

Dedicated to Holy Mother

Sri Sarada Society *Notes*

Fall 2014 Volume 20, Issue 2

MOTHER AND HER SON, GIRISH

by Joan Shack

Girish Chandra Ghosh, well known to the readers of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, was a man of opposite extremes. On the one hand he drank a lot, visited brothels, and was addicted to opium for fifteen years. On the other hand, his great intellectual power is considered second only to that of Swami Vivekananda among Sri Ramakrishna's disciples and his gigantic heart was especially evident in his care for the downtrodden. Phenomenally productive as a playwright, actor, and director, he dominated the Bengali stage in all three of these arenas for over 40 years.

Personal tragedy, the loss of his wife and a young son, brought him to Holy Mother's feet. He journeyed to Jayrambati for her darshan with Swami Niranjanananda, who opened his eyes to Mother's true nature. In his typically bold, direct, and unequivocal fashion, Girish inquired, "What kind of Mother are you?" She replied, "Your real Mother, not just the wife of your guru, not a foster mother, not a vague sort of mother, your real Mother."

Sixteen years earlier, before he had met Sri Ramakrishna, Girish was ill with a virulent strain of cholera. Physicians had given up hope he would recover. It was while in a semiconscious state that he had a vision: a "resplendent woman appeared...wearing a red-bordered cloth. Her face was full of compassion and love." Sitting near him on the bed, she had placed prasad in his mouth, requesting him to partake of it. Following this experience, his health gradually improved. Much to Girish's delight, upon meeting Sarada Devi, he recognized Mother as She who had saved his life; his long search for the one who pulled him back from the brink of death had ended.

Sri Ramakrishna left Holy Mother behind to continue their grand play on this worldly stage. She carried on this mission for thirty-four years, protecting, consoling, and guiding his devotees: seeing them as her children. For Girish, Ramakrishna's passing burdened his conscience every time he acted. Having given his power of attorney to Ramakrishna, his actions were no longer his to make. Even weeping for the passing of his wife and children was to him a betrayal; it demonstrated a lack of submission to his guru's will. Now in the presence of Holy Mother, his troubled heart found peace. Remembering the words of Ramakrishna, "Brahman and Shakti are one and the same—though in manifestation they appear to us as two," Girish realized his guru was still supporting him in the form of the Holy Mother. Recalling those blessed days in Jayrambati, Girish wrote: "As soon as I went to her all my sorrow and misery vanished completely, and I felt a supreme serenity of mind which I had never experienced before." Though physically robust, possessing a gigantic personality and an indomitable will, in Mother's presence he was, as he himself confessed, "a little child coming to its own mother." On one occasion, he forcefully declared: "She is the Mother of the Universe—*maha-maya*, *maha-shakti*—appearing on earth for the salvation of all creatures and at the same time exemplifying the idea of true motherhood."

In 1907, Mother came from Jayrambati to Calcutta to attend the four-day celebration of Durga Puja at Girish's house. Though in poor health due to malarial fever, she attended each puja so as not to disappoint her son. All his relatives and friends from the theatre were invited and received Mother's blessing.

Like Ramakrishna, Mother attended a number of plays written and directed by Girish. On several occasions Mother lost outer consciousness while watching the play. In April 1906, she saw *CHAITANYA LILA*, commenting: "That girl (Bhushan) was full of devotion; otherwise one cannot act in that role. She looked and dressed like the real Chaitanya. Who could tell she was a woman?" Like Ramakrishna, Mother understood the importance of the theater in transmitting the cultural and religious heritage of India as well as its history to the masses. Most of the roughly ninety plays which Girish wrote were written after meeting Ramakrishna, so topics like faith, renunciation, and self-surrender were prominent. Sometimes Ramakrishna's very words were used. Other times, Girish introduced his guru's ideals of religious harmony, universal love, or the spirit of service in the dialogue. Sometimes he created characters based on his disciples.

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IN MOTHER'S WORDS "Even the injunctions of Destiny are cancelled if one takes refuge in God.

Destiny strikes off with her own hand what she has written about such a person."

Mother saw the play *RAMANUJA* written by Aparesh Mukhopadhyay, Girish's associate. Afterward Aparesh wrote: "A man sees the outer form of a man, but God sees inside him, and I witnessed this truth. The Holy Mother, the spiritual consort of Sri Ramakrishna, came to a theater in Calcutta and embraced an actress who was a courtesan (she played the role of Ramanuja). Thus she demonstrated that God's grace does not discriminate between good and thorny plants, between good and bad human beings, and does not care for the injunctions and prohibitions of the empirical world. We saw that divine grace only purifies all—irrespective of caste and creed."

During Girish's last scene on the stage of this world, he uttered the words, "Master, you have come. Please destroy my worldly intoxication. Victory to Sri Ramakrishna! Let us go." Holy Mother noted that when passing, a man's destination is determined by the thoughts he had. She remarked, "At the time of death, Girish's mind was absorbed in the thought of the Master—the Ocean of Consciousness. You see, these devotees are parts of the Master—someone is his hand, someone his feet, someone his hair, and so on." Several days later she added, "Ah, a veritable Indra [king of the gods] has fallen. Oh, what tremendous faith and devotion he had for the Master."

