression amongst the thoughtful in America who realized that the spiritual ideals of the East could never be bound within the cold creeds and catechisms of the West. When they witnessed for over two decades the profession of the warm Oriental impulse in Abhedananda's utterances and character, found him to belong to a young, growing, abounding church, found besides the genuineness and depth of his attachment to the ideals of universal religion, they felt, more perhaps than they cared to express, that the future of the world's religion lay in the East, and not in the West. We gather from the contemporary records that in the eve of his departure from America Abhedananda spoke his mind in these words: "The East and West will unite—such is God's will. The signs of the times greatly encourage me, and my visit and prolonged stay in this country, has clearly convinced me that it is possible to make the world our home, and to love all as brothers and sisters. God's spirit is working everywhere. Blessed is he who sees the work, and realizes the Divine Spirit". Before he left for India he made it abundantly clear in one of his farewell messages that his mission in America had all along been to teach the self-development and a deeper understanding of human nature. "I believe that everyone of us has our mission on this earth and has certain duties to perform". Thus said the man who once came from London to this side of the Atlantic as a young Hindu preacher and who left America in 1921, in the full blaze of glory and greatness.

Abhedananda, it should be pointed out here, "spent almost a year on the Pacific coast, dividing his time between San Francisco and Los Angeles and testing and examining the growth of the work before his taking passage to India". He sailed in July, 1921, and he records: "I sailed from San Francisco and

crossed the Pacific ocean, breaking my voyage at Honolulu, where I was a delegate from India at the Pan-Pacific Educational Conference. Then I came to Japan and studied Japanese culture, philosophy and religion, stopping at Shanghai, Hong-kong, . . . . Manila and Singapore, where I delivered the message of Vedanta philosophy in popular lectures. From Singapore I was invited to Kuala-Lampur in the Malaya States where I gave a series of lectures on Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, before Chinese and Hindu audiences. From there I was invited to Rangoon, where after delivering several public lectures on the *Message of Buddha* and on *Religion of the Hindus*, I returned to Calcutta".

At Kuala-Lampur there was a centre of the Ramakrishna Mission, known as the Vivekananda Ashrama which came into existence in 1903, following the death of Swami Vivekananda in the previous year, and which came to be associated with the Mission in 1919. The name of Swami Abhedananda had already spread there and the Hindu residents of the place wanted to offer a hearty welcome to the spiritual brother of Vivekananda about whose missionary activities they heard so much. In fact in those days the name of Abhedananda was spread far and wide just as it had been once in the case of Vivekananda since he shot into eminence following his phenomenal advent on the platform of the Parliament of Religions at Chicago. After Swami Vivekananda it was quite natural for everyone to look upon Swami Abhedananda, his spiritual brother. His reception at Kuala-Lampur was as hearty and warm as could be imagined and we gather from the reports that appeared in the *Kuala-Lampur Times* that the Hindu residents there came in thousands to attentively hear his lecture at a local hall which was overpacked. All wanted to know something about the Swami's mission to America, and what were the effects of his preaching there for long twenty five years. The enthusiasm was so keen and spontaneous that Abhedananda had to stay for a couple of days in the capital town of the Malaya, delivering no fewer than four lectures, which were fully reproduced in a Calcutta English daily which arranged to publish in an elaborate manner all news relating to Abhedananda's triumphal return to Calcutta.

But it was reserved for the people of the colourful city of Rangoon to accord to Swami Abhedananda one of the spectacular receptions. He arrived at Rangoon on October 24, 1921, and next

day a lecture was arranged at the Jubilee Hall, where people thronged in thousands to hear him with rapt attention. The huge audience was composed of ladies and gentlemen, both European and Indian. The meeting presided over by Dr. N. N. Parakh. The subject of his lecture was *The Universal Religion*.<sup>1</sup> Here an interesting thing happened. The chairman introduced him as the disciple of Swami Vivekananda whom he also described as one of the founders of the Ramakrishna Mission. Swami Abhedananda, rising amidst loud applause, began by correcting the mistake: "I am not a disciple of Swami Vivekananda, but only his spiritual brother. My Master and Guru is Bhagwan Sri Ramakrishna who was the founder of this Mission, in fact in his name the Mission has been established. Swami Vivekananda was my predecessor and co-worker in the field of spreading truths of the universal religion all over the world. His Rangoon lecture evoked considerable interest amongst the audience. It was indeed a memorable occasion in the history of the Jubilee hall. *The Rangoon Daily News* of October 25, 1921, carried the full report of his speech which was quite lengthy and which in substance was one of his major utterances since he left America. It contains a fine analysis of all the sectarian religions of the world and their limitations. In course of his speech, Swami Abhedananda explaining the fundamental principle of a universal religion, observed: "A universal religion must be one which would find in its scope all the different ideas and conceptions. It must be broad and universal. The universal religion must be in perfect harmony with the ultimate conclusions of modern science. There had been a war between science and religion in Europe and America in the last century and that war has not stopped yet. It is still going on and science has gained a victory over the sectarian religions, doctrines and dogmas.... Truth is one whether it is discovered by scientists, or by philosophers, or by spiritual leaders, or by the incarnations of God. It is wrong to separate the truth discovered by science from the truth discovered by Buddha or Christ. Truth is one without a second and that must be the fundamental principle of a universal religion. There are, of course, an infinite variety of methods by which this truth can be reached".

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<sup>1</sup>This lecture has been printed in the "Complete Works of Swami Abhedananda", Vol. VI.

All through it was a dignified and rational presentation of the subject in which Abhedananda was a passed master when he uttered that "It is only the universal religion as based on the doctrines of Vedanta which is capable of bringing to us equality and love, fraternity and brotherhood—" he spoke with reasons and not with sentiment. He concluded his speech by declaring emphatically: "Bhagwan Sri Ramakrishna was the embodiment of this universal religion, because he came in this age that there should be harmony among all religions and that there should be no quarrel or dissension among them. It is this ideal of the universal religion that is going to rule the world".

While at Rangoon, Swami Abhedananda studied the Ramakrishna movement there. "This movement had been organised there under the Ramakrishna Sevaka Samiti by Kalipada Ghosh, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna". There was another society formed in 1910 by a group of South Indian devotees. It was in 1916 that the two Societies became united under the name and style of the "Ramakrishna Society" which began to conduct relief work. It was only just ten months before Abhedananda's visit to Rangoon that the Society opened a Sevashrama or i.e. a hospitals at East Rangoon. In later years this R. K. Mission hospital was to play a very important role in the field of medical work in Burma. It was a spectacular instance of the development of Mission work in a foreign land and it is needless to say that Swami Abhedananda was highly pleased when he visited the hospital, where he felt the living presence of the Master to whom service to the suffering humanity was of first consideration.

Abhedananda returned to India at the specific request of Swami Brahmananda who was then shouldering the entire burden of the Ramakrishna Mission as its President since the passing away of Vivekananda. Two decades had gone by and the activities of the Mission in India were then assuming a tremendous magnitude, and Brahmananda then desired to have Abhedananda amidst them as the Vice-President of the R. K. Mission. The administration of the Belur Math was getting heavier and Brahmananda realized, it seems, that who but Abhedananda could stand by him, sharing the burden of the responsibility. Moreover, it was felt that the Monastery at Belur should have the benefit of Abhedananda's long experience in the West. There was yet another reason. Swami Brahmananda

was then in failing health and after discussion with his other brother-disciples, he wrote to Abhedananda to return to India and stay at the headquarters of the Mission, looking after its administration.

The steamer carrying Swami Abhedananda reached Calcutta on the 10th November from Rangoon where he spent more than two weeks, and those two weeks were full of heavy engagements and also sight seeing at some places in the Upper Burma. From Honolulu to Rangoon, it was a journey which covered a period from August 7 to November 7, and during this period of three months he passed through Hawai Islands, Holo Island, Yokohama, Kobe, Kiato, Nagasaki, Shenghai, Manila, Hongkong Canton, Singapore, Malaya and Rangoon, and from contemporary reports we gather that during that period he delivered at different places not less than fifty lectures, besides private discussions and interviews. Here we can make a modest calculation on the basis of this statistics for three months as to the exact volume of public lectures that Abhedananda had to deliver from 1896 to 1921. It must stagger one's imagination to arrive at a correct figure which must be anything between, fifty to sixty thousand. Indeed it was a performance without any precedence anywhere in the world.

As soon as the steamer anchored at the port of Calcutta, the very first thing that Swami Abhedananda performed was to have an oblation in the holy Ganges. The journey from the dock to the monastery at Belur was done in a car while his luggages came afterwards. "Swami Abhedananda was returning to India and he would stay at Belur", this news had spread all over Calcutta and Bengal. And the city of his birth lost no time in making elaborate arrangements for his public reception befitting the return of a hero after a long time and also at a time when there was a new type of political awakening in the whole of India under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Thus his arrival to Calcutta became an occasion for universal jubilation such as the city had not witnessed since a long time. Thousands went to the Belur Math to have a glimpse of Swami Abhedananda who was hailed as the hero of thousand platforms at the two continents of Europe and America and the greatest preacher of modern India. No words can describe the joy of the monks of the Ramakrishna Order when their beloved 'Kali' was with them again. Memories of the olden days were revived, the days



with the Master were recalled, and Abhedananda accounted to his *Gurubhais* tales of episodes of his life and work in the West.

Abhedananda at 55 was magnificent to look at. Physically he presented an imposing figure—tall, straight rosy complexion, strong-built, carriage and bright penetrating eyes, dark<sup>2</sup> flowing hair, wide forehead and a face flushed with purity and serenity—all combined to resemble a painting by Raphael. The glow of his character was an added attraction for all. And what a powerful character it was! It radiated influence all around, reminding us of what *Carlyle* said: "A character stands or falls by the influence it exerts upon the minds of the subsequent generation of people". The influence of his character was vividly perceptible to anyone who had the fortune of coming within the orbit of his life, since the time he returned to India and lived among his people. In short, Swami Abhedananda at 55 represented the most resplendent figure Calcutta has ever seen. In person, he appeared to be distinguished and strong; in bearing, generous and gentle; in intellect a giant, and in spiritual experience and Divine intuition, he came to be regarded next to Swami Vivekananda, as the most eminent disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. No wonder, therefore, that since his arrival at the monastery, Abhedananda's presence stirred people who came to see him, to wonder and admiration—such as they experienced when Vivekananda returned to India at the end of his glorious mission in the West. No wonder, therefore, that all through his journey the fellow passengers hailed him as 'Prince Swami'. A prince truly he was in his own world.

People continued to visit Belur daily in hundreds. The university students began to visit Belur in great number, most among them who were inspired by his words which were not mere words, but so many sparks quite capable of infusing one's heart and mind with new thought and aspiration. The citizens of Calcutta and the authorities of the Calcutta University began to make arrangements to offer Swami Abhedananda a befitting reception in recognition of what he had done in the West since the last twenty five years. The date for his public reception at the city of his birth was fixed on December 25 and the spacious hall of the University Institute was selected for the purpose. On

<sup>1</sup> Swami himself called it the 'deep blue' nitabha-Krishna curling hair.

that day Swami Abhedananda was first brought from Belur to the residence of Jatindra Nath Chowdhury who personally went to the monastery to escort the Swami and in the afternoon he arrived at the Institute accompanied by his host in his own car. The University Institute hall was packed to its capacity and the ceremony was presided over by Sir Deva Prasad Sarbadhikary. It was entirely the students' function. After the 'address of welcome' was read out, Swami Abhedananda stood up amidst loud and prolonged cheers and spoke for an hour and half. Here in fact he delivered his message to the students community and it was an inspiring message, full of meaning and purpose and direction. All of them, who were present in the meeting, remained charmed and spell-bound with the Swami's eloquent and learned speech in one hand and on the other, with his style, method of delivery and fluent and sweet American English which was lucid and at the same time very deep and penetrating. All were also attracted with the Swami's benignant and bright countenance and charming look, and his yellow-bright dress and turban were the special objects of attraction of all.

He began his speech with a short account of the student life in America: "Patriotism is a chief feature of the character of the American students. From their school and college days they begin to prepare themselves to serve their country. Fellow-feeling is very strong among them". Then addressing the students of Calcutta he said: "It is extremely gratifying to me to know that you have appreciated the work that has been done by our illustrious brother, Swami Vivekananda and by his fellow-disciples including myself. Let this enthusiasm be a lasting thing and not a temporary, passing fad. Remember, the younger people all over the country are the future workers for the regeneration of our holy Motherland. Remember, what Swami Vivekananda said that the future of India will be greater than the past and it depends wholly on you to build up that past. This is the grand ideal which I hold before you".

Swami Abhedananda spent another fortnight at the Belur Math, and during this time visitors came daily, with whom Abhedananda discussed chiefly the problems of present-day education, economics and politics and also about the all-round state of decadence in the country. Religious topics seldom cropped up and it was a happy sign that the wave of enthusiasm which

was able to create in the minds of the younger generation did not go in vain. While staying at the head-quarters of the monastery, he spent most of his time in company with his brother-disciples, discussing with them about the growing activities of the Ramakrishna Mission. He evinced particular interest in the works relating to education and he was glad when he came to know that the Mission has taken up the education scheme of work in right earnest. The Swami also used to say: "Our boys should have all-round growth, spiritual, moral, intellectual and physical". Abhedananda is reported to have made this remark at that time which almost resembled to the educational ideals of Swami Vivekananda, who at the turn of this century, insisted on man-making and character-building education. Here it should be noted that Swami Brahmananda, the then President of the Belur Math, was not at the monastery. He was then in the south, in connection with the opening ceremony of the newly constructed permanent building of the Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home at Madras. When Brahmananda returned to Belur on January 12, 1922, Abhedananda had left for Jamshedpur at the invitation of the local Vivekananda Society. The journey to Jamshedpur was done by a car.

A public meeting of the residents of the India's Steel City, Tata Town, was held in the afternoon of January 10, 1922, to accord Swami Abhedananda a cordial welcome there. We gather from the contemporary reports that over two thousand people, including several European and American gentlemen had gathered on that occasion which itself was considered as a memorable event in the history of Jamshedpur. After the address of welcome was read out, Abhedananda rose amidst loud cheers and said in course of his reply :

"It was twenty-five years ago when I first landed at the great city of London. Twenty-five years is not a short period. I have given the best part of my life to continue the work that was started by my predecessor and to help humanity by broadening their views in life . . . . . In 1897 I went over to New York, at the request of some of the students of Swami Vivekananda who were eager to continue the study of the Vedanta philosophy. And from that time I lived in New York and travelled in different parts of the United States, teaching Vedanta and delivering lectures in various universities there and also before many other organi-

sations. . . . Twenty-five years ago when I went to America, all the missionaries were against us. The churches were talking against us, calling us names. I was the only Hindu then in the United States, and I had to fight tooth and nail against all false reports which were prevalent in that country. . . . our teachings have driven out some of the wrong impressions and misrepresentations which were made by the Missionaries”.

In the end of his speech he explained the significance of the advent of Sri Ramakrishna, saying that the ideals given by the great *Rishis* in ancient times, were much the same as emphasised by Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples. “Therefore, my friends”, the Swami concluded, “if you establish a centre of Ramakrishna Mission here, you will do enormous good to the masses, you will do a great justice to yourself, and justice to your own country”. Everyone present at the meeting, remained spell-bound so long he continued his speech which took about two hours to finish.

At Jamshedpur Swami Abhedananda delivered three more lectures, one at the Tata Institute on January 12, another on the next day at a local club, and the last one at the ‘L’ town on January 15. The main theme of these three speeches dealt chiefly with the ideal of the universal religion of which he was the greatest exponent of his time. In his lecture on ‘Progressive Hinduism’, he made some valuable observations which hold good even today for those who have but scant-idea about the basic tenets of the *Sanatana Dharma* that came from the ancient seers of truth in India. Explaining the subject in the context of the modern age, he said : “Now we are in an age where we have better understanding of the laws of nature than our forefathers had. We are now progressing towards something which they did not realise. This is the age of progress. Shall we remain in that ideal, or shall we go beyond it and find out the Lord of the universe Who is above our relative good and evil. Good and evil cannot touch Him. Good and evil cannot exist in His presence. Before the all pervading Spirit how can there be any good and evil? Therefore, the highest philosophy that Vedanta teaches this truth, was given by the *Rishis* and sages. Good and evil do not exist beyond human mind. . . . There is no such thing as absolute good and absolute evil and from the stand-point of the Divine Being there is neither good nor evil. From that divine stand-point, you can look on all sectarian religions

and realise how limited are their ideas and conceptions of God. . . . There is only one spirit, which is the source of intelligence, source of consciousness, and knowledge. It is the Divine intelligence that pervades the whole universe.

“The spirit of the modern progressive Hinduism was shown by the great Master, Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa who was the master of Swami Vivekananda. It was he who showed that the need of the present day is the brotherly feeling and toleration of all the religions . . . . In his teachings, and in his character, we find the embodiment, the personifications of all the great religions of the world and he showed us the way to love all and to recognize God in all humanity. He came to show the way of harmony and progress. Where there is no progress there is stagnation and stagnation means death”.

His last lecture at Jamshedpur dealt with the Message of Vedanta, and it took him about two hours to present his theme to the audience who heard it with rapt attention. In course of this lengthy speech Abhedananda observed that “The Vedanta philosophy is based upon the fundamental principle of one Truth, of one Life and one Mind. . . . We are just like the bubbles in the ocean of eternal Life. This life does not belong to any particular individual, but it belongs to Eternity. A question was asked by one of the seekers after Truth in ancient time, what was the nature of this Brahman or the eternal Being or the infinite Spirit? The answer was given by the great seers of truth: ‘Know that to be the Brahman from which all the animate and inanimate objects have come into existence, in which they live, and into which they return at the time of dissolution’.

This was truly the voice of the spiritual teacher whose utterances were the utterances of an illumined soul. And we shall see that during this period of his life, Swami Abhedananda presented himself, more in the pristine glory of a true *Acharya* or teacher than as a preacher. A careful analysis of his speeches and sayings since his return to India will at once reveal to us that throughout the period from 1921 to 1939 whatever he said or did, it was the dignified performance of a teacher who was conscious of his role and who was dedicated for the uplift of the humanity and the term had a special meaning to him. ‘Humanity is a word’, said Abhedananda on many occasions, “which we generally use, but we never understand its meaning.” Humanity

does not mean any particular class of people, any particular nationality, but it means all nationalities and all the peoples of the world". Just as he was the preacher of universal religion in his former days in the two Continents, so now returning to India, as we shall see, Swami Abhedananda assumed the dignified role of a universal teacher who wanted to embrace whole of the humanity.

A close study of his Jamshedpur lectures also reveal to us the profundity of Abhedananda's patriotism, love for the country. He seemed to be deeply concerned with the helpless and degenerated conditions of his people which found adequate expression in his third lecture on 'Progressive Hinduism'. He knew, just as Swami Vivekananda knew, that what India needed most, was the material prosperity and that prosperity depended entirely on her industrial development as it was noticed elsewhere in the world amidst the progressive nations. As one travelled widely and had the first hand knowledge of the prosperous nations of the world, it was quite natural on his part to make this observation: "You must encourage the industry of your own country. I have a great desire to have an ideal Institute of national industry established in India. One Tata project is not enough for India. She must have other factories in other parts of the country. One is not enough to fill the demands of 320 millions of people. You do not have to depend upon progress for the goods that you use. Use your country-made *Swadeshi* goods, Manufacture them. Look at Japan. How she became great. You have forgotten all your industries. You could produce wonderful things. You have left them and you have become lazy and a lazy man ought not to live—he must die. If he cannot work he must die. In this age, everybody should work and work day and night".

