



JULY 2016 - Volume 14 Number 07

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

AUGUST Calendar

Birthdays

**Swami
Ramakrishnananda**
Wednesday, 12 August
(mistakenly posted July)

**Swami
Niranjanananda**
Saturday, 29 August

Kyokai Events

Bhagavad Gita Class
6th Saturday 14:15-16:00
Indian Embassy / Bring ID

Hamamatsu Satsanga
7th Sunday / contact
Ms Kato 090-8475-9864

Yoga Asana Sessions
Sundays Zushi Centre
Hanari 090-6702-2308

Gospel Class
9th Tuesday 14:00-16:30
Zushi Centre

Upanishad Class
20th Saturday 14:15-16:00
Indian Embassy / Bring ID

Zushi Monthly Retreat
Krishna Birth Celebration
21st Sunday 10:30-16:30
LIVE STEAMING 10:50 JST

Imabari Satsanga
27th~28th / contact
Shioji 090-9542-1477

**August Nara Narayan
CANCELLED**



✧ Thus Spake ✧

“Remain strong and steadfast in thy own faith, but eschew all bigotry and intolerance.”

- Sri Ramakrishna

“In whatever way men worship Me, in the same way do I fulfill their desires, it is My path that men tread in all ways.”

- Sri Krishna

Public Celebration: Sunday, July 10, 2016 Swami Vivekananda 153rd Birth Anniversary The Vivekananda Cultural Centre of the Indian Embassy Tokyo

The Vedanta Society of Japan (Nippon Vedanta Kyokai) held its annual public birth anniversary celebration of Swami Vivekananda (Swamiji) at the Indian Embassy of Japan's Vivekananda Cultural Centre (VCC) in Tokyo on July 10 from 1:30 p.m. to 5 p.m. in cooperation with the Society's Celebration Committee and the Indian Embassy of Tokyo. In keeping with the theme of this year's Public Celebration, 'Selfless Service,' the gallery section of the large basement complex at the Embassy's VCC, held a photo exhibition of "Relief Works" of the Ramakrishna Mission and the International Red Cross, as well as earthquake relief from both the Japanese Red Cross and the Vedanta Society of Japan.

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153rd Birth Celebration (from page 1)

Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) was a prophet of Modern India. He was a lover of humanity, a preacher of Universal Religion and a protagonist of internationalism. Learned people of both Eastern and Western heritages hold Vivekananda in high esteem for his universal outlook, holistic approach and soul-stirring messages. He founded the Ramakrishna Mission, an international spiritual organisation, in 1897 with the objective of realising the Self and serving humanity in a spirit of worship.

The purpose of the Vedanta Society of Japan's annual programme is to pay tribute to the great swami, to highlight the various facets of his personality and deliberate on his message, which not only helps us to solve the problems we face at different levels, but also elevates us to a higher state of consciousness.

The programme began with a Sanskrit 'Invocation' led by Swamis Medhasanandaji President of the Vedanta Society of Japan, Guest Speaker Swami Bodhasaranandaji, Assistant General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Mission, and two Japanese devotees. Swami Medhasananda then asked the assembly to stand and follow him as he led them in a universal prayer for blessings followed by a few moments in silent prayer for the victims of the recent Kumamoto earthquake.

Swami Bodhasarananda was then called upon to offer a flower bouquet at the feet of a life-sized framed photographic image of Swamiji. Assisted by Swami Medhasananda, both swamis then prostrated before this photo of Swamiji. Medhasananda then offered a brief 'Welcome Address' in English (see page 4) with the Japanese trans-
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153rd Birth Celebration (from page 2)

lation projected across the back of the stage. This format has been adopted for all celebration events; talks in English are projected in Japanese, while those in Japanese were projected in English, since interpreter translations are time consuming and can both interrupt a speaker's delivery rhythm and audience attention.

Sri Amit Kumar, Deputy Chief of Mission, Indian Embassy, was then called upon to release this year's Special Issue of the Society's 'Universal Gospel.' Next Guest Speaker Mr. Tadateru Konoe, President, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and Japanese Red Cross was asked to officially release the Society's new publication, 'Meditation and Spiritual Life' by Swami Yatiswarananda, Japanese translation Volume 2.

