

Dedicated to Holy Mother

Sri Sarada Society *Notes*

Spring 2017 Volume 23, Issue 1

A CENTURY LATER

by Archana (Mary Tamraz)

Pravrajika Vivekaprana, a senior sannyasini of Sri Sarada Math and the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, came to America in the fall of 2016 to inaugurate celebrations for the 150th birth anniversary of Sister Nivedita. During her stay on the West Coast, Vivekaprana Mataji spoke at the historic First Unitarian Church of Oakland on Saturday, September 24, 2016, in Hamilton Hall, the sanctuary of the church in which Swami Vivekananda himself had spoken. Swamiji gave several talks here between February 28 and April 2, 1900. These included *The Resemblance Between Vedanta and Christianity*, *The Laws of Life and Death*, *The Reality and the Shadow*, *The Way to Salvation*, *Manners and Customs of India*, *Arts and Sciences of India*, and *The Ideals of India*.

In her talk on “The Guru—Disciple Relationship Between Sister Nivedita (Margaret Noble) and Swami Vivekananda,” Mataji raises this question before a present-day gathering: “Why are these special teachers called gurus?” Continuing, she explains that “Gurus take you from one level of evolution to another so that you understand that the dynamism that is needed in human evolution has to have very deep motivation. If you want to transcend from one level to another, you need to take charge of your energy whether it is physical or intellectual or emotional and make it one-pointed through the method of concentration and discipline....The final obstacle in our evolution is our own personality....Many times these likes and dislikes and bits and pieces of information that we gather can become something like a prison house...We need to get out of this prison house....Evolutionary process demands the dynamic movement of the mind. Turn it towards one specific purpose...which would be transcendence of the human personality itself.”

Swamiji came to America and gave the very ultimate level of human evolution: that non-dual psychology that every human being is Divine. “We are not ready to accept that there is something deeply spiritual about me, some Beauty, something tremendously wonderful that will give me Joy. This was the idea Swamiji wanted to give to humanity.” He chose Sister Nivedita to help him with the work of educating girls. “Society gets nurtured through women. Unless women all over the earth reclaim that position, civilization will die.” A video of Pravrajika Vivekaprana’s complete talk can be viewed at <http://www.maasamiti.org>.

The First Unitarian Church of Oakland remains a significant cultural and architectural treasure in America. It is listed as a California Historical Landmark and is included on the National Register of Historic Places. The building site was purchased in 1888 and construction of this solid masonry Romanesque Revival style church was completed in September 1891. With the exception of the famous stained glass windows, only materials from California were used in the original construction. The dramatic redwood arches in Hamilton Hall were built of first growth redwood harvested from the Oakland/Berkeley hills. At that time, these redwood arches formed the widest span in any building west of the Mississippi River.

The chair in which Swami Vivekananda sat is preserved at the entrance of Hamilton Hall, with Swamiji’s picture overhead. A brass plaque in his memory adorns the Hall’s podium as well. Pravrajika Vivekaprana spoke in this historical setting a little more than a century later before a gathering of over 125 people.



IN MOTHER’S WORDS “Disease and austerity are the same thing.

One may destroy the results of past actions through austerity and also through disease.”

Chaitanya's Birthday

i lost, my molten being was
 Redefined in His grip.
 I was His perfect complement with
 Every move.
 And he wanted to know
 And I told him
 "There is no one else."
 And he began to seal off the final exit
 Of the cloister that offers my wandering soul a home.
 My freedom stands
 Challenged by the words He pours into my open soul
 "No one ever died of longing."



PRAVRAJIKA SATCHITPRANA RETURNS THIS SUMMER

Those who have come to know Pravrajika Satchitprana will especially welcome news of her return to the United States this summer, arriving July 28. Pravrajika Satchitprana is a senior sannyasini of Sri Sarada Math, stationed at its headquarters in Dakshineswar, Kolkata. She has travelled extensively throughout India, Europe, Australia, and the Americas, teaching the principles of Vedanta. Her last tour in the United States was in 2014.

During this visit Mataji will be giving classes and retreats in three locations on the East Coast:

- 1) Vivekananda Retreat, Ridgely in Stone Ridge, New York
- 2) The Vedanta Society of Greater Washington, D.C. in Silver Springs, Maryland
- 3) The Vedanta Society of Providence, in Providence, Rhode Island

Joan Shack and Caroline Williams are the organizers of this summer's visit. They invite you to help with the expenses of the tour, which include 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 "Summer 2017" on the check.

For a full tour itinerary of programs with Mataji in each location, as well as additional information about the retreats listed below, please contact Joan at presma@aol.com or 518-869-6088.

*The following retreats are being held at Vivekananda Retreat, Ridgely.
 Please note the different instructions regarding accommodations for each.
 Early registration is encouraged as space is limited.*

Retreat 1: Bhagavad Gita, Chapters 10 and 11—August 3 through August 9

For accommodations at Vivekananda Retreat, Ridgely, apply online at <https://ridgely.org/visiting-ridgely>

Retreat 2: Meditation Intensive for Women—August 15 through August 19

The daily program will consist of two forty-five minute study classes on the Ashtavakra Samhita, three meditation periods, times for private readings, and evening satsang. Silence throughout the day is requested.