Now we gather that this part of his speech was highly appreciated by the audience, belonging to the steel town who hailed him as a great inspiring teacher to whom the material prosperity of his people meant as necessary as their spiritual advancement. The twentyfive years that he spent in the West in preaching the universal message of his Master, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa as well as that of culture, civilization, philosophy, religion and spirituality of India, were not in vain; for Abhedananda had then found ample opportunity of studying closely the material progress achieved by some Western nations, while his own coun-

try lagged behind. As at the time of his short visit to India in 1906, so now, most of his exhortations to his people pointed to their material prosperity which had to be gained by hard work, and not by laziness. It was an earnest and sincere mind that spoke to his people and the depth of his feeling could be easily realised from the following lines which we quote here from his Jamshedpur speech on 'progressive Hinduism'. "It is true," said Swami Abhedananda, "that you possess spiritual truth which no other nations can give you. But you have to learn great many things from the western people. They have courage, fearlessness, manliness, heroism and honesty. They are honest in business. You have to learn that. Honesty in business is the first thing to learn. Then we have to learn another thing from the western nations—the power of organization. We must have united efforts, and when we become united, we shall have tremendous strength. At the same time we must have self-confidence. Rely upon yourself only. You must have self-confidence and faith in yourself".

Those words of Abhedananda remind us of what Vivekananda once said after the latter's triumphal return from the West. He too brought from the West similar ideas and he too exhorted his people almost in the same strain. This is where these two personalities had a common ground in so far as it meant the material prosperity of their countrymen. Both exerted themselves in rousing them from age-long inertia and lethargy and both whipped them to activity and admonished them as a true teacher would do for their complacency. No other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna performed this task of nation-building as was done by Vivekananda and Abhedananda. As we have already indicated, "Swami Abhedananda returned to India at a time when a resurgent wave of national spirit was sweeping through the country and the political map of India was then about to undergo a transformation under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. But Abhedananda went a step further. His constructive genius went far beyond the radius of the political agitation. It envisaged the real necessity of advancing through hard and selfless work without which no useful purpose would be gained. So he gave a trumpet call at Jamshedpur when he uttered those words: "You must work or perish".

## CHAPTER III

### AMONGST HIS OWN PEOPLE

Abhedananda was away from India for about a quarter of a century excepting a brief visit in 1906. This prolonged stay abroad had naturally made him a legendary figure to his own countrymen. Though his name and fame had by this time spread over the two Continents, yet his own countrymen were nevertheless inquisitive for this great disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, even though they had no precise knowledge about the enormity of his work in the distinct West. Abhedananda too, had very little idea about the conditions then prevailing in India, nor he was fully acquainted with the social, political and economic changes during the long period of his absence. It was, therefore, quite natural with him that on his return to India he wanted in the first instance to be amongst his own people with a view to obtaining a correct picture about their conditions and also to infuse new life into them. It could be inferred from his various utterances during this period that Swami Abhedananda, too, had his own plan of campaign as Swami Vivekananda had after the latter's return from the West.

After a week's stay at Jamshedpur, he returned to the Belur Math where life brought him back to incessant demands upon his personality. People flocked to him there at all hours of the day, seeking his instruction and blessing and the privilege of taking the dust of his feet. And whenever the Swami came to Calcutta for a brief sojourn from Belur, he stayed at Balaram Babu's house in Baghbazar, where he and the monastic members of the Ramakrishna Order always found a ready welcome and warm hospitality. To the sons of Sri Ramakrishna it was no ordinary house; it was looked upon as a shrine—the "Balaram-Mondir"—due to its association with the Master. On such occasions it was the scene of the gatherings of devotees and visitors from all parts of the city. Whether it was at Belur or at Calcutta various striking conversations used to take place on the education that India needs, and he would traverse the whole ground in its different aspects in regard to men, women and the masses, putting forward practical suggestions by which it could be conducted on national



lines after the ancient models continued with the modern methods. Then at another time he would speak about the uplift of the women folk in India which was of urgent need and without which all round national awakening could not result in success. It so happened that one day when an educationist raised his objection to female education on mass scale, Swami Abhedananda gave the following opinion which only he could give. "Don't you realize", said the Swami, "that half of humanity is women-kind. You have neglected the women kind and, therefore, you are downtrodden today. You must remember that the women, your wives, your sisters, your mothers, are the mothers of the race. They are the mothers of the children that are going to take your place in future. Unless the women are educated how can the children be educated. In America, the women are more educated than men. There they are the leaders of the society. Our country has produced great women and the time has come when we must also produce other women like them". Everybody present on that occasion was greatly impressed with these words, and they were all the more pleased to hear this from the lips of a *Sannyasin*. Again, on other occasions, when he spoke of the master-minds of India, those who grouped round the Swami would invariably feel a stirring of the soul, as if they were in the very presence of the spirit of the hero in question. Of these constant meetings and conversations, it is impossible to make full record and it would only suffice to say that these conversations reflected his power of infusing a wonderful spirit of faith and courage into the minds of those who had the privilege of attending them.

Shortly after the Swami's arrival in Calcutta the birthday anniversary of Swami Vivekananda came off. It was celebrated, as usual at Belur, but the fact that Swami Abhedananda himself was to take part in the festival, drew large crowds to the monastery. He gave a stirring lecture before a huge gathering, and this was his first Bengali lecture. He began his speech slowly. But once he came into the middle of the theme, words flowed in torrents and the sweetness of his voice and the directness of his appeal impressed one and all. He was never tired of speaking about his beloved leader whose premature death had left a permanent void in his mind. On this particular occasion he sought to explain the national significance of Vivekananda's life and work. "All of

you know him", said Abhedananda in course of his speech, "to be a great Sannyasin. But how many of you know that to reassert India's essential self, and leave the great stream of national life, strong in a fresh self-confidence and vigour, to find his own way to the ocean, was the meaning of his Sannyasin. For his was pre-eminently the Sannyasin of the greater service. To him nothing was dearer than the future prosperity of India. Try to realize India of his dreams and you will then perhaps realize the true greatness of Swami Vivekananda." While at Belur one day he presided over the prize-giving ceremony held at a local school. The young students who received prizes from his hand, also received his blessings. His love for the students was unbounded for he believed that the future of India depended largely on the students and the younger generation of people. As an instance for his love for the younger generation we might mention here the following account. Once a group of boys, most of them teenagers, came to Belur to invite Swami Abhedananda in a meeting organized by them. The place was not far from the monastery. The leader of the group went straight to the Swami and asked him to preside at their meeting. Abhedananda consented to preside at a boys' meeting! Some of his *guru-bhais* were taken by surprise when they found him gladly accepting the invitation. When it was a case with the younger folk, he—the man with a mighty personality—was easily accessible. It was at this meeting when some of the boys gathered round him for his blessing, he is reported to have uttered these words: "Life is a quest for higher ideals and a strife for nobler aims. Let this be the motto in your lives. I have nothing to say beyond this". The boys of our times would do well to make this as the motto of their lives if they just want to become man in the true sense of the word. This was the dream of both the patriot-saints of modern India—Vivekananda and Abhedananda.

One day he visited the shrine at Kalighat where he spent sometimes, worshipping the Divine Mother with utmost devotion as was his nature. As soon as the news spread to the people of the locality, they flocked to the Kali temple to have a glimpse of Abhedananda about whom they had heard so much. The whole temple area was astir with excitement such was the magnetic spell of his personality. On entering inside the precincts of the temple where the statue of the Divine Mother stood, he touched the

pedestal and bowed down his head. It was a sine for sight that the great Vedantic monk of international reputation standing silently in utmost reverence before the Divine Mother! It is difficult for us to conjecture what were the feelings that were then surging up in his heart. Did it occur to him at that great moment that fifty-six years ago it was at the grace of this very Divine Mother that he was born as the son of a devoted and pious lady who had prayed to the Mother to bless her with a religious-minded son. And that prayer was granted. Physically it was Swami Abhedananda who stood before the deity in mute silence but spiritually it was an illumined soul that stood there in a transcendental mood in which both the form and the formlessness loose their respective identity. The temple at Kalighat had seen many saintly visitors, but the visitor on that particular day made such an impression on the minds of the spectators which was an event by itself.

In the middle of February, 1922, Swami Abhedananda accompanied by Swami Sivananda left Calcutta for a short trip to East Bengal. He arrived at Narayanganj on the next day. Whence they went to Dacca by a car and stayed at the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama there. Here it should be mentioned that Abhedananda came to Dacca on being specially invited by the organizers of a *Swadeshi* exhibition, the opening ceremony of which was duly performed by him on February 21. Before the inaugural ceremony of the exhibition, he had a week's time in his hand and during this period he visited all the interesting spots including the Abhoy Ashrama where he was given a cordial welcome by the members of this famous *Swadeshi* institution. One day he went to the residence of a devotee to participate in a music conference there. On the same day when he opened the exhibition, he was given a grand public reception which was attended by all the leading people of Dacca. It was an inspiring gathering consisting of more than three thousand citizens. In reply to the welcome address, he gave a lecture for about an hour, which was received with tremendous applause. On the next day the students of the Dacca University gave him a reception which was presided over by Prof. Haibag, the then Vice-chancellor of the Dacca University. The speech he delivered there mainly dealt with the needs of the students. Never forget that the student community of the country is the salt of our

people and the builders of tomorrow. It would be an unfortunate thing if the salt ever loses its fervour". This was the main burden of his speech to the students at Dacca. Next day he went to Narayanganj where the citizens, mostly business people, gathered in a large meeting to offer their welcome to Abhedananda. In both the public speeches at Dacca and Narayanganj, he spoke about the growing activities of the Ramakrishna Mission and urged upon the people to emulate the ideals preached by Swami Vivekananda which were, he stressed, more or less the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna "whose unbounded love for the humanity the world has yet to realize". Incidentally he also referred to some of the experiences gathered by him in the West. From the contemporary reports we gather that the people of Dacca and Narayanganj including the students had greeted Abhedananda almost with the same fervour as was noticed in them twenty-one years ago when Vivekananda visited East Bengal. Everyone was eager to get a sight of the Swami while at Dacca. Apart from public engagements, he was besieged by numerous visitors. To these he gave instructions at all hours of the day, particularly for two or three hours in the afternoon. More than a hundred persons attended these informal meetings daily and Abhedananda was never tired of speaking to them, for he, too, was equally eager to know the people—their needs and aspirations. Conscious as he was now of his role as a teacher, Abhedananda, since his return to India, took immense pain and care to understand the problems that then surrounded the lives of his countrymen. No wonder therefore that both at Dacca and Narayanganj all who came to see him were impressed by his gracious manner and charming personality. In the testimony of some elderly persons, Abhedananda resembled in many respects to Vivekananda, and they found much to their surprise and delight that the former's teachings were equally full of a living faith and devotion, and infused with the same intense vitality and power. As a result hundreds were led to make a diligent study of his message and his plans for the amelioration of India. "I wish I could do something for you". These words spoken to the Dacca students reflect the loving-kindness of Swami Abhedananda for his countrymen.

Both the Swamis, Abhedananda and Sivananda, left Dacca on February 24 for Mymensingh. Here both the sons of Rama

krishna laid the foundation of an Ashrama which subsequently came to be known as the Mymensingh Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama. Here too students flocked to have some talks with Abhedananda. He discussed with them about the ideals of education. The citizens of Mymensingh gave him a rousing reception which was attended by a gathering of three thousand people. He spoke to them for an hour and half. After the meeting was over, students came to meet him at the palace of the Raja of Gowripur where he was then staying as the guest of the latter. His conversation with the students and other visitors lasted till the late hours of the night. While Swami Shivananda stayed there in connection with the Mission work, Swami Abhedananda left Mymensingh on the afternoon of the next day and returned to Calcutta, where an important public function was awaiting him. On February 21, he presided over the Vivekananda Memorial meeting held at the Star Theatre. Two distinguished persons addressed the meeting—viz. Hon'ble Narayana Iyengar and Mr. H. W. B. Moreno who was the spokesman of the Anglo-Indian community.

On March 5, came off the birthday festival of Bhagwan Sri Ramakrishna which was duly observed at the monastery where sixteen thousand people were provided with the *prasad*. A fortnight later, Abhedananda participated in the Ramakrishna festival held at the garden-house of Moni Mallik. On his return journey he visited the Ramakrishna Orphanage at Kutighat, Baranagore, now known as the Baranagore Orphanage. So the Ramakrishna Mission had become a patent force in less than three decades and what little he has been able to see for himself since his return to India, it fully convinced him that the direction and purpose the Mission had received from Vivekananda, have not been in vain. Just as at the prime of his youth, he went to the West at the call of his leader and spent the best portion of his life in giving shape to the dreams of Swami Vivekananda, so now at this advanced age, he was to work for the regeneration of India, the plans for which have been laid down by the leader before he suddenly passed away from the worldly scene. Who was to look after the legacy left by him? We might conjecture that such thoughts were now and then uppermost in the mind of Abhedananda who understood India's need and aspirations just in the same manner as Vivekananda did. And in this respect one was very close to the other.

A great event of sorrow was now about to happen in the history of the Ramakrishna Mission. The curtain was being rung down on the life of Swami Brahmananda, the chief architect of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission since 1902. When he succeeded as the President of the Order after the *mahasamadhi* of Vivekananda. In fact, it was during the lifetime of Vivekananda that Brahmananda was made the virtual executive head of the Order. The readers of the life of Sri Ramakrishna need not be told about the Master's own estimation of the stature of Swami Brahmananda as once expressed by him in these words: "Rakhal can rule a kingdom". It is also known to us that Vivekananda and his brother-disciples took that utterance of the Master literally and from that day Rakhal Maharaj came to be known as 'Raja' to his brother-disciples, and a little later as 'Raja Maharaj' to the whole organization. It was Vivekananda, the leader, who prepared the ground for Brahmananda in all possible ways. Sri Ramakrishna knew in a vision the stature of his most favourite son (*mānasa-putra*), Rakhal who was a spiritual genius of the highest order. Though always indrawn in his mind, yet as everybody knows, Swami Brahmananda possessed a remarkable capacity for administration and the growth and development of the Math and Mission during the years from 1902 to 1922, is a clear testimony to it. Both Rakhal and Naren had been friends from their boyhood and Swami Brahmananda had all along acknowledged Swamiji's leadership. And Vivekananda too had the great trust in Rājā Mahārāj. So it was quite natural as everyone expected that Brahmananda would succeed Vivekananda, and so he did when the latter left the soil of the earth in 1902. The history of the organization during the post-Vivekananda days is essentially the history of the achievements of Swami Brahmananda as the President of the Order, assisted by the Swamis Premananda and Saradananda chiefly. For full two decades Brahmananda remained the executive head of the Order and guided efficiently the manifold activities of the organization. For a time, he became the living symbol of the Order.

But who then knew that the year 1922 would be the last year of his life? Swami Brahmananda returned to Calcutta on the second week of January 1922 from his Madras trip. It was on the fateful day of February 25 that he was attacked with cholera from which he duly recovered. But from that time on-

wards he lay on his sick bed at Balaram Babu's house in Calcutta, for undergoing treatment for virulent diabetis. As soon as the news of his illness spread all the *gurubhais* hurried back to his bed-side. Abhedananda went twice to Calcutta to see his ailing brother-disciple—the 'Raja' of the Ramakrishna Order. A strange thing happened on April 6. Abhedananda was then having just a snap when he said that as Brahmananda lay on his sick-bed, some sadhus were administering medicine to him while the Master sat close by, with his gaze fixed on his beloved son, Rakhai. And in that very moment he again said that Brahmananda has fully recovered. The entry in his own diary runs thus: "April 6 Saw in a vision some sadhus administering medicine to Rakhai who was lying very ill. Ramakrishna sitting beside. Immediately Rakhai sat up healthy and strong fully cured". Next morning Abhedananda, in company with Miss McLeod and other brother monks went to the residence of Balaram Babu to see Brahmananda. Here he is reported to have exchanged a few words with him. It seemed to Abhedananda that Rakhai Maharaj was feeling extreme difficulty in uttering even a few words. The scene was painful to him, and as such he wanted to cure his beloved brother-disciple by his mental power. It was but an unmistakable natural expression of the sense of brotherhood of monks that was founded years and years ago at Antpur before the living presence of Sri Ramakrishna. The determination on his part was, therefore, very much real and strong. At night while Abhedananda was transmitting his thought currents to cure Maharaj of his malady, it seemed to him that some unseen person told him: "Whoever desired to cure Rakhai Maharaj he would have to take upon himself the same disease. In this connection he writes in his diary: 'while lying down I was giving him a treatment but I was told that his disease must be taken by the mental healer who would heal him'".

Day by day Brahmananda's condition deteriorated. Abhedananda used to visit him daily at the house of Balaram Babu. Everyone prayed fervently for his life, and expert physicians were in attendance. But all attempts to bring him round failed. On April 10, 1922, Swami Brahmananda entered into *mahasamadhi*. It was a stunning blow to the whole organization, from which it took years to recover. By all accounts available to us, it was difficult for anybody to replace Swami Brahmananda, so far the

administration of the Order was concerned. His death therefore meant the end of an epoch. Next day in the morning his body was brought to Belur by a boat and the last rites were duly performed. Swami Abhedananda who stood at a little distance from the pyre saw the body consumed by the flames. So this was the end of the play of the eternal companion of the Eternal Player that Brahmananda was.

While he was staying at the Belur Math there was some difficulty for his accommodation and as such Swami Brahmananda had suggested to him to have a new room built on the guest house for his own use. So before he left for Shillong, Abhedananda placed some money with one of his disciples, Swami Sankarananda to have a new room built for him on the roof of the guest house at Belur. He left Calcutta for Shillong on April 24, arriving there the next day. The scenic grandeur of the place fascinated him very much and the climate appeared to him very refreshing. In this trip he was accompanied by some younger monks who belonged to the Order. He stayed there for two months and the entire period was crowded with various public engagements including his reception at the Quinton Hall when Abhedananda gave a lecture on Sanatana Dharma, one day he delivered another lecture for two hours at the local Harisabha on 'Progressive Hinduism' which was attended by a large number of people. Among the notable persons whom he met here were Sucharu Devi, a daughter of Keshab Chandra Sen and Maharani of Mayurbhanj, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy and the famous American Geologist Mr. Nightengale. The Swami sometimes went to the residence of Dr. Roy and had discussions with him on various subjects. Sometimes he would be entertained with tea at the residence of the noted physician. The main object of his visiting Shillong was to find out a location suitable for a centre of the Ramakrishna Mission. He delivered another interesting lecture on the message of Vedanta at the Quinton Hall. He left Shillong on July 1, for Gauhati.

While he spent two months at the delightful hill-station of Shillong, Abhedananda must have recalled the days when Vivekananda also visited the place for reasons of his health just a year before his death. Sir Henry Cotton was then the Chief Commissioner with whom Swamiji had some interesting discussion about India and the solution of her problems. Abhedananda



heard much about this noble Englishman who understood India's needs and aspirations better than any other English Civil Servants of those days. He was a great admirer of Cotton's historical writings on ancient India.

The entire student community of Gauhati was present at the station to receive Swami Abhedananda. The arrangement for his stay here was also looked after by the students. Here some priests of the Kamakhya Devi temple also came to meet him. The whole of the next day was spent with the visitors who flocked to see him and talk to him. In the afternoon he gave a lecture on Sanatana Dharma and the message of Vedanta. The Deputy Commissioner of Gauhati was present at the meeting which was attended by a large number of audience. Next he proceeded to the famous pilgrimage, Kamakhya. Here he visited the centre of the Mission and promised to present a few sets of his works to the Ashrama Library, which he did after his return to Belur. Brahmachari Satya Chaitanya of Belur Math has recorded the following of his visit to Gauhati.

