

Dedicated to Holy Mother

# Sri Sarada Society *Notes*

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## THE POWER IN DETAIL

by Jayanti

9 became mesmerized as Swami Chetanananda told devotees in San Diego about his newest book, *SRI SARADA DEVI AND HER DIVINE PLAY*. Such detail! What she used to clean her teeth. Really, how could he have found this out? Ah yes! I found it recorded in the reminiscences of her brother Prasanna's wife, Subasini:

*When the Mother was in Calcutta, I sent a container of tooth powder for her, which I made from roasted tobacco leaf and coconut leaf. Later my husband told me that the Mother praised my thoughtful gift.*

Another bit of information that I found rather amazing has to do with transportation. Generally, I think of Mother traveling by train, riding in a horse-drawn carriage or bullock cart, and being carried by palanquin or walking on foot. All these are true, and seemed appropriate to my vision of travel in India during the 1800s. Unexpected was the discovery that on February 11, 1911, Mother rode in an automobile. She and her party were driven from the train station to her guest lodgings across from the Ramakrishna Math in Madras. I had known of Mother's first experiences of electricity and running water. Yet, in my mind at least, the invention of the car is at the forefront of ushering in the modern age. Reading that Mother also rode in a car, I was suddenly keenly aware that, unlike Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, Sri Sarada Devi's life stretched to 1920, one-fifth of the way into the twentieth century. My awareness of Mother's living connection with modern life awakened.

In this way, I am finding that reading about Mother in such full and mostly chronological detail gives me new and deeper understanding. I am not always sure whether I'm reading about a newly translated incident from a Bengali source or a story I have forgotten. But even when it is a quote or incident with which I am familiar, the benefit of detail offers me a fresh perspective.

For example, in the chapter on "Holy Mother in the Midst of Her Family," Swami Chetanananda describes Mother's role as the head of her extended family. In the following quote, Mother is explaining her dealings with her nieces, each of whom has a different temperament:

*I show these girls due respect for their views. Remaining detached, I watch their movements so that they do not go to extremes. One should be humble and give some amount of freedom to all.*

I am fairly certain that I had encountered "One should be humble and give some amount of freedom to all" before. But reading this generalized teaching within context, I was struck by a profound insight into parenting. As parents, our task is to encourage our child's development into an independent being. Child-rearing experts assure us that this happens best in an environment of trust and acceptance, of loving guidance. How is this to be accomplished? Note Mother's prescription: By "showing due respect for their views" and seeing "that they do not go to extremes." What attitudes foster good parenting? Detachment and humility. How often do we see parents become angry, fearful, or harshly critical, not so much in response to their child's actions as from reactions arising within themselves? When we are caught up in our own expectations, judgments, and fears, we cannot see a situation as it is and allow it to unfold. The more we can observe a situation as separate from ourselves, the clearer our role becomes. We can then make better assessments and take more appropriate actions that balance a need to guide and protect the child with an ability to encourage freedom. If, as Mother says, those who are in our care and over whom we might be tempted to feel superior deserve our respect, then it follows that these principles reach into all interpersonal interactions.

The preface to *SRI SARADA DEVI AND HER DIVINE PLAY* reads: "Generally, biographers focus on the important events in the lives of great people and skip the insignificant details, but I included both in an attempt to inform the reader of even the smallest aspects of Holy Mother's life. In the eyes of a lover, everything related to the beloved is sweet and precious." How is it possible to know what will spark a devotee's heart? The Swami has done an invaluable service.

**IN MOTHER'S WORDS** "I show these girls (her nieces) due respect for their views.  
Remaining detached, I watch their movements so that they do not go to extremes."

## SARAH FARMER, SWAMIJI, AND GREEN ACRE

*This is the second in a series by Joan Shack exploring the spiritual heritage of Green Acre, located in Eliot, Maine.*

The *BOSTON EVENING TRANSCRIPT* of July 28, 1894 reported on Swami Vivekananda's first week at Green Acre: Each morning [he] may be seen attired in his flowing red robes and yellow turban, sitting cross-legged on the ground under a wide-spreading pine, and surrounded by a group of eager listeners, men and women, to whom he pours out freely his treasurers of knowledge and experience.

The towering Lysekloster pine under which Vivekananda taught stood on a hill a quarter of a mile from the Inn at Green Acre, far removed from all distractions. The pine became known as the Prophet's Pine or, as some write, the Swami's Pine. Representatives of other religions also taught, surrounded by their students, under pines in this same vicinity. Others taught in small tents set up near the Inn or in nearby open fields.

