

Dedicated to Holy Mother

Sri Sarada Society *Notes*

Spring 2016 Volume 22, Issue 1

BEHIND THE VEIL

by Sravani Bhattacharjee

After Belur Math was established in 1897, Holy Mother occasionally resided nearby in a bungalow, commonly known as Nilambar Mukherjee's garden house. Once during her stay there Swami Virajananda came to her to convey a message from the Math. Swami Virajananda, who would later become the sixth president of the Ramakrishna Order, was only a young monk then. Mother affectionately called him Kalikrishna, his premonastic name. Finding Mother by herself, engaged in household chores, her face covered with the end of her sari, Kalikrishna spontaneously revealed a deep regret in his heart by saying, "Mother, in spite of having so many opportunities to see the Master when he was alive, I failed to do so. I am so unfortunate."

He told the Mother that he was fourteen years old when the Master left the body. He had grown up in a neighborhood that the Master often visited and members of his family had enjoyed the Master's holy company. But alas, he had never joined them. Hearing this, Mother remained silent. So Kalikrishna uttered these same words again. Mother was still silent. Seeing Mother's seeming indifference he asked, "Mother, don't you listen to your son's agony?"

At this, the Mother threw the veil from her face and looking into his eyes replied, "Why are you cursing yourself, my child? You are seeing him."

This left him speechless; his mind withdrew inward in an effort to fathom the meaning of those powerful words. Leaving the garden house after finishing his assigned duties, he thought to himself: Did Mother mean seeing her is the same as seeing the Master? Just then his eyes fell on the porch, where Mother stood raising her hands, as if in a sign of approval. Kalikrishna's heart was filled with a great peace.

Holy Mother expressed her unique identity with the Master on other occasions also. Understanding this identity opens new doors to our spiritual awareness. However, when we try to absorb this more deeply, many doubts arise.

Holy Mother as the Master's wife served him with undivided attention during the nine years she spent in his presence. After the Master's passing, she carried forward his spiritual mission. In unassuming ways she silently but steadily guided, nurtured, and established the spiritual ideals the Master wanted to disseminate. And yet they were so different in their looks, ways, and expressions. How then, can seeing the Mother be the same as seeing the Master?

To fathom its true meaning let us leave the boundaries of our limited thoughts and sense perceptions and dive into deeper realms of awareness. What does "seeing the Master" really mean? Swami Vivekananda describes the Master as one seeing whom, delusion vanishes. The *SRI RAMAKRISHNA SHATAKAM*, by Pramadadas Mitra, elaborates on the sublimity of the Master's being. Translated from *Sanskrit* the verse reads:

That Eternal and Universal, which is pure knowledge, infinite bliss, the cause of the entire universe, an ocean of compassion, beginningless, endless, and beyond nature, has appeared in this world in the form of Sri Ramakrishna.

The finite form of the Master is a vivid representation of the formless Absolute. Can this be equally true with Holy Mother? An incident from their lives may help us find an answer to this.

On an auspicious night during the summer of 1872, the Master summoned Holy Mother to his room and worshipped her, following the injunctions of the scriptures, as the Divine Mother of the Universe. At the end of the worship, he consecrated the fruits of his intense austerities, his spiritual realizations, and himself at the feet of Holy Mother. Such an act is unheard of in the spiritual history of mankind. Toward the end of this intensely powerful worship, both the Master and the Mother were immersed in a deep state of *samadhi*. In that transcendental union of the Spirit, the worshipper and the worshipped realized their identity as actually being Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss Absolute.

By the performance of that great rite, the Master invoked in Holy Mother the same spiritual consciousness and

Continued on page 2: BEHIND THE VEIL

IN MOTHER'S WORDS "If one is without kindness, how can one be called a human being?"

"The purpose of one's life is fulfilled only when one is able to give joy to another."