'After his return from Shillong, Swami Abhedananda went to visit the temple of the goddess Kamakhya and Vasistashrama and other spots of this pilgrimage. It was then high current in the river Brahmaputra, so it was not possible for him to go by a boat to see Umananda Bhairava. It was somewhat novel on the part of the Swami who was a confirmed Monist to go on pilgrimage. But few knew that apparently though he was a Vedantin, yet inwardly he was a great devotee. Everything associated with a place of pilgrimage appeared to him as holy; even the dust of the place would be regarded by him as sacred. Though endowed with the highest spiritual realization, yet Abhedananda was found to sit before the goddess of Kamakhya, worshipping her with *Sodosha-upachara* (the term means 'in a grand scale'). The Personal deity must have then merged, in his realization, in the Impersonal—as was the case with his great Master, Sri Ramakrishna. Everybody was taken by surprise to find him bathing in the Souvagya-Kunda (the Tank of Fortune which was nothing but a pond full of impure and filthy water). He not only bathed in the pond with utmost devotion of a pilgrim, but he also drank the water of the pond, holding a little quantity on his palm. He went round the temple along with the priest, chanting the *mantras*. In and around the

Kamakhya temple there were certain spots associated with Dasamahāvidyā (ten different forms of the Divine Mother) and it was extremely inaccessible for anybody and so the *Pāndās*, (priests) advised him not to risk to visit those places. But Swami Abhedananda was undaunted and he visited all the ten spots which were situated inside the caves and worshipped each and every deity with the help of a torch light. It so happened that some of the caves had to be reached by him simply by crawling.”

The said Brahmachari has recorded another incident which is nonetheless revealing and which should be mentioned here just to show the true nature of Swami Abhedananda's spiritual soul. “It so happened that while the Swami was receiving the address of welcome at a meeting at Gauhati, a devotee presented him with a copy of a book written by an Englishman which strongly criticised the symbol worship of the Hindus. Some were very much surprised to find Swami Abhedananda supporting the views expressed by the author in that book and it naturally wounded their feelings. After a while he expressed his eagerness to visit the Vasistashrama. He sent for the attendant and told him, ‘look here, we need not have our bath in the cold waters of the pond there lest we catch cold. Let us be less enthusiastic in our devotion this time’. While on his way to the spot, he discussed the views of the said English author again and again and supported them emphatically, saying that opinions expressed by him were quite correct. The attendant and other devotees felt very much hurt at this. But as soon as he reached the spot we found him to be a different man. He presented a figure full of gravity and calmness. As he entered inside the Ashrama in slow space, everybody noticed him to be deeply absorbed in a meditative mood mixed with intense devotion. His every footstep infused a strange feeling in our minds. Then coming to the banks of the *Tridhārā* (confluence of three rivers), he asked his attendant slowly, if he had brought any clothes. The attendant replied in the negative. Clothes or no clothes, it seemed to matter little with him. At once he undressed himself and had his bath, completely naked. He seemed to be in an ecstatic mood, as if seized by some divine feeling. After a while he told his attendant, ‘one must have his bath at these places which are holy’. This was the first time when he had

his bath in the open air since his return from America. After the bath was over, he came out of the pond, completely wet and put on his clothes. Later on he visited minutely all the spots of the place for a long time. Next morning he went by a steamer to visit Asvakraṅti. There were innumerable signs of horse-hoof inscribed on the stone-walls which he observed with minute attention as was his nature. Whenever he would be in a pilgrimage, nothing of significance escaped his inquisitive glance. "Besides religious aspects, every place of pilgrimage in India has special significance from cultural and architectural points of view which should never be missed. I never go to any place of pilgrimage just to see the idols there. I find equal interest in its architectural beauty as well as its cultural aspects". Thus remarked Abhedananda once to one of his disciples in Calcutta who was then preparing to go out for pilgrimage.

During his stay at Gauhati, Abhedananda visited all the spots associated with the Tantrik culture which once flourished in Assam. He left Gauhati on July 7 accompanied by his attendants. We have seen that though Abhedananda had visited half of the world including China, Japan and Burma. Yet Tibet still remained unvisited. He must see the ancient land where once Buddhism flourished. He now began to make the necessary preparations for his journey to Kashmir and Tibet as soon as he reached Calcutta from his Assam tour.

His Highness Maharaja Jaisingh of Alwar was a great friend and admirer of Swami Abhedananda. When he was staying at Shillong, Abhedananda received a message from the Maharaja which informed him that the Maharaja of Kashmir would be too glad to have Swami Abhedananda as his guest when he visits that place. So on reaching Calcutta he made preparations for his intending journey to Tibet via Kashmir. This was Abhedananda's last important journey which he undertook at the age of fifty-six. A born traveller as he was, he never felt tired in responding to the call of the beyond. Tibet always loomed large in his vision since he went to visit the Himalayan Tirthas in his youthful days. But to think of Swami Abhedananda undertaking fresh pilgrimage to a far-off and almost insurmountable region like Tibet at the advanced age of fifty-six is just to think the greatness of an eternal traveller.

## CHAPTER IV

### JOURNEY TO KASHMIR AND TIBET

If Swami Abhedananda was a man of religion and realization of the highest Order, he was equally a man of courage. It was indeed an act of courage on his part to undertake the hazards of journey to Tibet at the age of fifty-six when people seldom go out on pilgrimage. The events of his life since the day when he went to Dakshineswar as a teenager body, if properly viewed and analysed will at once bring to our mind the fact that the sense of courage was always stronger in him under all circumstances and this accounted for his phenomenal success as a preacher in the distant West. A close study of his magnificent life reveals to us the truth that Abhedananda comprehended courage as the universal virtue and he was always motivated more by courage than by anything else. Courage drove him to travel across the length and breadth of India, barefooted and penniless and the same courage must have inspired him to respond to the call of his leader when he proceeded to London at the age of thirty. With him courage meant not merely the excitement of something but as something potential, a sort of virtue which comes out of one's own soul. This was the type of courage that Abhedananda displayed all through his life must have flowered in him in the process of his spiritual *sadhana* and later on it became an integral part of his nature which always provided him with inspiration for work. Going out to fresh pilgrimages had all along been a sort of spiritual passion with him—a passion born out of sublime courage. Such type of courage as we notice in his character comes out of only deep-seated belief in one's own self, in his integrity and the rightness of his cause. Vivekananda displayed this sort of courage in abundant measure; so did his beloved successor Abhedananda and both of them present resplendent figures of magnificent courage. If they were religious monks, they were equally courageous monks the modern India has ever seen.

Swami Abhedananda himself has left an account of his eventful journey to Kashmir and Tibet in his journal, presumably with the intention of developing it into a full-fledged travelogue

afterwards. Returning from the trip he asked his attendant, Brahmachari Bhairav Chaitanya who accompanied him in his journey to Tibet, to prepare an outline of the story of his journey with the help of his day to day notes. Accordingly the said attendant made out a fairly lengthy account with the help of the Swami's notes and other valuable and informative books relating to Kashmir and Tibet. But it could not be duly revised by Abhedananda owing to his various pre-occupations since his return from the trip, which took about one and a half year to complete. Later on when the monthly 'Visvavani', the Bengali organ of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Math came out in the year 1927, the draft account as prepared by the said Brahmachari began to be serialised and it then evoked considerable interest amongst those who had the occasion to read it. Thereafter when the pressing request came to publish the whole account in a book form, Abhedananda then made a thorough revision of the whole thing with the help of his own notes and other source-books on the subject. He also added a new chapter entirely written by himself on the cultural and historical aspects of Tibet, China, Japan and Korea. Then in 1929 the enlarged manuscript was published in book-form under the name and title of *Pariwrajaka Swami Abhedananda*, which was, of course, not an appropriate title for the book. Subsequently the title was changed to *Kashmir O Tibbate* and it was in 1954, that is fifteen years after the passing away of Swami Abhedananda that a revised second edition of the book came out duly edited and foreworded by Swami Prajnanananda. This might be regarded as one of the most absorbing books written by Swami Abhedananda and it gained wide popularity on account of its valuable contents. Apart from the interesting accounts of his journey, the historical importance of the book lies elsewhere. While visiting the Himis monastery in Ladak, Abhedananda discovered a Tibetan manuscript which, he was told, contained the account of the unknown life of Jesus Christ. He requested a Lama for an English translation of it which bears a close similarity with the one previously collected by the well-known Russian traveller, Nicholas Notovitch. Students of history will find this particular portion of the book immensely interesting.

This particular chapter of our narration is more or less based on Swami Abhedananda's own account of his journey to Kashmir

of self-knowledge". These were the words that came out of his lips when Abhedananda got the sad news.

The three days that he stayed at Varanasi were spent mostly in sightseeing and meeting some notable persons including Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya who welcomed the Swami at the premises of the Banaras Hindu University. Abhedananda was highly impressed with the profound scholarship of Malaviyaji and while discussing with the latter about the educational problems of India Abhedananda is reported to have made the following remarks: "I notice a deficit of certain values in the character of the younger generation all over India. So our educationists should give particular emphasis on character-building of the student folk on modern techniques instead of solely depending on ancient ideals". Everybody was impressed with this remark which came from a Sannyasin. In fact, since he returned to India, it was one of Swami Abhedananda's great dreams and how often did he say whenever there was occasion for it: "No nation in the world can aspire to be great unless it possesses men of strong character. The question of the formulation of ideal character—individual or national, should engage our serious attention".

One day while he was returning to the Ramakrishna Sevashrama Abhedananda, pointing to the garden of Durgabari, said to his attendant that thirty years ago it was at this place that he along with Saradananda, Satchidananda and Yogananda had spent a number of days practising all sorts of spiritual austerities and living by begging alms. "Who knew then that the Master trained us thus with a view to engage us with the task of preaching the universal message of Vedanta to the thousands of people in the West". Thus said the Swami at that time.

At Lahore, Swami Abhedananda was the guest of Mr. S. C. Chatterjee who had the fortune of playing host to Swami Vivekananda when the latter visited Lahore. On arriving at Srinagar, he came to learn from the Maharaja's Private Secretary that all arrangements for his journey to Tibet was complete. Kashmir was to him a delightful spot full of unsurpassed scenic beauty. A man who has travelled almost half of the world, and who has

seen all that were beautiful elsewhere was now really taken by surprise as Abhedananda cast his glance over the hills and dales and the lakes of Kashmir. From Rawalpindi to Srinagar it was a stretch of about two hundred miles motorable road, with pine and cedar forests on both sides of it. As soon as he reached Srinagar, the capital city of Kashmir, Abhedananda's mind went to the distant past and he recalled from the pages of ancient history the different religious periods through which Kashmir had passed. Here he enjoyed the *shikara*-riding over the river Bitasta. He also visited with great interest the local museum which contained a rich and varied collections having archaeological importance.

Among the ancient spots visited by Swami Abhedananda was the one known as the burial place of Jesus Christ at Khana Yari which lay below the foot of Hariparvat, on the top of which stood the ancient fort, which was previously a Buddhist monastery during the hey-days of Buddhism. As a preacher, the life of Christ had always interested Swami Abhedananda and while in America he gave some of the most interesting lectures on the life and message of this great prophet of humanity, whom he regarded as one of the saviours of the world. So it was but natural with him that he should feel attracted for the legendary spot where the earthly remains of Jesus the Christ were laid at rest. The legend is that Jesus came here secretly when his own country became hot for him and the rest of his life was spent here, and hereafter when he met with natural death, his body was laid to rest here. The burial place of Jesus appeared to the Swami is a spot of holiness and purity. A few photographs were taken here and thereafter Abhedananda went to visit a library, known as the 'Vivekananda-Pathagar' which was situated nearby. He was very delighted to see this small library founded in the memory of his beloved leader. The library contained almost all the works of Swami Vivekananda and there were pictures of great men on the walls, including those of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. It delighted him more than anything else to find that the message of the Master had spread in so distant a place as his. Many local people who had read his books, came to see him. One day he also visited the local school where requested by the students he delivered a lecture on the duties of the students. This was a subject of which he was never tired of speak-

ing and this was a clear proof, if any proof was needed, of his anxiety concerning the future of the younger generation of India.

Thus after staying at Srinagar for three days, Swami Abhedananda made preparations for his journey to Amarnath, accompanied by some fellow pilgrims, mostly Bengalees. It was on the first day of August, 1922, that the party left Srinagar for Amarnath cave. "The pilgrimage of thousands of devotees to the far away sacred shrine of Amarnath nestled in a glacial gorge of the western Himalayas, through some of the most charming scenery in the world, is fascinating on the extreme. One is struck with wonder at the quiet and orderly way in which a canvas town springs up with incredible rapidity at every halting place with its tents of various colours and of all shapes and sizes, with its Bazars, and broad streets running through the middle, and all vanishing as quickly at the break of dawn when the whole army of gay pilgrims set out on the march again. The glow of countless cooking-fires, the ashen-smearing Sadhus under the canopy of their large *gerua* umbrellas stuck in the ground, sitting and discussing or meditating before their *dhunis*, the Sannyasins of all orders in their various garbs, the men and women with children, from all parts of the country in their characteristic costumes, and their devout faces, the torches shimmering at nightfall, the blowing of conch-shells and horns, the singing of hymns and the prayers in chants,—all these are most impressive, and convey to some extent an idea of the overmastering passion of the race for religion".

A seasoned pilgrim as he was, Swami Abhedananda observed scrupulously all the customs and rules while on his pilgrimage to Amarnath, in the same way as was once noticed in Swami Vivekananda during the latter's visit to the same holy shrine. The reader will find an intimate and almost day to day account of his journey to Amarnath in the Swami's own book and as such we need not recapitulate it here. While he was on his way to the sacred shrine, Abhedananda could not help but recalling the days when Vivekananda visited this place and how at the very sight of the Ice-Lingam (Amarnath-Siva) Swamiji was overpowered by an exalted mood and had almost swooned with emotion, and also a great mystical experience had then come upon him, of which Abhedananda heard from some other brother-disciples at Belur. When towards the end



of the journey, the party arrived at Seshanag, a place 12,000 ft. above the sea level, he was delighted to see the beautiful lake there surrounded on two sides with eternally snowclad mountains, the water of which seemed to his eyes as bright green. Legend is that the water of this lake possessed healing qualities. Pointing to the lake, the Swami said to his attendant: "Look at the glaciers that are coming down from those mountains. It has been conjectured by our scripture that the snow-clad crest of the Himalayas represent the head of the Lord Siva and these glaciers are the matted hair of his head". The surrounding was concerned all through with multi-coloured season-flowers and the whole thing presented as if a piece of multi-coloured embroidery. "I have seldom come across such ravishing natural beauty anywhere in the world". The Swami is said to have made this remark as he proceeded onwards to his destination.

At last he arrived at the cave of Amarnath. He was then in a mood of spiritual exultation as was natural with a devout pilgrim like him. It is not for us to fathom the sublime experiences of that great spiritual soul as he stood before the Ice-Lingam with folded hands and with his gaze fixed on it. Time and space was forgotten instantaneously and those who were privileged at that particular moment to look at the serene face of Swami Abhedananda, apparently lost in transcendental mood, saw something the like of which they had never seen. It was indeed an inspiring spectacle to see Abhedananda standing in mute silence before the sparkling image which was to him the Lord Himself. Really he stood there face to face with the Lord Siva Himself, just in the same exulted mood as it was the case with Swami Vivekananda years ago. Evidently the whole personality of the Swami had then become fully saturated with the living presence of the supreme Divinity, as he stood there in rapt meditation. He bathed in the river Amaravati that flowed by the cave, the waters of which looked white and as such the river is also known as 'Dudhganga', or the Ganges containing milky water. The return journey down the mountain.....to Pahalgao.

Here the Swami recounted a story to his attendant which is worth reproducing here. "Here I recall my days in America. On one occasion I along with my friend Prof. Parker went on a mountaineering excursion to the Canadian Alps which was 18,000 ft. above the sea level and the top of a distance of forty-

eight miles and thus surpassed all previous records. It took three days for others to cross this distance on horseback. There was a lake, named the 'Emerald Lake', which was the most beautiful one I have ever seen".

Returning to Srinagar, he spent a few days at Gulmarg which was situated at a distance of twenty-seven miles from the capital city of Kashmir. Gulmarg is the flower-garden city of the valley, containing various kinds of flowers. It was a sort of table-land, having a length of two miles. Back to Srinagar, Abhedananda made preparations to visit Kshira-Bhavāni. In Kashmir, it should be mentioned here, the Swami and his party were treated with the greatest considerations by the Maharaja and all during his stay and high officials and scholarly persons visited the Swami's place to receive religious instructions and converse with him upon general topics. One day he told his attendant—"Come, let us go to Kshira-Bhavāni which was visited by Swami Vivekananda".

Following the pilgrimage to Kshira-Bhavāni, Swami Abhedananda returned to his house-boat at Srinagar. Here he is reported to have said to his attendant: "This is the route by which Gangadhar Maharaj (Swami Akhandananda) had returned from Tibet. It is my desire to go to Tibet by the same route: We need not go into the details of his journey to Tibet, which the readers can read in his own book already referred to and which contains a very intimate account of this daring journey. Intimate and thrilling as well. The eternal pilgrim in Abhedananda cared neither for any hazards nor for any inconvenience of the road. He was accustomed to it since his youthful days. Indeed he was a Parivrajaka *par excellence* and amongst the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna perhaps he stood second to none in this respect. So one day, accompanied by his attendant, he started his eventful journey to Tibet on foot by the banks of the river Indus, while all his essential articles including a tent were carried by two horses. "It had been my cherished dream all along to cross the Himalayas on foot. Let us see how far we can walk and if necessary we might hire a horse from somewhere on the road". So saying he took up his pilgrim staff and went on his way. And when at this distance of time we recall those days when Swami Abhedananda at fifty-six risked the hazards of this journey, we are simply reminded of the illustrious

Bengali scholar, Atish Dipankar who centuries ago went on foot to Tibet to preach the message of Lord Buddha there. And they too were not young in age. So history repeats itself, and what a glorious repetition it was in our times when a son of Sri Ramakrishna and a great Vedantic scholar went to Tibet on foot! In the study of Abhedananda's eventful long life, this particular episode has a special significance which should not be lost sight of, if only we went to realise the inherent greatness of this great Parivrajaka of modern India.

After crossing hundreds of miles on foot and through insurmountable and sometimes extremely precarious passages that Swami Abhedananda reached his destination—the monastery at Hemis, in Tibet. It was on October 4 that he arrived there and we gather from his diary that it took him about two months to complete the hazardous journey. Throughout this long track he halted at several points including the hill town of Leh, capital of Ladak and studied the social and religious customs prevailing at those places. He must have heaved a sigh of relief when he set his foot on the soils of the Hemis Gumpa (monastery) and he must have also felt inwardly a sort of spiritual ecstasy for being able to cross the Himalayas on foot which was his cherished dream. Here are a few lines of this successful journey taken out of pages of his Diary: "In 1922, I went to Tibet from Kashmir crossing the Himalayas on foot, to study manners, customs and the Buddhist philosophy and Lamaism which prevail among the Tibetan Lamas. I went along Yarkand Road, the highway to Europe and stopped at 'Leh', the capital of Ladak, in western Tibet. My destination was Hemis monastery about 'twenty-five miles north of the city of Leh'".

