खण्डन-भव-बन्धन-स्तोत्रम्

KHAṆḌANA-BHAVA-BANDHANA-STOTRAM

(ĀRĀTRIKA HYMN ON SRI RAMAKRISHNA)

By Swami Vivekananda

INTRODUCTION

The Hindu scriptures propound the doctrine of the four *puruṣārthas* or ends to be sought for in life by human beings. They are: *Dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (wealth), *kāma* (bodily pleasures), and *mokṣa* (liberation from transmigratory existence). Among these, the last, *mokṣa*, is considered as the highest, and has been described as the *paramapuruṣārtha* or *puruṣārtha par excellence*.

Out of the several spiritual disciplines described in the scriptures as aids to *mokṣa*, *bhakti* or devotion is considered to be the easiest and the most efficacious. *Śrīmad Bhāgavata*, the crest-jewel among such scriptures that advocate the path of *bhakti*, portrays it as of nine kinds : *śravaṇa* (listening to the names and glories of Sri Viṣṇu), *kīrtana* (singing the same), *smaraṇa* (remembering Him), *pādasevana* (serving His feet), *arcana* (offering ritualistic worship to Him), *vandana* (obeisance to Him), *dāsya* (attitude as that of a servant to his master), *sakhya* (attitude as that of a friend towards his friend), and *ātmanivedana* (total dedication of oneself to Him) (vide 7.5.23).

Out of these nine modes, it is only *kīrtana* that easily captivates the minds of all, since it is in the form of music.

To be perfect, such devotional music should have six aspects : *sāhitya* or good text, *śruti* or background of harmoniously tuned musical instruments, *rāga* or tune, *laya* or rhythm, *tāla* or beat, and *bhābanā* or feeling. Whereas such perfect music, rendered by one endowed with a sweet and rich voice, can enthral even animals, there is no gainsaying the fact that it does enrapture the minds of devotees of God.

The effect produced by such devotional music, especially at dawn and dusk, is indescribable. It is precisely due to this reason that the singing of the *suprabhātam* (literally, good morning) hymns, early in the mornings and the *ārātrikam* (vespers) hymns in the evenings, has been in vouge in many of our temples and places of worship over the centuries.

After establishing the main monastery of the Ramakrishna Math at Belur, Swami Vivekananda introduced certain rituals which have now become a tradition in all the branches, too. One of these is a short worship to Sri Ramakrishna at dusk, followed by waving of lamps and other *pūjā* meterials before the deity to the accompaniment of music. Swamiji himself composed the text of this song and also set it to music. It has now become well known as the *Khaṇḍana-bhava-bandhana-stotra*, and is sung all over the world in the monasteries of the Ramakrishna Order, during the evening service.

Since a clearer and deeper understanding of this exquisite text will help transform the act of singing into an act of contemplation, a humble attempt has been made here to present to the readers a simple exposition of the same.

It is significant to note here that nowhere in this hymn has Swamiji mentioned Sri Ramakrishna by name. The various adjectives he has used are so general that they can be applied to any incarnation or aspect of God. Yet, each one of them fits in admirably with the personality of Sri Ramakrishna. While commenting on these, quotations from the scriptures as also incidents from the life of Sri Ramakrishna have been brought in, wherever possible, to elucidate or support them.

खण्डन-भव-बन्धन जग-वन्दन वन्दि तोमाय।
निरञ्जन नररूपधर निर्गुण गुणमय॥ १॥

khaṇḍana-bhava-bandhana jaga-vandana vandi tomāy
nirañjana nararūpadhara nirguṇa guṇamay

1. Breaker of the bond of saṁsāra! Adored of the world! Obeisance to you! (You are) stainless! (You have) taken the human form! (You are) beyond the guṇas! (And yet, you are) full of blessed guṇas!

COMMENTARY

Khaṇḍana-bhava-bandhana (breaker of the bond of *saṁsāra*) :*Bhava* means *saṁsāra* or transmigratory existence. This itself is *bandhana* or bondage. Our essential nature is the *ātman*, the soul. Being devoid of birth, growth, change, decay, or death, this *ātman* is eternal and immutable. It is the body that is actually

subject to birth, decay and death. But, somehow, we have wrongly identified ourselves with the body and superimposed all its limitations and infirmities on ourselves. This is due to *ajñāna* or *avidyā*, nescience or ignorance, whose origin can never be known, but which can always be destroyed by adopting the right means. Taking refuge in God is the easiest and the most efficacious means of destroying this *ajñāna*. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (2.23) says that the *ātman* reveals Himself to him, whom He chooses. So when we take refuge in Him, the Lord may endow us with *jñana* (knowledge) or *bhakti* (devotion), both of which are equally capable of achieving this. Or, He may bless us with *manuṣyatva* (human birth), *mumukṣutva* (desire for emancipation), and *mahā-puruṣa-saṁśraya* (refuge given by the great ones), which will soon lead us to enlightenment and liberation (vide *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* of Śaṅkara, 3) by breaking our bonds of *saṁsāra*. Thus, it is the Lord who ultimately destroys our bondage of transmigratory existence.

Since Sri Ramakrishna gave liberation to seekers like Narendra (Swami Vivekananda) through *jñāna*, Girish through *bhakti*, and is helping the average seekers like us with the three prerequisities already mentioned, the term '*khaṇḍana-bhava-bandhana*' applies to him also admirably.

Jaga-vandana (adored of the world) : God, being the creator and nourisher of this world, is the Father-Mother Principle. It is again He who gives us the wisdom of the Vedas for our emancipation (vide *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*,

18). Hence He is fit to be adored by the whole creation. Our mythological lore contains innumerable hymns of praise addressed to the Supreme God not only by human beings, but also by the gods and demigods.

Through his inspiring life and illuminating teachings, as also the tremendous achievements of his illustrious disciples like Swami Vivekananda and Swami Brahmananda in the religio-spiritual field, Sri Ramakrishna is now being worshipped as an incarnation of God in millions of homes all over the world. He has thus become '*jagavandana*' both in letter and in spirit.

Nirañjana (stainless): *Añjana* is stain, impurity, or sin. '*Nirañjana*' is one who is stainless, sinless, and hence, pure. Sin accrues to him who is controlled by *māyā* (illusion and nescience). Since God is the Lord of *māyā*, He is untainted by it for ever, even as a cobra is never affected by its own poison.

The refrain of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings is *kāma-kāñcana-tyāga*, renunciation of lust and greed. He himself had practised it both in letter and in spirit. Consequently, he had become the very embodiment of that principle. His life is one of the rarest of the rare examples of absolute purity. Hence, he is '*nirañjana*' in the truest sense.

Nararūpadhara (bearing the human form): A human being is called a *nara*, since he is helplessly led by his *karma* (result of past actions) into the human birth—*nīyate karmaphalena iti naraḥ*. But, when God, who is the *karmādhyakṣa*, the presiding deity over the destinies of all

living beings, decides to take the human form, He does so out of His free will ; and *māyā* evolves under His command to produce a body that serves His purpose best. Compassion for the suffering humanity is the root-cause of His incarnation. Destroying *adharma* (unrighteousness) and uplifting *dharma* (righteousness) are the twin purposes of an incarnation.

Sri Ramakrishna's parents had several supernatural experiences before his birth. He himself had declared before Narendranath (Swami Vivekananda) that He who was Rama and Krishna was Ramakrishna in 'this' body. Many who have contemplated on him have been blessed by his visions. He is now widely accepted all over the world, as God made man, '*nararūpadhara*' Nārāyaṇa.

Nirguṇa (without *guṇas*) : The word '*guṇa*' in Sanskrit has several senses: rope, secondary, the three *guṇas* of Samkhya-Vedanta philosophy, and quality. 'Rope' signifies that which binds. Since God is beyond all bondage, He is '*nirguṇa*'. The Śaivāgamas (philosophical treatises that accept Śiva as the Supreme God) describe the *jīva* or the bound soul as *paśu* (animal) and God as *paśupati*, the Lord of *paśus* or bound souls. Being *paśupati*, God has got to be '*nirguṇa*'.

Since God is the uncaused Cause, from whom the whole creation emerges, He is the *mukhya* or primary source. Everything else, having emerged from Him, is *gauṇa* or secondary to Him. Since He is thus without 'secondariness', He is '*nirguṇa*'.

According to the Samkhya-Vedanta metaphysics, the whole creation emerges out of *prakṛti* (Nature) or *māyā* (power of illusion) which comprises of three *guṇas* —*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. The *puruṣa* or the *ātman* (the soul often identified with God), however, is *asaṅga* or unattached and hence unaffected by these *guṇas*. He is therefore rightly called '*nirguṇa*', without or beyond the three *guṇas*.

A quality can be predicated of only those things that can be comprehended by the sense-organs or the mind. Since God is beyond 'speech and mind' (vide *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 2.9), He is '*nirguṇa*' or without qualities.

Since Sri Ramakrishna has been accepted by his devotees as an *avatāra* or incarnation of God, all these adjectives applicable to God apply to him also, in his transcendental aspect.

Guṇamay (full of *guṇas*): The previous adjective '*nirguṇa*' may lead us to surmise that God is like saw-dust, a tasteless, odourless thing of nought. Hence this term '*guṇamay*', full of *guṇas* or blessed qualities. The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (2.7) describes Him as '*raso vai saḥ*', 'He is verily bliss!' He is the origin and repository of all the noble, great, and blessed qualities that one can ever conceive, and much more. Since the whole creation has come out of Him, all that we see and recognize as good, great, or perfect must also have originated from Him alone.

The term '*guṇamay*' very aptly fits in with Sri Ramakrishna, too. He was a veritable mine of virtues. To

mention only a few: truthfulness, gentleness of speech, intense renunciation, total absence of passions like lust and greed, universal love and compassion, extraordinarily sharp intellect, robust common sense, respect for womanhood, humility, keen sense of humour, intuitive insight, and so on.

मोचन-अघदूषण जगभूषण चिद्घनकाय।
ज्ञानाञ्जन-विमल-नयन वीक्षणे मोह याय ॥ २ ॥

mocana-aghadūṣaṇa jagabhūṣaṇa cidghanakāy
jñānāñjana-vimala-nayana vīkṣaṇe moha jāy

2. (You) free us from the vilest of sins. (You are) the ornament of this world. (You are) consciousness solidified (as it were). (When you) look at us (with your) pure eyes, smeared with the collyrium of knowledge, (our) delusion disappears.

COMMENTARY

Mocana-aghadūṣaṇa (free of the vilest of sins) : Minor sins which can be expiated through gifts etc. are called '*agha*'. More serious sins like *brahmahatyā* (killing of a *brāhmaṇa*) are '*aghadūṣaṇa*' (reprehensible sins); and they can be got rid of only by God's grace. If a king who has framed the laws of the land can waive a punishment on appeal from a convict, God, the King of kings, too, can pardon even the vilest of sins, when the sinner genuinely repents and seeks refuge in Him.

That Sri Ramakrishna freed Girish Ghosh from all his abominable sins and made him pure and fit enough to share the same seat with the ever pure Vivekananda is proof enough for the application of this epithet to him. The various spiritual experiences that Sri Ramakrishna vouchsafed unto his householder disciples on 1 January 1886, now celebrated as the 'Kalpataru Day', may also be cited here to buttress this point further.

Jagabhūṣaṇa (ornament of this world) : *Bhūṣaṇa* or an ornament, when worn on the body, enhances its beauty. But it is powerless to enhance the beauty of character. Great men do not need ornaments of gold or jewelry to shine in this world. Their very character is their adornment. Sri Ramakrishna, who was honoured and worshipped by such great men as Gauri Pandit and Keshavchandra Sen, was a jewel among such men; and hence, an adornment for the whole world.

Cid-ghana-kāy (solidified consciousness incarnate) : The nature of *Brahman*, the Absolute, is *cit* or pure consciousness. The *Brahman* cannot, by itself, incarnate as a human being, without being associated with Its power of *māyā*. When *Brahman* thus assumes the human form—called *avatāra* or incarnation—in association with its *māyā*-power, it is said to have become '*ghana*' or 'solidified'. Since its original nature of *cit* is always there, the *avatāra* is '*cid-ghana-kāy*', 'solidified consciousness incarnate'.

It may be pertinent to remember here that Sri Ramakrishna used to go very frequently into the highest

state of *samādhi* or superconscious experience of *Brahman*, described as *sat-cit-ānanda* (existence-consciousness-bliss). From this, we may surmise that he never forgot that he was *cid-ghana-kāy*.