Continued from page 1: *BEHIND THE VEIL*

power that was manifesting itself through his own personality. He made her a participant in all his austerities and spiritual attainments and a vivid manifestation of that Absolute Consciousness that he himself represented.

Holy Mother's future actions were all, therefore, devoid of any personal object, but meant to fulfill the great mission that was being worked out through the Master. She carried herself like any other woman of those days, abiding by the social customs. Her tremendous power was concealed behind a veil, a veil which our ordinary, mundane awareness cannot penetrate. But to a real seeker of Truth, she removed that veil and showed her true nature, a nature that is one with the Absolute Consciousness in a very real sense. Looking at her face, when we can see that reality, would itself be true spiritual attainment. ❀

A REFLECTION OF THE GURU'S INSTRUCTION

Diane Crafford and Susan Salm share their reflections of Courtenaye Olden (1917-2015), a devoted disciple of Swami Pavitrananda and actively selfless member of the Vedanta Society of New York.

To know Courtenaye Olden, to be with her, was to be immersed in the words and teachings of her guru, Swami Pavitranandaji. She was the personification of "guru bhakti"—every action, every moment of her day was related to the thoughts and ideas of the swami. She lived her life and behaved according to what he taught.

In February of 1951, Courtenaye and her husband attended the first lecture that Swami Pavitrananda gave in the West as the new minister of the New York Vedanta Society. In 1954 they became members and intimate devotees and workers at the Center. In 1964, Courtenaye moved from her palatial suburban home in Westchester to a modest studio apartment in New York City, a two-minute walk from the Vedanta Center. Thereafter she was at the Center every day of the week, serving and cooking for Swami Pavitrananda daily. She helped with much of the swami's extensive correspondence and was one of the designated drivers for him as well as for visiting swamis and devotees.

Courtenaye attended every class Swami Pavitrananda gave. She had a formidable memory and was able to quote his teachings verbatim. She was an incessant note-taker, recording the wonderful tidbits of wisdom he would utter. The swami entrusted her with transcribing and editing his lectures for publication.

Her duties at the Center ran the gamut from cooking and serving meals, to serving as board member and holding the post of treasurer, with its many great responsibilities. Whatever Courtenaye did was her worship, and she was ready to do it joyfully. When Swami Pavitrananda requested her to instruct some of the new workers in the Center's kitchen, she did so, giving openly, lovingly, and unstintingly. One devotee stated, "It was a joy to work under her and with her."

She was motherly and protective of everyone she cared about. She was disciplined, planning activities and details down to the minute. She could be quite strict, while always loving, open-minded, and generous. She had a nickname for each person. With an affectionate comment she made everyone feel welcome and a close part of the work. Her genuine warmth and natural dignity made her a source of comfort to many, and they came to her often seeking conversation, advice, consolation, or the pleasure of her company. Because of these qualities the swami often requested her to speak to those in distress.

She was fearless in standing her ground, as much for others as for herself, and uncompromising with regard to what was right. As has been said of her: "She was incorruptible." Her judgment was fine-tuned and her alertness like a laser. Everything she said and did was honest to the core. She was a devotee who understood the practical application of spiritual thinking in daily life. The strength she gained from Vedanta was internalized, she lived it. She had endured many personal tragedies in life by always surrendering herself to Swami Pavitrananda's care and guidance and she had found safety at the Vedanta Society of New York. She knew that her inner world, her inner center as well as her Vedanta Center, were right there, and that her swami and her friends would always stand by her as she herself had done for them.

The following incident from Courtenaye's last days was told us by her devoted healthcare aide. Courtenaye was receiving hospice care at Calvary Hospital in the Bronx. She had not spoken since arriving at the hospital and it was believed she had lost that ability. A nurse came to tend to her. Courtenaye looked up at the nurse and said in a clear, strong voice, "I love you." It stopped the woman in her tracks. She had been caring for her for days and these were the first and only words she heard from her. That was the final statement of Courtenaye's life: All the years of study of Vedanta, of caring for others, and following to the letter the instructions of her guru—Love. At the most difficult and painful point of her life: "I love you." And she really did love everyone around her.