This was followed by Deputy Chief Sri Amit Kumar reading a brief message from the Embassy's Ambassador Sujana R. Jinoy, noting his pleasure that the Vedanta Society of Japan was holding a public celebration at the Embassy's Vivekananda Cultural Centre; and praising both Vivekananda's role in giving colonial India a sense of confidence and his service to the masses in expounding his concept of 'selfless service' and Karma Yoga. Deputy Chief Kumar then offered his own address in praise of Swamiji and his timeless, universal message (see page 5).

Swami Bodhasarananda then addressed the celebration's theme with a brief outline of the ideals behind the establishment of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission's humanitarian and social service activities. He then briefly discussed each of these activities and services (see page 8).

Mr. Tadateru Konoe then presented a lengthy and historical account of the founding in World War I and the growth and development of regional and national affiliates worldwide throughout the years (presented in the August Issue of TVK). Konoe-san detailed the Red Crosses role in establishing the Geneva Convention Ac-

cords and more recently its effort in the Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Mr. Kenichi Mitamura, Secretary, Vedanta Society of Japan, gave brief 'Vote of Thanks' before announcing a 30-minute refreshment break before the start of the Cultural Programme (presented in the August Issue of TVK). The programme MCs were Mr. Ranjan Gupta (English) and Ms. Satsuki Yokota (Japanese), who encouraged everyone to partake in the refreshments offered in the auditorium's large foyer where the Vedanta Society's Japanese and English publications were on sale.

The refreshment packet was a lovely samosa, a sweet, and piping hot chai offered this year as well by Mr. J. S. Chandrani, founder of Tokyo's Indian Restaurants, 'Spice Magic Calcutta'. The nice weather made it easy to find spots outdoors, too, to eat and chat.

The Cultural Programme began a little after 4pm with Ms. Shanti Izumida on a keyboard leading a group of 8 devotees in an original Japanese composition. They were followed by a large contingent of the Yoga School Kailas of Yokohama who sang another composition. Then both groups joined in on the last number with Ms. Shanti providing accompaniment and solo on violin.

The featured cultural performance was an exceptional dance drama depicting events in Swami Vivekananda's life by a Nupurnad group from India.

As every year, each attendee was given a large envelope containing the 153rd Birth Anniversary Programme Guide, the Special Issue of 'Universal Gospel', the Society's Bookstore Catalogue, a brochure on the Nippon Vedanta Kyokai and its activities, and a questionnaire to provide impressions of this event and possible suggestions for the next event.

With some 300 people having attended, the programme ended most successfully with a 'Vote of Thanks' given by Mr. J. S. Chandrani, as Secretary of the Organising Committee. •

Public Celebration: Sunday, July 10, 2016
Swami Vivekananda 152nd Birth Anniversary
The Vivekananda Cultural Centre of the Indian Embassy Tokyo

Welcome Address

by Swami Medhasananda,
President, Vedanta Society of Japan

Distinguished guests and dear friends,

May I offer a hearty welcome to you all to the public celebration of Swami Vivekananda's 153rd birth anniversary being held in the auditorium of the Vivekananda Culture Centre of the Indian Embassy here in Tokyo. We have been holding such public celebrations since 1994, and this year marks our 22nd annual event.

We are honoured that the Honourable Sri Amit Kumar, Deputy Chief of Mission, will grace this occasion as the President of this meeting. Our other guests of honour are Swami Bodhasaranandaji, Assistant General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission, a world-wide spiritual and philanthropic organisation headquartered in India, and Mr. Todateru Konoe, President of the Japanese Red Cross, and also President of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which do not need any introduction.

Swami Vivekananda (Swamiji), as many of you know, was decidedly the prophet of peace, harmony and goodwill to all walks of life in this Modern Age. Though he lived more than one hundred years ago, his soulful messages have become a source of tremendous inspiration to those who want a world of harmony, peace and goodwill.

Swamiji was also a staunch advocate of 'selfless service' which is the theme of today's addresses. Today's programme offers us a rare opportunity to hear about this topic and be inspired to practice it in our own lives from key executives of both the Ramakrishna Mission and the Red Cross; both of which have distinguished themselves over many years in the field of 'selfless service.'