Jñānāñjana-vimala-nayana (with the eyes purified by the collyrium of knowledge) : Ever since Sri Ramakrishna obtained the first vision of Mother Kālī, wherein he witnessed Her as the all-pervading consciousness, and was commanded by Her to remain in *bhāvamukha* or the threshold of the superconscious, he was seeing God, and nothing but God, everywhere. He had thus obtained a vision based on the knowledge of the Supreme Self. And this knowledge is the greatest purifier. Says the *Bhagavadgītā* (4.38) : 'There is no purifying agent here like knowledge.' Hence his eyes were pure, being endowed with knowledge.

Vīkṣaṇe moha jāy (glancing destroys delusion) : The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (3.1.10) says : *tasmād ātmajñaṁ hyarcayed bhūtikāmaḥ*—'Therefore, one who is desirous of wealth should worship the knower of the *ātman*.' Here, 'wealth' means anything worthwhile in life, including *mokṣa*, which is the greatest of such wealths. If even an *ātmajñānin*, the knower of the Self, can bestow liberation on others, then, how much more is the capacity of an *avatāra* to grant it? So, when we, the ordinary seekers of spiritual enlightenment, take refuge in him and he turns his pure eyes of wisdom on us out of compassion, our *moha* or delusion (same as *ajñāna* or ignorance) is totally destroyed, even as darkness by light.

भास्वर भाव-सागर चिर उन्मद प्रेम-पाथार।
भक्तार्जन-युगलचरण तारण-भव-पार।। ३।।

bhāsvara bhāva-sāgara cira unmada prema-pāthār
bhaktārjana-yugalacaraṇa tāraṇa-bhava-pār

3. Ocean of resplendent emotions! (You are) ever intoxicated (with divine love). Sea of love! The devotees gain your (lotus) feet and cross over the ocean of saṁsāra!

COMMENTARY

Bhāsvara bhāva-sāgara (Ocean of resplendent emotions) : '*Bhāva*' means any emotion that arises in the mind. Such an emotion can be either *bhāsvara* (resplendent, pure, good), as devotion to God, compassion to beings, and so on ; or, it can be *tāmasa* (dark, evil), as lust, greed, jealousy, etc. Sri Ramakrishna is the very ocean of such resplendent emotions. While practising the various spiritual disciplines, he exhibited in abundance attitudes, emotions, and feeling like renunciation, faith, peace, self-control, forbearance, intense desire for illumination, devotion of various types, and so on. After illumination, whenever he had to teach the disciples and devotees that came to him, seeking his guidance, he would automatically go into those moods. While listening to devotional music or spiritual texts or talks, he would involuntarily be merged in the respective sentiments

expressed by them. The devotees of various types that flocked to him could pick and choose these modes and attitudes as per their nature and nurture.

The words '*bhāsvara*' and '*bhāva-sāgara*' may also be treated as independent words. In this case, '*bhāva-sāgara*' means 'ocean of sublime emotions'. Since Sri Ramakrishna was ever immersed in, and ever radiating, divine wisdom, the epithet '*bhāsvara*' eminently fits him. Interpretation of the latter word is the same as given above.

Cira unmada (ever intoxicated) : Even the ordinary people of the world in mad pursuit of fulfilling their 'lust and greed' become intoxicated when they succeed. What to speak then of a divine being like Sri Ramakrishna who breaks the bonds of *saṁsāra*, saves one from heinous sins, puts *māyā* to flight, just by a glance of his ever pure eyes, and is an ocean of resplendent emotion! Since he is ever established in his glorious Self (vide *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 7.24.1), and has intense love for the same (vide *Nārada Bhaktisūtras*, 2) he has perforce to be '*cira unmada*', 'ever intoxicated'. We note from his life that this divine madness was an eternal companion of his, right from childhood up to the final departure from this world.

Prema-pāthār (sea of love) : The previous characteristic automatically leads to this. He is the very ocean of love and affection.

It was common experience for all the persons that came in contact with Sri Ramakrishna to be inexplicably drawn to him. They felt like coming again and again. His

own parable of a peacock fed with opium on a particular day presenting itself the next day at exactly the same hour is an excellent illustration of his love, too. Even Narendra (Swami Vivekananda), a super-intellectual agnostic and a hard nut to crack, had to bow before his love and had to admit that not even his own mother loved him as much as Sri Ramakrishna did!

Bhaktārjana-yugalacaraṇa (the two feet fit to be gained by the devotees) : Here the word '*bhakta*' ('devotee') can be interpreted as the seeker interested in crossing the ocean of *saṁsāra* or transmigratory existence. Such devotees practise devotion to God, take refuge in His lotus feet, and with their help succeed in crossing the ocean of *saṁsāra*. Since the lotus feet of God are thus endowed with the power to save one from *saṁsāra*, they are ever sought for.

Tāraṇa-bhava-pār (one who helps us to cross *saṁsāra*) : '*Bhava*' or '*saṁsāra*' is transmigratory existence. Birth, suffering, death, and rebirth—an apparently eternal cycle of these—is its characteristic. *Avidyā* (nescience) and *māyā* (the cosmic counterpart of *avidyā*) are the causes of this *saṁsāra*. Though this is an apparently endless cycle, it can be broken or transcended by the grace of God (vide *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, 4.10; *Bhagavadgītā*, 7.14).

Since Sri Ramakrishna has been accepted as an incarnation of God, and since innumerable devotees have received spiritual illumination through his grace, leading to *mokṣa* or liberation, this epithet fits him very well.

It is also possible to combine the phrases *bhaktārjana-*

yugalacaraṇa and *tāraṇa-bhava-pār* into one unit and interpret it as : 'One endowed with the (holy lotus) feet, capable of taking the devotees across the ocean of *saṁsāra*; and precisely because of which, the devotees like to acquire them.'

जृंभित-युग-ईश्वर जगदीश्वर योगसहाय।
निशेधन समाहित-मन निरखि तव कृपाय॥ ४॥

Jṛṁbhita-yuga-īśvara jagadīśvara yogasahāy
nirodhana samāhita-mana nirakhi tava kṛpāy

4. (You have) manifested yourself as the Lord of this age. O Lord of the worlds! Helper in the path of Yoga! Of subdued and concentrated mind! I am able to see you out of your grace!

COMMENTARY

Jṛṁbhita-yuga-īśvara (manifested as the Lord of this age): Sri Krishna has declared in the *Bhagavadgītā* (4.7,8) that He will incarnate Himself whenever *dharma* (righteousness) declines and *adharma* (unrighteousness) gets the upper hand. Restoring the spiritual balance has been an ongoing phenomenon in the history of the human race. In this age, the Divine Power has manifested Itself as Sri Ramakrishna. The speciality of this incarnation is to

give assistance to earnest spiritual seekers in their paths of *yoga* and help them to attain *mokṣa* or liberation.

Jagadīśvara (Lord of the worlds) : An *avatāra* is essentially God Himself. Though the frame is human, the inner stuff is divine. Hence an *avatāra*, as God, is the Supreme Lord of all the worlds and their denizens. Sri Ramakrisna being an *avatāra*, the term applies to him also.

Yogasahāy (helper in the path of *yoga*) : The *Yogasūtras* of Patañjali (1.26) says that God is the teacher of even the most ancient teachers, since He is not limited by time. This applies to an *avatāra* as well, since he never forgets his real nature (vide *Bhagavadgītā*, 4.5).

None can become a teacher, especially in the field of *yoga* (any path of spiritual discipline ultimately leading to union with God), unless he has himself practised that discipline and realized its fruits. Sri Ramakrishna was a teacher *par excellence*, since he had traversed practically every known path of spiritual discipline, reaching its fulfilment. That is why he could assist any *sādhaka* or aspirant in his chosen path. He could guide the aspirants along the paths best suited to them, warn them of the pitfalls ahead, equip them to face all contingencies, and even give them a free lift, as it were, when needed.

Even after shuffling off the mortal coil, he continues in his subtle Ramakrishna-form, ever assisting the sincerely struggling aspirants. There are several instances of such help given to the earnest seekers. And, one of the easiest ways of receiving his assistance is to take his name and call on him.

Nirodhana samāhita-mana (of subdued and concentrated mind) : The reference to *yoga* in the previous expression naturally leads to these two expressions. *Yoga* has been defined as suppressing the modifications of mind : *yogaś-cittavṛtti-nirodhaḥ* (*Yoga-sūtras* of Patañjali, 1.2). This is an aid to *samādhāna* or perfect concentration of mind, also called *samādhi*, resulting in the superconscious experience of the Self within.

Perfect subdual of the mind (*cittanirodha* or *nirodha*) and absolute concentration resulting in *samādhi* were daily occurrances in Sri Ramakrishna's life. Hence the aptness of these terms as adjectives to him.

Nirakhi tava kṛpāy (I see, out of your grace) : Here two interpretations are possible : (a) I am able to see, by your grace, that you are the Supreme Lord of the universe, come down as the incarnation of this age, to help the seekers of liberation, in their path of *yoga*; (b) By your grace, subduing my mind, concentrating it on you in my heart, I am able to see you. (In this case, the words *nirodhana* and *samāhita-mana* apply to the devotee and not to the Deity.)

भञ्जन-दुःखगञ्जन करुणाघन कर्मकठोर।
प्राणार्पण-जगत-तारण कृन्तन-कलिडोर ।। ५ ।।

bhañjana-duḥkhagañjana karuṇāghana karmakaṭhor
prāṇārpaṇa-jagata-tāraṇa kṛntana-kaliḍor

5. Destroyer of abominable misery! Mercy incarnate! Doer of arduous deeds! (You) sacrificed your life for the good of the world! (You) cut asunder the bonds of Kali!

COMMENTARY

Bhañjana-duḥkhagañjana (destroyer of abominable misery) : The miseries from which we suffer, whether brought in by our present foolishness or past *karma* (result of past deeds) are always disliked by us. We are ever eager to get rid of them. However, we do not always succeed, in spite of our best efforts. It is here that we need divine intervention. And nothing could be better than the assistance extended by an *avatāra.*

Though Sri Ramakrishna was loth to help in mundane matters, his compassionate make-up would often break the bonds, and the supplicant's prayers would be answered. The boon he gave to Narendra regarding the sustenance of his family members is one such illustration.

Karuṇāghana (mercy-incarnate) : This gives the reason for the previous trait. The very cause for God incarnating as man is compassion or unlimited mercy. All the *avatāras* have exhibited this trait in their lives abundantly. Rama's compassion to Guha and Shabari, Krishna's towards Kubja and Sudama, Buddha's towards the swan and the lamb, are cases to the point. The way Sri Ramakrishna protected Rasik, the sweeper of Dakshineswar, at the time of his death may be cited here as one of the many instances of mercy shown by him.

Karmakaṭhor (doer of arduous deeds) : Unlike Parashurama, Rama, or Krishna, Sri Ramakrishna is a purely *sāttvic* incarnation. Apparently, one does not see him perform heroic deeds or acts of supreme valour. However, on a closer look at his life, we do discover the truth of the epithet, *karmakaṭhor*. The various *sādhanās* or spiritual practices that he performed right from the beginning up to the *ṣoḍaśī-pūjā* (worshipping his own consort, Sri Sarada Devi, as the Divine Mother) were, to say the least, stupendous. No ordinary human seeker could ever hope to perform such a variety of *sādhanās* with such unprecedented intensity.

Prāṇārpaṇa-jagata-tāraṇa (one who sacrificed his life for saving the world) : The famous *Puruṣasūkta* of the *Ṛg-veda* has described how the Supreme Person sacrificed Himself in the process of the creation of this world. Maintenance or smooth working of the world, too, needs sacrifice, sacrifice of great men and women, unselfish to the core. Our history is replete with instances of such noble souls sacrificing their all, even their lives, for the good of the world. Sri Ramakrishna was no exception.

Protection of the world (*jagata-tāraṇa*) is of two types : (a) Warding off the particular crisis, as was done by Rama and Krishna, when they destroyed Ravana, Kamsa, and others; (b) Endowing one with the necessary spiritual inclination, so that he turns towards God and successfully overcomes, or transcends, all the problems of life through His grace.

The protection afforded by Sri Ramakrishna was of the second type. Ultimately, this is the superior way since none can stop the problems of life from cropping up once again. In this world of *māyā*, problems are an integral part of life.

Sacrificing one's life for the good of the world also can be of two types : (a) Becoming a martyr in the process, as in the case of Jesus Christ or Guru Teg Bahadur; (b) Total dedication of one's life for the welfare of others, dying a slow death in the process.

It is now part of history how Sri Ramakrishna, with his ever-consuming passion, out of compassion, sacrificed his life for bringing spiritual solace to one and all that came to him. Even during his last days, when afflicted with the fatal disease of cancer, he never ceased from working.