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.

PRAVRAJKA VIVEKAPRANA RETURNS TO THE WEST IN 2016

Revered Pravrajika Vivekaprana, a senior sannyasini of Sri Sarada Math, has accepted an invitation to travel to the East and West coasts of the U.S. in the fall of 2016. Her visit will herald the beginning of Sister Nivedita's 150th birth anniversary. A tour outline with contact information is given below.

The organizers of Pravrajika Vivekaprana's visit invite you to help with the expenses of the tour, including airline tickets, travel insurance, and visa costs. Tax-deductible donations may be given by a check payable to Sri Sarada Society and sent to P. O. Box 38116, Albany, NY 12203. Please note "Vivekaprana's visit 2016" on the check.

Pravrajika Vivekaprana is presently head of the retreat center of the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission at Pangot, district Nainital. She first lectured abroad in 1989 and since then has visited Argentina, Brazil, England, France, Germany, Holland, the United States, and Uruguay. She speaks from her own realization and understanding of Swamiji's teachings and does so in a way that this ancient Indian philosophy becomes relevant and practical to our daily lives.

East Coast Retreats: August 27–September 20

Contact: Caroline Williams by email at 2clwilliams@gmail.com or phone 732-456-4015
For accommodations at Vivekananda Retreat Ridgely in Stone Ridge, New York, please apply online at <https://ridgely.org/visiting-ridgely/> Early registration is encouraged as space is limited.



Vivekananda Retreat Ridgely
<https://ridgely.org>

Retreat 1—The Relationship between Sri Ramakrishna and Narendranath
Tuesday, August 30 through Friday, September 2, 2016 (Four-day retreat)

Symposium—Inspired to Action: Western Women and Swami Vivekananda
Sunday, September 4 through Monday, September 5, 2016

Sunday AM: Pravrajika Vivekaprana will speak on how Sister Nivedita presented the message of Swami Vivekananda in *The Master as I Saw Him*.

Sunday PM: An informal session on Western women inspired to action, including Pravrajika Gitaprana's presentation on "Events at Ridgely: Western Women and Swamiji."

Monday AM: Swami Yogatmananda speaks on "Swami Vivekananda and Western Women Disciples."

Retreat 2—Action, or Karma, As a Path to Freedom

Thursday, September 8 through Saturday, September 12, 2016
(Nine-day retreat—No class on September 12)

West Coast Retreats: September 21–October 17

Contact: Mary (Archana) Tamraz by email at maryarchana108@gmail.com or phone 209-217-4026
For accommodations at Mercy Retreat Center in Auburn, California, please contact Mary Tamraz.
Reservations made before May 1, 2016, will receive a discount.



Mercy Retreat Center
<http://mercycenter.org/>

Special Presentation—The Guru–Disciple Relationship between Sister Nivedita (Margaret Noble) and Swami Vivekananda
Saturday, September 24, 2016

At the First Unitarian Church, in Oakland, where Swami Vivekananda spoke in March 1900

Retreat 1—Understanding Raja Yoga for the West

Monday, September 26 through Friday, September 30, 2016

Retreat 2—The Universe and the Individual: The Macrocosm and the Microcosm

Monday, October 3 through Friday, October 7, 2016

Retreat 3—Inquiry into the Nature of the Seer and What is Seen

Monday, October 10 through Friday, October 14, 2016

All West Coast retreats begin with a community lunch on Monday and end after a community lunch on Friday.