It was a fine morning on the next day when Abhedananda went to visit the celebrated monastery accompanied by some Lamas (Tibetan priests). Of this monastery as we have already indicated, the Russian traveller, Notovitch, in his work entitled *The Unknown Life of Jesus* has written extensively. Those who have read this work and considered soberly its strange intriguing research and which no scholar has so far been able to refute, may realise that it was no ideal quest on the part of Swami Abhedananda to risk the journey more as a historian than a religious monk, to that monastery with a view to verify and confirm what had been published by Notovitch. This was Abhedananda

whose nature was to go into the source of the things and always see for himself the truth of the things. It is this remarkable trait that distinguished him from his brother-disciples. As soon as he presented himself at the threshold of the Gumpa, Abhedananda was cordially received by a senior Lama who ushered him inside the main hall and here he was first requested to write his name in the visitor's book which was held before him by a younger Lama. He signed his name in English thus, "Swami Abhedananda, Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, Calcutta". As he did so, he looked through the other pages of the Visitors' Book out of curiosity, but found not a single name of a Bengali monk. Here it should be pointed out that Abhedananda returned to India at the particular request of Swami Brahmananda to take over the Vice-Presidency of the Mission and also to look after its administration. He remained in the same capacity till 1929.

Abhedananda's description of the Hemis monastery is really interesting; nothing of significance escaped his inquisitive observation. The readers would do well to refer to his own account as given in his book. After going around the monastery, accompanied by the Lamas, and looking all that were interesting, he enquired about the manuscript on the basis of which Notovitch wrote his revealing book. He was then shown a large scroll which was carefully preserved among the various valuable collections in the monastery. "But this is not", said the Lama, "the original manuscript, it is just a copy. The original is in a nearby monastery known by the name 'Marbur', which is written in Pali. This one is in Tibetan language". As he looked through the manuscript, Abhedananda found it divided into fourteen chapters, consisting of 244 slokas. He then requested the Lama to have some portions of it translated into English for him. The Lama gladly complied with the Swami's request.

After visiting the Hemis monastery, he returned to Srinagar by a shorter route and reached there towards the end of October. He then wanted to visit Taxila, the famous Buddhist seat of learning. He left Kashmir in the first week of November and arrived in Rawalpindi whence he proceeded to Taxila where he visited the ruins of the ancient city and other objects with interest. Here as he stood on the ruins of this ancient city, his

mind flew back to the past centuries when Indian civilization was at its apex and when India witnessed the flowering of her finest cultural genius. "Anybody who desires to understand the true significance of the Indian civilization during the early period of the Magadhan hegemony he shall have to turn to Taxila". Swami Abhedananda is reported to have made this remark to a foreign tourist at that time who also went to see the architectural beauty of Buddhist temples there. But what pleased him most was the Taxila museum where some precious objects were preserved. "You should know", he said to this attendant, "that we owe to Lord Curzon for the preservation of these precious articles and places of historical interest. The preservation of this Ancient Indian Monuments Act was perhaps his best gift to India". At Taxila he also gave two lectures, one on the Hindu Religion (Sanatan Dharma) and the other on 'Life beyond Death'. In the final phase of his journey he visited Peshwar whence he returned to Lahore in the first week of November.

The presence of Swami Abhedananda at Lahore was an object of delight to all the residents of the place and they wanted to hear something from his lips. We gather from the *Reminiscences* of the late Bhai Paramananda, the celebrated scholar and a leader of the Hindu Mahasabha, that Swami Abhedananda gave one public lecture at Lahore and another in the National College, which was presided over by Lala Hansraj, the Principal of the College and which was specially arranged by Bhai Paramananda. It was addressed exclusively to the students. Besides advising the students, he also narrated some of his experiences in America. "I have never heard", writes Bhai Paramananda, "such soul-stirring lecture in my life as the one I heard on that day of November 10, 1922, when the great Vedantic preacher and scholar, venerable Swami Abhedananda addressed the students of our College. It was indeed an unforgettable experience for me and also for those who were present on that occasion. He spoke for about an hour. It was a magnificent speech I have ever heard and it made a lasting impression on the minds of the audience which consisted mainly of the students. I have still vivid recollections of some of the brilliant lines uttered by the Swami, the dignity of whose majestic appearance is still fresh in the scroll of my memory. When at the end of his speech he exhorted on the necessity of training our youngmen properly and

strictly according to the ancient Indian ideals and at the same time accepting what is good in the Western education, there was loud cheers in the College Hall which was packed to its capacity on that memorable occasion”.

After staying for about three weeks at Lahore he left the place and came to Rishikesh on December 1—this particular place of pilgrimage has, as we knew, played an important role in his early life in so far as the development of his self realization was concerned. This is why the place always remained fresh in his memory and this accounts for his re-visiting it while making the return journey to Calcutta. Here he stayed for about a week and during this time he went to visit the Kailash Math, founded by the eminent Vedantic scholar, Dhanraj Giri. The head of the Kailash Math, Gobindananda Giri extended to him a cordial reception as Abhedananda entered inside the monastery. Gobindananda was his classmate at the time when he was a pupil of Dhanraj Giri. Gobindananda's joy knew no bounds when he met Abhedananda after about three decades. “So you are now a famous preacher. We have heard much about your achievements in the West. It is very kind of you to visit us”. These words of Gobindananda must have touched the heart of his one-time classmate. Though there was a warm and pressing invitation for him to stay there, yet Abhedananda had his food there by begging alms from a local *Satra* as in the days of the old, which surprised the Mahant of the Math. Swami Abhedananda of international reputation to beg alms from the *Satras* as he used to do before in the early days of his spiritual *sadhana*. Here was a true Sannyasin and a real disciple of Sri Ramakrishna thought Gobindananda for a moment. Swami Abhedananda then went to Kankhal and stayed there at the Ramakrishna Sevashrama. Here he also initiated some aspirants to Sannyasin and Brahmacharya. He left Hardwar on December 8, and reached Calcutta on the eleventh of that month. The birthday ceremony of the Holy Mother came off on that particular day and it was duly observed at Belur and about two thousand five hundred persons were provided with the *prasad*. It is needless to mention that Swami Abhedananda participated in the ceremony with utmost devotion befitting a son of the Holy Mother. Thus ended one complete year since his return to India.

## CHAPTER V

### HIS DAYS IN CALCUTTA

The scene now shifted from Belur to Calcutta, the city of his birth. "After returning from Tibet" writes Swami Abhedananda in his Diary, "I established the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society in Calcutta of which I am the President. In 1924, I opened a branch of this Society at Darjeeling under the name of Ramakrishna Vedanta Ashrama". But the background story of the shifting must be told in its proper perspective, otherwise it will not be possible for us to follow the life-story of Swami Abhedananda since his return from Tibet. In the first instance, let us see what were exactly the reasons that prompted him to chose Calcutta as the centre of his future activities.

When he returned from America, he returned with a load of a huge number of books and furniture and pile of his manuscripts relating to his innumerable speeches and writings which were to be processed before publishing in book-forms. Those things so long remained almost unpacked for want of adequate space in the monastery at Belur. The Ramakrishna Mission headquarters in those days had limited number of rooms and as such it became difficult to provide Abhedananda with a suitable and even a sizeable space. Initially there was a proposal which had the sanction of Swami Brahmananda before his death, to have a new storey constructed over the guest house, to afford the requisite accommodation to Abhedananda and for which the latter was prepared to bear all the expenses. But when an objection to it came from the side of the donors of the guest-house, the project had to be abandoned. It was at this time, that Swami Abhedananda held consultations with his two *Gurubhais*, Swami Sivananda (who was then the President of the Order) and Swami Saradananda and proposed to them that since there was difficulty of accommodation at the headquarters of the Mission, it would be proper for him to shift to Calcutta and settle there and to carry on his own activities. It is on record that both Sivananda and Saradananda had given their consent to this proposal, and accordingly efforts were being made from

the beginning of 1923 to find out a suitable house for Swami Abhedananda in Calcutta.

Yet there were other reasons for his choice of Calcutta as the centre of his future work. It could be safely presumed that when he returned to India from America, he must have had some plans of his own, the realization of which needed a separate establishment, if not altogether a separate organisation outside the Order. He was one of the Trustees of the Belur Math and as such there was no question of his disassociating from the parent body. We all know that till the last days of his life, Swami Abhedananda always claimed himself as a humble spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna and Calcutta was the place associated with innumerable memories of the life of the Master which Belur cannot claim. The city was sanctified not only by his frequent visits to the houses of various devotees, but some of the last days of his life were actually spent here. And even the Master passed away at a place which is situated just on the fringe of the city. Thus the very atmosphere of this metropolis of Bengal breathed something that emanated from the direct association of the Master. It therefore seemed to Abhedananda that there could be no ideal place for him to spend the rest of his life than in Calcutta.

But it was not only the association of Sri Ramakrishna with the city that was of chief consideration with him in this matter, Calcutta was the pivotal place of the Renaissance of which Swami Abhedananda was a brilliant product. Since the days of Ram-mohan, the city has witnessed many a social, cultural and religious movements which had produced far-reaching effects on the rest of India. The city has had the privilege of passing through different stages of renaissance and reformation in all the fields of national awakening since the beginning of the last century. Abhedananda knew better than anybody else that great cities not only produce great men, but they also generate great movements which in their turn bring new epochs. All this and many other considerations must have weighed in his mind when he intended to lay anew the corner-stones and foundation to his work in the city of his birth as testimony to his Master. It was but natural on the part of Swami Abhedananda to make himself available to one and all and also to widen the field of his future work. It is, therefore, not correct to say that there was any



ill-feeling between himself and his brother disciples, or any breach with them, or that any injustice was done to him, during the time when certain changes were made in the administration of affairs at the Belur Math following the departure of Swami Brahmananda. Nothing of the sort ever happened. Yet it is unfortunate that Swami Abhedananda's stay at Calcutta and aloof from the Belur Math gave rise to various conjectures which have no foundation. Some ignorant people and scholar like Christopher Isherwood and others to whom Abhedananda appears to be an individualist, were entirely wrong in their supposition that since he was a man of independent spirit it ill-suited Swami Abhedananda to remain at Belur in company of his brother-disciples.

Such assumptions and presumptions are really far-fetched on the part of those whose idle fancy can hardly measure the statues of the disciples of Ramakrishna or fathom their spiritual attainments. There might be some apparent differences of views among them, or in their modes of life and methods of work, but collectively they represented a homogenous unit, reflecting the glory of their Master and also the spirit of the Brotherhood of Monks that held them together forever.

Still his remaining outside the Belur Math and quite apart from the Mission gave rise to various conjectures as to why Swami Abhedananda preferred to remain aloof. To allay these conjectures from the minds of the public let us reproduce here *in extenso* what has been recorded in the official history of the Mission, in this regard. This account, we believe, gives a correct picture.

“Habituated for a quarter of a century to the Western mode of life, Swami Abhedananda found it difficult to adjust himself to the conditions prevailing in Belur in those days with too many monks in each room and a very poor standard of living. He pleaded with Swami Brahmananda to put up an upper storey over the guest house for him at his own expense. After the demise of Swami Brahmananda, Swami Abhedananda entrusted this work to another Swami and then left for Shillong. The proceedings of the Trustees' meetings dated June 13, 1922, record : “While the construction was going on, complaints were lodged by some donors, several Mission members and a guest that on no account any private residential quarters be allowed

to be built on the guest house. So the Trustees decided that Swami Abhedananda be offered the Library room of the Math for his own use as long as his quarters are not built in another site to be approved by him. Accordingly Swami Abhedananda was informed by Swami Saradananda that as the guest house was meant for guests, it would not be proper to build on it a permanent residence for him. Swami Abhedananda's problem of accommodation, therefore, remained unsolved. In the meantime he planned a long tour to Kashmir and Tibet, on which he started soon. He returned to Calcutta on December 11, 1922. He then decided to live in Calcutta all by himself from February 20, 1923, when he leased premises No. 48B, Mechuabazar Street (now Keshab Sen Street). He started the Vedanta Society, working along his own lines. Personal monastic disciples gathered round him one by one. As yet it was not a split. Swami Abhedananda himself maintained the best of friendly relations with the monks of Belur Math and its branches, who, in their turn, paid him frequent visits. Besides, he continued to be Trustee of the Math and, therefore, a member of the Governing Body of the Mission till the last day, though with advancing age, it became increasingly difficult for him to go to Belur to attend the meetings, and during the closing years he ceased altogether to attend them".

Thus inspite of his having a Society of his own and with his headquarters in Calcutta since the beginning of 1923, it is not correct to say or suppose that he ceased all connection with the Ramakrishna Math and Mission as some would have us to believe. The institutions—the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, on one side and the Vedanta Society of Abhedananda on the other—appeared distinctly separate bodies although Sri Ramakrishna was the common deity and the ideals of universal religion as based on Vedanta were the common goal. So there was never any unfriendly feelings between the two, for it is on record that the senior Swamis of the Belur Math used to pay him occasional visits at Calcutta. Thus the feeling of love and cordiality between them was never lost which is a positive proof, if any proof is needed, of the eternal bond between the sons of Sri Ramakrishna that came out of the brotherhood of monks which was founded on that memorable day at Antpur, following the passing away of their Master whose living presence they

always felt and which in fact, remained as the golden link between them. So viewed spiritually and judging historically, it can be concluded that the Belur Math and the Vedanta Society of Abhedananda are nothing but two distinct centres, duly sanctified by Sri Ramakrishna, from where emanate the white radiance of Truth and universal religion.

We now enter into a new phase of Swami Abhedananda's life in which he played the role of a nation-builder and as such it deserves our close study. If the best part of his life was spent in the west in preaching the universal message of Vedanta, the mature years of his life was spent in the task of nation-building which was of paramount necessity in the twenties of this century. A new epoch had then started in Bengal with the emergence of Deshabandhu Chittaranjan Das as the new political leader of the country. As we have already indicated, Abhedananda returned to India at a time when a great tidal wave of national awakening was sweeping through the length and breadth of India. It was, in fact an upsurge of the people's spirit in India. We are not concerned here with the history of that upsurge. What struck

thousands of ordinary men and women were touched with a new spirit of hope and endeavour and a galaxy of stars had then appeared in the political firmament of India. Deshabandhu Chittaranjan Das was one such personality of the first magnitude.

Here a few words about this great son of Bengal who himself was very much impressed by the stature of Swami Abhedananda, when he met him frequently in Calcutta and also by his pronounced views, may not be altogether out of place. Deshabandhu was in active politics for barely six years, and yet he established himself in the heart of the Indian people as one of their greatest leaders. What is still more remarkable, he rose within this brief period from agitational politics to statesmanship of the highest order. This might seem surprising only to those who do not know that his whole life had been a preparation for this consummation. He had the special genius of using the instrument of British law to India's national interest. Almost amongst one of the richest men in India changed to one who had barely anything which he could call his own. Almost overnight, Mr. C. R. Das, Barrister-at-law, having a princely practice at the Bar, became Deshabandhu Chittaranjan, the friend and

servant of his country and his people. It was therefore quite natural for Abhedananda to be attracted to him and *vice versa*. Besides Deshabandhu, there were other notable personalities in Bengal such as Sir Surendranath Banerjee, Sir J. C. Bose, Sri Ashutosh Mukherjee, Sir P. C. Roy and many others who were more or less attracted to Swami Abhedananda for his pronounced views since his return to India, his public speeches in and around Calcutta must have aroused a great interest in their minds, for he spoke less of religion and philosophy and more about the need of the day which was of course the regeneration of the younger folk. Thus the period of his life from 1923 till the end, has a remarkable significance in the contemporary history of Bengal. From the contemporary reports we gather that within a very short time after he settled in Calcutta that Abhedananda became a potent force in the life of the nation and also a much sought after person. Invitations began to come from various cultural and religious bodies such as the Mahabodhi Society, Brahma Samaj, Vivekananda Society, University Institute and others and he had to respond to these invitations, because he now regarded that to rouse the nation from inertia and to give it a proper direction was his first and foremost task to which he now set himself whole heartedly. As in the west in the prime of his youth, so now in his own country and amongst his own people, Swami Abhedananda spent an intensively active life, the full story of which has yet to be recorded. During this period most of his time were spent chiefly at Calcutta and at Darjeeling. But it was in Calcutta where daily increased his field of activity. Daily in the morning and in the afternoon hours there would be stream of visitors which consisted of the leading persons of the city, including the Christian Missionaries. The Lord Bishop of Calcutta was a particular friend of Swami Abhedananda and the former paid frequent visits to his place. He remained for two and half a month at his Mechhuabazar residence where all his personal belongings were carried from Belur chiefly by a group of enthusiast college students.

Later on he shifted his residence to No. 11, Eden Hospital Lane which witnessed the birth of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society and thus was fulfilled one of the cherished dreams of Swami Abhedananda. There should be a centre in the heart of Calcutta from where he would be able to preach the message

of his Master. Sri Ramakrishna must be a living truth with the people, and the ideals of the 'great Vivekananda' must inspire one and all and no other place seemed to him suitable for this purpose than Calcutta. Moreover, since his return from America, everyone looked upon Abhedananda as a national hero who talked about the reconstruction of national life through education on a religious basis just as Swami Vivekananda did. As we have already indicated, it was a great era of national awakening in Bengal and India as well when Abhedananda set his foot on the soils of his country in 1921. So was the case with him during his earlier visit to India in 1906 when there was a great tidal wave of the *Swadeshi* movement in Bengal. So it was quite in the fitness of time that the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society (afterwards known as the Ramakrishna Vedanta Math) came into existence in Calcutta to supply the fundamental spiritual urge directing the national life at that momentous period of the country.

It was at No. 11, Eden Hospital Lane that the real foundation of the Society were laid and where regular classes<sup>1</sup> were held for the benefit of the aspirants. Some of his future disciples who afterwards adopted the monastic life also began to gather round him from this time. There were frequent lectures which were mostly attended by the students. A special room at No. 11, Eden Hospital Lane was set aside where arrangements for regular worship of the Master was carried on under his instruction. The magnificent painting of Sri Ramakrishna as drawn by Fránk Dvorák was placed on the altar. This was the famous painting which was done by the celebrated artist while Abhedananda was in America and which he brought along with him when returning to India. Here a few words about this superb painting by the Czech painter whose portrait of Ramakrishna brought him into close connection with all devotees of Ramakrishna may not be out of place here.

Fránk Dvorák was in Chicago during the Parliament of Religions in 1893. Years later he met Swami Abhedananda in New

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the notes of the class lectures delivered in 1924 on the *Patanjali-darsana*, the *Gita*, and the *Katha Upanishad* were taken by some of his disciples and were published in book forms under the titles of *Mahārājer Kathā* (by Swami Chitswarapananda, and *Tīrtharenu* (by Swami Prajnanananda). Some of the Swami's class notes taken on 1923, have been published in the *Sri Ma-darshana*, Vol. II & III.