Kṛntana-kaliḍor (one who cuts asunder the bonds of the age of Kali) : The chief characteristic of the age of Kali (iron age) is addiction to bodily pleasures. This leads to the strengthening of body-consciousness to the detriment of the *ātman*-consciousness, the two being poles apart. This automatically leads to the abysmal bondage of *saṁsāra*. The only way of cutting asunder this bondage of Kali is by reversing the whole process, through the infusion of spiritual values. This is exactly what Sri Ramakrishna did throughout his life and died for.

वञ्चन-कामकाञ्चन अतिनिन्दित-इन्द्रिय-राग ।
त्यागीश्वर हे नरवर देह पदे अनुराग ।। ६ ।।

vañcana-kāmakāñcana atinindita-indriya-rāg
tyāgīśvara he naravara deha pade anurāg

6. (You have) renounced lust and greed. (You have) despised attachment to senses. O King of ascetics! O Best of men! Give me attachment to your (holy) feet!

COMMENTARY

Vañcana-kāmakāñcana (renouncer of lust and wealth) : The refrain of Sri Ramakrishna's teaching is '*kāma-kāñcana-tyāga*', 'renunciation of lust and wealth (or greed)'. He taught this after he himself had practised it perfectly. His renunciation of lust and greed are proverbial now. Not only did he practise *mātṛbhāva* (attitude as towards one's own mother) towards all women, but also carried it to the acme by worshipping his own wife, Sri Sarada Devi, as *ṣoḍaśī* (an aspect of the Divine Mother, embodiment of beauty and grace). He retained the attitude of a little child throughout his life.

He practised renunciation of wealth also to such supernal heights that he could not stand even the touch of metal. His rejecting outright the offers of gifts by the Marwari devotee Lakshminarayan and Mathuranath Biswas are proofs enough, if further proofs are ever needed.

The word '*vañcana*' has two senses : giving up, cheating. Till now the interpretation has been based on the first sense. If we accept the second sense, the term '*vañcana-kāmakāñcana*' will mean 'one who has cheated

lust and lucre'. Normally, lust and lucre cheat ordinary mortals by enticing them away from the path of *niḥśreyas* or the highest good. But Sri Ramakrishna, successfully 'cheated' even lust and lucre, by never allowing himself to be trapped by them!

After the first comprehensive spiritual experience of Mother Kālī as the Cosmic Consciousness, there was no more any need to practise '*vañcana-kāmakāñcana*', since he saw God and nothing but God everywhere. Lust and greed hold their sway only when duality is seen, and will automatically be eliminated in non-dual spiritual experience.

Atinindita-indriya-rāg (attachment to senses was despised by you) : Perception of duality leads to *rāga* or attachment and *dveṣa* or aversion. *Rāga* and *dveṣa* are residues in the mind left over after experiences of pleasure or pain (vide *Yogasūtras* of Patañjali, 2.7,8). These experiences come through the contact of the sense-organs with the sense-objects. When a person gets the non-dual experience of *ātman* or *Brahman* or Cosmic Consciousness, there is absolutely no chance of falling a prey to the temptations of the sense-organs and sense-objects. This was the case with Sri Ramakrishna. However, in order to teach the world the need for abjuring sense-pleasures, Sri Ramakrishna practised extreme abhorrence of the same.

Tyāgīśvara (king of ascetics) : Both by precept and by example, Sri Ramakrishna taught the necessity of *tyāga* or renunciation in order to get *yoga* or union with God. His

life was a model as much to the ascetics as to the others. He was, in fact, an *ativarṇāśramī* (one who has transcended the limits of the *varṇa-āśrama*-system), an *avadhūta* (one who has shaken off all bondages), and a *paramahaṁsa* (man of supreme non-dual knowledge).

Naravara (best of men) : What distinguishes a *nara* or a human being from animals is his intelligence and discrimination. The best of men is he in whom these have reached their pinnacle, resulting in supreme wisdom. In this respect, none can be superior to the *ātmajñānī* (man of self-knowledge). Sri Ramakrishna, being not just an *ātmajñānī* but an *avatāra* himself, deserves this epithet most. The word '*puruṣottama*' ('best of men') used by the *Bhagavadgītā* (15.17-19) may be recollected here.

It is interesting to note here that once Sri Ramakrishna, playing pun on the word '*mānuṣ*'('man') explained it thus : A *mānuṣ* is one whose *man* or mind is *huś* or alert. What an apt definition !

Deha pade anurāg (give [me] attachment to [your] feet) : It is the nature of the human mind—as long as one is in the state of bondage—to get attached to something or the other in life. Since *indriya-rāg* is *atinindita* and the mind has to get detached from it, it must be given an alternative object to which it can get attached. What object can be better than the holy lotus feet of the Lord for this? However, this *anurāg* for the feet of the Lord does not come so easily. It can come only by His grace! Hence this prayer.

'*Anurāg*' is interpreted as love or devotion also.

निर्भय गतसंशय दृढ़निश्चयमानसवान।
निष्कारण भकत-शरण त्यजि जातिकुलमान ॥ ७ ॥

nirbhaya gatasaṁśaya dṛḍhaniścayamānasavān
niṣkāraṇa bhakata-śaraṇa tyaji jātikulamān

7. O fearless one! (You have) gone beyond all doubts and misgivings. (You) of firm resolve! Causeless (Cause)! Refuge of the devotees! (You) have cast off all pride of caste and family.

COMMENTARY

Nirbhaya (fearless one): Fear is an instinct natural to all living beings. It is felt only when duality is perceived. For one like Sri Ramakrishna who has experienced the non-dual consciousness, and hence sees his own self everywhere, where is the question of fear? That is why the sage Yājñavalkya assures the king Janaka, '*abhayaṁ vai prāpto'si janaka*', 'Thou hast, verily, Janaka, attained the fearless!' (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 4.1.4).

Fearlessness was, even otherwise, a natural trait of Sri Ramakrishna, right from his boyhood days, when he would spend long hours in the village burial ground, at night. Nor did he fear the rich or the well-placed in society, when it came to the question of speaking the truth, even unpleasant ones.

Gatasaṁśaya (one who has got rid of all his doubts) : Doubts and misgivings in any field, especially in things

spiritual, will persist only so long as direct experience has not come. Once the experience comes, all such doubts vanish for ever. Since Sri Ramakrishna had realized the Truth directly, that too from various angles following various paths, he had transcended all doubts for ever. Not only that, he could, just by a touch or even a wish, give such experiences to others, as he did in the case of Narendra and many of his other disciples.

Dṛḍhaniścayamānasavān (of a firmly resolved mind) : Ordinary people exhibit a firmness of resolve when they have an axe to grind. It often depends upon their intrinsic will-power also. But their so-called will-power collapses when things are otherwise. Not so is the case with persons like Sri Ramakrishna.

Whenever Sri Ramakrishna made up his mind to do something, none could modify it, let alone prevent it. This was because he did everything as the Divine Mother showed him and commanded him to do. His determination to keep up the word he had given to Dhani, the Shudra woman, to receive the maiden alms from her on the occasion of his *upanayana* ceremony (formal initiation into the Vedic studies and religious rites), in spite of fierce opposition from his orthodox brother, is an instance that highlights this trait even in his younger days. His resolve to take *sannyāsa* (monastic vows) and practice *advaita* (non-dual) meditation under the guidance of Totapuri, in spite of the resistance from Bhairavi Brahmani, his first *guru*, is another illustration. So also is his refusal to listen to the advice of Totapuri to give up *bhajans* with clapping

of hands, since it belonged to the realm of *māyā*!

Niṣkāraṇa (causeless [cause]) : God is the *kāraṇa* or cause of the whole creation. He Himself has no cause, since this will lead to *anavasthā* or infinite regress in logic. He is, therefore, *niṣkāraṇa*, uncaused cause. This term applies to Sri Ramakrishna in his cosmic aspect.

Bhakata-śaraṇa (refuge of the devotees) : In spite of their best intentions and supreme efforts, human beings cannot always succeed in getting what they want and getting rid of what they do not want. There is always an unknown factor involved (vide *Bhagavadgītā*, 18.4). It is only by supplicating the Lord and by surrendering themselves unto Him that their desires can be fulfilled. Hence God is '*bhakata-śaraṇa*', 'refuge of the devotees'.

It is also possible to club together the two terms '*niṣkāraṇa*' and '*bhakata-śaraṇa*' and interpret them as 'one who offers refuge to the devotees unconditionally'. This is just in the fitness of things, since divine grace abhors preconditions.

Tyaji jātikulamān ([you] have cast off [all] pride of caste and family) : Like prejudice, pride also is a serious obstacle in the spiritual path. Birth in the Brahmana caste (considered superior to other castes), in an esteemed family known for racial purity, learning, and virtues, can often beget pride. Though this pride may not be deemed unrighteous in the usual course of the world, it becomes a serious handicap in the path to perfection. Sri Ramakrishna, who intuitively understood this, assiduously practised to get rid of it. As is now well known, he used to

cast away his clothes and *yajñopavīta* (sacred thread, symbol of Brahmana caste) before sitting for meditation, during the early days of his *sādhanās* or spiritual practices at Dakshineswar.

The term may also be interpreted thus : While teaching an earnest aspirant, Sri Ramakrishna never took into consideration his or her caste, pedigree, or status in society. Among his disciples can be found people from the highest castes (e.g. Swami Ramakrishnananda) to the depraved and fallen ones (e.g. Girish Ghosh the dramatist-actor, Rasik the sweeper, Nati Binodini the actress).

सम्पद तव श्रीपद भव गोष्पद-वारि यथाय।
प्रेमार्पण समदरशन जगजन-दुःख याय ॥ ८ ॥

sampada tava śrīpada bhava goṣpada-vāri yathāy
premārpaṇa samadaraśana jagajana-duḥkha jāy

8. Your holy feet are the wealth of (the devotees). (Consequently,) saṁsāra (becomes) like a puddle made by the hoof of a (passing) cow (easy to cross). O offering of love! Of even-sightedness! The miseries of the people of the world (thus) disappear.

COMMENTARY

Sampada tava śrīpada (your holy feet, the wealth of [the devotees]) : Śrī is Lakṣmī, the goddess of wealth,

prosperity, and fortune. Nārāyaṇa, also known as Viṣṇu, is the consort and Lord of Śrī. Hence his feet also are endowed with the qualities of Śrī. Sri Ramakrishna, being an incarnation of Gayā-Viṣṇu, it is but meet that his holy feet also have been called *śrīpada*. The devotees who are interested in crossing the ocean of *saṁsāra* (transmigratory existence) are not interested in possessing worldly wealth, which they know to be a serious impediment in spiritual life, save the 'wealth of *śrīpada*' of the Lord. Possessing this wealth, they can get whatever they want in life. But what is it that they really want? This, as indicated by the next epithets, is overcoming the bondage of *saṁsāra*.

Bhava goṣpada-vāri yathāy (*saṁsāra* [becomes], like a puddle made by the hoof of a cow) : In the Sanskrit hymnal literature, it is a common practice to compare *bhava* or *saṁsāra* to a limitless ocean, *apāra-sāgara*. On the other hand, any task that is easy of accomplishment is compared to the crossing of a puddle made by the hoof of a cow in the rainy season, *goṣpada-vāri*. The idea is that those devotees, to whom the feet of Sri Ramakrishna are the sole wealth and possession, effortlessly overcome the bonds of *saṁsāra*.

Premārpaṇa (offering of love) : Due to his *prema* or intense love for the Divine Mother Kālī, which brooked no delay in realizing Her, Sri Ramakrishna was about to make himself an *arpaṇa* or offering at Her feet, by sacrificing his head. Hence the appropriateness of the term *premārpaṇa*.

Samadaraśana (of even-sightedness) : When Sri Ramakrishna obtained the cosmic vision of Mother Kālī, he discovered that She existed everywhere, in all things, from the tiniest to the mightiest. This removed, once for all, all the distinctions from his mind, vouchsafing unto him *samadarśitva* or even-sightedness. The *Bhagavadgītā* (5.18) calls such persons as *paṇḍitāḥ*, men of knowledge or spiritual wisdom.

Jagajana-duḥkha jāy (misery of the people of the world disappears) : Miseries of the people of the world are the result, ultimately, of the wrong identification of their real self with the body-mind complex. This is technically called *avidyā* (nescience), a part of *māyā* (cosmic nescience), which is extremely difficult to overcome. However, those who take refuge in God (whose power this *māyā* is) will be able to cross it very easily (vide *Bhagavadgītā*, 7.14). It is this that has been hinted in the first line of the verse 8. Once this happens, all their miseries will disappear in no time.