SPIRITUAL REFLECTION

During her visit this Summer, Pravrajika Satchitprana led a retreat on the BHAGAVAD GITA, Chapters 7–9, at Vivekananda Retreat Ridgely in Stone Ridge, New York. It is said that one draws from focused spiritual teachings that which inspires a deeper awareness. The following notes were offered to SRI SARADA SOCIETY NOTES by one retreat participant. They have been edited for content and clarity by Pravrajika Satchitprana herself.

- ❀ The *BHAGAVAD GITA* explains and elucidates the concept of *yajna* (sacrifice). Cosmic *yajna* is being performed all the time. The sun, moon, trees, and plants all give of themselves. Our work becomes a *yajna* when done with the right attitude. Are we contributing to the ongoing cosmic *yajna*? The *GITA* refers to one as a "thief" who only enjoys the gifts by all elements without contributing to this cosmic *yajna*.
- ❀ Cause and effect are one. The effect contains the cause. A seed is the cause; a tree is the effect. The tree becomes the cause of the seed, thus the seed is the effect. Being projected out of Brahman the individual self is essentially Brahman, of the nature of pure consciousness. Brahman is the apparent cause. It is changeless. The phenomenal world is superimposed on Brahman. That is, Brahman appears as the world. The world cannot exist without Brahman as its substratum.
- ❀ Including Brahma, the Lord of all beings, and the other higher beings (gods), all beings and the worlds are subject to recurrence, to appear and disappear, subject to repeated transmigrations through "Brahma's day and night." In Indian mythology there are 4,320,000,000 of our years in one day of Brahma (evolution) and the same number of years in one night (dissolution) of Brahma. At the end of a complete day/night of Brahma, the projection (called creation) begins anew. One's karma carries over to the next projection.
- ❀ The Lord is all-pervasive and yet free from contact with any object because of His incorporeal nature, not touched by anything happening in time/space. The infinite Lord can't be contained in a finite universe.
- ❀ No change can be perceived without the background of changelessness. A mirage needs the background of a desert, waves need the background of an ocean, and a moving picture the background of a screen. The absolute, unconditioned, unchanging, eternal Brahman is like a screen on which the world of changes is projected.
- ❀ The mind is the source of war and it spreads out.
- ❀ "Liking" something is the reason behind possessing—liking is where it starts.
- ❀ Why do we have desires? Because we don't know that we are perfect in ourselves.
- ❀ The word dharma is used in a number of different ways. It refers to: a social, moral, or religious rule of conduct; righteousness; duty; the inner constitution of a thing that governs its growth; a body of doctrines including rituals; the rule of the station to which one belongs; or the quality or action of a thing.
- ❀ *Swabhava* refers to one's inner constitution, mental capacity, or tendency. *Swadharma* refers to one's outer actions. If I am following my *swadharma*, there is contentment. Every person who follows their *swadharma* has the same chance to achieve the goal.
- ❀ You were never born so you can never die. We do not come into being, we always are. Only the body comes and goes. You are the Atman, the Absolute Existence.

WHO WE ARE Sri Sarada Society is a nonprofit association of spiritual aspirants interested in the application of the universal ideals of Vedanta with Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, as our inspiration.

Time, My Friend

Time, my friend,
Like a sparkling mountain stream,
Rushes on.

Do make haste
To make your peace, before you kiss
The ocean's sure embrace.

The Great Silence

The Great Silence calls
Where no more is heard
The cry of a whippoorwill,
The gentle breeze through meadow grass,
Or seen the dimples of a sparkling
mountain brook.

Dissolved into the cliff of Time
All outward doors forever locked;
Sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell
Turned within, sighted

Only Silence, where all comes to rest.
The Great Silence calls
Where all is not, and all is,
The womb of no-thing, vibrant with all,
All disappeared, there is no turning back
From The Great Silence, still.

Edith O. Tipple

MOTHER'S WELCOME

When the Vedanta Center of Atlanta opens its guest and retreat residence this Fall, lodgers will be welcomed by a unique manifestation of Mother. The painting is a gift to the Atlanta Center by the artist, Gary Golio. Appreciatively, Br. Shankara, resident minister of the Atlanta Center, remarks: "This work of art will indeed grace our retreat and visitors quarters. The way Gary captured Ma's indrawn-ness is remarkable; though her eyes are open she appears to be seeing only what is within. And yet it's not a 'vacant' look; she's very present. What a gift he has!"

Gary has been a spiritual seeker from an early age. He was introduced to Sri Sarada Devi and Sri Ramakrishna in the 1980s. During this period he was inspired to paint this portrait of Mother along with several large images of the Buddha. He recalls: "After seeing hundreds of paintings and pastels-on-paper leave my studio over the years, I often felt that they had sort of 'taken place' while I stood there, brushes in hand." Following a career change from landscape painter and therapist to author and illustrator of children's books, Gary asked Sri Sarada Society for help finding a suitable home for Mother, explaining that he is "in the midst of a thorough 'lightening' of my life. This has involved giving away many things. The painting of Mother requires a certain level of care."