Note: This intensive is being held in the Casino guest house at Ridgely, operating independently of the Vivekananda Retreat staff. Therefore, please contact Joan for making reservations.

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.

JOIN "NOTES" ONLINE

After 23 years in publication, we have decided to end publication of the print version of *SRI SARADA SOCIETY NOTES* with this issue. We have chosen to continue publishing articles online.

Unlike the past, when we made PDF versions of our print newsletter available, the new *SRI SARADA SOCIETY NOTES ONLINE* is completely internet based. This means that the display adapts to computer, tablet, and smart phone viewing. You will still be able to print individual articles, if you like.

Visit <http://online.srisarada.org/wp> to see the articles in this issue online. Expect some additions as you explore. If you do not already receive our email notices, you will need to join our email list. You can subscribe online or by emailing Joan at presma@aol.com with your request.

We appreciate your continued support though the years and hope that you will come with us as we embark on this new adventure. We welcome your comments and continuing article submissions.

IN MEMORY OF MY TEACHER AND FRIEND

by Gloria Maité Hernández

Note from the author: Triveni (Chabedia) Popat was born in Karachi, British India, on October 27, 1927, and passed away in Massachusetts on November 6, 2016. She studied Social Sciences at the Banaras Hindu University, and received an MA in sociology from the University of Texas in Austin. Triveni's involvement in the Gandhi liberation movement resulted in three incarcerations and a lifelong commitment to freedom, equality, and social justice. From her teenage years, Triveni was involved with the Ramakrishna Order. She was a close disciple of Swami Ranganathananda and Swami Sarvagatananda. Together with her husband Pran, Triveni served and frequently hosted monks and devotees from the Vedanta Centers of Providence and Boston in their home. Following are reminiscences of Triveni drawn from our friendship during the last twelve years of her life.

If I had to think of only one word to describe Triveni, that word would be *rasa*. In Sanskrit, as in Hindi, the word *rasa* has several meanings, and each of them can be said to relate to Triveni. The most common meaning of *rasa* is “taste,” both the palatal taste and the taste of the arts, the taste of beauty. Triveni was not only a great cook who enjoyed hosting family and friends, but she manifested an artful beauty that remained with her to the end of her life. Being a dancer and an exceptional yoga teacher, Triveni had trained her body with *rasa*. Every movement of her arms, hands, or eyes radiated beauty. But she had also trained her spirit. And when her body started weakening, Triveni's inner *rasa* was revealed.

Of the twelve years that I knew Triveni, it was only in the first two or three years that she was still capable of moving around and engaging in long conversations. During that time, she taught me many subjects: yoga, how to cook mixing all the right ingredients—particularly turmeric, which according to Triveni can be used for everything from a cure for pimples to an indispensable spice. She also taught me how to give massages, how to practice pranayama, how to be patient, and how to be spiritually free and confident. These teachings were already a lot to digest.

But the real teachings began when Triveni's daily habits were interrupted by the onset of Alzheimer's disease. Slowly and painfully, she had to give up everything that commonly defines a person's identity: her independence, her capacity to make decisions, her productivity, and even her speech. Deprived of the ability to follow up on her own actions and intentions, Triveni's spirit quieted down. A very pure love rose from within. Another meaning of *rasa* is “essence.” And Triveni's essence was joyful love.

When she could still walk, members of the community would take turns bringing her to the Providence Center for classes. Once we were running late for the class and Triveni was very quiet. I was concerned because she had not spoken to me at all during the trip. As we approached a traffic light, I sped up and managed to pass while it was turning red. Triveni then looked at me with big eyes and a smile, and said “Yes”! That “Yes,” along with her open eyes, has stayed in my mind as a sign of fearlessness, although that night she didn't speak again.

One of my most beautiful memories of Triveni was one day that I took her to a butterfly exhibit at Roger Williams Park, Rhode Island. We walked very slowly, as she contemplated every leaf and every small petal of every flower. It was like a magnified experience of the beauty of nature. The butterflies came and sat on her open palm, and she was as if communicating with it all, the leaves, the flowers, the butterflies. I made it my purpose to not walk faster than Triveni. If she stopped, I stopped, and when she continued I would continue, as in a walking meditation. Together, we listened to the birds, felt the air, the heat of the sun. Her smile was infinitely sweet, but also intense, challenging.

When she could no longer welcome me at her doorstep, make me chai, or talk with me, Triveni would put all her love into her smile. I felt as if she was a life-giving fountain just waiting for me to come and sit next to her. Being with Triveni, in silence, looking at her smile, was simply healing. And I believe she knew it. That was the case on the last day that she could see me, Dussehra Day, October 11, 2016. I arrived around 10:30 in the morning, She was sleeping. I sat next to her and played some aratis on my phone. Then she became very alert and followed the rhythm of the music with her head. That day she allowed me to feed her lunch, and I remember repeating to her, “you are so beautiful.” She smiled and looked intensely at my eyes.