नमो नमो प्रभु वाक्यमनातीत
मनोवचनैकाधार
ज्योतिर ज्योति उजल हृदिकन्दर
तुमि तमोभञ्जनहार ॥ ९ ॥

namo namo prabhu vākyamanātīta
manovacanaikādhār
jyotira jyoti ujala hṛdikandara
tumi tamobhañjanahār

9. Lord! Repeated obeisance to you! Though beyond speech and mind, you are the sole support of mind and speech. You, the Light of lights, are blazing forth in the cave of my heart, destroying the darkness there.

COMMENTARY

Namo namo prabhu (Lord! repeated obeisance!) : '*Prabhu*' means the all-powerful Supreme Lord. The word '*namas*' implies *na* (not), *mas* (mine). Hence while physically offering obeisance to God, one should feel at heart that nothing is one's own, but that everything belongs to Him.

Vākyamanātīta (beyond speech and mind) : God has been described as beyond speech and mind by our scriptures. For instance, the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (2.9) says : *yato vāco nivartante aprāpya manasā saha*, 'from which speech, along with the mind, returns (being unable to reach)'. Speaking and thinking (which is nothing but unexpressed speech) depend upon language; and language has been evolved to express the ordinary experiences got through the sense-organs and the mind. Since God-experience has nothing to do with sense-experience or mental experience, it can never be described by words, tailored to suit the latter.

Manovacanaikādhār (sole support of mind and speech) : True it is that God cannot be described through speech or comprehended through the mind, since He is

beyond *nāma* (name) and *rūpa* (form), and is *nirguṇa* (without attributes). But He is the power as *ātman* or Self in our bodies, behind our speech and mind. But for Him neither works (vide *Kena Upaniṣad*, 1.2; 1.5,6).

Jyotira jyoti (Light of lights) : The lights of our world, the sun, the moon, and the fire, all receive their light ultimately from God, the Light of lights. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (4.4.16) describes *Brahman*, the Absolute, as *jyotiṣām jyotiḥ*, 'Light of lights'. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (5.15) says that all these lights of the world — the sun, the moon, and the fire — shine, *following* Him ; and they cannot shine there, where He shines.

Ujala hṛdikandara (blazing forth in the cave of the heart) : This is actually a prayer to Him, the Light of lights, to blaze forth in our hearts, destroying all our darkness of ignorance. The reason is given by the next epithets.

Tumi tamobhañjanahār (you are the destroyer of darkness) : God, being the Light of lights, and of the nature of Supreme Knowledge (vide *satyaṁ jñānaṁ anantaṁ brahma*, '*Brahman* is Truth, Knowledge, and Infinite' — *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 2.1), has to destroy the darkness of our ignorance, when He chooses to shine in the 'cave of our heart', responding to our earnest prayer to manifest there.

धे धे धे लंग रंग भंग बाजे अंग संग मृदंग
गाइछे छन्द भकतवृन्द आरति तोमार ।।

जय जय आरति तोमार
हर हर आरति तोमार
शिव शिव आरति तोमार ॥ १० ॥

dhe dhe dhe laṅga raṅga bhaṅga bāje aṅga saṅga mṛdaṅga
gāiche chanda bhakatavṛnda ārati tomār
jaya jaya ārati tomār
hara hara ārati tomār
śiva śiva ārati tomār

10. The assembly of devotees is performing ārati (waving of lights at vespers), singing song to the accompaniment of several musical instruments, and beating of the drum and the cymbols, which are making typical sounds like dhe dhe dhe laṅga raṅga etc., and (rending the air with shouts of joy), hailing : 'Victory ! Ārati to you ! Hara ! Hara ! Ārati to you ! Śiva ! Śiva ! Ārati to you !'

COMMENTARY

The words *dhe*, *laṅga*, etc. represent the imitative sounds of the various musical instruments.

Hara is one who destroys the world at the end of a cycle of creation or the sins in our hearts.

Śiva is the ever auspicious one.

The stanzas 9 and 10 apply to the cosmic aspect of Sri Ramakrishna, as God, the Highest Truth.

ॐ-ह्रीं-ऋतं-स्तोत्रम्

OṀ-HRĪṀ-ṚTAṀ-STOTRAM

(SRI RAMAKRISHNA-STOTRAM)

By Swami Vivekananda

INTRODUCTION

Hinduism accepts God both as *sākāra* (with form), *saguṇa* (with attributes), and as *nirākāra* (formless), *nirguṇa* (attributeless). In fact, they are like the obverse and the reverse of the same coin. Sri Ramakrishna observes : 'Yes, God has form and He is formless, too. Further, He is beyond both form and formlessness. No one can limit Him.' (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 1974, p.125).

Religio-philosophical scriptures of Hinduism, like the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata*, the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, the *Bhāgavata*, as also the Āgamas and the Tantras, lay a great emphasis on the cultivation of *bhakti* or devotion to God, especially in His *sākāra saguṇa* aspect, as the chief, if not the sole, means of attaining whatever we want in life, including *mokṣa* or deliverance from the cycle of transmigration. Chanting of *stotras* or hymns occupies a very important place in this path of devotion.

Hindu hymnology in Sanskrit is very vast, almost unlimited. The variety, too, is bewildering. However, from the standpoint of the subject content of these hymns, we can broadly classify them as follows :

1. Hymns that describe the physical form of the deity, from 'head to foot' or 'foot to head'. Hymns like

Śiva-keśādi-pādānta-varṇana-stotram by Śaṅkara belong to this category.

2. Hymns that describe the exploits of the deity, based on the mythological lore. The celebrated *Caṇḍī* or *Devīmāhātmya*, from the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*, belongs to this category.

3. Hymns describing the *guṇas* or qualities of the deity. Their number is legion. The *Aṣṭottaraśata* (108 names) and the *Sahasranāma* (1008 names) hymns belong to this group.

4. Hymns expressing supplications, like the *Kavaca* and the *Argalā* hymns of the *Caṇḍī*.

5. Metaphysical hymns like the *Nirvāṇaṣaṭkam* or *Vijñānanaukā* of Śaṅkara.

These are just generalities, though, very often, the same hymn may contain elements from the other groups also.

The hymn presented here of Swami Vivekananda on Sri Ramakrishna, called '*Sri Ramakrishna-stotram*', but popularly known as '*Oṁ-hrīṁ-ṛtaṁ-stotram*', due to the opening words of the hymn (like the names *Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* and *Kena Upaniṣad*), cannot actually be fitted into any one of these patterns, though it contains the features of almost all. There is of course no description of the physical form of Sri Ramakrishna anywhere here. But, whereas the last verse (the fifth), known as the '*namaskāra-mantra*', alludes to his life's work, verses 1, 3, and 4 refer to his *guṇas* (qualities). If supplication in

general is expressed in the last lines of all the four verses, the second verse contains a special prayer for granting devotion and knowledge. The first verse definitely breathes a metaphysical air.

This hymn, perhaps, fits in better with the group of hymns accepted by tradition as *mantras* or *mahāmantras* (mystic formulae), like the *Caṇḍī*, the *Lalitāsahasra-nāma-stotra*, and the *Viṣṇusahasranāma-stotra*, since it contains the great *mantra* of Sri Ramakrishna concealed ingeniously. Such hymns are endowed with the power of producing concrete results, accomplishing the particular desires of those who recite them ceremonially and fulfilling all the prerequisites prescribed for them. Here, faith and devotion are more important than a knowledge of their meaning. The only departure is that this hymn is meant for *niṣkāma-upāsanā* or desireless worship.

The *mantra* itself, as it emerges by combining the first letters of the first three lines of all the four stanzas, is : ॐ नमो भगवते रामकृष्णाय, *Oṁ namo bhagavate rāmakṛṣṇāya*, 'obeisance to Sri Ramakrishna'.

Recitation of such esoteric hymns is generally preceded by a statement of its *ṛṣi* or the sage to whom the hymn is revealed, *chandas* or metre in which it is composed, *devatā* or deity to whom it is addressed, and *viniyoga* or application, indicating the purpose for which it is chanted. If we can venture to apply the same here also, then Swami Vivekananda is the *ṛṣi*, *vasantatilakā-śakvarī* is the *chandas*, Sri Ramakrishna is the *devatā*, and

attainment of *parama-puruṣārtha* (highest good, liberation) is the *viniyoga*.

It is interesting to note that Swamiji, himeslf a perfected being, has put himeslf in the place of an ordinary *sādhaka* (aspirant) here to show the way to pray.

ॐ ह्रीं ऋतं त्वमचलो गुणजिद् गुणेड्यः
नक्तन्दिवं सकरुणं तव पादपद्मम्।
मोहङ्कषं बहु कृतं न भजे यतोऽहं
तस्मात्त्वमेव शरणं मम दीनबन्धो ॥ १ ॥

Oṁ hrīṁ ṛtaṁ tvamacalo guṇajid guṇeḍyaḥ
naktandivaṁ sakaruṇaṁ tava pādapadmam
mohaṅkaṣaṁ bahu kṛtaṁ na bhaje yato' haṁ
tasmāttvameva śaraṇaṁ mama dīnabandho

1. You are Oṁ, hrīṁ, and ṛta. You are immutable. You have transcended the guṇas. (Yet) you are adored for your guṇas. Inasmuch as I do not worship your lotus feet, capable of destroying delusion and full of compassion, day and night, therefore (I have) committed many (evils). Hence, O Lord of the lowly! You are my only refuge !

COMMENTARY

Oṁ : i.e. the *Brahman/Ātman* principle, the Absolute. *Praṇava* or *Oṁ* has been designated as the

symbol of *Brahman* or *Ātman* (vide *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, 8; *Bhagavadgītā*, 8.13 and 17.23).

Hrīṁ : i.e. Śakti or Power Divine. *Hrīm* is a *bījākṣara* or seed-word often used in the Tantras (scriptures that expound the worship of the Divine Mother as Śakti) for Śakti, especially for Kālī.

Ṛtaṁ : *Ṛta* is the Cosmic Law that regulates this created world. *Satya* (truth) and *dharma* (righteousness) are its aspects. The *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad* (12) says that *ṛta* is also *Brahman*.

Acalaḥ : The idea is that *Brahman* continues to remain *acala* or immutable even after creation.

Guṇajid : The conqueror of the three well-known *guṇas* : *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*.

Guṇeḍyaḥ : Adored for the *guṇas*. Here the word '*guṇa*' means quality or virtue.

A few words are needed here by way of explanation of the concepts involved in the first line of this verse. *Oṁ* indicates *Brahman* which is *nirākāra* (without form), *nirguṇa* (without attributes), and *nirvikāra* (without modifications). When this *Brahman* wills to become many (vide *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 6.2.3 ; *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 2.6.1) or create the worlds (vide *Aitareya Upaniṣad*, 1.1.1), it draws upon its *Śakti* or power (usually described as the female consort by religious and mythological literature). The 'union' of *Brahman* and *Śakti* (also designated as *māyā*) gives rise to the whole of creation. Once creation comes into existence, it needs a regulating

principle, a principle that assures not only its sustenance and smooth working, but also keeps it within the limits for which it was created. This is *ṛta*, the Cosmic Law. *Satya* (truth) and *dharma* (righteousness, right conduct) are its extensions at the individual or personal, and social levels.

Now the question arises whether *Brahman*, which was *nirvikāra* before creation, became *vikṛta* (modified, changed) after creation. Accepting this contention would mean that *Brahman* is a changing principle, and hence non-eternal. To refute this, the word *acala* has been used. The *Puruṣasūkta* (3) says that the whole creation is only a *pāda* (a quarter, a small part) of the *Puruṣa* (Cosmic Person) and that His 'three-fourths' are beyond, in the celestial regions. This is just a poetic way of describing that He is beyond creation, untouched by it.

Since *śakti* or *māyā* comprises the three *guṇas* of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, the permutation and combination of which have given rise to the whole creation, the doubt arises whether *Brahman* also has come under their sway. To deny this, the word '*guṇajid*' (conqueror of the *guṇas*) has been used.

Though the purpose of creation is to give one more chance to the unredeemed souls, for perfection, *Īśvara* (God, *Brahman* associated with *śakti*) condescends to come down, out of compassion for them as *avatāra* or incarnation, to show them the path to perfection and also to give a helping hand in their struggle. When He comes down as *avatāra*, He manifests in Himself all the virtues

that need to be cultivated by the *jīvas* or bound souls, to their perfection. Hence the aptness of the term '*guṇeḍyaḥ*' ('praised for your great virtues').

Thus in one short line, Swamiji has compressed the whole of Vedic philosophy.

Mohaṅkaṣaṁ : Destroyer of *moha*. *Moha* or delusion is mistaking the *anātman* (the non-Self) for the *ātman* (the Self). It is the result of *avidyā* or *ajñāna* (ignorance). If we surrender ourselves at the feet of God, He will help us to overcome it (vide *Bhagavadgītā*, 7.14).