York and later in London, and learnt about his great Master whose life and teachings roused his imagination to such an extent that he desired to make a portrait of Sri Ramakrishna. The first portrait was drawn from an experience of a vision and when Dvorák produced that before Abhedananda, the latter then showed him a photo of Sri Ramakrishna and he also supplied him with all the available photos of the Master that were taken during his life time. Swami Saradananda also inspired Fránk Dvorák in drawing a portrait of Sri Ramakrishna. It is learnt that Mr. Dvorák also presented a bust portrait of Sri Ramakrishna to Swami Saradananda before he painted the full-size portrait of Sri Ramakrishna. However, the artist did the final drawing of the full-size portrait of the Master, which had the approval of Swami Abhedananda. It is the best portrait of Sri Ramakrishna so far available. He later painted a similar portrait of the Holy Mother also, and it is to note that both the portraits of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi were taken by Swami Abhedananda to India and were installed in the temple of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, Calcutta. This celebrated Czech artist subsequently became a disciple of Abhedananda whose final oil-painting he also made. Fránk Dvorák passed away in 1927. The rich association of this great painter with India is never to be forgotten.<sup>2</sup> It might be mentioned here that Rabindranath Tagore had visited twice Fránk Dvorák in his

<sup>2</sup> Let me quote here the 'Lecture Tour' of Swami Ranganathananda, where he has also given an account of Fránk Dvorák and his sister Miss Helene Dvorák of Prague. The Swami wrote in his running narrative :

"Accompanied by Jiri, Cech and Das, I reached the house of Miss Helene Dvorák at 11-45 a.m. June 23, 1961. She is the 80-and-odd year old sister of the well-known Czech painter, Mr. Fránk Dvorák whose portrait of Sri Ramakrishna brings him into close communion with all devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. Helena and her younger sister, Marie Rijackova, who live in the studio of their late brother, received us very cordially; Ajit Chakravarty, artist, was already there expecting me. The sisters told us about their brother and his devotion to Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother. Fránk Dvorák and Helena were in Chicago during the Parliament of Religions of 1893. He had a ticket for the Parliament but could not attend it on the day Swami Vivekananda spoke due to a painting job on hand: he regretted for this very much when a few years later he met Swami Abhedanandaji, another disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, in New York, and later in London, and learnt about Vivekananda and his great Master, Sri Ramakrishna. In the meantime he had painted Sri Ramakrishna from an experience of a vision, which painting he produced before Abhedanandaji when the latter showed him a photo of Sri Ramakrishna. Abhedanandaji took this painting to India. It is the best portrait of Sri Ramakrishna so far available and adorns many a publication of the Ramakrishna Mission. He later painted a similar portrait of the Holy Mother also. Helena showed me a *gerua* coloured

studio in Prague in 1921 and again in 1926. Dvorák also made three fine oil-paintings of Swami Abhedananda besides a beautiful profile in pastel. "He was a gifted painter of rare talent" thus once remarked the Swami while speaking about Dvorák.

It was in May, 1923 that Swami Abhedananda went to visit Darjeeling, in company with one of his disciples. Years ago, after the passing away of the Master, he was attacked with malignant malaria. It was at that time that he spent a few days at Darjeeling along with Swami Brahmananda. The salubrious climate of the place fully cured him of the malady. While on his second visit to Darjeeling after his return from America, it struck to Abhedananda that this beautiful spot on the lap of the Himalayas might be an ideal place for preaching the message of Ramakrishna, which remained so long out of the consideration of the Mission. This was the reason which must have inspired him to establish a Vedanta Centre at this hill town. In 1924, he purchased a cottage, which was known as 'Ruby Cottage' and established there the Ramakrishna Vedanta Ashrama, with an attached primary school and charitable dispensary and a memorial building in the name of Sister Nivedita. He also raised a suitable memorial marble block on the spot

erected by Swami Vivekananda which she had received as a present from the late Miss Macleod and which she treasures with great devotion. I saw with her a letter of Abhedanandaji received by her brother who treated Abhedanandaji as his *Guru*; there is a fine oil painting of Abhedanandaji by Fránek Dvorák in Helena's room. She showed me a photo frame on one side of which is a print of Dvorák's painting of Sri Ramakrishna with a thumb impression of the Holy Mother at the bottom margin and on the reverse side is a print of Dvorák's painting of the Holy Mother, also with a thumb impression of the Holy Mother at the bottom margin with the inscription in English: 'With blessings and love of Srimati Sarada Devi to Mr. Fránek Dvorák'. There are 3 miniature photos of Swami Vivekananda also in different poses in the bottom margin of this side. I could not get a convincing answer to my query whether the thumb impressions were of the Holy Mother. To be so, he should have finished the Mother's painting before the Mother's passing away in 1920. Fránek Dvorák passed away in 1927. She showed me a letter of Swami Abhedanandaji from Ramakrishna Vedanta Society, Beadon Street, Calcutta, dated March 16, 1928 in which he thanked her for sending him her brother's painting of the Holy Mother. She showed me also a half column cutting of the Calcutta Daily Forward, of March 16, 1928 and *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of March 15, 1928 in which this gift had been narrated and thanked for. I saw with her a copy of the Bengali Monthly, *Vishvavani*, for *Vaishakh* 1335 carrying a photo of Fránek Dvorák and Sister Helena. From these it is not possible to conclude that the thumb impression is of the Holy Mother. The Ramakrishna Vedanta Math in Calcutta with which she has been in correspondence for long may be in a position to clear the matter. The sisters are very devoted to Sri Ramakrishna and India and they dearly cherish the memory of their great brother".

was elected General President of the Parliament of Religions at the Town Hall of Calcutta, held on the occasion of the birth-centenary of Sri Ramakrishna. After the recording of his opening address the President invited Swami Abhedananda to take the chair and left the hall as he was not well. The Swami occupied the chair in the midst of deafening applause and was greeted with a spontaneous outburst of ovation such as the Town Hall had seldom seen. His very presence evoked such enthusiasm and emotion in the minds of those present, that it is difficult to express adequately. All gaze were fixed at his majestic appearance. It was on that day that Abhedananda delivered his last and one of the finest speeches of his life. It was, as it were, his swan song and everybody heard it spell-bound. We quote below a few lines from this memorable speech of the Swami, which remains still this day as a piece of unforgettable classic.

"I stand here not as a delegate from any Institution, not as the President of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of Calcutta, but as the humble spiritual son of Bhagawan Sri Ramakrishna and the last surviving *Gurubhai* (spiritual brother) of the west-renowned Swami Vivekananda whose mantle fell on my humble self, to carry on the works started by him in England and America in 1896 A.D.. At last in the 19th century Bhagawan Sri Ramakrishna came to fulfil that declaration 'Whosoever comes to me through whatsoever path I reach him. All men are struggling in the various paths of religion which ultimately lead to one Almighty Lord of the universe' said Sri Krishna in the *Gita* by practising the religious methods of various creeds and living like the consummation of all the Prophets, Seers and Incarnations of the Divinity that appeared before His advent. I hope that this Parliament of Religions will sound the death-knell of all communal strife and struggle and will create a great opportunity for promoting fellowship among the various faiths. . . . The present upheaval of the spiritual tide, the waves of which traversing nearly one half of the world have touched the shores of America, was produced by the christ-like character and divine personality of Bhagawan Sri Ramakrishna. . . . His life was so wonderful and unparalleled that within ten years after his departure from this earth, it attracted the admiration, respect and reverence, not only of all classes of people of India, but of many of the distinguished English and German scholars of the nine-



teenth century, who happened to know something about Him". At the end of his speech he quote three lines which were written by the renowned Professor Max Müller as an expression of his tribute to this Incarnation of the Divinity: "This great sage showed in His life had to cultivate the search after God and proved by his example, that wherever there is extreme longing to see God, there is the nearness of the realization of the Absolute Truth".

He then concluded his speech with these soul-stirring words, which still reverberate at the corridors of time: "The days of prophecy have passed before our eyes. The manifestation of the Divine powers of One who is worshipped today by thousands as the latest Incarnation of Divinity. We have witnessed with our eyes. Blessed are they who have seen Him and touched His holy feet. May the glory of Sri Ramakrishna be felt by all nations of the earth; may his Divine powers be manifested in the earnest and sincere souls of His devotees of all countries in all ages to come—this is the constant prayer of this spiritual child and humble servant of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna".

Viewed historically, we cannot fail to grope the significance of this utterance from the lips of one whose life was but a living commentary of his beloved Master. Perhaps no other disciple of Sri Ramakrishna has fulfilled his life's mission in the way as did Abhedananda who lived a fairly long and eventful life. Perhaps Swami Abhedananda could not have accomplished his life's mission in a more noble way than by preaching to the world during the closing years of his life, the glory of the greatest Incarnation of the Divinity the world has ever seen. Immersed fully as he was all through his earthly existence in the thought of his Master, it was quite in the fitness of that glorious career to sing his last song in the way as Abhedananda did as he stood before the audience on that memorable day which gathered at the Parliament of Religions—the first of its kind in India—held on the occasios of the birth-centenary of Sri Ramakrishna whose advent brought harmony for which the world awaited so long. And viewed spiritually, this speech of Swami Abhedananda indicated the glorious chapter in the life of this Apostle of Monism. He did not utter a single word of Vedanta, nor he spoke of religion or philosophy, but simply declared in no unemphatic words the spiritual greatness of his Master, Sri Ramakrishna.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE EVENING GLOW

No great man lives in vain and the life of every great man only has meaning insofar as it aids in making the life of everything living nobler and more beautiful. Every great man imprints his name and image on the minds of those who are drawn to him, and Swami Abhedananda has left deep imprint not only in the minds of his own people, but also in the minds of millions of English and American people, just in the same way as did Swami Vivekananda. The life of Swami Abhedananda has another significance for us. As one follows the growth and development of this unique spiritual personality, one finds it as a beautiful flower having eternal fragrance. This reminds us of his own sayings which runs thus: "We have to grow like flowers, close to the earth, in beauty and simplicity; then the fragrance will do its work like the fragrance of the flowers." As we look at his eventful and glorious life with all its achievements and noble aspirations, we are reminded of what Simson Carter, the famous American poet of the late nineteenth century, expressed in a poem:

With cheerful step,  
adown the western slope,  
The grey-haired singer-goes:  
The sunset sky is  
flushed with rosy hope,  
As earth-life nears its close.

Let us, therefore, now look at the evening glow of the life of a man who knew that "to have all we want, we must give all we have". And Swami Abhedananda had everything he wanted in the pursuit of his spiritual *sadhana* which began at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna almost in the morning hours of his life and as an *Acharya* or teacher he gave away everything he had during the evening hours of his life, for the emancipation of mankind. Let us also try to catch some of the evening glows of the life of this great monist.

All accounts of Abhedananda's life are incomplete if we do not take into our consideration the workings of his inner

mind during the last few years of his life when the Ramakrishna Vedanta Math had its final abode in its newly built premises. It was consecrated to the name of his Master and at the time of installing the portraits of Sri Ramakrishna and his Divine consort, Sarada Devi, inside the main temple, his prayer was—"O my Master, do thou remain here for ever". The prayer came from the innermost recess of his soul which itself was dedicated to the altar of his own high spirit which had the baptism at the hands of Sri Ramakrishna. The teacher to whom hundreds of aspirants then used to come at the Math, did well his part. He perfected a genuine spiritual character which fed the whole band of his disciples and devotees, as the gentle dews of heaven fall softly at night and keep the vegetable world alive. His pure and simple life, living upon the faith in God, his lofty thoughts rising to the deep meanings of things seen and unseen, his pious sentiments breathing love of God and also of man, and his profound spiritual experiences realizing God and Immortality, call forth our true nature, lead us on to a life of devotion and renunciation and remind us of our destiny which is the life in God. Since the foundation of his own two centres—one at Darjeeling and the other at Calcutta, Abhedananda as it were, set himself to serene in the vineyard of the Lord, which is not confined to any particular sect or nationality. True love has a service to give which extends all the world over. It has a mission for every soul stricken with sin and sorrow. Wisdom, deep insight and genuine spirituality appeal to everyone, whether born in the Orient or the Occident. Amidst the din and bustle of Calcutta, and also in solitude of the Himalayas, the great teacher now took himself to the task of creating an atmosphere which would breathe nothing but spirituality. His life in the Himalayas was a delightful and profitable study. There amidst nature's beauty and silence, he was engaged in his quiet occupation of study, meditation and writing. Most of his books and profound writings were written there. He used to get up early in the morning and walk in the lovely road in front of the Vedanta Ashrama for a short while, deeply immersed in meditation. Tea was made by this time, which he took alone sitting on the *Verandah* facing the mountain range. He then used to go out on a long walk alone going along lovely roads, plunged in thought. Walking was one of the chief enjoyments of his life all through his life. The

habit remained with him almost to the last days. He used to return home at 9 o'clock and at once sit down to write and was thus engaged till 11 o'clock. Bath followed which was to him a daily baptism. He now entered his sanctuary and spent about an hour in meditation. Who will forget having once seen the solemnity and sanctity of the occasion? His adoration was an echo of some celestial music "perhaps my chiefest delight is in my meditation", writes Abhedananda. It was speechless meditation with the unspeakable Divine Presence for his only witness. Breakfast followed and during this time he was in the same devout mood as characterized his morning hours. It was indeed to him a feast of the Spirit. The meal being over, he read one of the daily papers, usually the *Statesman*, after which he rested for a while. From three to five o'clock in the afternoon he again went on writing after which he took a walk for an hour or so. In the evening visitors and devotees called on him and he talked with them on a variety of subjects—domestic, social, political and religious, according to the nature and character of the visitors. When alone, he used to read. There was hardly any idle moment with him even at the old age. Such was his life on the hills during the summer days.

Swami Prajnanananda, one of the disciples of Swami Abhedananda, has depicted an excellent account of his Master's life in his Bengali book "*Mana O Manush*" (*The Man and His Personality*) which gives us a glimpse of the evening glow during the closing years of the Swami's appreciative life. The book, a proper appreciation of the Great Swami, deals chiefly with the discussions the author had with his Master and, as such, it is valuable. It is full of interesting accounts which reveal the mind and wisdom of Abhedananda. He has garnered in the pages of this remarkable book a wealth of thought that came out of the very depth of his Master's mind in the closing years of his life.<sup>1</sup> In this book, Prajnanananda has delineated some of the important characteristics of Swami Abhedananda which has been possible only due to his close association with the latter and this treatment reveals the

<sup>1</sup>The other books (I) *Tirtharenu* and (II) *Abhedananda-darshana* (Philosophy of Swami Abhedananda), written by Swami Prajnanananda, (in Bengali), should also be read to well-estimate the religious and philosophical thoughts and ideas of Swami Abhedananda.

inner man and the one knowledge of the spirit of our subject that is essential to understand the whole man.

The *Mana O Manush* is a sort of prism through which reflects and radiates the illumined soul of the great teacher as Abhedananda was. This intimate study is intensely interesting not because of some interesting anecdotes it contains, but because of the superb revelation of the inner glory of a glorified life, the like of which we have seldom seen. The book also throws a flood of light on Abhedananda's life in America and brings to our mind the perfect picture of a preacher and his association with some of the world celebrities and, as such, it has a biographical value of its own. In our study of Swami Abhedananda's inner life, this book will prove extremely helpful. The background story of the establishment of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Math in Calcutta, as contained in this book gives us a correct picture of the Institution. It is not a sectarian institution that Abhedananda founded in this city and as one reads some of the clauses of the Trust Deed which was executed by the Swami just before his final departure from the scene, one finds that he had some great ideas and greater objectives in his mind embracing the whole society whose all-round welfare was his cherished dream. To know Abhedananda, one must know the full story of the greatest achievements of his life—the establishment of the Math—that has been beautifully told in this book. From this book we come to know that in the role of a leader he used to frequently declare to his disciples: "In the preaching of Sri Ramakrishna, it is a fundamental tenet that man has a duty towards every other human being". And it reveals to us the idea of the brotherhood of all human beings as cherished all through his life by Swami Abhedananda.

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We have seen that as he advanced step by step towards the goal of his life, Abhedananda became not only a true Vedantin of a Ramakrishnite, but the very reviver of the spirit of Vedanta. We have also seen that the age in which he flourished was a scientific age and an enlightened culture epoch. Nobody would acclaim the greatness of one who is merely a religious teacher, however great and transcendental he may be, unless he has tried "to spell, in part, the tunes of these, our days". Abhedananda, through his teachings, kept himself in the closest touch with the

thought-currents of the modern age. This is Abhedananda *par excellence*. The reproachment of science and religion is a remarkable trait in the life of this great monist and Vedantic philosopher. He knew that science, if studied with insight, brings a man's mind about to religion. He also knew that the ever-increasing success of science had posed many challenges and conflicts for religion—conflicts which are resolved in individual lives in a variety of ways. To Abhedananda science and religion are both universal and basically very similar. Once in Calcutta a learned professor of science came to see him and raised the question of the convergence of science and religion. It was on this occasion, the Swami made the following remarks: "It has been proved by the history of the progress of science that the concept of scientific absolutism is entirely wrong. You know that towards the end of the last century many of the philosophical and conceptual basis of science have been disturbed, scientists have now become considerably more cautious and modest about extending scientific ideas into realms where they have not yet been thoroughly tested. Let us now look at the similarity and the near identity of science and religion. The goal of science is to discover the order in the universe and to understand through it the things we sense around us, and even man himself. The goal of religion is an understanding as well as acceptance of the purpose and meaning of our universe and how we fit ourselves into it. And this purposeful force we call God." When, on another occasion, one of his close disciples asked the Master to give the idea of the role of revelation in religion, Abhedananda gave the following answer: "In religion discoveries often came by great revelations, while in science they come by a process of logical deductions and laws based on datas. But this is not all. Even according to the admission of a modern scientist whom I had the chance of meeting in America, most of the important scientific discoveries came about. Very differently and much more closely they are akin to the revelation which in scientific terminology is called as intuition or idea. And if we compare how great scientific ideas arrive, do they not look remarkably like religious revelations viewed in a non-mystical way? After all, truth is the final goal aspired by both a scientist and by a man of religion. A Gautam and a Galileo stand as close as possible to truth and meaning".

This was but one of the facets of the evening glow in the life of this great teacher. His acceptance of science and religion for better understanding of the problems of the world is certainly a special trait of his genius. In many of his religious and philosophical utterances and writings we find that Swami Abhedananda used to say very often: "If religion is a way of life, science is also a way of life. In theory and practice one seeks to give expression to the nature of God, the relation between God and man, and the other seeks to give expression to the nature of the universe and man and the relation between man and world. And both the expressions seek to express the absolute Being who is the be-all and end-all of everything". To realize fully the convincing arguments of Abhedananda's observation on a subject like religion and science, one should go through his works. Essentially a man of strong rational faith, Abhedananda had his first allegiance to Vedanta and whatever he wrote or said, all had their sanction in the Vedantic tenets. Reason, he knew, never disproves the infallibility of the scriptures, but shows that there is in the old path a newness waiting for those who seek it. "The Book of Religion is ever the same Book. Each new Incarnation is the same Man". Only Swami Abhedananda who had the rare privilege of having Sri Ramakrishna who fits in our modern life and thought, as his Master, could have made this remark.

"Truth and genius had embraced under the eye and sanction of religion". The new age awaits the parturition of the spirit, and, insofar as Abhedananda represented this spirit, he belongs to the new age. The last years of his life reveal to us the fact that he was in touch with the palpitating aspects of modern life, and he kept in view the changes in the world outlook, though often lost in the nameless void of *Samadhi*; and along with his scientific passion for truth for truth's sake, there was also his recognition of the relation of the individual claimant to society. He thus stood so magnificent and august in the hearts of modern India. His voice carried great weight, his personality cast a lasting spell. He was the friend and teacher not of the few, but of the present age. His whole life was an adaptation of the ancient religion of India to the new problems of life. He knew more than anybody else that:

A new light shall break upon the earth,

A new world shall be born  
 And the things that were promised shall be fulfilled.

He lived to see the fulfilment of some of this inspiring assurance for the aspiring earth. A seer *par excellence*, Abhedananda could see everything by his own unerring divine light and the last eighteen years of his life in Calcutta were devoted solely not to the forging of a lever by which to lit up not only India just a part of the world, but the whole human world to a lofty point in the scale of evolution. Bodied and disembodied, he has been engaged in this colossal task in complete combination with the Divine power to bring the process to its assured consummation. And the evening glows of his life were but indications of it. In this connection one is reminded of what he once said to a disciple: "A new spirit of oneness will take hold of the human race. The spiritual gift of India to the world has already begun. India's spirituality is entering Europe and America in an ever-increasing measure. The movement that Swami Vivekananda started in the West has grown and will grow". So one closely looks at the evening glow of his life one is led to believe that Swami Abhedananda who worked all through his life for India's uplift, had a clear vision of the Dawn of a New Age for the world.