Many times I wondered what was it with this woman. What made her so powerful and attractive, even while being approachable and loving? Being with Triveni as death approached, watching her breathe in and breathe out, I understood that there was not an easy way into the mystery of Triveni's life. She not only travelled and died thousands of miles away from her birthplace, but accomplished greater distances of learning and transformation in this one lifetime, where some of us were fortunate to encounter her.



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/>

SARAH FARMER, SWAMIJI, AND GREEN ACRE

This is the final article in a series by Joan Shack exploring the spiritual heritage of Green Acre, located in Eliot, Maine. In the first article, Sarah Farmer's efforts in establishing Green Acre were summarized. The second article addressed Swamiji's participation in its 1894 summer program. This article cites the growth of Green Acre and the influence of the swamis who participated in the summer programs from 1896 through the early 1900s.

You are working for what all founders, reformers of religion have been working, to make men and women feel their divine brotherhood, and bring them to look on earth as but another name for heaven. The wise people will tell you that this is impossible, but no harm is done by doing what seems impossible.

—Max Müller in a letter to Miss Farmer, 1896

Receiving Swami Vivekananda's request for help in the West, Swami Saradananda sailed for England in March 1896, arriving on April 1st. Within a few months, he departed for New York with J.J. Goodwin, Vivekananda's stenographer. A short four days after arrival, under Sara Bull's tutelage, Saradananda arrived at Green Acre by steamship from Portsmouth, Maine. On July 7 he gave his first public lecture in the big tent on the grounds to a group of seventy during a session of the Conference of Comparative Religions that was being held there. In a letter to the editor of the *BRAHMAVADIN* journal, dated July 23, 1896, Goodwin wrote: "[Saradananda] received a thoroughly sympathetic hearing for this, his first lecture in the West, [and] impressed people with the feeling that both from his manner, and the matter of his address, he had much to give them." Goodwin notes that an interesting discussion followed, highlighting the principles of his address "with still more telling force."

The years following Vivekananda's visit to Green Acre in 1894 were marked by growth in the summer school. In 1896, the first summer that Saradananda participated, the Monsalvat School for the Comparative Study of Religions was formalized under the direction of Dr. Lewis Janes, an eminent scholar. In this same year the *GREEN ACRE VOICE*, a weekly newsletter, was first published, announcing news of the programs. Goodwin's accounts of Saradananda's lectures appeared regularly in this publication. Children attended a nature school held in the woods and fields, which had been created just for them. And, for the first time, the general lecture courses were divided into conferences of a week's duration. In addition to the Conference of Comparative Religions, there was the Anthropology Conference, an Evolution Conference, and a Nature Conference, just to name a few. Saradananda attended these lectures, learning about the interests of Americans and thus preparing him for his future work in the West.

Saradananda also conducted a series of classes under the Prophet's Pine, the same Lysekloster pine under which Swamiji had taught. The topics were Raja Yoga, Karma Yoga, and finally Bhakti Yoga. Due to the number of interested individuals, he gave private instructions in Raja Yoga throughout the three-month conference. At the close of the season the *TRANSCENDENTALISTS IN TRANSITION* journal published this account:

This morning was the Swami's last talk, and as the privileges of the pine tree were not to be had, the group of disciples by the roadside under the trees, presented a unique picture to the passers-by who...paused in unsurprised silence to hear the words of the teacher. The topic, which was the love of God...the scene, and the whole atmosphere of the occasion made one understand as never before how the Master in Galilee went about teaching and preaching the kingdom of God, and how the people heard him gladly.

By the summer of 1897 Green Acre was known around the world. Some referred to 1897 as the "boom year." Visitors flocked in to attend lectures and be part of the intellectual atmosphere. As was the practice, admission to all lectures was free, though voluntary contributions were suggested. Saradananda was once again in residence, most likely in the Sunrise Camp, an encampment of tents on the grounds that accommodated overflow from the Inn.

The Monsalvat School brochure for August 2 through September 2, 1897 specified that the Swami would offer a "special course on the Vedanta Philosophy, Sankhya and Yoga Philosophy of India." Interestingly, the program praised "the teachers of Vedanta" for having allied themselves with various nonsectarian movements of the day, asserting the universality of truth. It so happened that sectarian influences were particularly dominant in America at the time. Saradananda gave a second series of lectures on the literature of India on Wednesday mornings. The first lecture in this series was "The Poetry of the Vedas."

A notable occasion that summer was the Parliament of Religions held on August 30 under the large tent, with its sides open to the field and river in order to accommodate the greater number in attendance. On the platform with Saradananda were Jain, Quaker, Unitarian, Episcopal, Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Free Church representatives. Sara Bull as founder of the Cambridge Conference was also part of the assembly. Sarah Farmer occupied the center spot. Dr. Jain was seated next to her.

Article concludes in the online version. Please visit <http://online.srisarada.org/wp>

NEWSLETTER STAFF EDITORIAL Joan Shack, Janet Walker, Jayanti Hoye, Ellen Paull

CIRCULATION Hari and Lakshmi Reddy • LAYOUT Ellen Paull, Jayanti Hoye