Dear guests and friends, again, may I offer a most cordial welcome to you all for attending this august programme. •



THANKS TO ALL EARTHQUAKE DONORS

Dear All,

Our appeal for “Contributions for the victims of the recent Kumamoto earthquake” was uploaded to our homepage on April 28th. Our heartfelt thanks and gratitude go to those who kindly responded to that appeal and sent donations from within and outside of Japan.

Donations received so far are being and will continue to be utilised for the support of the earthquake victims under the supervision of “Mother’s Group” (A group of our devotees in Kumamoto).

We now would like to withdraw our appeal for Kumamoto donations effective June 30th, as the situation is no longer dire. Please also be informed that our appeal for donations for the victims of Nepal and East Japan earthquakes are also withdrawn effective June 30th.

Swami Medhasananda
President,
Vedanta Society of Japan

Swami Vivekananda 152nd Birth Anniversary
The Vivekananda Cultural Centre of the Indian Embassy Tokyo

Welcome Address

by Sri Amit Kumar, Deputy Chief of Mission, Indian Embassy, Tokyo



“Swami Bodhasaranandaji, Assistant General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Mr. Tadateru Konoe, President, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and Japanese Red

Cross, Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon!

Friends, let me begin by reading out the message of Ambassador Mr. Sujan R. Chinoy:

1. I am very pleased to note that the Nippon Vedanta Kyokai is organizing an event to commemorate the 153rd Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda on 10 July, 2016 at the Vivekananda Cultural Centre of the Embassy of India.

2. Swami Vivekananda was one of the great visionaries of modern India. He left an indelible influence on Indian society despite having departed at an early age. His thoughts and philosophy enthused our people and infused them with a sense of

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Deputy Chief Kumar (from page 5)

confidence at a time when India was under colonial rule. His enduring appeal is a testimony to the timelessness and universality of his message.

3. Swami Vivekananda had visited Japan on his way to the Chicago Congress of World's Religions in 1893. He was deeply impressed by many virtues of the Japanese people such as patriotism, hard work, power of assimilation, cleanliness and keen sense of aesthetics, prompting him to urge the Indian youth to visit Japan at least once in their lifetime. He in turn also left a deep impression on the many Japanese friends and admirers who interacted with him.

4. The theme for this event "Selfless Service" is particularly relevant in contemporary times as well as very apt in light of Swami Vivekananda's own conception of a service-oriented philosophy expounded through Karma Yoga, the path of selfless action, and organization of large-scale social service for the masses.

5. I convey my best wishes to the Organizing Committee of the Nippon Vedanta Kyokai on this occasion.

Friends, I continue now with my own thoughts on this occasion:

Swami Vivekananda, contemporary of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi, was one of the great visionaries from modern India. All these three leaders, all coincidentally born in the decade of 1860s, went on to shape and influence the destiny of India in many ways.

Swami Vivekananda did not live long but had a remarkable influence on Indian society. At that time, his philosophy transformed the society and helped the nation regain its confidence. At the time when the self-esteem of our people was low and many Indians looked at the West for idols and role models, Swami Vivekananda infused self-confidence and pride in them.

Swami Vivekananda blended deep spirituality with an intense spirit of critical inquiry.



On the Hindu religious practices at the time, he said, "the present religion of the Hindus is not in the Vedas, nor in the Puranas, nor in Bhakti, nor in Mukti"; he also added that the religion has degenerated into a state which is neither the path of knowledge nor that of reason; it the path of "Don't touchism". He rationally questioned how those who could become impure at the breath or touch of others purify others.

Swami Vivekananda's speeches at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 created a sensation. With his simple words delivered with fierce intensity he argued that religion is about self-realization; not talk, not doctrine, nor theories, however captivating they may be. It is about being and becoming, not hearing or acknowledging. For him, religion was the manifestation of the Divinity already in man.

It was this belief about the manifestation of the Divinity in every man that led him to formulate a definite philosophy of service expounded through Karma Yoga. He said, "I have understood this as the real truth -- god is present in every Jiva; there is no other God besides that. 'Who serves Jiva, serves God indeed'."

Swami Vivekananda drew upon the ancient wisdom contained in the Bhagwad Gita, which advocates the path of Karma Yoga. salvation through the path of selfless action. He particularly quoted the following verse, which is perhaps the single most referred verse from this book:

(con't page 7)

Deputy Chief Kumar (from page 6)

Karmanyē vadhikaraste
Ma Phaleshu Kadachana,
Ma karmaphalaheturbhurma
Te Sangostvakarmani.