Sakaruṇaṁ tava pādapadmam : Your compassionate lotus feet. God is compassion incarnate (vide the term '*karuṇāghana*' in verse 5 of the *Khaṇḍana-bhava-bandhana-stotra* by Swamiji himself). Hence His holy feet, too, should be endowed with that characteristic, even as the feet of a sugar doll are as sweet as its head or hands.

Bahu kṛtaṁ : Many (evils) were committed. Often, these two words are joined together as '*bahukṛtaṁ*' and interpreted as 'greatly', 'intensely', 'with yearning', and so on. But grammatically speaking, it cannot be treated as one word, as equivalent to '*bahukṛtvaḥ*' (many times). Hence, it has been split up as two words and interpreted as *bahu akṛtyādikam kṛtaṁ vihitaṁ mayā*, 'Many evil deeds were committed by me'.

Dīnabandho : Lord of the lowly ! Anyone who has been reduced to a helpless state due to disease, poverty,

worries, etc. is a *dīna*, and God is *bandhu*, friend, of such people. All *avatāras* have exhibited this trait abundantly in their lives.

INTRODUCTORY

In the last verse, the nature of God was described. The reason for one's own misery, viz not worshipping the holy feet of the all-merciful God, was also stated. Now, recognizing his incapacity for realizing God due to the lack of fundamental spiritual virtues, the devotee prays for refuge :

भक्तिर्भगश्च भजनं भवभेदकारि
गच्छन्त्यलं सुविपुलं गमनाय तत्त्वम् ।
वक्त्रोद्धृतन्तु हृदि मे न च भाति किञ्चित्
तस्मात्त्वमेव शरणं मम दीनबन्धो ।। २ ।।

bhaktirbhagaśca bhajanaṁ bhavabhedakāri
gacchantyalaṁ suvipulaṁ gamanāya tattvam
vaktroddhṛtantu hṛdi me na ca bhāti kiñcit
tasmāttvameva śaraṇaṁ mama dīnabandho

2. Devotion, virtues like knowledge, and worship that can destroy saṁsāra — these are more than enough to attain the Supreme Truth. However, while finding utterance through my mouth, they are not at all appearing in my heart!

Hence, O Lord of the lowly! You are my only refuge!

COMMENTARY

Bhaktiḥ : *Bhakti* or devotion has been defined by various authorities in various ways. *Śāṇḍilya Bhaktisūtras* (2) defines it as extreme attachment to God. *Nārada Bhaktisūtras* (2) puts it as intense love for God, who is the Soul of our soul. *Bhāgavata* (3. 29. 11, 12) says that the chief characteristic of *bhakti* is for the mind to melt on hearing about God and to flow uninterruptedly towards Him.

Bhagaḥ : *Bhaga* represents a group of six qualities like supreme lordship, righteousness, knowledge, renunciation, etc. (vide *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, 6.5.74). One who possesses them is called '*Bhagavān*'. The last two are important from the standpoint of spiritual life. Actually, even any one of them, if practised sincerely and intensely, can lead to the Highest Truth.

Bhajanaṁ : It is interesting to note here that only this word '*bhajanaṁ*' has been provided with the adjective '*bhavabhedakāri*' ('destroyer of *saṁsāra*'). Worship of God with devotion destroys *saṁsāra* by purifying the mind and revealing God in the heart.

Vaktroddhṛtantu etc. : The example given by Sri Ramakrishna of the parrot that repeats the names of God very well, but uttering only its natural cries when a cat catches it (forgetting the names of God) and is about to die, may be cited here.

Sometimes, an alternative reading of the text is given —वक्त्रोद्धृतोऽपि हृदये न मे भाति किञ्चित्, *vaktroddhṛto'pi hṛdaye na me bhāti kiñcit.* Here the metre is defective. But, if this is the original, then, being the composition of a *ṛṣi* like Swamiji, the defect is condoned.

INTRODUCTORY

Most of the people of this world are bound hand and foot by desires and ambitions. It is because of this that virtues such as knowledge and detachment do not rise easily in their hearts. But even for such souls, there is a way leading to beatitude. This way, of sublimating one's weaknesses by directing them towards God Himself, will now be described :

तेजस्तरन्ति तरसा त्वयि तृप्ततृष्णाः
रागे कृते ऋतपथे त्वयि रामकृष्णे।
मर्त्यामृतं तव पदं मरणोर्मिनाशं
तस्मात्त्वमेव शरणं मम दीनबन्धो ।। ३ ।।

tejastaranti tarasā tvayi tṛptatṛṣṇāḥ
rāge kṛte ṛtapathe tvayi rāmakṛṣṇe
martyāmṛtaṁ tava padaṁ maraṇormināśaṁ
tasmāttvameva śaraṇaṁ mama dīnabandho

3. Having cultivated their love towards you, Ramakrishna, the truth and the path, and having thus quenched all their desires, (your devotees) forthwith transcend rebirth. Your feet are capable of destroying the billows of death and

conferring immortality on the mortals. Hence, O Lord of the lowly! You are my only refuge!

COMMENTARY

Rāge kṛte : Having cultivated (their) love (towards you). The idea is that human infirmities like *rāga* (attachment or love), when directed towards God get refined and sublimated. More than the feeling or the sentiment, the person towards whom it is directed is important. *Śāṇḍilya Bhaktisūtras* (21) has discussed it. Our mythological lore abounds in such instances of people attaining God by hating Him (as in the case of Śiśupāla), treating Him as a relative (like the Pāṇḍavas), as a friend (like Sudāma), or through passionate love (like the Gopis of Vrindaban).

Ṛtapathe : The word '*ṛtapatha*' can be interpreted in two ways: *ṛtaṁ ca tvam panthāśca*, 'you are the Truth and the path that leads to the Truth'; *ṛtaṁ panthā yasya*, 'One to whom the truth was the path'. Between these two, the former is more appealing to the devotees, because they attain to Him, the Truth, by following the path of devotion towards Him. Thus, to them He is both the goal and the path leading to the goal.

Tṛptatṛṣṇāḥ : Having satiated their desires. Desires can never be satiated when directed towards sense-objects. But when they are directed towards God, they do get sublimated.

Tejastaranti : Cross the *tejas*. The word '*tejas*' has been interpreted here as the semen or seed, the cause of rebirth. It may also mean *rajas*. In this case, the interpretation would be that they transcend *rajas*, attain *sattva* and then through its help, reach God.

Martyāmṛtaṁ tava padaṁ etc. : Your feet of immortality, to mortals, provided the mortals consider them as the only wealth of their lives! See '*sampada tava śrīpada bhava goṣpada-vāri yathāy*' in the *Khaṇḍana-bhava-bandhana-stotra* by Swamiji. Your feet are capable of destroying the billows of death.

INTRODUCTORY

Suppose one is unable to do even this, directing one's infirmities like *rāga* towards God. Does he have any chance of redemption or is he condemned for ever? No, because Sri Ramakrishna's name is sufficient to purify him and confer eternal bliss. This is now described :

कृत्यं करोति कलुषं कुहकान्तकारि
ष्णान्तं शिवं सुविमलं तव नाम नाथ।
यस्मादहं त्वशरणो जगदेकगम्य
तस्मात्त्वमेव शरणं मम दीनबन्धो ॥ ४ ॥

kṛtyaṁ karoti kaluṣaṁ kuhakāntakāri
ṣṇāntaṁ śivaṁ suvimalaṁ tava nāma nātha
yasmādahaṁ tvaśaraṇo jagadekagamya
tasmāttvameva śaraṇaṁ mama dīnabandho

4. O Lord! Your auspicious name ending with the letter 'ṣṇa' and capable of destroying the wily māyā purifies even an evil deed! The only goal of all beings! Because I have no (other) shelter, therefore, O Lord of the lowly, I take refuge in you!

COMMENTARY

Kuhakāntakāri : Destroyer of *māyā*. *Kuhaka* is that which cheats, the wily one. Since *māyā* cheats us by presenting the non-Self in very attractive attire, it is called *kuhaka*. Name of God easily destroys *māyā*.

Kaluṣaṁ kṛtyaṁ suvimalaṁ karoti : Purifies even an evil deed. Poison can be neutralized by its antidote. Similarly, God's name can offset the effects of evil deeds. Better still, like the proverbial *sparśamaṇi* (philosopher's stone), which transforms base metal into gold, or the river Ganga, which makes even dirty water holy when it mingles with it, or fire that burns up all dirt, the name of God can convert the bad effects of evil deeds into good ones. *Bhagavadgītā* says that the utterance of '*Oṁ tat sat*' at the beginning of undertakings sets right all the defects (17.23-26).

Jagadekagamya : Only goal of the world. Since God is the only origin of all beings, He is also their final goal.

Aśaraṇaḥ : Shelterless. Having tried various things in life for shelter (like wealth, bodily pleasures, and even ritualistic religion) and having discovered them to be wanting, I have finally come to you !

And, lastly, the obeisance *mantra* :

ॐ स्थापकाय च धर्मस्य सर्वधर्मस्वरूपिणे।
अवतारवरिष्ठाय रामकृष्णाय ते नमः॥ ५॥

Oṁ sthāpakāya ca dharmasya sarvadharmasvarūpiṇe
avatāravariṣṭhāya rāmakṛṣṇāya te namaḥ

5. Oṁ! Obeisance to you, Ramakrishna, who established dharma (on earth), who is the personification of all dharmas, and who is the best of avatāras.

COMMENTARY

Swamiji composed this verse at Sri Navagopal Ghosh's house, on 6 February 1898, on the occasion of the consecration ceremony of a newly built shrine at the latter's house. Later on, this has been added to this hymn and is sung at the end.

Oṁ : Since this verse is treated as *mantra*, *Oṁ* has been added at the beginning.

Dharmasya sthāpakāya : To the establisher of *dharma*. *Dharma* is righteous living which leads ultimately to beatitude. Sri Ramakrishna established it both by practice and by precept.

God exists. To realize Him is the ultimate goal of life. This realization frees us from misery and confers eternal bliss. This can be achieved by leading a life of self-control, through the control of lust and greed; and cultivating *vyākulatā*, intense yearning for God. This is the gist of his

teaching. Once we accept it as the philosophy of our life and try sincerely to practise it, *dharma* will automatically be established in our lives. When such *dharma* becomes a part of the individual's life, social life, too, gets transformed according to it.

Sarvadharmasvarūpiṇe : To the personification of all *dharmas.* Various cults of Hinduism and the different religions of the world have prescribed a variety of ways of righteous living, *dharma*, that helps one to reach the final goal of life. Sri Ramakrishna practised them all and found to his amazement that, when practised rightly, all of them lead to the same spiritual experience. He thus embodied in himself all the *dharmas.* Hence the term '*sarvadharma-svarūpiṇe*'.

Avatāravariṣṭhāya : To the best of *avatāras.* In what sense has Swamiji used this word '*avatāravariṣṭha*' ? Though the *avatāras* are different from one another, they are all *avatāra* of the same God. Hence, it is not very prudent to compare and contrast them. If relevance is taken as the criterion, then also each *avatāra* being relevant to his times, there will be no basis for such comparison. If all-time relevance is projected as the test, then Sri Rama and Sri Krishna, who still hold sway over millions in our country (and abroad), and are very much alive in our hearts and culture even now, can equally claim that privilege. Also, Sri Ramakrishna himself has declared that 'He who was Rama and Krishna is now Ramakrishna in this body'; and Swamiji has echoed the same in his well-known hymn *Ācaṇḍālāpratihatarayo.*

Perhaps, this riddle may be solved in any one of the following ways :

(a) The term has been used by Swamiji, as some suggest, out of his intense devotion to his *guru*. Hence, no comparison is intended. However, Swamiji seems to have used this term with the full knowledge of its implication, since he has openly declared the superiority of Sri Ramakrishna to the other *avatāras* (vide *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 1979, Vol. v, p. 389).

(b) We often come across words like '*puruṣaśreṣṭha*' ('best of men'), in our mythological lore. It does not mean that a particular person addressed thus is greater than all his contemporaries. For instance, when Sri Krishna addressed Arjuna as '*bharatasattama*' or '*bharataśreṣṭha*' ('best among the descendants of Bharata') in the *Bhagavadagītā*, it does not mean that Arjuna was superior to Bhīṣma or Yudhiṣṭhira, who were also of the same clan. It should rather be taken as a term indicating excellence. Similarly here also.

(c) If at all a comparison is to be made, we can make it among the *avatāras* of the *daśāvatāra* group (the well-known ten *avatāras* of Viṣṇu) and say that Rama and Krishna were the best among them from the standpoint of relevance to human life. What applies to Rama and Krishna applies automatically to Ramakrishna also, since he is Rama and Krishna rolled into one. There is another reason, too. In these two incarnations, there is greater play of *rajoguṇa*, whereas in the Ramakrishna-incarnation, it is pure *sattva* all over. Since *sattvaguṇa* is considered superior to *rajoguṇa*, can we not accept the superiority of this incarnaton ?