The emergence of Abhedananda as an *Acharya* or the world teacher is the closing chapter of his great life. We have seen how his truth-seeking soul was blessed with the deep spiritual embrace of Sri Ramakrishna and since then till the time he went to the West. Abhedananda lived the life of a disciple *par excellence* along with his other brother-disciples. It was at the feet of his Master that he learnt that absolute self-surrender to the *Guru* did not mean the abject slavishness of one individual to another or even the spirit of unquestioning faith and trust of one man in the judgement of another of immensely superior powers and attainments. So when his own term came to play the role of the teacher, Abhedananda appeared to his disciples as an ideal *Guru*.

All that Swami Abhedananda said, he himself practised. His precepts were thus exemplified in his life. He now came to be regarded as a *Guru* or an *Acharya*. Wherever he went, people gathered round him to enjoy his holiness, and they felt satisfied



no less by his affectionate look and suavity of manners than by the sound instructions which it was their happy lot to receive at his hands. He loved his disciples as a father would love his sons and never encroached on their free-thinking. Once when a disciple wanted to know the meaning of self-surrender to and worship of *Guru*, the teacher in Abhedananda is reported to have made this reply : "The Master used to teach us that the worship of the *Guru* is exactly not what you mean by man-worship. The worship of the *Guru* is the outcome of one's actual experience of Brahman—the self of his self.—in the person of the *Guru*. It is born of deeper spiritual truth—realization in a higher plane of existence". And the closing years of his life were the clear expression of the spiritual light with all its freshness and beauty that came down to the disciples of Swami Abhedananda. They found in Abhedananda, the teacher, the very embodiment of the Divine Grace. His blissful spiritual nature embraced one and all. It is true that he made no discrimination between high and low, yet he was very careful in choosing his disciples. He was accessible to all earnest God-seekers, and herein lies the real greatness of Swami Abhedananda as a *Guru*. To him the *Guruship* meant something higher and nobler than is usually understood. His disciples had little hesitation in communicating to him their needs and difficulties in their spiritual pursuit. Even a trifling matter would receive his utmost attention. This was possible, we can presume because of his long association with his Master under whose benign care and direction his own life was shaped. In Sri Ramakrishna he found an ideal *Guru* and when the turn came in his life to play the same role, it was but natural on the part of Abhedananda that as a *Guru* he would emulate the ideals of his own Master. This was the secret of his success as a teacher.

The following lines taken from the writings of Sister Sivani (Mary LePage), a disciple of Abhedananda will at once show his eminence as a teacher : "From the hour of my discipleship," writes this American disciple, "I felt a bond growing not so much between myself and the Teacher as a bond tenuous and inclusive that seemed the core of all humanity. Swami Abhedananda as my teacher is infinitely sweet. Not to speak of his individual disciples whose welfare was always uppermost in his mind, and who gave a great heart to the redemption of all man-

kind. Every word that he uttered to his disciples was pregnant with release. He taught us to love the spirit of the *Guru* more than the belovedness of the Teacher. He loved his spiritual children as a mother would have her children. If he demanded an obedience, he did so in a very kind way. He always watched over with tender care".

Indian or Western, all his disciples were of the same opinion — Abhedananda as an ideal *Acharya* was infinitely sweet and graceful, though he always subjected his disciples to a constant and unrelaxing discipline. When all is said and done about this particular aspect of his life, there is but one conclusion : it was the spirit of Sri Ramakrishna that really took shape, when time came, in the life and thought of Swami Abhedananda as the latter emerged as a world teacher.

## CHAPTER VII

### FINAL ABSORPTION IN RAMAKRISHNA

To have lived out the full biblical span of three scores of years and ten, to have spent them dedicated and usefully in the course of religion, to have carried India's age-old message of spirituality and culture and the relevance of a never-ending search for the supreme truth to the countries across the seven seas and to have capped it all with twentyfive years as leader of an organization with dignity and zeal, is given to a very few, but this is the life-story of Swami Abhedananda who attained his 73rd birthday in September, 1938. Few could realize then that his life's span was nearing to end and he would live even less than a year, after the execution of the Trust Deed in respect of the entire Calcutta property belonging to the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society. (which was afterwards known as Ramakrishna Vedanta Math). Thus, when the whole thing was consecrated to the name of his Master, a great burden was lifted out of his heart and he heaved a sigh of relief. His life's work had been done and silently he began to prepare himself for his final journey. "I am only an instrument in the blissful sportive play of the Master and the moment my life's mission is over, I shall not wait even for a second longer." Thus he spoke to a disciple on the occasion of his 73rd birthday that was celebrated all over India.

Abhedananda was now left alone. One by one all his beloved brother-disciples had passed away before his eyes. What pained him most was the passing away of the last three Presidents of the Math and Mission, *viz.* Swami Sivananda, Swami Akhandananda and Swami Vijnanananda which came in quick succession in course of five years. Swami Sivananda who was born in 1855 was the seniormost of all the disciples of Ramakrishna. He was popularly known in the Order by the name 'Mahapurush Maharaj' and his "very presence was a benediction to all, and who even in his ripe old age of seventy-nine continued to instil faith into all and lead them along the spiritual path". He ceased to live in the mortal frame on February 20, 1939, after a prolonged illness following a stroke of thrombosis, which paralysed his right side and deprived him of speech. The year

1934 was, therefore, reckoned as a catastrophic year in the history of the Belur Math. A few days before his death came off the birthday celebration of Sri Ramakrishna, and Abhedananda, as usual, went to Belur to participate in it. But his heart was heavy on account of the illness of Swami Sivananda. He paid a visit to him at his sick-bed, sat by his side, touched his hands tenderly and spoke a few words of affection and reverence. Sivananda passed away on the next day. A memorial meeting was held on March 4, in the Albert Hall, presided over by the Maharaja of Santosh and addressed by Swami Abhedananda. was one of the soul-stirring speeches the Swami gave on that occasion, since his return to India.

Sivananda was succeeded by Swami Akhandananda as President. "An ardent disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and a staunch follower of Swami Vivekananda, Swami Akhandananda was original in many respects. A man of wide travel and vast experience as well as possessed of a retentive memory, he wrote his Bengali memoirs in a fascinating style, with an admixture of spiritual conviction. The Math and Mission expected much of him, but God did not spare him long; he was snatched away by death on February 7, 1937 after occupying the honoured post of the President for scarcely three years. Akhandananda, it should be mentioned here, preferred to spend most of his time outside Belur and chiefly at Sargacchi, the field of his lifelong labour (here he founded an orphanage). A diabetic patient since a long time, he fell into diabetic coma and was brought to the Belur Math for treatment. Immediately on receipt of his illness, Abhedananda sent some of his Sannyasin disciples to Sargachhi to enquire about his condition. And in the morning of February 7, he received a message from the Math that Gangadhar Maharaj was lying in a critical condition, and he at once started for Belur. There a touching scene happened. Before he could reach Belur, Akhandananda had passed away. Abhedananda placed in his own hands a wreath around the neck of his brother-disciple and returned to Calcutta after the last rites were performed. It was a heavy blow to him, for Akhandananda who inaugurated the birth-centenary celebration of Sri Ramakrishna on February 1936 was to instal the marble statue of the Master in the newly built temple at Belur.

Following the death of Swami Akhandananda, the last of

the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna to succeed to the Presidency was Swami Vijnanananda, who was previously the head of the Allahabad centre of the Mission and, at the time, the Vice-President of the Order to which post he was elected in April, 1934. When he became President, his health had declined so much that an active life as before was no longer possible and he passed away on April, 25, 1938, after installing the idol of the Master in the beautiful temple at Belur, which ceremony was performed in the presence of Swami Abhedananda on January 14 of that year.

Here a few words about the new Ramakrishna temple at Belur may not be out of place. The birth-centenary of Sri Ramakrishna is an event by itself and may be looked upon as the crowning achievement of the whole Ramakrishna movement which had its inception in the year 1886, "when Sri Ramakrishna lay sick at the Cossipore garden-house, and around him gathered the young hopefuls the future apostles of the Avatar". It was, therefore, quite in the fitness of things that his followers made this an occasion "for world-wide joy and a fresh attempt to propagate his message". It was a year-long function which began in February, 1936, and ended a week after the next birthday, in March, 1937. "A fitting epilogue to the centenary celebrations, there was erected a magnificent temple of Sri Ramakrishna at Belur Math, the plan of which emanated from Swami Vivekananda. The foundation stone of the temple was laid as early as March, 1929, by Swami Sivananda, and the entire plan of the temple was drawn by Swami Akhandananda, who in 1897 was in the company of Swami Vivekananda when the latter studied carefully the architecture of north-west India with a view to incorporating its best features in his proposed temple of Sri Ramakrishna, so that it might be an epitome of Indian culture just as the Master himself embodied the realization of the country's religious aspirations throughout the ages".

Swami Abhedananda was then lying seriously ill in Calcutta when the ceremony of the dedication of the Sri Ramakrishna temple at Belur Math came off on January 14, 1938. Swami Vijnanananda invited Swami Abhedananda to be present at the ceremony and the latter readily responded to it. How could he—the beloved son of the Master—remain aloof from this auspicious function? So he decided to participate in

the ceremony and went to Belur, accompanied by some of his disciples and attendants who carried his medicine-box, as instructed by the physicians. This was his last visit to Belur. On arriving there, he first visited the three temples dedicated to Swami Vivekananda, the Holy Mother and Swami Brahmananda. He then slowly proceeded towards the new temple where a large number of people had gathered to witness the memorable event. He was delighted to see the newly built temple and when the news spread that Swami Abhedananda was present on the occasion, there was noticed esteemed jubilation, for everybody became anxious to have a glimpse of him. All eyes were then fixed on him, as he entered into the new temple and moved slowly towards the sanctum. All around there was an atmosphere of serenity. Swami Vijnanananda made open the temple after performing religious rites, and the ashes of the Master had been placed in it. "On the new altar was placed an image of the Master in *samadhi* pose executed in white Italian marble by a reputed Calcutta sculptor who came several times to Ramakrishna Vedanta Math to study there the superb portrait of the Master as drawn by Frank Dvorak, just to have an exact idea about the correctness of his feature, particularly his hallowed face, so vivid and accurate in the Dvorak painting.

What was Swami Abhedananda doing all this time? He stood silently before the sanctum while the young monks sang in chorus the soul-inspiring Ramakrishna hymns which was composed by Abhedananda during the time when he was spending his days in austerity at Baranagar Math. As he heard those lines and looked at the statue, he felt the living presence of the Master and at once lost his consciousness. He stood there for a while almost motionless. Did it portend that his play also was soon going to be over? Perhaps so. He knew more than anybody else as he witnessed the installation ceremony that the day of his final absorption in the Master was not far off. With Swami Vijnanananda gone from the scene there now remained only Swami Abhedananda, as the last surviving disciple of Ramakrishna. This was perhaps the greatest glory of his life. While the other brother-disciples had left this world one by one, it fell on his lot to linger a little more. It is on record that following the train accident during his return journey from Darjeeling to Calcutta in September, 1938, Abhedananda's health gradually

declined, resulting in his confinement to his room due to infirmity. The play had the end and the Swami entered into final beauty in September 8, 1939 and "with his passing away the first generation of monks, who had founded the Ramakrishna Order, was wiped out, leaving the movement and the world distinctly poorer". We refrain from giving a graphic description of this poignant event. His last wish was to remain at the feet of his Master and, accordingly, his last rites were performed with due solemnity at the Cossipur cremation ground on the bank of the Ganges, where forty-seven years ago the sacred body of Sri Ramakrishna was consigned to the fire.

The thousands who gathered at the burning ghat and watched their beloved spiritual leader in his last rites must have asked with Shelley :

And is this death?—the pyre has disappeared,  
 The pestilence, the tyrant, and the throng ;  
 The flames grew silent. Slowly there is heard,  
 The music of a breath-suspending song.

The song of course was Vedanta, for which he had lived and worked. Thus passed away the last beloved son of Sri Ramakrishna. The voice of the hero of hundred platforms was hushed for ever. Thus ended a great epoch that began at Dakshineswar with the advent of Bhagawan Sri Ramakrishna. What now remained was the spiritual glow which will never be extinguished.

Then the ashes were gathered and carried to the Ramakrishna Vedanta Math in a copper vessel, to be deposited there on the Master's bed and for regular worship. Though the hearts of his disciples and admirers were enveloped in unalterable gloom, yet they knew it very well that Swami Abhedananda, the great disciple of Bhagawan Sri Ramakrishna, could have no death ; he only discarded his mortal frame to be accessible to all in a more real sense for all time to come, and the ashes and the things used by him were to remain as mementos of that everlasting presence. Truly so. The river of the great Vedantic monk's soul re-entered the ocean of the Divine Being which has no beginning and end. Abhedananda is not gone. His work is not done. He is still in the pilgrimage of life, holding his lamp of truth and knowledge to light the way of humanity. It is blasphemy to talk of such a man as dead. No, we cannot call it a death in the ordinary sense of the term. Men like Sri Rama-

krishna, Vivekananda and Abhedananda can never die. When they depart, they are simply absorbed into that Great Being from where they came. Therefore, spiritually speaking it is nothing but the final merging of the self in the Universal Self. When their earthly play is over, they abandon their apparent individualities with a view to be absolutely united with the Supreme Being. When Swami Abhedananda executed the Trust Deed and put his signature on it on the birthday of his Master in 1939, he knew very well that his final absorption in Ramakrishna would not be delayed more than a few months, and since that day, though apparently lying seriously ill, yet a feeling of consciousness of the Freedom of the Soul was with him. And there were forebodings of what was going to happen soon. The very last days, or to be accurate, the last few months which Abhedananda passed on earth were indeed full of events indicating the approaching end, though at the time they passed by unnoticed by all those who were about him. Sick as he looked, there was none probably who suspected how near the end was approaching in the life of the last surviving disciple of Ramakrishna. As days went by, the Swami felt more and more the necessity of withdrawing himself from directing the work of the Math, leaving the management in the hands of them that were about him. His last days were in fact the days of solitary meditation, preparing himself to merge in *mahasamadhi* or final illumination, as is natural with a luminous soul like him.

So on that early hours of the dawn on September 8, 1939 what happened at the sanctuary of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Math was not just the passing away of Swami Abhedananda. As the first rays of the morning sun shone tenderly on his serene face, with eyes closed, it seemed to his disciples that their Master was not dead, he was meditating upon God. He was on his final sleep which was "verily the awakening into the highest consciousness of his Real Self". Abhedananda, the high priest of monism, the beloved son of Sri Ramakrishna and the greatest preacher of Vedanta the world has ever seen, merged in the very spirit of Vedanta itself. A great life, having fulfilled its mission, disappeared from the public gaze.



## CHAPTER VIII

### ABHEDANANDA: THE MAN AND HIS MESSAGE

Lives of great men are like music, the tunes of which linger in our ears long after they are heard no more. Death snatches an individual from this earth, time draws its veil over him and he becomes a part of the past which grows dim as days roll on. In the case of great men, however, the past creeps into the present and becomes a part of the future. We remember those great men because we feel their presence in our midst. Their words and deeds are not converted into the shadows of the past, but find a place in the hearts of millions, and become an indivisible part of the personality of the nation and in some cases even of humanity. An attempt, therefore, to know the perennial significance of the work of a noble and spiritually great individual is in fact an attempt to know that part of our life which is his. An attempt to interpret the life of a great man is prompted by a sort of an intellectual curiosity. History is a fascinating subject and it is all the more fascinating to study how a great individual influenced the course of history and to place him in the scheme of things. Swami Abhedananda, though belonging to the Ramakrishna Order, is a part of India's personality—a part which Indians should justly be proud of. To evaluate his life correctly is a task which only a master mind can accomplish. It is not for a lay man to reach the Himalayan peak.

The personality of an individual is a complex of the stable and the ever-changing. The former aspect consists of temperamental characteristics formed during the impressionable age of the individual. This determines the nature of the individual's reactions to any situation. The latter is the change in the standpoint or the opinions of the individual. In the case of most people this change is generally impulsive and is determined by the momentary events. There are, however, some individuals whose life is a perpetual search after truth, whose mind is enriched by experience and knowledge and the changes in whose attitude reveal the development of their intellectual, moral and spiritual stature. Abhedananda belonged to the latter category, and he showed a dynamic attitude in his life as a preacher and a

teacher. The peculiar complicity of his life was that the main qualities promoted in him during the impressionable period of his life were conformity and acceptance, while the development of his personality led him more and more on to the path of renunciation and dedication to the altar of truth and universal religion. The dynamic aspect of his character was far more dominant than the conservative traits in his nature and because of this he became one of the main spiritual and moral architects of the progress of our nation.

At seventy-three Swami Abhedananda was looked upon by all who came into his close contact as the great harbinger of a new age. His work, or rather the Divine work in him, went on as before. Now in the superior position of an *Acharya* or *Guru*, he verily played the noble role of a liberator of humanity in the light of the spiritual ideas crystalized in his mind after a long process of thought, feeling and action. As an ideal *Guru* to many aspirants, he always presented a picture of serenity and majesty not only in his external appearance but also in his inner image. Hundreds of persons flocked to him for being accepted as his disciples and receiving the Divine grace through his perfectly spiritualized personality. They found in him the living embodiment of the Divine *Guru* of whom he spoke with deep emotion—the very incarnation of Truth, Love and Bliss. He poured down his love and showered his blessings upon all. He pointed out to them the ways to the fulfilment of human existence, and also presented to them his own life as a shining example of what a man should be and could be. Whoever came to him with an open mind and in a spirit of absolute surrender, it was certain that his mind would undergo a thorough metamorphosis with all his doubts and prejudices vanished. Hundreds of such instances may be cited by way of illustration of his wide diffusion of spirituality in the country among all strata of men and women. It was indeed the Abhedananda era during the twenties and thirties of this century insofar as the regeneration of faith was concerned. And yet the Swami claimed no credit for it. "It is all our Master's play of love. I am but his reflected glory". So he frankly expressed once to an eminent professor of philosophy who used to come to him frequently. On another occasion he made an identical utterance to one of his disciples: "I am but an instrument in the blissful game of the Master". That he

lived constantly and intensively in the consciousness of Rama-krishna need not be disputed. He always thought of himself as a spiritual child of his Master ; all his entity was completely merged in the entity of that Incarnation of the Divine. The success of his discipleship was perhaps the secret of the success of his *Guruship*. His *Guruship* never overshadowed the discipleship, and this itself was a lesson of utmost importance to his own disciple as well as to those who approached him for spiritual enlightenment.

There is yet another aspect in the life of Swami Abhedananda since his emergence as a *Guru* or an *Acharya*, or world teacher. He taught not by precept, but by the very example of his life as it was the case with his own Master. "How can a man progress in the path of spirituality?"—to this question of an aspirant, Acharya Abhedananda is reported to have given the following reply : "No substantial progress in spiritual pursuit is possible without sincere humbleness of the heart, without emancipation from the clutches of the vain ego, without the cultivation of the habit of seeing goodness in others and paying respects to them. Self-conceit in any degree and in any form, is the stumbling block in the path of devotion to the Lord and realization of His love and mercy". Only a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna could speak in this vein whose very life since its beginning was a perfect example of it.