The classes under the Prophet's Pine were the first Vivekananda held in America. Sparse notes from the diary of Miss Emma Thursby, a distinguished vocalist, offer some insight into the nature of his talks. He touched on the following practical and philosophical concepts: learning to play consciously, seeking the highest, freedom of the soul, concentrating the power of the mind, and the deepest meaning of *Shivoham*, *Shivoham*, "I am everything!" Since Emma was not regularly at Green Acre that summer due to singing engagements, some or all of these notes were sent to her by Josephine Locke, who would have attended Vivekananda's classes regularly.

On August 3, 1894, Vivekananda spoke on the reality of God to a gathering in the big tent, his only public talk at Green Acre.

Regarding attendees at Green Acre, Vivekananda wrote of a speaker who was thought by some to be "under spirit control," and another who called himself a "mental healer." On the surface, the group was a mix, including leading thinkers and scholars of the time as well as practitioners of faith healing, witchcraft, and spiritualism. Vivekananda never operated on the surface, though; to him, the conference illustrated his teaching that religious growth never goes from evil to good but from good to higher realization. His 1895 letter to Sarah Farmer indicates this.

To Sarah, whose vision was the impetus for the conference, he wrote:

*There is a mass of thought which is at the present time struggling to get expression...It teaches that no situation is hopeless, and as such accepts every form of mental, moral or spiritual thought where it already stands, and without a word of condemnation tells it that so far it has done good, now it is time to do better..*

*The Green Acre meetings last summer were so wonderful, simply because you opened yourself fully to that thought...and because you took your stand on the highest teaching of this thought that the kingdom of heaven already exists.*

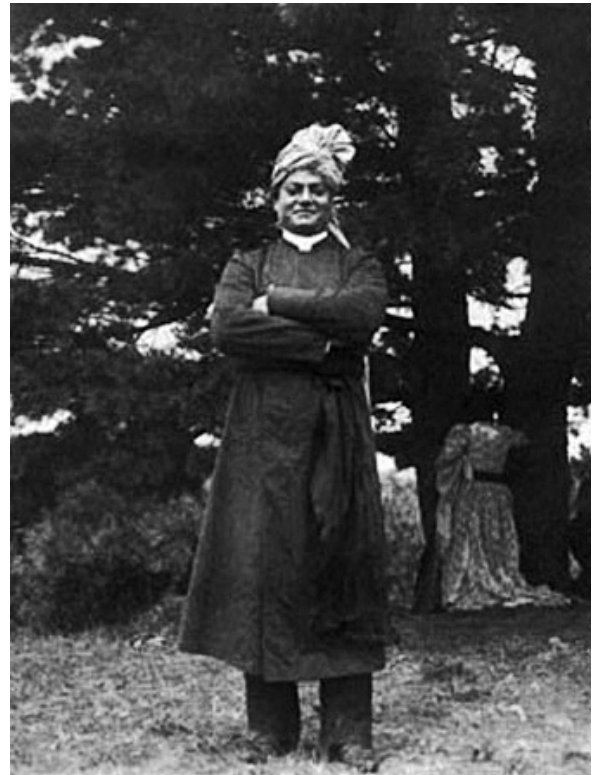
That same year, Sara Bull, who helped Miss Farmer organize the event, offered Vivekananda funds for his work in India. He replied:

*I sincerely believe that you ought to turn all your help to Miss Farmer's Green Acre work this year. India can wait...an immediate work at hand should always have the preference.*

In 1896, Vivekananda sent Swami Saradananda to the summer Green Acre conference and later Swami Abhedananda.

In her writings on Vivekananda, Marie Louise Burke suggests that as a result of the Green Acre classes, Vivekananda's attitude toward his work in the West changed. In letters to various friends and confidants, dated from late 1894 into 1895, an unfolding awareness of his world mission is evident. The following snippets have been taken from Swamiji's letters during this period.