(d) The word '*variṣṭha*' can mean '*priyatama*' or 'dearest'. Here it can mean 'dearest to us , since we find in him greater fulfilment of our ideals than in others.

A deep study of Sri Ramakrishna's life in comparison with those of Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Christ, Shankara, Chaitanya, and others shows that he combined in himself the bast of them : Rama's devotion to truth, Krishna's harmonizing spirit, Buddha's renunciation, Christ's compassion, Shankara's keen intellect, Chaitanya's devotion to God, and so on.

See also the Appendix on 'The Doctrine of Incarnation and Sri Ramakrishna'.

सर्वमङ्गल-स्तोत्रम्

SARVAMAṄGALA-STOTRAM

(DEVĪSTUTIḤ)

INTRODUCTION

Worship of God as the Divine Mother is as old as the Vedas. The *Ambhṛṇīsūkta*, *Rātrisūkta*, and *Śrīsūkta* of the *Ṛg-veda*, and the *Durgāsūkta* and *Medhāsūkta* of the Upaniṣads prove this beyond doubt. The concept was later developed and systematized in the Śāktāgamas or the Tantras.

The *Caṇḍī*, also known as the *Devīmāhātmya* and *Durgāsaptaśatī*, is a well-known and highly venerated text of the Śāktāgamas. Though a part of a bigger work, the

Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa, it has attained an independent status like the *Bhagavadgītā*. In fact, it is considered as a *mantraśāstra* (an esoteric treatise), and each of its verse is itself said to be a *mantra* (mystic syllable or formula). Hence a ceremonial chanting of the same is believed to confer whatever boons one desires.

The work describes the exploits of Śakti or Devī (Power Divine or Mother Divine), an incarnation of power of all the powers that emanated from the bodies of all the gods, including the Hindu Trinity.

There are four exquisitely beautiful hymns in this work, addressed to the Devī. The last of these, appearing in the eleventh chapter, is known as the *Nārāyaṇī-stuti*, since each stanza ends with the words '*nārāyaṇi namo' stu te*'. It is addressed by the gods Indra and others out of gratitude, since the Devī had destroyed the terrible demons, Śumbha and Niśumbha, and had restored the heavenly abode to them.

The three verses of this hymn under study are actually part of this *Nārāyaṇī-stuti* (10 to 12). Since Sri Ramakrishna, at the end of the *Ṣoḍaśī-pūjā* (worship of the Divine Mother as *Ṣoḍaśī*, a girl of sixteen years, the very personification of celestial beauty) to Sri Sarada Devi, on an auspicious day (to mark the end of his *sādhanās* or spiritual practices) offered his rosary at her feet, symbolizing the fruits of all his *sādhanās*, and chanted these three verses, they have now become associated with her. The hymn of these three verses is now regularly sung in all the monasteries of the

Ramakrishna Order during the evening service, after the hymn '*Oṁ hrīṁ*'.

Hence, this point is also kept in mind while commenting on the hymn.

As in the case of the earlier hymns (on Sri Ramakrishna), the title of this hymn also is based on the first words, '*sarvamaṅgalamāṅgalye*'.

ॐ सर्वमंगलमांगल्ये शिवे सर्वार्थसाधिके ।
शरण्ये त्र्यम्बके गौरि नारायणि नमोऽस्तुते ।। १ ।।

Oṁ sarvamaṅgalamāṅgalye śive sarvārthasādhike
śaraṇye tryambake gauri nārāyaṇi namo'stu te

1. Oṁ. Auspiciousness of all that is auspicious! Śive! Accomplisher of all (our) desires! Refuge (of the afflicted)! The three-eyed One! Gauri! O Nārāyaṇi! Obeisance to you!

COMMENTARY

The word 'Nārāyaṇi', which is repeated in all the stanzas, is the substantive and the other words are its adjectives.

Oṁ: *Oṁ* has been added since the hymn is considered as a *mantra*. Following the ancient tradition, we may state that Sri Ramakrishna is the *ṛṣi* (sage) of this *mantra*; *anuṣṭubh* is the *chandas* (metre); and Sri Sarada Devi is the *devatā* (deity); and the *viniyoga* (application) is chanting it for the destruction of all our afflictions,

fulfilment of all our desires, and the attainment of supreme auspiciousness.

Sarvamaṅgalamāṅgalye: (auspiciousness of all that is auspicious) : Our religious tradition considers certain things as very auspicious. For instance, seeing a cow or a Brāhmaṇa, hearing the sound of a conch or a temple bell, smelling the *tulasī* leaves (basil) offered in worship, touching the feet of the *guru* (spiritual preceptor), and so on. What makes all these auspicious is really the presence of the Divine Mother in them all, as *citi* or pure consciousness, as the *Caṇḍī* itself has declared (5.78). Hence She is the auspiciousness of the auspicious.

This epithet applies to the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi also in her cosmic aspect, as the spouse of the Divine, since Sri Ramakrishna has been accepted as an *avatāra* (incarnation) of God.

An interesting incident gives us an inkling of this quality in Sri Sarada Devi. When an old widow of Jayrambati (parental village of Sri Sarada Devi) stepped upon excreta, and felt mentally impure in spite of repeated washing and even sprinkling of the Ganga water, the Holy Mother asked the lady to touch her. When she did so, the feeling of impurity disappeared at once !

Śive: Pārvatī, the spouse of Śiva. The word can also mean 'O auspicious One', the same as the previous expression.

A lady devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, who looked upon him as Śiva Himself, did not believe that Sri Sarada Devi

could be Pārvatī. In a strange way she was one day vouchsafed a vision in which she realized this.

Sarvārthasādhike (accomplisher of all desires): '*Artha*' is the same as the four *puruṣārthas* (the ends or goals of human life) : *dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (wealth), *kāma* (pleasures of the flesh), and *mokṣa* (liberation).

When the Divine Mother is pleased, She will give any or all these four *arthas.*

There are several instances in the life of Sri Sarada Devi, where she has yielded to the importunities of her disciples and devotees and responded to their prayers. Kshirodbala Roy was cured of her chronic itches. The grandson of Napharchandra Kolay was saved from imminent death. One young man addicted to drinking was weaned away. A fallen woman was accepted as a disciple and purified.

As for people who sought spiritual solace from her by taking initiation, their number was legion.

The word '*artha*' may also be taken as 'meaning'. Then the phrase may be interpreted as 'one who enables us to understand the true import of the scriptures by purifying our mind'. In fact, this aspect of the Devī has been christened as 'Medhādevī' (the goddess of memory and intuition).

Śaraṇye (giver of refuge): This follows logically from the previous epithet. One who fulfils all our desires also

gives us refuge and protects us from all fears and dangers.

Tryambake (the three-eyed One): Śiva is said to have three eyes. Hence His Śakti, too, must have three eyes !

In Her cosmic form, the Devī has the sun, the moon, and the fire as Her three eyes.

In the case of Sri Sarada Devi, the third eye is the eye of wisdom, of intuition. It may be mentioned here that several knotty problems of the Ramakrishna Order used to be referred to her. Her wise counsel used to prove remarkably correct.

Sometimes, the word त्र्यम्बिके '*tryambike*', is found in some readings. In this case the meaning would be 'one indicated by the three letters', i.e. *a*, *u*, and *ma* or *Oṁ*. (Here, *amba* means a letter of the alphabet.)

Gauri : The 'white One'. Being the daughter of the Himālayas (eternally covered by snow) and the consort of Śiva, the white One (ever covered with ashes), the Devī, too, must be white.

If white is taken as a symbol of light and consciousness, then it would mean : 'O Light !', 'O Consciousness'.

Nārāyaṇi: The spouse of Nārāyaṇa, i.e. Lakṣmī. The *Caṇḍī* describes three aspects of the Devī—Mahākālī, Mahālakṣmī, and Mahāsarasvatī.

The word 'Nārāyaṇa' means : (a) One who has made the causal waters as His abode; (b) One who has made the

human beings His abode by living in their hearts; (c) One who is the abode of all human beings, the Cosmic Being.

सृष्टिस्थितिविनाशानां शक्तिभूते सनातनि ।
गुणाश्रये गुणमये नारायणि नमोऽस्तुते ॥ २ ॥

sṛṣṭisthitivināśānāṁ śaktibhūte sanātani
guṇāśraye guṇamaye nārāyaṇi namo'stu te

2. Power behind creation, preservation, and destruction! The Ancient One! Support of the guṇas! Full of (blessed) qualities! O Nārāyaṇi! Obeisance to you!

COMMENTARY

Sṛṣṭisthitivināśānāṁ śaktibhūte (power behind creation, preservation, and destruction) : Hinduism accepts the world process to be eternal. According to it, *sṛṣṭi* (creation), *sthiti* (preservation), and *pralaya* (destruction) go on perpetually in a cyclic order. Though it is the same Īśvara (Supreme God) that is responsible for the whole process, He is often pictured as three different deities—Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Rudra or Śiva—each connected with one aspect of the process (creation, preservation, and destruction, in that order). They form the Hindu Trinity. The Śakti or power of each of them is conceived as the female consort. These are Sarasvatī, Lakṣmī, and Pārvatī (Kālī or Durgā), in the same order. However, these three are one and the same Śakti, the Devī.

Sanātani: '*Sanātani*' can mean 'the Ancient One' or 'the Eternal One'. Since She is the uncaused cause, both epithets hold good.

Guṇāśraye (support of the *guṇas*): The *guṇas* are *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*—the three fundamental substances of the matrix or Prakṛti (Mother Nature). Śakti is identified with them.

Guṇamaye (full of blessed qualities): Here, '*guṇa*' means 'quality' or 'virtue'. Since the Devī is '*sarvamaṅgalamāṅgalye*', therefore She has perforce to be '*guṇamayā*', full of blessed qualities.

Sri Sarada Devi was the repository of many blessed qualities, like fearlessness, renunciation, wisdom, motherly love, unselfishness, spiritual power, etc. Some of the well-known incidents of her life reflect these great virtues. For instance : fearlessness, while facing the dacoit couple; renunciation, while rejecting the offer of a huge sum of money by a Marwari devotee; wisdom, while declaring (in the Koalpara Ashrama) that all those who stretch their hands to receive are poor; motherly love, towards one and all, including the Muslim robber, Amjad; unselfishness and spiritual power, in giving spiritual shelter to all and sundry, though she had to suffer a lot by that, and so on.

शरणागतदीनार्तपरित्राणपरायणे ।
सर्वस्यार्तिहरे देवि नारायणि नमोऽस्तुते ।। ३ ।।

śaraṇāgatadīnārtaparitrāṇaparāyaṇe
sarvasyārtihare devi nārāyaṇi namo'stu te

3. Ever devoted to the protection of those humble and afflicted souls who have surrendered themselves to you! Destroyer of the afflictions of all! Goddess Nārāyaṇi! Obeisance to you!

COMMENTARY

The word '*śaraṇāgatadīnārta*' can also mean: (a) those who have surrendered to you for the fulfilment of their desires, though they are not indigent or afflicted; (b) the indigent ones; (c) the ones afflicted by disease, or harassed by thieves and robbers, or threatened by animals etc.

Sarvasyārtihare (destroyer of the afflictions of all): Being the compassionate Mother of all, She responds to their prayers by removing the afflictions.

Devi: The word can mean 'the Effulgent One' or 'One who plays with creation', as it were.

As regards the application of these epithets to Sri Sarada Devi, what is given in note on *sarvārthasādhike* under the first verse will suffice.

After this verse, the words 'जय नारायणि नमोऽस्तु ते', '*jaya nārāyaṇi namo'stu te*', are generally repeated four times in the singing. It may signify the desire of the devotees to get the four *puruṣārthas* or an emphasis on the fourth *puruṣārtha* (*mokṣa* or liberation).

प्रकृतिं-परमां-स्तोत्रम्

PRAKṚTIṀ-PARAMĀṀ-STOTRAM

By Swami Abhedananda *

INTRODUCTION

The student, after having finished his long course of Vedic studies, has just approached his revered preceptor to get from him parting advice. After exhorting him to speak the truth and lead his life in accordance with the tenets of *dharma* as enjoined in the scriptures, the preceptor goes on to advise him regarding the social conduct he has to cultivate. The first thing in this list is, '*mātṛdevo bhava*'—'Consider your mother as God' (*Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 1.11.2). The great *ṛṣi* of the Upaniṣad has thus given the earthly mother a precedence over the father, and even the preceptor himself, with regard to the respect to be shown. No less is the fervour with which Sri Śaṅkara, that great king of the world-renouncing monks, declares in his *Devyaparādha-kṣamāpaṇa-stotra*, '*kuputro jāyeta kvacid-api kumātā na bhavati*'—'A bad son may be born, but never a bad mother!'