During the last two years of his life, Abhedananda used to pass his days and nights in a serene meditative mood, with a continuous flow of Divine Bliss within and a calm and smiling gravity in his outer appearance. There was then almost a ceaseless torrent of people from all walks of life towards him at his new sanctuary, the Vedanta Math. All went to him seeking spiritual light and also the solution of certain problems which puzzled their brains. Acharya Abhedananda would receive them with cordiality and honours rightly due to their position and attainments, discuss social, moral and religious topics with them, point out to them the way to the real solution of their problems and suggest to them how they could turn the opportunities bestowed on them by the grace of the Lord to the real and permanent benefit of the society. He would say to those persons, who were wealthy or learned or had occupied positions of authority and prestige in the society, ought to be conscious of the

great responsibility entrusted to them by the Divine Ruler of human destiny and their obligations to the poor, uncultured and depressed people of the country. Once he told a reputed social worker : "Think of the Great Swami Vivekananda and his love for the poor and the downtrodden and just try to emulate his ideals". On another occasion when a rich man of the locality came to pay his homage to him and asked him about the aims and objects of his new monastery—the Vedanta Math, Abhedananda gave the following reply : "The portrait of Sri Ramakrishna which I have installed in this new sanctuary is not just a portrait. I have invoked life into it and as I did so I was lost in *samadhi* while meditating. After that my prayer to the Master was : 'Do thou, O my Master, remain here for ever for the welfare of humanity'. I know my prayer has been fully granted. His grace will fill the air of the place as it does at Belur".

But he generally avoided the company of rich men who were proud of their riches and whose energies were spent up in the worship of wealth, honour and pleasure. He pitied those who forgot the spiritual ideal of human life and employed their wisdom and power in the futile attempt to satisfy their economic hedonistic ambitions. Wealth, learning, power and prestige, were, he taught, of little worth, unless they were subservient to the spiritual ideal, unless they were dedicated to the service of God and the service to His creatures. They were positive nuisance if they made men forget the loving and blissful Lord of their souls, the eternal fountain of all knowledge, power, prosperity and happiness. Verily he would quite often say, the company of such soul-forgetful worshippers of earthly fortune was the most dreadful poison to the sincere worshippers of spiritual Bliss. With all the disciples of Ramakrishna excepting Abhedananda, gave from the scene of the earth by this time, it was but natural with all truth-seekers to flock to the last of the spiritual giants to seek his blessings. This was one of the reasons that he became the centre of attraction towards the closing years of his life. Like Master, like disciple. In his distribution of spiritual wealth, Acharya Abhedananda was as beautiful as was his own Master. If anybody ever went to him, yearning for initiation from him, Abhedananda would extend his mercy to him, irrespective of his caste, creed or colour. The last years of his life were thus spent in executing his mission of transmitting cur-

rents of spirituality to all layers of the human society. In fact, he was in the service of all, and this was quite befitting a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. His affection for all knew no bounds, or made no discrimination. He treated all who came to him with the same degree of compassion. This serene and scintillating image of Swami Abhedananda will remain for ever not only on the minds of his disciples but also on the canvas of time. It is not possible on the part of any lay man to fathom his inner consciousness which was in constant communion with the Divine. And that inner consciousness would silently proclaim that religion is for all, and not for a few cultured and elevated minds. Religion has to make every man cognizant of the Divine Presence in all apparently finite beings of the universe and conscious of the essential unity of himself with all.

Volumes could be filled in about Abhedananda—the man and his message. We will never see the like of him again, not because generations yet to come will be wanting in his scholasticism or the probing mind or the probity that is so much a part of his character, but because the time in which Abhedananda grew up and lived can never be duplicated. He came to manhood at a period in India's history when rationalism was the rage and religion was under seige. Decadent Hinduism was in peril of being discredited by the assaults made by more organized pressure groups. It fell to Swami Abhedananda to prove that the eternal truth proclaimed by the Vedic sages were neither soporiferous nor out-of-date. His struggle to blow away the ashes of ignorance about religion, both in the West and at home, to assert that Hinduism is neither an excretion nor an accident, has not been in vain; in this, he is one of the illustrious line of reformers and teachers, from Rammohan to Vivekananda.

Hinduism, in this sense, owes more to this one man than to any other single individual in the twentieth century. Mahatma Gandhi with his unerring sense of social justice tried to resurrect Hinduism from the wayside where it had fallen. His was the emotional approach, the approach of Vaishnava saints, of whom Narsi Bhagat was a prime example. But Abhedananda's was the approach of the intellect, the approach, one might say, of Sankara. He took the bottle to the two continents of Europe and America. This particular and, of course, spectacular role in his life will survive the ravages of time. As a great Vedantic scholar

and philosopher, he demonstrated that India could walk in the pathways of the world with her head held high. He was indeed an arch-exponent of the Hindu way of life.

It is not possible for any lay man to fully comprehend either the multi-splendoured personality of Swami Abhedananda or his message to the humanity at large. One has to approach Abhedananda with reverence and submission so that by his grace that one can understand the various aspects of his life and the deeper implications of his message. We have seen him as an ascetic and Yogi, we have seen him as a wandering monk, and we know how deeply was his mind saturated with ascetic ideas and also with the spirit of a pilgrim. And what a Yogin he was! His life since it had the blessed touch of his Master was one of interminable concentration, the like of which we notice in the life of his brother-disciple, Swami Vivekananda. By undergoing the most austere religious practices, Abhedananda set a new example of monastic life. Then if we look at the other sides of his life, we find him as a preacher of the Vedantic doctrine or the gospel of the universal religion, he stood second only to his predecessor and in some respects he might be regarded as surpassed him. As a teacher and the leader, Abhedananda impressed one and all. According to the statement of some of his Western disciples, the mere presence of Abhedananda and even his silence was as effective as his most eloquent utterances. He could transmit spirituality easily and actually; such were his attainments. With a glance, or a gesture he would throw a world of light and revelation, for he actually visualised spiritual truth and idea. He was a great flame of spiritual illumination, and those who came near could not help absorbing the light. His dominant personality accounted for his leadership in the world of religion and higher thought. Yet he was never out of touch with the ordinary facts or purely human elements of life.

But it is as a mystic and philosopher that Swami Abhedananda compels our attention. With him spirituality entered into everything. If he was a great philosopher, it was also because he was a great mystic. His philosophy cannot be separated from his spiritual experience, for it is the language thereof. It is a school of its own, gained from observations along all lines of human speculations and realization concerning the Divine Nature.<sup>1</sup> To him religion and philosophy were contravertible

terms. He made poetry of philosophy and philosophy of poetry. All his philosophical writings and lectures bear a testimony to it. In one of his lectures in America which Abhedananda gave before a distinguished group of philosophic scholars in a university he said among other things : "To my vision, the *Upanishadas* are the greatest poems ever given out by man to man". One also notices a certain distinctive poetical faculty in most of his expressions which have certainly acquired a classic value. Here are some of the gems of poetical philosophy that once dropped from his lips and which the world listened with rapt attention :

"Truth is one but there are many ways of obtaining it".

"Spirituality is our life. It is a part of our soul".

"India worships the ideals, not the idols".

"Light of wisdom has travelled from the East".

"Vedanta is older than any of the world religions".

"Vedanta is at once the most ancient and the most modern of philosophies".

"My only propaganda is the propaganda of Truth which stands on its own authority and which can bear the light of the day".

"Renunciation is the highest ideal to which a man can aspire".

"Salvation simply means the attainment of perfection".

"Faith is life, doubt is death".

"True religion begins with the realization of God's existence".

"You Americans live in time, we Indians in sternity".

Such epigrammatic expression is one of the characteristics of all his philosophical thoughts and writings. It would suffice to say that as one surveys at this distance of time his work in the West, one sees him moving through the great cities there as some mighty, glorious and effulgent light, shedding lustre all around him. He spoke as saints speak, and this is why his words

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<sup>1</sup>Read at least the following books which contain the philosophical and religious thoughts and ideas of Swami Abhedananda :

1. *Complete Works of Swami Abhedananda*, Vols. I—X.
2. *Guide to the Works of Swami Abhedananda* by Swami Prajnanananda.
3. *Abhedananda-darshana* (in Bengali) by Swami Prajnanananda.
4. *Tirtha-Renu* (in Bengali) by Swami Prajnanananda.

are like so many sparks from the anvil of his soul, which set souls a fire. Behind his philosophy was the spiritual temperament and his character was the test of his intellectual asertions. It was, therefore, that his philosophy aroused in men not one, but all the faculties of consciousness in a new and spiritual awakening. Years of meditation and spiritual austerity were behind him, and hence his very words were living potencies. His logic and reasonings were so accurate because of the shining light of his spiritual experiences. In sum, the mission of Swami Abhedananda as the high priest of monism and also as the apostle of religious philosophy and philosophical religion, was of the prophets and Acharyas, to restate, to re-illustrate, and give them expression so as to make them clearer to contemporary intellect. We all know that Abhedananda was the foremost Vedantic thinker and scholar of his time and his great desire was to make the Vedanta practical, so that instead of remaining a mass of mere abstractions it might interpenetrate society and be a living religion, a living fact in the everyday life of the individual in every station of life, just as it was in the glorious days of the Upanishads. In all the principal lectures that he delivered in India and abroad, he laid special emphasis on the intense practicability of the Vedanta, and showed with his convincing power of reasoning that it was not a dreamy philosophy, and that its practical effect on human conduct was not to induce inaction and indifference, tending to weaken the motive for human exertion, as it is often alleged through ignorance, but that it was the very reverse of it. And, moreover, he adjusted new spheres of functions and activities into it in the logical application and extension of its intrinsic principles, in consonance with the changed conditions and needs of the time. Herein lies his magnanimous eminence as a great Vedantic philosopher and in this respect he succeeded Vivekananda in a remarkable degree. Both were men of realization and both of them were successful in writing and speaking religion and philosophy to such an extent that have never been attempted by any others in modern times.

If he was a philosopher, Swami Abhedananda was no less a patriot. In fact, after Swami Vivekananda, he was the patriot-saint of India of a superior stature. That Abhedananda will be regarded by posterity as the patriot of a unique type, must have been borne in upon the minds of those who have studied his



life deeply. Dr. S. N. Das Gupta, the eminent scholar and philosopher of India, has observed that during the time he was in America, he had occasions to see for himself the achievements of Abhedananda as the leader of the Vedanta movement there. "In recent times", writes Dr. Das Gupta, "when we lost all faiths in our ancient culture as a result of our subjugation and we accepted the Western science and the Western mode of life as our ideal, it was then Vivekananda went to America as a standard-bearer of Indian culture and he was soon followed by Swami Abhedananda who had the boldness to present the image of India in all its pristine glory, to the people of the West. I have personally seen that in his task of preaching the glory of ancient Indian culture and civilization, he gave no quarter and asked for none. He upheld the glory of India while engaged in his mission in Europe and America for more than two decades, in such a way as only a patriot is capable of doing. Any one who has read his book, *India and Her People*, will admit that Abhedananda was first a patriot and then a philosopher."

His lectures in India during 1906 and afterwards bear an ample testimony to his deep patriotism. But at the same time he had his own ideal of patriotism. For a fuller study of his political thought, one should read his famous article which he wrote in Bengali and which was published in the famous political Weekly of the time, viz. *Atmasakti* in its issue No. 24, 1925. The article is entitled *Tarun Bangla Adarsha* or the ideals of young Bengal. Every word of it breathes patriotism and the whole piece might be regarded as his political will and testament. He knew that no country would advance politically unless led by an ideal leader. And by this he meant a self-sacrificing leader who accepts renunciation as his creed. This is why he was highly impressed with the sacrifice of Desabandhu Chittaranjan whom he hailed as the ideal leader. "Follow him", writes Abhedananda, "if you find any such man who has dedicated his life, his everything for the welfare of his country and his people. A leader is never made, some are born as leaders. A real leader must be one having strong moral and unexceptionally ideal character".

On his return to India, Swami Abhedananda sensed the rise of the new forces as revealed through the non-cooperation movement led by Mahatma Gandhi, Desbandhu and others. Similarly it

did not take him long to realize after the Gandhian movement was played out that Subhas Chandra Bose was the rising star on the political horizon of India. When Bose was elected President of the Indian National Congress which was his virtual political coronation, Swami Abhedananda was then lying seriously ill at his Math premises in Calcutta. He was equally impressed by the sacrifice and sacrifices of this political heir of Desabandhu. He felt a strong desire to see Subhas Chandra who at once responded to the Swami's request. One day there came in the Vedanta Math Subhas Chandra, the Congress President and he went upstairs to see the ailing Swami. As soon as he entered into the room, Abhedananda wanted to embrace him. But lying prostrate on his sick-bed, it was extremely difficult for him to fulfil his desire. Subhas Chandra stood near the bed, Abhedananda rose up with great difficulty and said affectionately : 'Come on Subhas, let me embrace you'. The young patriot was moved beyond words at this loving gesture of the world renowned disciple of Sri Ramākṛishna. He stood almost speechless. It was an unforgettable scene. As he slowly held Subhas Chandra in his affectionate embrace, the Swami blessed him with these words : "Be thou victorious". Afterwards the Swami is reported to have discussed with Subhas Chandra about the situation in the country, and the latter replied to his queries with the humility and childlike simplicity. "When India is going to win her freedom?" —to this question of the Swami, Subhas Chandra gave this reply : "It is not so easy, Maharaj, to remove the heavy stone (*jagaddal-pāthar*) of subjugation". Subhas Chandra remained with the Swami for about an hour on that occasion.

Abhedananda had great hopes for the future of his country which found expression in many of his utterances both in India and abroad. His faith in the regeneration of the people, and in the part he was to play in it, was something innate, intuitive and unshakable, proceeding from the firm conviction that, today or tomorrow India was bound to achieve her independence. Were he spared for another seven or eight years, he himself would have witnessed it for himself. One should go through his works carefully to realize the dull aspect of Swami Abhedananda's genius as a lover of his country and as a teacher of the highest religion and his ultimate reconciliation of both these conflicting ideals in his realization of a new order of things. And when

comes to analyse the national significance of his life and work, one will be amazed to find that though intensely patriotic, yet Swami Abhedananda was not blind to the demands of the higher humanity, full of reverence for the past, yet keenly alive to the changed circumstances of the present. Nationalism to him was not a political supremacy, or the acquisition of rights and privileges to have a voice in the government of the country, but a sacred ideal "whose inmost striving was to express its own conception of ideal manhood". In this sphere, he resembled his brother-disciple, the great Swami Vivekananda. "Man making is all the task to which I want to devote myself". These words of Abhedananda give a correct picture of the patriot in him. He was indeed the very embodiment of the true Indian spirit of nationality. Throughout his life, he held the torch of his country's honour aloft, because he drank deep at the fountain of Indian culture. He must have foreseen the day when culture and not political ideal would become the main spring of Indian life. And herein lies the true significance of the eventful life of the patriot saint of India.

Finally, I will endeavour to relate Swami Abhedananda's thinking to conceptions inherent in much of our contemporary religious experience and thought. The emphasis in his teaching is on the fundamental unity of all spiritual experience. Beginning with the ancient Hindu conception of the oneness of the Self with the Divine, he gives 'oneness' new significance by relating it to the functional dependence and union that exists between all particular and individual existences and the universe from which they derive their being. In spiritual consciousness this relation finds its highest expression. Despite the discordant character of much of our this worldly experience, Abhedananda is convinced that the power and influence of man's enjoyment of this union with the Divine must become manifest in enriching and harmonising human relations. Since all derive life and inspiration from the one source of power, the operation of the power in them must be revealed by deep fundamental unity in their ways of life.

Essentially a man of Divine knowledge or realization, Abhedananda in all his philosophical utterances laid special emphasis on the absolute necessity of faith which, according to him, "is the corner-stone of all religions. It is the foundation of all creeds. Faith

is indispensable to man, for without it he cannot proceed forward on his journey through the unknown". At the same time he also makes it clear by pointing out that "faith ought not to be imposed, it should come as a free perception on an imperative directive from the inner spirit". For a better and clearer understanding of the deep philosophical thoughts of Abhedananda, the readers might obtain sound idea from two excellent books, viz. *Tirtha-Renu* (collections of the Teachings of Swami Abhedananda)<sup>2</sup> and *Abhedananda-Darsana* (The Philosophy of Swami Abhedananda) written by his disciple, Swami Prajnanananda. The first book contains the essence of the discussions which the Swami used to hold on Raja Yoga, the Gita and the Upanishads while he was staying at No. 11, Eden Hospital Road, where the Vedanta Math formally came into being. In the opening chapter of this book, the author presents a synopsis of the Swami's philosophical thoughts on various subjects which will help the readers for a better understanding of the subsequent chapters. *Tirtha-Renu* contains untold spiritual treasures which Abhedananda gave away freely to all seekers after Truth and knowledge. *Abhedananda-Darsana* may be considered a limelight for a comparative study of Abhedananda's philosophied thoughts and religious ideas.

What is the message Swami Abhedananda has left for the posterity? "No great man lives in vain", so said Carlyle. And no great man leaves this world without leaving behind some sort of message to inspire the future generation of people and also to illumine their minds. Sri Ramakrishna has left behind him unique gospels, so did Vivekananda and Abhedananda. Both of them were living commentaries of the life of their Master who himself was the epitome of all knowledge. We also know that both Vivekananda and Abhedananda rose to their full stature and became respectively vehicles for the transmission of transmitting power. The more we look at the inner spiritual being of Swami Abhedananda the more we see him in his full glory as the teacher par excellence for whom the most vital issue of the age is whether future progress in humanity is to be governed by the modern materialistic mind or by a nobler purpose enlight-

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<sup>2</sup>The word *Tirtha* means *Guru* or religious preceptor and *Renu* means some collections and, therefore, *Tirtha-Renu* implies the meaning of some sweet collections of the teachings of Acharya Swami Abhedananda.

tered by spiritual culture and knowledge. As a seer he is convinced that so long as human consciousness remains predominantly ego-centric, life will remain much as we see around us a conflict and difficult accommodation of divided, opposition, or differing forces, and divergent ideas which cannot arrive at the knowledge of their necessity to each other or grasp their place in that unity behind, which is expressing itself through them. At the same time he is convinced that there is no other way by which the diverging and conflicting world forces can be transmitted and brought into an inner unity of purpose and effort making for the progress of mankind. But he is confident of the eventual issue, for all individual being has come from the absolute One, and there is that in Nature and in man that makes for ultimate harmony. When as a true Vedantin, Abhedananda says that "the realization of God is the highest aim of our life", or "our souls are but reflections of God", or, "true religion begins with the realization of God's existence"—he actually means to say that Godconsciousness is a stage in the spiritual progress of man. "It is that stage", declares Swami Abhedananda, "which man must strive to reach if his long pilgrimage on earth is not brought to naught". Let the humanity march on its search for truth and knowledge and let it walk in the light instead of in darkness. If it does, then only we should think that Swami Abhedananda did not live in vain or his advent was without any significance in so far as the spiritual evolution of the mankind is concerned.

## CHAPTER IX

### VIVEKANANDA AND ABHEDANANDA

#### (An Estimation)

To any comparison possible between Swami Vivekananda and Swami Abhedananda ! The question is pertinent and the answer to it is still more pertinent. Both of them fulfilled their lives—one during a short span of only thirty-nine years and the other during a long span of seventy-three years—by fulfilling a great mission that was assigned to them by history. They represent two distinct personalities—one of dazzling glow and the other indicating sovereign calm—having close similarities and also dissimilarities among them. Let us, therefore, look into these two characters and find out the contrast presented by them in relation to their realizations and achievements.

Rabindranath once said that if one was to know India, one must know Vivekananda, for everything about him was positive and nothing negative. This beautiful remark is equally applicable to Abhedananda. In the panorama of modern culture and civilization in India, three peaks stand out prominently—Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Abhedananda. Synthesis of all religions that was the crying need of the day and Ramakrishna stood for this ideal which found its historical fulfilment in the endeavours of Vivekananda and Abhedananda; both of whom stood for cosmic humanism through scientific humanism.