*I find [that] I have a mission in this country also...this is a grand field for my classes...truth is my God, the universe is my country... I have a truth to teach, I, the child of God...you must not forget that my interests are international and not Indian alone.*



Swamiji at Green Acre in 1894

**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.

## REMEMBERING SWAMI TATHAGATANANDAJI

*Swami Tathagatananda served the Vedanta Society of New York as Resident Minister and Spiritual Leader from 1977 to 2016. An inspiring presence to members of Sri Sarada Society, he lent abiding support and guidance to the organization from the early days of its formation.*

During her visit to Calcutta in 1909, Sister Devamata spent a lot of time conversing with Swami Premananda. In a letter to her, he wrote: “You may out of your goodness hesitate to claim a moment of what you suppose to be my precious time, but I assure you that to all servants of my Lord, wheresoever in the three worlds he or she may be serving Him, I feel myself absolutely sold forever.” To young or old, man or woman, Indian or American, the swami gave his time. Numerous times over twenty-five years, I heard Swami Tathagatananda express the same sentiment—a sincere interest in and respect for anyone whose life was dedicated to Them. Reflecting upon the passing away of the Vedanta Society’s long-standing dedicated workers, Jeanne Genet in 1998 and John Schlenck in 2015, his extensive written remembrances expressed his appreciation and high regard for their dedicated service. In a letter to me, he wrote: “Without such dedicated workers (Western) Vedanta cannot function in U.S.A., or foreign countries.” More recently I heard him say, “If we cannot love others, if we cannot serve others, what are we here for?”—*Joan Shack*

### *The Fools’ Society*

*“I am fool number 1,”  
I heard Him say.  
Like to a magnet this other fool was attracted.  
I listened and learned.  
Wisdom, not in dogma, but in encouragement.  
All my foolishness was welcomed.  
A mountain of love, Shiva in Supreme meditation.  
A tornado of emotions.  
He engulfed and swallowed the venom of my fears.  
The obstacle of my excuses disappeared in a whirlwind.  
With His heavy step He seemed to cement my will.  
My weakness was crushed.*

*In His mirror I saw my strength.  
I open my eyes in His wide laughter.  
Each day, I am grateful to Life  
Because “Life is God.”  
The Sun is The Mother,  
Nourishing the seeds of strength He gave.  
Whoever is not “Grateful to The Sun” will be depressed.  
I face the sun and feel its warmth.  
I worship Life and share.  
Share, as I expand my heart, further, wider.  
In Holy Mother words: “No one is a stranger,  
My child. The whole world is your own.”  
Thank You, Mother Tathagatanandaji.*

—*Shraddha*

## KHOOKI: BRITAIN’S GIFT TO INDIA

*In honor of her 150th birth anniversary celebration beginning this Fall, we offer part two of an article on Margaret Elizabeth Noble, Sister Nivedita, by Prem Tilak Mallik, outlining her contributions to India. To Holy Mother, she was the beloved Khooki, meaning “beautiful, lovable, young girl.”*

The reader may recall that Swamiji had inspired India’s noted industrialist Jamsetji Tata to invest in India’s future, stressing that the establishment of a training and research center in steel science would give rise to his vision of revitalizing India’s universities. Regrettably, Jamsetji’s proposal was met with utmost indifference on the part of the British government, as British industry continued utilizing Indian resources wantonly. On Swamiji’s return to India from the U.S., Jamsetji sent a soul-searching letter for an intensified campaign. “I am of the opinion that if such a crusade in favour of asceticism of this kind were undertaken by a competent leader, it would greatly help asceticism, science and the good name of our common country; and I know not who would make a more fitting general of such a campaign than Vivekananda.” Soon Nivedita would step up in the forefront of that effort.

The first day of the actual reckoning came on December 31, 1898, when members of the Provisional Committee met with Lord Curzon, British India’s Viceroy-designate, to discuss the project. Curzon turned it down with disdain and sarcastic comments. With prospects getting bleaker by the day, Jamsetji sent his sister and a trusted associate to seek Vivekananda’s counsel. This is where Sister Nivedita, along with Miss Josephine MacLeod and Mrs. Ole Bull, American supporters of Vivekananda, were roped into the effort. Strategy in place, Vivekananda had *PRABUDDHA BHARATA* magazine issue a public exhortation: “We are not aware if any project at once so opportune and so far reaching in its beneficent effects was ever mooted in India as that of the Post-Graduate Research University of Mr. Tata.”

Enter Sir William Ramsay, who replaced Curzon. Alas, he too shot down the proposal. Jamsetji became so frustrated that he was about to give up the project. But Vivekananda and his lieutenants now applied ‘Plan B.’ Sister Nivedita and

Continued on Page 4: *KHOOKI*

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Continued from Page 3: *KHOOKI*

Mrs. Bull met with George Birdwood of the Education Ministry in England. He was just as caustic, informing them: “We govern India primarily for our good—with an amiable attempt to make that good more or less consistent with the wealth and happiness of India but not as humbugs would make the world believe, for the good of the governed.”