It is a well-known fact and also a matter of our direct experience that the influence of the mother on the child is the greatest, especially during the formative period of its

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* We are deeply indebted to the publishers of *The Complete Works of Swami Abhedananda* for the English translation in verse which has been taken from Vol. VII.

life. Father stands for power and authority and is merciless in meting out punishment, when the child errs. Not so the mother. She cannot bear to see her child castigated, however great may be its transgressions. No wonder that man casts his God in a human form and that too in a female form, adoring it as the Mother of the Universe.

The concept of the motherhood of God is not anything new to the Hindu mind. We see it as early as the *Ṛg-veda* itself, in its *Devī-sūkta*. The *Caṇḍī* of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* is well known. One whole Purāṇa, the *Devī-bhāgavata*, is devoted to the exploits of the Divine Mother. As for the hymns on Her, they are just too numerous to be mentioned.

If the efficacy of the worship of the Divine Mother had been taught by Sumedhas and proved by the king Suratha as also the merchant Samādhi (see the *Caṇḍī*), it was demonstrated even more vigorously by Sri Ramakrishna in recent times. Worshipping Kālī the Mother with the attitude that She is the Supreme Brahman Itself, he attained the acme of the spiritual life.

Today, millions of people consider and worship Sri Ramakrishna as God Himself, who incarnated Himself in a human body to fulfil the need of the age in accordance with his own promise (*Gītā*, 4.7). Hindu theology declares that whenever God incarnates in a human form in a male body, He invariably brings His Śakti or power, in a female form as His consort. So it is the belief of the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna that Sri Sarada Devi, his divine consort, is

none other than the Divine Mother Herself. That this belief is not without foundation becomes clear by an unbiased and careful study of their noble lives.

Hiding her natural and divine splendour, she chose to be born in a poor but noble Brāhmaṇa family full of godly virtues, led her life in such an unostentatious way as to quietly exhibit the highest ideal of womanhood in all its glory, and withdrew herself from the stage of the world after being convinced that her self-appointed duties were over, and after delivering her final message pregnant with the highest realization of Advaita to mankind through 'Annapūrṇa's mother'.

As the Mother, so were her spiritual children : Swamis Vivekananda, Brahmananda, Shivananda, Saradananda, Ramakrishnananda, Yogananda, Abhedananda, Premananda—each peerless in his own way. Among these, next to Swami Vivekananda, Swami Abhedananda was specially gifted with deep Sanskrit learning and fine poetic genius. He has composed six hymns of exquisite beauty on Sri Ramakrishna and two on Sri Sarada Devi. Out of these last two, the one chosen here is very well known and is sung in the monasteries of the Ramakrishna Order.

Following the usual tradition, we can say that Swami Abhedananda is the *ṛṣi* of this hymn, *toṭaka*, *anuṣṭubh*, and *upajāti* are the *chandas*, Sri Sarada Devi is the *devatā*, and singing it as *bhajana* to please her is the *viniyoga*.

This first verse describes the various glorious qualities of the Mother :

प्रकृतिं परमामभयां वरदां
नररूपधरां जनतापहराम् ।
शरणागतसेवकतोषकरीं
प्रणमामि परां जननीं जगताम् ॥ १ ॥

prakṛtiṁ paramāmabhayāṁ varadāṁ
nararūpadharāṁ janatāpaharām
śaraṇāgata-sevaka-toṣakarīṁ
praṇamāmi parāṁ jananīṁ jagatām

1. *O Prakṛti Supreme in human form,*
Bestower of boon and bliss!
Distress of souls removest Thou
And grantest them content and peace.
Thy servants, who surrender all to Thee,
Thou makest them contented and free.
O Great Mother of the world,
Be my salutations ever to Thee!

COMMENTARY

The last line is the principal sentence. All other words are adjectives to the word *jananī*. Let us consider them one by one.

Paramā prakṛti (Supreme Prakṛti) : The procreatrix or the material cause of a thing is called its *prakṛti*, of which the thing itself is a *vikṛti* or modification. According to the

Vedanta, the Supreme Brahman itself is both the material cause and the efficient cause of this world, *abhinna-nimitta-upādāna-kāraṇa* (vide *Brahma Sūtras*, 1.4.23 and Śaṅkara's commentary thereon). Hence Brahman is *parama prakṛti*. This Brahman is associated with Its special power often designated as *māyā*, the relation between the two being one of non-difference or *tādātmya*. Sri Ramakrishna gives the example of the snake coiled up and the same when moving, the former representing Brahman and the latter *māyā*. Sometimes, he also gives the example of fire and its buring power, or milk and its whiteness to explain the relationship between the two. Consequently, Mother Sarada Devi, being the consort of Sri Ramakrishna who is regarded as verily Brahman by his devotees, has been identified with him and called *paramā prakṛti* here.

Abhayā (the fearless): The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (1.4.2) says that fear comes from a sense of duality. Since she is the non-dual Brahman Itself, she is fearlessness itself. Alternatively : This mundane existence (*saṁsāra*), being the root of all fears, can be designated as *bhaya*. Since one goes beyond it by taking refuge in her, she is *abhayā*, the derivative meaning of which can be given as : *na vidyate bhayaṁ, sarvabhayamūlaḥ saṁsāraḥ, yasyām āśritāyām iti abhayā*. The same Upaniṣad mentioned above designates liberation or *mokṣa* as *abhayā* (4.2.4).

Varadā (bestower of boons): She is the bestower of all boons asked for earnestly, be it a tinsel or total liberation itself. Since she is *dayāsvarūpā*, as depicted later

(verse 8), she will give whatever her children pray for. Hence a tremendous responsibility is thrown upon the shoulders of her devotees who should be careful in selecting their boons. They should never ask for such things as will ultimately increase their bondage and make them suffer. Standing before the emperor, it is ridiculous to ask for a brinjal as a boon—so says Sri Ramakrishna. So, one should always cultivate the habit of asking for the highest and all that leads to the highest.

Nara-rūpa-dharā (the wearer of the human form) : The ordinary mortals are born here being bound by their previous *karma*. They are born in spite of themselves, whereas the Mother is born out of her own free will, due to her compassion for all. The Lord says in the *Gītā* (4.6) : 'I come into being through my own inscrutable power (*māyā*).' This applies to her also. The only purpose of an *avatāra* is the protection of *dharma*. Moreover, being the consort of the Lord, she has to come down in a human form whenever He comes down as man, to fulfil His divine play.

Jana-tāpa-harā (dispeller of the distress of people) : The world is full of misery. People are constantly suffering because of physical and mental maladies. They naturally turn towards God after exhausting all the human resources to dispel their distress. It is in answer to such prayers of people in distress that she has descended. If the Lord is busy putting the house of *dharma* in order, she is busy in soothing the parched hearts of people. In fact, this is her sole purpose of incarnation.

Śaraṇāgata-sevaka-toṣakarī (giver of contentment of those servants of hers who have surrendered) : Contentment is a rare virtue. It is due to the lack of it that people are constantly pestering the Divine for the fulfilment of all their multifarious desires. She will certainly fulfil their desires. But, then, there is one condition : they must become *sevakas* and *śaraṇāgatas*. *Sevā* is worshipful service. *Śaraṇāgati* is total surrender. If these devotees surrender themselves to the Divine Mother and offer worshipful service to Her, they are sure to get what they want. She will give not only what they want and have asked for, but also that which they have not, viz *mokṣa* or liberation. This will put an end to their desires once for all and produce total contentment (*toṣa*). Of course, it goes without saying that She will also give ordinary contentment (which also is *toṣa*) by fulfilling their lesser desires.

Jagatām parā jananī (the Supreme Mother of the worlds) : As already described in the introduction, she is the Universal Mother, since she is Brahman, the primordial cause, and also the consort of the incarnation of the Lord.

Praṇamāmi (I bow down to) : Whether to get worldly desires fulfilled or spiritual progress attained, the Deity is to be propitiated. The easiest and the most efficacious form of doing this is by doing *praṇāma* to Her, by respectfully bowing down to Her. This bowing down is not a purely bodily posture. It must be accompanied by feeling and devotion, a humble mood of self-surrender.

The word *praṇāma* itself indicates a feeling of 'not mine' (*na mama*), 'but thine'.

The Lord repeatedly asks Arjuna in the *Gītā* (9.34) to bow down to Him and to surrender at His feet.

The dying *ṛṣi* of the *Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* (18) tries to propitiate the Supreme by just *namaskāra*, obeisance, since he is unable to show his adoration in any other way.

Hence obeisance is a very powerful weapon in the hands of a devotee who knows how to wield it!

After describing the Mother's higher nature, the secret of her descent, and her blessed qualities, the poet now prays to her again with a view to drawing her attention towards her many luckless children who have acquired the habit of constantly erring :

गुणहीनसुतानपराधयुतान्
कृपयाऽद्य समुद्धर मोहगतान्।
तरणीं भवसागरपारकरीं
प्रणमामि परां जननीं जगताम्॥ २॥

guṇa-hīna-sutānaparādha-yutān
kṛpayā'dya samuddhara mohagatān
taraṇīṁ bhavasāgarapārakarīṁ
praṇamāmi parāṁ jananīṁ jagatām

2. Through mercy do Thou save
Thy sons bound in māyā's chain,
Who have virtue none to say,
Full of crimes and ever vain.
O, Thou art the only ship,
To ferry them across the earthly sea!
O Great Mother of the world,
Be my salutations ever to Thee!

COMMENTARY

These children of hers are *guṇahīna* (virtueless), *aparādhayuta* (full of faults), and *mohagata* (fallen into delusion).

The virtues are those described in the *Gītā* (16.1 to 3) as *daivī-sampat*, the divine qualities, like fearlessness, purity of mind, etc. Or, the word *guṇa* may also mean the virtues like devotion, knowledge, renunciation, etc., which Swami Vivekananda describes in the second verse of his famous hymn on Sri Ramakrishna (*Oṁ hrīṁ* etc.). These children of hers have never cared to cultivate those great virtues which will enable them to lay claim on the Kingdom of God.

Added to this, they have committed innumerable errors of omission and commission, mistakes, blunders, and crimes, due to their inordinate attachment to 'lust and greed' as Sri Ramakrishna used to say, which itself is the greatest *moha* or delusion. Coming under its spell, they have practically ruined themselves.

Salvaging such souls is possible only to the Mother of the Universe, since Her greatest virtue is *kṛpā* or compassion. Nay, She is the very embodiment of compassion, *dayāsvarūpā* (verse 8). She is like a huge ship — *bhavasāgara-pārakarī taraṇī* — capable of carrying hundreds of people in its bosom. Only this ship carries them across the ocean of transmigratory existence itself ! One has somehow to get into it or just be picked up ! That is all.

Thus has the great composer prayed to the Mother on behalf of her erring children. Now, putting himself in the position of an ordinary aspirant — even though he himself is a perfected being — he shows how one should tackle one's mind in order to control it :

विषयं कुसुमं परिहृत्य सदा
चरणाम्बुरुहामृतशान्तिसुधाम् ।
पिव भृंगमनो भवरोगहरां
प्रणमामि परां जननीं जगताम् ।। ३ ।।

viṣayaṁ kusumaṁ parihṛtya sadā
caraṇāmburuhāmṛta-śānti-sudhām
piva bhṛṅgamano bhavarogaharāṁ
praṇamāmi parāṁ jananīṁ jagatām

3. Renounce, my mind-bee,
The sense-flowers of the earth,

Drink the nectar of 'Lotus-feet'
Enjoy, thus, in peace and mirth.
In charm of 'Delusion'
Then shalt thou cease to be.
O Great Mother of the world,
Be my salutations ever to Thee!

COMMENTARY

The mind is compared here to a bee. The bee is black. The mind is full of the darkness of ignorance. The bee flies constantly. So the mind, ever fickle, moves from object to object. Hence the comparison is very apt.

This bee of the mind is now engaged in constantly sucking the poisonous juice from the wayside wild flowers. The objects of the senses are the wild flowers (*viṣaya-kusuma*). Material enjoyments are the poisonous juice. They appear sweet in the beginning, but turn out to be bitter poison at the end (*Gītā*, 18.38). Thus *viṣaya* becomes *viṣa* ultimately.

An object of sense is called *viṣaya,* since it takes away one's mind from the thoughts of the Supreme —*viṣṇāti viyojayati balān manaḥ paramārtha-tattva-vicārād iti viṣayaḥ.* Thus by its very nature it takes the mind away from God and brings misery.