A chance contact with Br. Shankara proved fortuitous. Mother was, herself, welcomed into her children's new home, which has since been named Sri Sarada Mandir.

Straight Like An Arrow

I spoke with love.
Remove the barriers with your feelings.

I worked with love,
self-effacing service.

When I rested my mind, it prayed.
Now is time to awaken, to let go.

How to love?
How to give?

For a while I believed the dream.
You think it will burst, but instead tries
to swallow me in.

What am I holding on to?
The struggle is not for concrete things.

All water comes from the Ocean,
evaporates and eventually returns.

Where am I going?
Onto Mother's lap.

Shraddha (Merchi Vendrell)



Painted by Gary Golio in 1989-1990.

CONTACTING US Sri Sarada Society, P.O. Box 38116, Albany, New York 12203, PHONE (518) 869-6088

FAX (518) 869-6084, EMAIL notes@srisarada.org, HOLY MOTHER'S WEBSITE <http://www.srisarada.org/>

KEEPING HOLD OF THE THREAD

by Jayanti Hoye

The internet was just emerging when Sri Sarada Society introduced a website dedicated to Holy Mother in 1996. An information-sharing forerunner had been in place in government and academic circles, but a system for public access, complete with images, was exciting, perhaps even revolutionary! The focus was on the “worldwide web,” which started us thinking about creation. Wasn’t this virtual world simply a new manifestation within, as well as a representation of, the illusion of Maya? We named the site “Holy Mother’s Cyber-Tantu” after a Sanskrit term, “tantu,” meaning silk threads or a web, and wrote this introduction:

How much the worldwide web mirrors the Divine Mother’s web of creation, Maya!

Having seen cyberspace come into being we know its nature is illusory. Yet, as with creation itself, the illusion appeals to us. We find this virtual world increasingly useful. As new frontiers continuously open it is not difficult to envision that a veil of forgetfulness will fall. Cyberspace will become as real to us as the physical world of our everyday experience, which physicists and mystics assure us is not at all as it seems.

By the power of creation the Divine Mother snares us in the alluring web of Maya, causing us to forget our own true nature and the divinity of the world around us. Yet in this bondage we are ever tied to Her, bound by a silken thread that is fastened to the Mother’s heart.

At the time we had little awareness of the internet and technological explosion that lay on the horizon. Yet, how prophetic the reflections seem. Eighteen years later, the digital age is upon us, impacting every aspect of our daily lives. Whether in the workplace or in the classroom, at home or on the go, digital devices and internet connections have become commonplace. The early “worldwide web” united us in communication with others, unhampered by location or distance. Today it is the gateway to shopping, banking, information, recreation....The communication aspect alone has spawned social networks, video and text messaging, “tweeting”—an ever growing list.

“All this technology is overwhelming. It demands my constant attention,” is a common complaint expressed. I wonder, are the challenges and “demands” really greater? Or, do we become so caught up in this new expression of Maya because of its availability? As spiritual aspirants we try to move our attention from the countless distractions in our daily life and apply it, mindfully, to the tasks at hand. If technology helps us, why do we need to feel overwhelmed? Might its ready availability be simply a more subtle test of our self-mastery? Might it be offering us new opportunities to exercise discrimination by choosing what is helpful to us and leaving behind what is not?

I have been physically disabled since birth, so there is much I like about this readily accessible world. At an early age, punching keys with a stick enabled me to write on a typewriter. Enter the computer in the late 1980s and my “key punching” gave expression to so much more, things many people take for granted. The salesperson had “loaded” my computer with programs he thought I would enjoy. I spent hours mesmerized. My family had always kept a jigsaw puzzle in the works and now and then I’d seen a piece from afar. But now, I was putting together jigsaw puzzles on my own! Through computerized desktop publishing, I was soon doing layout projects, *SRI SARADA SOCIETY NOTES* being among these. As the internet flourished, my experience of the world become more “normal” and the pitfalls more obvious.

For example, I like the independence of internet shopping, but one learns that the ordinary guidelines of thrift and sensibility apply. Being able to access information when I want or need it is great if I have a purpose. But I dislike “surfing the internet”; I’m just not curious by nature. While I find email very useful, social media proves a mixed bag. Having the ability to do things on my own has allowed me to become aware of my tendencies toward excess. Through the years I have gotten better at not thinking that I have to step into a situation or take on yet another project “just because I can.” The jury is still out on whiling away time streaming movies. What matters is knowing that while the digital age has given tools enabling me to interact with the world, my own strengths and weakness “drive the show.”

Vedanta assures us that “all this is verily Brahman.” As spiritual aspirants we know, at least as a guiding principle, that nothing is Real except the Divine, which is playing hide and seek with us behind an ever-alluring veil. Our spiritual tools of discrimination and detachment apply no less in this age than in ages past. We can trust that Mother has spun this newest attraction. Holding fast to her, we can use it for our benefit no less than the so-called “physical world.” If anything, it can serve as a reminder of the overall illusion of Maya. We need not feel overwhelmed.