The meaning of the verse is—
You have the right to work only,
but never to its fruits.
Let not the fruits of action be your motive,
nor let your attachment be to inaction.

The original verse was used by Lord Krishna to address self-doubts plaguing the mind of the mighty warrior Arjuna as he faced his cousins and uncles on the battle field. Lord Krishna urged him to discharge his responsibilities for the good of his country and the society moving beyond one's immediate circle of family and friends.

While the context of this verse was guiding an individual in doing the right thing for greater good without worrying or being attached to the outcomes, Swami Vivekananda expanded this concept to service. To him Karma meant either service to humanity or preaching. To do real preaching, none has the right except the Siddha Purusha, i.e. one who has realised the Truth. Since very few can become Siddha Purusha, the rest or most people must devote themselves to service of humanity. Indeed, he said, “to service, everyone has the right, and not only so, but everyone is under obligation to serve others, so long as he is accepting service from others.”

He thus explained the role of selfless service as a service which is rendered in the spirit of offering to God that is without the fruits of action, where the thought that 'I am doing this' is absent. The service is to be rendered without the desire for name or fame. He also advocated that Selfless service needs to be done in an organized way so as to reach out to many, to bring and involve those who want to help out, to learn to be part of the bigger 'I' and to make it sustainable.

While Swami Vivekananda kept away from politics, he regularly stressed the importance of liberty and equality, and raising of
Public Celebration: Sunday, July 10, 2016

the masses. He held the neglect of the masses and inferior position of women in society as the two causes of India's downfall. For him, mass mobilisation of people for service to others was a way to uplift the society.

Swami Vivekananda deeply influenced the leaders of the Indian freedom movement. Pandit Nehru acknowledged that many of his generation were powerfully influenced by him. His advocacy of large scale selfless service did indirectly prepare the Indian masses when Gandhiji started his work of mass political mobilisation in India.

What explains the timeless relevance of Swami Vivekananda's message? They remain relevant today because they dealt with fundamental matters and aspects of problems facing us, the society and the world. For example, the importance of service in today's world can hardly be downplayed. Indeed, we all can and should contribute individually or jointly to the betterment of the people and society around us in innumerable ways. And more often than not, this requires small steps. We are perhaps limited by our own lack of imagination and initiative in this respect.

Swamiji was also a great nationalist as well but not in the narrow sense of the word. He was open to critical inquiry. And therein lies the universality of his message. He did not accept something just because it was Indian or reject something just because it was Western; he responded to various influences judiciously, accepting what was good and rejecting that was deleterious.”

Thank you for your kind attention and for joining us on this occasion. •

• Thought of the Month •

“The best way to find yourself
is to lose yourself
in the service of others.”

- Mahatma Gandhi

Service Activities of the Ramakrishna Mission

A talk by Swami Bodhasaranandaji
Assistant General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Mission

The Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission are worldwide, non-political, non-sectarian, spiritual organizations which have been engaged in various forms of humanitarian, social service activities for more than a century.

Inspired by the ideals of renunciation and service, the monks and lay devotees of the Math and Mission serve millions of men, women and children, without any distinction of caste, religion or race, because they see the living God in them.

The organizations were brought into existence by Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886), the great 19th century saint from Bengal who is regarded as the Prophet of the Modern Age, and Sri Ramakrishna's chief disciple, Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), one of the foremost thinkers and religious leaders of the present age, who is regarded as 'one of the main moulders of the modern world', in the words of an eminent Western scholar, A.L. Basham.

Although Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission are legally and financially separate, they are closely inter-related in several ways and are regarded as twin organisations. These twin organisations have set in motion a non-sectarian, universal spiritual movement which has been silently working for more than a hundred years to catalyse the spiritual regeneration of humanity.

The chief catalyst in this ongoing transformation is India's ancient religious philosophy known as Vedanta. Although several other systems of philosophy arose in India at different times, they were confined to small groups. Vedanta alone has remained the dominant philosophy of India's religious tradition from Vedic times to the present day. In modern times this ancient system of thought has been purified, unified and energised by Sri Ramakrishna, and expounded

in the modern idiom by Swami Vivekananda and thus made available to all people all over the world without any distinctions of caste, creed or race.