The aspirant has to cajole this mind to give up its habit of alighting on the venomous flowers of the senses and

take to the pure lotus of the Mother's feet, full of the nectar of peace and eternal beatitude. Only thus can it be redeemed, the aspirant being made blessed in the process.

It is the mind that causes bondage and it is the mind again — when purified and well-directed — that redeems us. So say the scriptures (*Amṛtabindu Upaniṣad*, 2, and *Gītā*, 6.5). Hence it is quite in the fitness of things that the aspirant should try his best to win over his mind to better ways.

The poet now supplicates the Divine Mother to show Her special grace towards Her children who have heeded the advice given before, thus :

कृपां कुरु महादेवि सुतेषु प्रणतेषु च।
चरणाश्रयदानेन कृपामयि नमोऽस्तुते ॥ ४ ॥

kṛpāṁ kuru mahādevi suteṣu praṇateṣu ca
caraṇāśrayadānena kṛpāmayi namo'stu te

4. Pity, please, O merciful Mother!
Thy sons bowing to Thee anon.
Grant them refuge at Thy feet,
Take their salutes ever and on.

COMMENTARY

The Mother has been addressed as *mahādevī*, the great Goddess. This is but apt, since she is believed to be

the very personification of the three deities in one, viz Mahākālī, Mahālakṣmī, and Mahāsarasvatī.

Before her birth, her mother Shyamasundari Devi had a vision of Pārvatī (whose aspect Kālī is) as a little girl entering into her body. Her father Sri Ramachandra also had a similar vision, but of Lakṣmī. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that Sarada was Sarasvatī Herself (as her very name suggests). Hence the belief.

She is here requested to show her grace towards her children who have specially taken refuge in her. It is but natural for us to suppose that her grace does flow towards all beings who are really her own children, since she is the Universal Mother. But these children of her who are now bowing down to her are of a special type, since they have managed to give up *viṣaya-kusuma* and have chosen to adore her lotus feet. Hence a special grace is to be shown towards them.

What is that special grace? Just this much: *caraṇāśraya-dāna*, giving the gift of refuge at her holy feet. They do not crave for anything else, because they know that they get everything by getting this!

Does not the Mother automatically look at these children and bless them? Is a special supplication necessary? Yes, says the poet, since she has covered herself with the veil of modesty!

लज्जापटावृते नित्यं सारदे ज्ञानदायिके।
पापेभ्यो नः सदा रक्ष कृपामयि नमोऽस्तुते ॥ ५ ॥

lajjāpaṭāvṛte nityaṁ sārade jñānadāyike
pāpebhyo naḥ sadā rakṣa kṛpāmayi namo'stu te

5. O Sāradā, gracious Mother ?
Giver of wisdom, in 'Modest veil',
Protect us, please, I salute Thee,
Ever since from sin and ail.

COMMENTARY

She wanted to show to the world that modesty is the greatest ornament for a woman and not ear-rings or bangles. Sri Ramakrishna himself emphasized this point while training her. Hence she would always (*nityaṁ*) cover herself with a veil. So she is *lajjā-paṭāvṛtā*.

She is *Sāradā*, the giver of *sāra* or essence of all knowledge, i.e. Supreme Knowledge or liberation. Since she is also Sāradā or Sarasvatī, the goddess of learning and wisdom, she is *jñāna-dāyikā*, the giver of all knowledge, including the worldly sciences. A glance from the corners of her eye is enough to transform a shepherd into a Kālidāsa.

'We have erred, we have sinned! Protect us from the meshes of these mistakes and shackles of sin!' cries the poet, identifying himself with the ordinary devotees. All sins are the results of ignorance of our real nature. 'Give us knowledge and wisdom and free us from these sins.' That is the only way out!

In this and the next two verses, there is a description

of the special qualities of the Mother followed by obeisance to her :

रामकृष्णगतप्राणां तन्नामश्रवणप्रियाम् ।
तद्भावरञ्जिताकारां प्रणमामि मुहुर्मुहुः ।। ६ ।।

rāmakṛṣṇa-gataprāṇāṁ tannāma-śravaṇapriyām
tadbhāvarañjitākārāṁ praṇamāmi muhur muhuḥ

5. Thy heart to Ramakrishna doth remain,
To hear His name is joy to Thee.
O Embodiment of His thought alone,
I salute Thee ever, over again.

COMMENTARY

She is *rāmakṛṣṇa-gata-prāṇā*. Her life-forces have entered deeply into Ramakrishna. Ever since her marriage at the age of five, till her *mahāsamādhi* at the age of sixty-six, her life was one continuous meditation on Sri Ramakrishna. Hence this epithet. Or, since she had no separate existence apart from him, being his spiritual consort, she is called thus.

This naturally leads to its corollary that she is *tan-nāma-śravaṇa-priyā*. Ever dear to her heart was the name of Ramakrishna, which she liked to hear over and again.

By such uninterrupted, long, and loving adoration of Ramakrishna, she became *tadbhāva-rañjita-ākārā*. Her

whole being was coloured by that of Ramakrishna. She had become one with him, even like the Gopis of Vrindaban with Krishna.

पवित्रं चरितं यस्या: पवित्रं जीवनं तथा।
पवित्रतास्वरूपिण्यै तस्यै कुर्मो नमो नम: ॥ ७ ॥

pavitraṁ caritaṁ yasyāḥ pavitraṁ jīvanaṁ tathā
pavitratāsvarūpiṇyai tasyai kurmo namo namaḥ

7. Noble, Thou hast a character,
Pure is Thy life divine.
Ever I bow to Thee, O Mother,
Thou Incarnate Purity fine.

COMMENTARY

Immaculate purity even as in Sita was her especial virtue. Her conduct was pure. Her whole life was pure. Nay, she was the very embodiment of purity. That is why she could impart purity to her children just by a wish or a look. Those who came in touch with her were transformed, even as iron is transformed into gold at the touch of the philosopher's stone, or as dirty water is made holy by contact with the Ganga.

देवीं प्रसन्नां प्रणतार्तिहन्त्रीं
योगीन्द्रपूज्यां युगधर्मपात्रीम्।
तां सारदां भक्तिविज्ञानदात्रीं
दयास्वरूपां प्रणमामि नित्यम् ॥ ८ ॥

devīṁ prasannāṁ praṇatārtihantrīṁ
yogīndrapūjyāṁ yugadharmapātrīm
tāṁ sāradāṁ bhakti-vijñāna-dātrīṁ
dayāsvarūpāṁ praṇamāmi nityam

8. O Sāradā, Goddess Holy!
Killer of misery in souls resigned,
Saviour of Religion in every age,
By Yogīndra worshipped,
O Mother kind,
Givest love and wisdom Thou,
Grace Incarnate, to Thee I bow.

COMMENTARY

Devī (goddess) : The root *div* has several senses, the chief ones being (i) 'to shine' (*dyutî*); (ii) 'to sport' (*krīḍā*) and (iii) 'to desire to conquer' (*vijigīṣā*). She is *devī*, since she is resplendent in her divine aspect. Being full of knowledge and wisdom, she is resplendent in her human aspect also, since light symbolizes knowledge. Or, she is *devī*, since she sports with the world by creating, sustaining, and destroying it. Or, again, she is *devī*, since as Kālī or Caṇḍī she desired to conquer all the evil forces ; or as the Mother of all, she desires to conquer the hearts of her erring children, through love.

Prasannā (pleased, gracious) : She is *prasannā*, ever pleased, ever gracious. Not a single day in her life on earth did she put on a wry face, even in the midst of grave

provocation. She was the personification of grace, *kṛpāmayī* (verse 4).

Praṇata-ārti-hantrī (the killer of the miseries of the souls resigned): She kills or destroys the miseries of souls who resign themselves unto her, surrender themselves at her feet. This misery may be physical, due to diseases etc. Or, it may be due to the problems posed by others in social life. Or, it may be due to the obstacles in spiritual life. Whatever may be the complexion of this misery, it just disappears into thin air, if only the devotees can surrender themselves with intense resignation.

Sometimes, it may be that the devotees get the strengh to transcend all these worries and miseries, in spite of their continued existence.

Yogīndra-pūjyā (worshipped by Yogīndra): Yogīndra or Swami Yogananda was her first disciple who served her for thirteen long years, with matchless devotion.

Or, the epithet may mean 'worshipped by the Lord of the *yogīs*', when taken in a general way. She was worshipped by Sri Ramakrishna himself, the king of *yogīs*, as also by other *yogīs* like Swami Vivekananda and others.

Yugadharma-pātrī (saviour of religion in every age) : Since the Lord comes down in every age for the protection of *dharma*, the Religion, she too, comes as his consort and helps him in the accomplishment of that purpose.

Bhakti-vijñāna-dātrī (giver of love and wisdom): *Bhakti* is supreme love of God. *Vijñāna* is the special

knowledge which enables one to see the world, not as an illusion, but as God Himself. Both these are like the two sides of the same coin. The Mother gives these to those who feelingly ask for them and pine for them.

Dayāsvarūpā (incarnation of compassion) : As already referred to, the Mother was the very incarnation of compassion. Whether it was the robber couple of Telo-bhelo, the mulberry robber Amzad, the drunkard Binod Behari Som, the sweeper woman being kicked by her husband, the devotees refused by Swami Brahmananda, or the cats and calves of her household — Mother was always all compassion without the least hesitation and with no exception.

The Mother seems to have responded to the earnest entreaties of her devotee-children to show her grace towards them. How exactly she does it, is being described now:

स्नेहेन बध्नासि मनोऽस्मदीयं
दोषानशेषान् सगुणीकरोषि ।
अहेतुना नो दयसे सदोषान्
स्वाङ्के गृहीत्वा यदिदं विचित्रम् ।। ९ ।।

snehena badhnāsi mano'smadīyaṁ
doṣānaśeṣān saguṇīkaroṣi
ahetunā no dayase sadoṣān
svāṅke gṛhītvā yadidaṁ vicitram

9. Through tie of 'Love' divine
Bound Thou hast the heart of ours,
Granting e'er Thy lap benign
O wonder! how Thy mercy showers !
By grace hast Thou made us holy
To virtue changed our endless folly.

COMMENTARY

By giving us a taste for the nectar of your lotus feet, by producing a sense of adoration and devotion in us, you are binding our hearts with your divine love. The result of this bond of love is that all our faults and foibles are being transformed into merits and virtues, even as the base metal is converted into gold by the philosopher's stone.

We, thy erring children, have no virtues worth the name to boast of. And yet you take us into your lap and show us your affection. Is this not wonderful? Such a conduct is possible only for the Mother Divine.

The Mother once said that a child may dirty itself in mud, but it is the duty of the mother to place it on her lap and clean it. This may be remembered here.

For ages, man has become used to transitory strokes of luck. Can it be that the Mother's grace also is transitory ? For a moment, a doubt creeps into the mind of the devotee striking fear into his heart. So, he prays again, begging her to show her grace for ever :

प्रसीद मातर्विनयेन याचे
नित्यं भव स्नेहवती सुतेषु।
प्रेमैकबिन्दुं चिरदग्धचित्ते
विषिञ्च चित्तं कुरु नः सुशान्तम् ॥ १० ॥

prasīda mātarvinayena yāce
nityaṁ bhava snehavatī suteṣu
premaikabinduṁ ciradagdhacitte
viṣiñca cittaṁ kuru naḥ suśāntam

10. Be loving and gracious to Thy sons,
O Mother! I humbly beseech,
Sprinkle in their hearts arid,
A drop of love, to enjoy peace!

COMMENTARY

'O gracious Mother! I beg you humbly with all my heart and soul! Be gracious unto these sons of yours for ever and anon! Their hearts have grown dry, being scorched by countless worries of the worldly life over millions of births! But those very hearts will be soothed and bathed in eternal peace, if only you can just sprinkle a drop of your immortal love!' — This is the idea.

And now comes the well-known hymn of obeisance:

जननीं सारदां देवीं रामकृष्णं जगद्गुरुम्
पादपद्मे तयोः श्रित्वा प्रणमामि मुहुर्मुहुः ॥ ११ ॥

jananīṁ sāradāṁ devīṁ
rāmakṛṣṇaṁ jagadgurum
pādapadme tayoḥ śritvā
praṇamāmi muhur muhuḥ

11. O Ramakrishna, the Teacher of all,
And Mother Sarada, Goddess Divine!
In bosom holding Their lotus feet,
Salutations to both be e'er of mine.

COMMENTARY

The hymn ends with this verse. Hence the final obeisance.

Sri Ramakrishna is the *jagad-guru*, the great Teacher of the world. The word *guru* may also mean father. Hence he is the Father of the world. And she is the Mother of all. Salvation lies in taking refuge at their holy lotus feet. So the poet says : 'I bow down to them again and again!'