When Birdwood insisted that the existing universities were already struggling, Nivedita sharply reminded him: “But all the universities in fact are completely in government control.” Birdwood claimed that “in 50 years, Indians have not been able to excel in any field of literature, science and philosophy,” to which Nivedita retorted: “For the first time in its history, The Royal Society offers the whole of its programme from opening till the Xmas holiday, to be filled by the Hindu Professor (J.C. Bose) of Physics.” Although derided, Birdwood would not budge from his stated position.

Neither would Nivedita give up her fight, eventually proving that the pen is mightier than the sword. She wrote impassioned letters to influential people the world over, including the philosopher William James, well known educationists, sociologists, geographers, philanthropists, biologists, and the pioneering town planner Patrick Geddes—all with a view to garnering moral support for preserving the “Indianness of this University Project.” The pressure exerted on the British Government eventually brought forth the desired result, though with a grudging acquiescence, in 1909, establishing the foundation of what is today the prestigious Indian Institute of Science.

### *Heeding An Unfolding Call*

Initially, Nivedita was optimistic about British rule in India. Subsequently she saw through the brutal side of the British Raj and realized that for India to prosper, it was imperative for India to gain independence. Therefore, she devoted herself wholeheartedly to the cause of opposing the British rule.

After Swamiji’s demise she publicly dissociated herself from the newly formed Ramakrishna Mission, being acutely aware of the inconvenience her political activities caused the Order. However, she maintained a cordial relationship with all the brother disciples of Swami Vivekananda, with Swami Saradananda helping her in her charitable and educational activities—apparently all with the blessings of Holy Mother. Equally noteworthy, working on her own, she kept in direct contact with young revolutionaries of Bengal. She also exposed Lord Curzon after his speech in the Calcutta University in 1905 by making it public that, in his book *PROBLEMS OF THE FAR EAST*, Curzon had proudly described how he had given false statements about his age and marriage to the president of the Korean Foreign Office to win his favor. This revelation, published in prominent Indian newspapers, caused a furor, forcing Curzon to apologize. In this same year, Curzon initiated the partition of Bengal, a major turning point in the Indian independence movement. Nivedita played a lead role in planning strategy as well as providing financial and logistical support, while leveraging her contacts to get information from government agencies to forewarn the revolutionaries.

It may not be widely known, even in India, that the famous Tamil poet Subramanya Bharathi was swayed by Nivedita, after meeting her only briefly, in 1906, to work throughout his life for the freedom of women in the country.

Nivedita’s intense respect for India is reflected in what she wrote in the editorial of *KARMA YOGIN*, the nationalist newspaper of Aurobindo:

*The whole history of the world shows that the Indian intellect is second to none. This must be proved by the performance of a task beyond the power of others, the seizing of the first place in the intellectual advance of the world. Is there any inherent weakness that would make it impossible for us to do this? Are the countrymen of Bhaskarya and Shankaracharya inferior to the countrymen of Newton and Darwin? We trust not. It is for us, by the power of our thought, to break down the iron walls of opposition that confront us, and to seize and enjoy the intellectual sovereignty of the world.*

Swami Vivekananda’s reckoning that Sister Nivedita was Britain’s “gift to India” is reflected in her epitaph: “Here reposes Sister Nivedita who gave her all to India.” This poem, “Benediction,” penned by Swamiji to Sister Nivedita amply attests to how he revered her:

*The mother’s heart, the hero’s will,  
The sweetness of the southern breeze,  
The sacred charm and strength that dwell  
On Aryan altars, flaming, free;*

*All these be yours and many more  
No ancient soul could dream before—  
Be thou to India’s future son  
The mistress, servant, friend in one.*

### **THESE CORRECTIONS TO OUR SPRING ISSUE HAVE BEEN MADE TO THE ONLINE EDITION**

1) The *SRI RAMAKRISHNA SHATAKAM* was written by Pramadas Mitra. In the article by Sravani Bhattacharjee, we mistakenly identified Swamiji as the author. 2) The article on Courtenaye Olden was co-authored by Diane Crafford and Susan Salm. 3) Prem Tilak Mallik’s name was misspelled.

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