The spiritual power generated by Sri Ramakrishna through his unprecedented spiritual practices got transmitted to different parts of the world through his direct disciples. At the moment Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission have 186 centres. Out of these 140 centres are in India and 46 centres are outside India. In foreign countries Ramakrishna Mission centres are generally known as Vedanta Societies. Besides, there are more than 1200 unaffiliated centres which are working on similar ideals as the Ramakrishna Mission. Thus the message and power of Sri Ramakrishna has been spreading in ever widening circles to form what may be termed the Ramakrishna Movement.

The Ramakrishna Order does not believe in conversion, nor does it indulge in the occult or the sensational. The Order places utmost importance on personal spiritual unfoldment and selfless service. Inspired by the idea of the harmony of all faiths, its centres encourage adherents of different faiths to meet in a spirit of friendship and mutual appreciation, and to learn from one another without having to give up one's own faith. In the words of Sri Ramakrishna: "God has made different religions to suit different aspirants, lives and countries ... all doctrines are only so many paths; but a path is by no means God Himself. Indeed one can reach God if one follows any of the paths with whole-hearted devotion."

Sri Ramakrishna himself set the goal for this organisation. One day, while the concept of compassion according to Vaishnava tenants was being discussed, Sri Ramakrishna, emerging from ecstasy, burst out: "Compassion for creatures! You fool! An insigni-

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Service Activities (from page 8)

ficant worm crawling on earth, you to show compassion for others! Who are you to show compassion? No, not compassion for others, but rather the service of man, recognising him to be a veritable manifestation of God.'

Everyone present there heard those words, but it was Vivekananda who alone understood the profound significance of this revelation. Outside the room he said to others:

"What a wonderful light I have discovered in these words of the Master! How beautifully he has reconciled the ideal of Bhakti with the knowledge of the Vedanta.... It is God alone who has manifested Himself as the world and the created beings. Serving man knowing him to be the manifestation of God purifies the heart and accelerates the aspirant's progress towards the goal."

Another day when Sri Ramakrishna asked Naren (earlier name of Vivekananda) what he wanted, Naren said he wished to remain in Samadhi, once in while coming down to the sense plane to eat a little food. There upon the Master exclaimed: 'Shame on you! Don't be such a small-minded person. You should be like a banyan tree affording shade and shelter to thousands.' Here again the idea of service to fellow men as the means of realisation was stressed.

Vivekananda thus understood that a Jnani must become a Vijnani. A jnani realises that Brahman alone is real, so he gives up the world. But the Vijnani takes the further step. Having known that there is nothing apart from Brahman, he realises that it is Brahman who is manifested as the world and its beings. So instead of running away from one's fellow beings, one must worship them by serving them—shiva jnane jiva seva. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'If God can be

worshipped through a clay image, then why not through a man?' The motto of the twin organisations given by Swami Vivekananda is Atmano mokshartham jagad hitaya cha, "For one's own salvation and for the welfare of the world".

The main sources of inspiration behind our service activities are two important incidents in the life of Sri Ramakrishna where we find that he himself initiated the welfare activities and set a model before us. The first incident is when Sri Ramakrishna, on his pilgrimage to Varanasi and other holy places, reached Deoghar, he became overwhelmed when he saw the miserable condition of the local people. He said to Mathur Babu: 'Give these people sufficient oil to cool their heads and each a piece of cloth to wear and feed them to their fill once.'

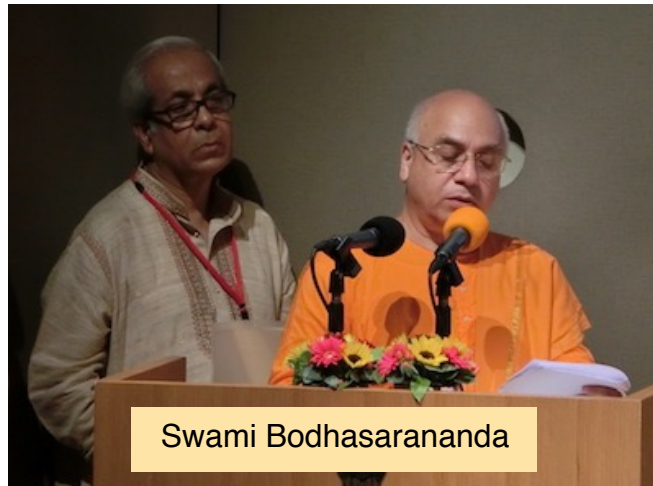
At first Mathur was a little hesitant. He felt if all the money was spent in serving the poor, then they will not be able to continue their pilgrimage. Sri Ramakrishna was not satisfied with his reply. There was an incessant flow of tears from his eyes to see the misery of the villagers. 'You rascal, I will not go to your Varanasi. I