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/>

KHOOKI: BRITAIN'S GIFT TO INDIA

Margaret Elizabeth Noble was born on October 28, 1867, in Dungannon, Tyrone County, Ireland. After spending much of her early childhood in Ireland, she attended college in Halifax, England, and eventually met Swami Vivekananda in London in 1895. In honor of her 150th birth anniversary celebration beginning this Fall, we offer Part One in a series on her contributions to India, adapted from an article by Prem Tilak Mallik, who observes: "Swami Vivekananda reckoned that she was Britain's 'gift to India' and made her one of his foremost disciples, naming her Nivedita, meaning 'one dedicated to God.' And to the Holy Mother she became the ever beloved Khooki, meaning 'beautiful, lovable, young girl.'"

Her destiny was to serve the people of India: as a teacher to little children and their mothers to start with, and later playing a leading role in India's freedom struggle and in the furtherance of science in India. Her service to the poorest of the poor in sickness, famine, and flood is legendary.

When the Call Comes...

From her grandfather, Margaret Noble inherited measureless courage, boundless patriotism; from her father, tremendous compassion for the poor; and from her mother, great beauty, tenderness, abiding truth, sympathy, and unbridled kindness. She often went with her grandfather and her father to the homes of the poor, rendering service. Thus, even from her earliest years, service became a force of habit with her.

One day a certain friend of her father, a preacher, visited the family after serving in India as a missionary. He felt drawn to this cute little girl. When he said good-bye, he told his little friend, "India, my little one, is seeking her destiny. She called me once." Hearing this, Margaret's heart was filled with inexpressible joy.

Her father had a meager income as a clergyman. Yet out of his slender means he gave his utmost to the less fortunate. Death claimed him at the age of thirty-four, ending his life of selfless service. At the last moment he called his devoted wife and whispered, "When the call comes from Heaven, let Margaret go. The little one will reveal her talents and do great things."

This was indeed prophetic. From the very beginning, she was a very zealous child, always full of spirit. At the early age of eight, she had already had the realization that religion is not about having belief in the doctrines, but rather about searching for the divine light that would bring enlightenment.

Khooki's Valor

London, 1895: Margaret Noble comes across Vivekananda. The rest is history. His principles and teachings had such an imprint on her mind and heart that they brought forth a major change in the way she saw and lived her life. Vivekananda, of course, had assessed her innate fire and passion as well as her ability to transform the society of India.

When she arrived in India, women's education barely existed. In 1898, amidst this backdrop Margaret, now having been given the name Nivedita by Swamiji, established a school in Calcutta for girls who were deprived of even basic education. Her aim was to bring about an improvement in the lives of Indian women, especially those of the lower castes and lacking social standing. We are given insight into Nivedita's child-like simplicity from Saralabala Sarkar's account of Holy Mother's coming to visit the school. Saralabala, a teacher at the school and a famous writer of that era, tells of Nivedita's anticipation of and unbound joy on the occasion.

Nivedita's selfless service to humanity is awe inspiring, especially her dedicated vigil and service when the plague became endemic in the slums of Calcutta. As an intellectual and educator, she was probably beyond compare. Not surprisingly, she had excellent rapport with many intellectuals of the Bengali community—notably, the scientist J.C. Bose; Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore; and Aurobindo Ghose, one of the major contributors towards early nationalism. Perhaps what is not so widely known in the West is that during the later years of her short 43-year life she was vigorously engaged in activities that promoted the cause of India's independence, and that her inspiring writings expressed the pan-Indian nationalist views that proved to be a motivating force for people from all walks of life.

Nivedita launched an all out effort to secure India's higher education system against the obstreperous British establishment. Her ammunition: missionary zeal to establish higher education through real universities set to infuse and encourage the learning, scientific temperament, and research that would inspire reverence and impart self-reliance. Actually, she took up the baton where Vivekananda had left it. Swamiji had inspired India's noted industrialist Jamshetji Tata to invest in India's future, stressing that establishing a training and research center in steel science in India would be of great benefit to the country, in keeping with India's rich tradition of learning. Jamshetji also envisioned Swamiji's dream of an International University, or of redeveloping the existing universities on the model of a post-graduate university like those in the United States.

To Be Continued