The life story of Vivekananda has been told and retold again and again. It always begins in this way: "Among the young lads and men attracted by the magnetic personality of the Paramahansa was Narendranath Datta, afterwards known as Swami Vivekananda. There was nothing to distinguish him from the other youngmen who used to visit Ramakrishna Paramahansa. He was an average student with no promise of brilliance but the Master early picked him out from the rest and predicted a great future for him". And we all know today what that "great future" really meant to Vivekananda. The same is equally true of Abhedananda. But as regards their acceptance of Ram:

krishna as their Master, the story is not exactly the same in both the cases. A born iconoclast as Narendra Nath was, it was somewhat difficult on his part to accept Ramakrishna easily. He had his doubts and hesitation and hence he had to possess Ramakrishna after a good deal of difficulty. With Kaliprasad however, it was altogether a different picture. The saint of Dakshineswar was already an achieved possession with him as his *Guru*. While, since his first visit to Dakshineswar, Narendranath was awed and dazzled into admiration, the story is quite different with Kaliprasad who went to Dakshineswar with an open mind and in a spirit of absolute dedication, while the one had the dim smouldering fire of spirituality in him, the other had within him an abundance of spiritual fire. But there was a glow of renunciation in both of them ; both of them were destined to follow the path of Jnana and perhaps for this reason Ramakrishna made it a point to talk of the Advaita philosophy to both of them whenever they visited the saint at Dakshineswar garden house. Naren had to be tested on more than one occasion by the Master, but there is nothing on record to show that Kaliprasad had ever to undergo any such ordeal.

In the early days of his association with the Master, Vivekananda had to pass through various struggles and suffering mind and heart. A man of superb intellect, his intellectual cravings and doubts did not allow him to accept any one as a teacher. "There were many difficulties to be faced, many doubts to be settled before he could resign himself to a teacher and accept his teachings without question, and he was to fight every inch of the way, accepting nothing until it was proved conclusively". To gain a still clearer perspective of Vivekananda's personality and the early stage of his mental development, let us quote a few lines from the observation of Dr. Brojendranath Seal, a fellow student. He says in an article written a few years after the death of Vivekananda : "Undeniably he was a gifted youth, possessing one iron will. But few knew the inner man and his struggle which expressed itself in his restless wanderings... The struggle soon took a seriously ethical turn—reason struggling for mastery with passion and sense. This was the hour of darkest trial for him".

It was during this critical period of his life that Vivekananda went to Dakshineswar and the subsequent story of his life is too

familiar to need recounting. Abhedananda, on the other hand, had no such experience of inner struggle, nor he was ever caught in the meshes of doubts and disbelief. In one case we have the spectacle of a born iconoclast and free-thinker going on an adventurous journey to Dakshineswar, while in the case of the other, it was the spectacle of a born Yogin having a deep adherence to Hindu scriptures, going on a pilgrimage to Dakshineswar. It was indeed a spirit's pilgrimage. But the peaceful solitudes of the Temple-garden, sanctified by the unique spiritual *sādhanā* of Sri Ramakrishna, had worked miracles in both the cases, fusing both the lives into one great illumination the pure monism of the Vedānta. It is quite possible that Ramakrishna recognised in both of them "a high, ardent and pure nature vibrant and resonant with impassioned sensibilities".

If Vivekananda was a born iconoclast, it is equally true that his early life also indicated a quest for Truth. He was an agnostic but agnosticism was only a mood with him, rather a passing phase. Inwardly he was always pining for Truth. A lover of pure Reason as he was, yet he was not altogether without mystical temperament. Deeply versed in Western philosophy, science, history and literature, he was the last man to believe anything without understanding. Theological dogmas never appealed to him. His inner spiritual urge (which few took into cognisance) always hankered after truth and not mere diagrams of truth. Thus the early life of Vivekananda presents a picture full of contradictions, confusions and is strong conflict.

Look at this picture and look at the other. The early life of Abhedananda presents altogether a different picture. As we have seen, Kaliprasad showed signs of a born prodigy in various directions from his very infancy, but he developed a distinction and spontaneous craving for knowing the ultimate Truth of this universe, from his boyhood. He read almost all the original Sanskrit scriptures and the prominent philosophical works written in English by different authors. From the *Gita* and the *Upanishads* to the works of Hume, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Mill, and Spencer was a journey which he completed when he was only sixteen or seventeen. But he was the last person to remain satisfied with mere bookish knowledge. There was in him an unquenchable thirst for knowing for certain whether God really existed or not. This unbeconable inner urge in his heart



of hearts goaded him ultimately to the gracious feet of Rama-krishna, for finding out if he could deliver the Truth to him in any way. And the Truth was delivered to him on that very first visit to Dakshineswar.

It is also understood that both Vivekananda and Abhedananda were well-equipped with the history and also with the doctrines and dogmas of Christianity, and they thoroughly studied Christianity as a means to stand against the attack of the dogmatic Christian Churches and fanatic Christian people. Both of them, it is known, were the followers of Dr. David Friedrich Strauss, and Ernest Renan, the best biographers and interpreters of Christ and Christianity. But yet from the writings and lectures of both Vivekananda and Abhedananda it is found that the latter was more critical, more analytic and more historical in his treatment on the life of Christ and on Christianity than the former. In most of his writings on Christ and Christianity, we find that Abhedananda has followed Dr. Strauss, Mr. Renan, J. M. Robertson, Dr. Arthur Drews and other critical writers. Swami Abhedananda read extensively and critically the literature and history of Christianity in the personal library of Rev. Dr. Heber Newton, D. D. of the Episcopal Church of United States of America. The Swami has mentioned it in his *Leaves from My Diary*: "On January 25th I was invited to dine with Rev. Dr. Heber Newton, D.D. of the Episcopal Church. He was the most liberal-minded and prominent Christian Minister in New York City. \* \* Dr. Heber Newton was very very kind and cordial to me. He was a great scholar and a saintly character. He never met Swami Vivekananda, but he was interested in the universal principles of the Vedanta philosophy. \* \* Dr. Heber Newton was a reformer of the orthodox doctrines, creeds and dogmas of Christian Churches. He did not believe in the immaculate conception and miraculous birth of Jesus the Christ. \* \* \* He had a private library which contained valuable works on the ecclesiastical history, Higher Criticism of the Bible as well as the Sacred Books of the East edited by Max Müller. He gave me a free access to his library. Mrs. Newton loved me like her own son and used to come to my lectures. He introduced me to his friends and other Ministers of the other Churches and invited me to speak before Religious Conferences of the Christian Ministers which he had

organized in New York City. In those conferences I lectured with him many times from the same platform”.

While critically dealing with the subjects, *Christ and His Teachings*, *Christ and Christmas*, *Vedanta and the Teachings of Christ*, *Did Christ teach a New Religion*, *Christian Science and Vedanta*, etc. We find that Swami Abhedananda has refuted many of the mythical and unscientific Christian doctrines and faiths, and in many cases he has boldly stood against the legendary myths and blind faiths regarding birth of Jesus and his miracles as well as the mysteries of the Christian Churches. As for example, while dealing with *Christ and His Teachings*, he has said from the standpoint of both history and modern science : “The light of scientific investigation has now enlightened the intellects of many and today we are able to examine the truths, regarding those old prophecies and predictions and to ask whether the life of Jesus the Christ was a perfect fulfilment of all those old Jewish prophecies ; whether the life of Jesus the Christ as described in the synoptic gospels, is historical or not ; whether they were the historical records or more traditions accepted and handed down by credulous people of that age. . . . .”.

Swami Abhedananda further has discussed about time and place of birth of Jesus the Christ and has said that in most cases they are not historical. Dr. Strauss, Mr. Robertson, Mr. Drews and other Christian historians and critics are mostly doubtful even about the historicity of Jesus. Most of them were of the opinion that Jesus was not a historical person, and the Christ-myth really evolved from the sun-myth. The Swami’s writing on *Christ and Christmas* is a unique and historical one, and in this writing he has shown his insight and depth of study in the history of Christianity and Christian Churches. He has quoted Eusebius, the first ecclesiastical historian, Irenaeus, Cannon Farrar, Prof. Bunsen, Gibbon, Cunningham Geikie and other authoritative scholars and has shown that most of the myths and traditions in the name of the Redeemer Christ are not based on exact historical records. Mr. J. M. Robertson has compared the life of Christ with that of Krishna in the chapter, “Christ and Krishna” (the Hindu Christ) in his monumental book, *Christianity and Mythology*. and similarly Swami Abhedananda has compared the life of Christ with that of Krishna in his lecture on *Christ and Christmas* in a critical and beautiful way, and in this lecture the

Swami has taken many materials from Robertson's *Pagan Christ, Christ and Christmas*, and *A Short History of Christianity*.  
 \* Again like Dr. Strauss, Swami Abhedananda has forwarded his independent opinion in respect of Christ and his teachings : "The students of Vedanta do not care whether the personality of Jesus was historical or not, whether he was born of a virgin at Bethlehem or not, whether he was the fulfilment of the old prophecy, or of the promise of Yaveh, the tribal God of the house of Israel, or of the Messianic hope of the Jewish people, but the students of Vedanta recognize the sublime character of the Saviour Christ and manifestation of the universal Logos, or the Word of God, as they do in other Incarnations of the same almighty Being" (though Mr. Strauss has not mentioned about Vedanta and theory of Incarnation). In the lecture, *Did Christ teach a New Religion*, Swami Abhedananda has clearly said regarding the religion of Jesus the Christ : "The religion of Jesus the Christ was not like the orthodox Christianity of today, neither did it resemble the faith of the Jewish nation. His religion was a great departure from Judaism in principles and ideals as well as in the means of attaining them. It was much simpler in form and more sublime in nature. The religion (real religion) that Christ taught had neither dogma, nor creed, nor system, and nor theology. It was a religion without priests, without ceremonials, without rituals, and even strict observances of the Jewish Laws". Swami Abhedananda has also delivered two lectures in America on (1) *A Hindu's View of Christ* and (2) *To Understand Christ* and they were published in "*The Literary Digest*" and "*The Sun*". In the latter lecture the Swami has said them who believed that Christ their Saviour died in the Cross, that what is the significance of Christ's death ? It has a inner significance. Christ foresaw that his life and death would fix the mind of other men upon Him (God) and this would help them to realize the divine nature with us all—our oneness with God. And in the former one, the Swami has said that although a Jew by race, yet Christ was in every fibre of his character a Hindu or Vedantist. Now this kind of new estimation about Christ was not at all happy for the Christians in general, but Swami Abhedananda stood always against false conception of the Christians and when he was in the West among the Christian people, he used to say everything what was true and his-

torical and was founded upon reason and science. The Swami has also delivered a learned lecture in Boston museum on the *History and Tradition*. In that lecture the Swami proved that Christ preached no new religion, but he taught the Persian conception of religion, which was preached by Gautama Buddha in India. Again like the biographer and historian Ernest Renan the Swami has said: "It is indeed a well-known historical fact that the gospel of peace, good-will and love was preached in Syria and Palestine by the Buddhist monks nearly two hundred years before Christ. Their influence was felt most deeply by the Jewish sect, called the Essenes or the Therapeutæ, to which sect, as scholars believe, Jesus himself belonged. It is interesting to note the similarities between the Essenes and the followers of Buddha. The Buddhists were also called *Theraputta*, a Pali form of the Sanskrit *Shiraputra*, meaning 'the son of Sthirs or Thera' i.e. one who is serene, enlightened and undisturbed by the world. Thera was one of Buddha's names. These people had the power to heal disease". Ernest Renan has also mentioned these things in his *Life of Jesus*. The noted Christian historian Mahaffy also admits this fact of Buddhist influence upon the Christian sects. The Swami has mentioned that Neo-Platonist Philo Judia, who was a contemporary of Jesus the Christ, mentioned in his writings once or twice the Indian Gymnospheists or the Buddhists. Pliny and Josephus also admitted this fact of the Buddhist influence upon Christianity like Swami Abhedananda. Sir Wallis Budge has also written a book, *Baralam and Yewasef*, in which he has mentioned about the Buddhist monks from Central Asia and North-Western India, travelled different parts of the world and preached the sublime ethics of Buddha in Syria, Palestine and Alexandria" and that means the Christian world took the religious ideas of Buddhism from Alexandria.

Again we find that Ernest Renan has supported the view of Swami Abhedananda when he says: "The Essenes resembled the *Gurus* (spiritual masters) of Brahminism". "In fact", he asks "might there not in this be a remote influence of the Mounis (holy saints of India)? According to Renan, "Babylon had become for sometime a true focus of Buddhism. Boudasp (*Bodhi-sattva*, another name of Buddha) was reputed as a wise Chaldean and the founder of Sabaism, which means, as its etymology indicates, baptism". He also says: "We may believe, at all events

that many of the eternal practices of John, of the Essenes, and of the Jewish spiritual teachers of the time were derived from influences then existing but recently received from the far East", which means India. Thus we can understand that there was an indirect influence of the Buddhist monks upon the mind of Jesus through the Essenes, and especially through John the Baptist.

Regarding death of Jesus the Christ in the Cross, Swami Abhedananda says that Christ did not die on the Cross, but died a natural death. Christ was crucified, but he was saved by his followers. The Swami believed in the account of the 'Letter' of the Esceer, which was published in book form, in the name of *The Crucifixion* (published from Chicago, Indo-American Book Co. in 1915) as true. The "Letter" was written to a highest esteemed member of the Brotherhood in Alexandria only a few years after the death of Jesus, giving full description of the life, doctrine and death of Jesus, who, the "Letter" proves to have belonged to and been a member of their Brotherhood. Swami Abhedananda brought this book with him from America.

Similarly Swami Abhedananda believed like the Russian Traveller Mr. Nicolas Notovitch that Christ came to India in company with the travellers and traders from the West and stayed in India for twelve years and learned many things from the Indian learned men. Like Notovitch the Swami also went to Hemes monastery in Ladak while visiting Kashmere and Tibet in 1922, and collected reliable records from that monastery about the stay and leaving of Christ in India. The Swami also believed that the narratives of the Evangelists supplied about the death of Christ in the Cross are not authentic and historical.

So, in our study of these two great world teachers, the fact should not be lost sight of that Sri Ramakrishna could easily read on their faces the spiritual attainments of their past lives when each of them went to see him and also the great roles they were destined to play before the world, as the Master cast his first look at them. The rest of the story of their lives need not be repeated here and let us now pass over to the subsequent chapters of their career. As wandering monks, both Vivekananda and Abhedananda travelled across the length and breadth of India for a considerable number of years, following the death of their Master in 1886. They truly represent as the two noted Parivrajakas of modern India. But comparatively speaking,

thing more—intellect, heart and devotion. The uniqueness of Vivekananda lies in his sympathy for the poor and the down-trodden. He always emphasized service to them. He felt for the teeming masses of India, as no one else ever did. Abhedananda too was inspired by the universal spirit in religion, and he was equally anxious to impart the touch of love and life to everybody, but never from the plane of emotion or sentiment but always from head and intellect.

Both of them organized a church on the lofty principles of the Vedanta which they found embodied in the life and teachings of their Master. The conception of the Ramakrishna Math and that of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Math is much the same. Each of them made his monastery a centre of knowledge and service. Both Vivekananda and Abhedananda introduced the divinity of Ramakrishna and instituted him as the inspiring, invisible, divine force symbolised in human form. Ramakrishna's ideal was spiritual synthesis and he is worshipped as the symbol of spiritual synthesis. And this ideal inspired and shaped the lives of both Vivekananda and Abhedananda. The infinity in man was their outlook—they taught it, they practised it, they lived and died for it. They carried practical Vedantism as reflected in Ramakrishna to all corners of the world. As we look closely at the lives of these two great souls, we find one as the spirit of action and the other as the spirit of wisdom.

Although there cannot be any point of distinction between the greatness of these two great disciples of Ramakrishna, in so far as their respective influence over the people of India, yet the fact remains that Vivekananda's sphere of influence was wider than that of Abhedananda. While the influence of the former was almost instantaneous, that of the latter was somewhat slow. His long absence from India did not allow any opportunity to Abhedananda to exert his influence in the manner Vivekananda had done. Because of his intimate association with the people of India it was possible on the part of Vivekananda to infuse a new breath of life into our young men who were stirred to activity with his message. It was not so with Abhedananda until he returned to India in 1921. If in the first decade of this century the message of Vivekananda revitalised the heart and soul of India, it is equally true to say that during the third and the fourth decade the same thing was done by the message of Abhe-

dananda and both of them blazed trails of glory till the middle of the twentieth century. It is true that the thoughts and writings of Abhedananda did not revolutionize our outlook in the same degree as it was the case with Vivekananda, but an impartial assessment of the achievements of Abhedananda will show that since 1921, his thoughts and writings also installed a new breath of life into moribund India. He too, like Vivekananda, wanted to rouse everybody to action, for neither of them was a visionary.

It was Sister Nivedita who once said : "These two names Vivekananda and Abhedananda are names as inseparable as is the confluence of a stream, as are reverse sides of a single coin". Truly so. Both of them were the messages of the lofty gospel of their Master and both the souls were illumined by the light of intense realization of their Master. "All the direct disciples of Ramakrishna are individualists, but they were united in love for each other", so said Abhedananda once. As preachers of Vedanta in the West, the performance of both Vivekananda and Abhedananda are unique, but at the same time there was a gulf of difference in their approach. Dynamic by nature and somewhat restless in work, Vivekananda as a preacher presented the unforgettable picture of a warring monk from top to toe. As a leader and originator of the Vedanta movement of the Ramakrishna movement in the west, Vivekananda gave no quarter and asked for none. Both of them discovered the soul of America, but one notices a remarkable difference in the methods of their discovery. It is true that without a Vivekananda, or without an Abhedananda the gospel of Sri Ramakrishna would never have travelled outside India. At the same time it is equally true that without the efforts of Swami Abhedananda extending over a quarter of a century, the Vedanta would not have its roots in the soil of America. While Vivekananda bursted upon the earth like a hurricane, Abhedananda appeared on the world stage with a sovereign calm that drew around him millions of truth-seekers in both the continents of Europe and America. On hearing the maiden lecture of Abhedananda in London, it was Vivekananda who complimented him by saying : "You have resonant voice with carrying power too". The Western world heard this voice for twenty-five years and it felt its tremendous carrying power which reflected light and not heat. Of all persons it was Vivekananda

who knew very well that the work started by him would need a man of high stature to carry it to perfection. At this distance of times, it is not possible for anybody to realise the true nature of this perfection attained by Abhedananda throughout the years of his continuous work. So we quote below a few lines from the farewell address given to him by the inmates of the San Francisco Vedanta Retreat, which was his handiwork when he left America for ever in 1921.

“Although there are many teachers amongst us, still we have not found another like you who has such a vast treasure of wisdom and such a deep spiritual wisdom and who has the power to awaken the Divine Consciousness in the earnest souls of seekers after Truth. Therefore we feel that in your absence we shall be sailing in troubled water in a ship without her captain and cannot bear the thought that you would leave us so soon and go to India”.

This was the preacher Abhedananda who won the heart of millions of people in America and won it in a way which was entirely his own. While there was some element of awe in the dazzling personality of Vivekananda the preacher, it was just the opposite with his successor, Abhedananda who was graciousness incarnate. He too had a dominant personality but at the same time he combined in him natural graciousness and inner strength, which cast a spell on those who gathered around him. The comparison of these two dedicated lives will not be completed without a reference to the impact of their respective preaching of the Vedantic doctrine. Any evaluation of the interpretation they gave to Vedanta, or any estimation of the influence they exerted on the life and thought of America, is bound to fall short unless we take into our cognisance the fact that both Vivekananda and Abhedananda were conscious of the noble heritage of India. And this perhaps enabled them to give their best to bring about the spiritual synthesis in a world tormented with chaos and confusion. Together they represented a great, glorious and majestic Self which was fully illumined by the Light of lights that Ramakrishna was. Together they sang in joy the song of eternal life and together they preached the message of universal religion and love.