will remain here with them, they have none to call their own; I will not leave them behind and go.' Mathur Babu had to buy the necessary things and distribute them as asked for.

Another instance is to the point. Sometime in 1870, Mathur Babu, while going out to visit one of his estates for collection of rent, took Sri Ramakrishna with him. His tenants, at that time, were passing through a crisis. For two consecutive years the harvest had failed, and this had brought the people of the locality to the verge of starvation. Ramakrishna's tender heart was shocked by the sight of appalling poverty around them.

He asked Mathur Babu to feed the tenants and help them financially instead of de-

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Service Activities (from page 9)

manding his dues from them. Swami Vivekananda also saw with his own eyes the utter poverty and helplessness of the poor masses during the course of his travels all over India as a wandering monk. He saw, as Romain Rolland says, 'God struggling in humanity.' He decided to dedicate his life to uplift their condition. One of the main reasons for his going to the West was to seek funds for his work in India.

After a year after the Ramakrishna Mission was founded on 1 May 1897, Calcutta was struck by an epidemic of plague. Swami Vivekananda was in Darjeeling at the time, resting. But when he heard the news, he asked his brother monks to start nursing and caring for the sick. They did so, even at the risk of their own lives. Swamiji himself supervised the work. Besides the monks, Sister Nivedita also nursed the sick, and so did the college students. The Mission needed money for the work but there was none. Swamiji then declared he would sell the newly purchased land at Belur Math in order to get the needed funds. Fortunately money came and the land had not to be sold.

Sometimes the Mission is mistaken for a social-welfare organisation. It is engaged in extensive social service, no doubt. But, basically, it is a spiritual organisation. Its object is to help people attain God-realization and also to help uplift human beings. The Mission has some remarkable features. The most important of them is that it is open to all—to Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, and so on. It does not matter what name you give your religion. What the Mission emphasises is that one should be truly religious and respect all religions as the same.

The service activities of the Mission can be classified into the following categories:

1. Spiritual and Cultural Services
2. Education for the Masses
3. Medical Services
4. Relief and Rehabilitation
5. Rural and Tribal Development
6. Welfare Work

Spiritual and Cultural Services

Swami Vivekananda wanted to deluge the world with spiritual ideas and also uplift the masses. He was of firm opinion that just as we should be physically and intellectually strong; we must also strengthen our spiritual foundation so that the so-called economic development does not destroy our moral fibre. With that end we have published a lot of literature on Sri Ramakrishna - Vivekananda and Indian cultural heritage in various languages. We also conduct lectures both within and outside our centres. We have published about 3500 titles in many languages through our various publications centres.

Education for the Masses

Swami Vivekananda's aim in starting various educational institutions was to teach the so called secular subjects like modern sciences, technology, vocational oriented sciences, arts, English, etc. on the one hand, and the so called spiritual subjects like the ancient Upanishads, Vedic literature, Sanskrit, etc. on the other hand, was to create a complete human being fully developed in head, heart and hand. He wanted that Belur Math should ultimately blossom into a full-fledged university. The Math and Mission run one University with five off-campus faculty centres, 12 colleges, including one Sanskrit college, 507 schools of different grades, two schools of languages, four polytechnics, six junior technical and industrial schools, 79 vocational training centres, 100 hostels, six orphanages, two centres for the disabled, one school of Vedic education, and 129 non-formal education centres. The total expenditure incurred on these activities was about 288 crore rupees during 2014-15. A few lakh of students are being benefited every year through the above institutions. One of the fundamental characteristics of the Ramakrishna Mission institutions imparting education is the active involvement and dedicated service of a large number of monks.

Medical Services

Seeing the suffering of the ailing monks at
(con't page 11)

Service Activities (from page 10)

Hardwar and Rishikesh, Swami Vivekananda commissioned his disciple Swami Kalyanananda to go and look after them. Another characteristic is that both sacred, as well secular. education is imparted to the students.

Living on alms, Swami Kalyanananda and his able assistant Swami Nishchayananda opened a two-room dispensary at Kankhal (a place in Hardwar) and attended not only to monks but also to other ailing poor people. Often the Swamis had to carry the patients on their back and clean their bodies. The orthodox monks hated them. They called them scavenger monks but now they are respected in high esteem. In course of time this dispensary became a very big hospital. Later the Mission started many hospitals at Varanasi, Brindavan, Mayavati, Kolkata, Lucknow, Trivandrum. During 2014-15 the Math and Mission had 14 hospitals (with 2332 beds), 113 outdoor dispensaries, and 59 mobile dispensaries. The hospitals and dispensaries are situated in cities, towns, and even in little villages in the Himalayas and are meant primarily for the poor. More than 81 lakh patients were treated in these medical centres in 2014-15. Besides these, a considerable number of medical camps are organised, mostly in rural areas, where thousands of patients are treated and more than 11,000 operated on for cataract free of cost. The Math and Mission run 7 nurses' training centres where about 700 students are trained in nursing every year. 3 Old age homes are also maintained. During 2014-15 a sum of about 187 crore rupees was spent on medical service.

Relief and Rehabilitation

The history of the Ramakrishna Mission's relief services is as old as that of the Mission itself because its first organised relief work was conducted by Swami Akhandananda hardly two weeks after the Mission was founded in May 1899 by Swami Vivekananda. Swami Akhandananda drew inspiration for his humanitarian services from his teacher, Sri Ramakrishna who used to say, 'If God can be worshipped through a clay image, then why not through a man?' When Swami Akhandananda while

travelling as a wandering monk, reached Murshidabad, he was shocked to see the misery and utter helplessness of the local people due to famine. Though a penniless monk, he prayed to Sri Ramakrishna every day with tears in his eyes to enable him to serve those poor people. Swami Vivekananda encouraged him and sent him Rs. 150 with the instruction to start the work immediately. Thus began the first relief work of the Ramakrishna Mission and it marked a new phase in the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement.

The next most important relief work was when the plague first broke out in Kolkata in the year 1898 and then it reappeared in 1899. The people panicked and started moving out of the city. Swami Vivekananda was then resting in Darjeeling. Hearing the tragic news, he rushed to Kolkata and started relief service.

Over the last century, various relief operations were conducted whenever calamities occurred. Relief services are generally undertaken by the Mission whenever there is any calamity. Calamities are of two types: natural and man-made. Flood, famine, drought, earthquake, cyclone, tidal wave, forest fire, etc. constitute natural calamities, while riots, communal disturbances, arson, accidental fire, etc. fall under the category of man-made calamities. As soon as the news of a calamity is heard over the media, the Mission immediately sends a team to the affected area to assess the extent of damage and determine the exact requirement of the affected people.

Relief work is generally conducted in 3 phases: Primary relief, Rehabilitation, and Follow-up programmes. When large number of dwelling houses has been devastated by the calamity, steps are taken to rehabilitate at least the worst affected people. Some major relief and rehabilitation operations conducted by the Mission are: Kurukshetra

Refugee Relief and East Pakistan Refugee Relief when Partition of India took place in 1947, Burma Evacuees' Relief in 1948, Bangladesh Evacuees' Relief in 1971, Andhra Pradesh Cyclone Relief and re-

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Service Activities (from page 11)

habilitation in 1977-78, Gujarat Earthquake Relief in 2001, etc. Relief and Rehabilitation work has not been confined to India alone. Whenever occasions arose, relief services were extended to Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh. Primary relief work was also done in Russia in 1992, in Japan during Tsunami and recently in Fiji. Lot of money is spent for the purpose every year.

Rural and Tribal Development

In India the tribal people generally live in secluded places, like forests and hills, away from the advanced sections of society. Around 1966, a new field for the Mission's tribal service opened up when an invitation came from the Government of India to start centres in Arunachal Pradesh on the borders of China and Japan. In that inaccessible place Ramakrishna Mission started 3 centres, viz at Along, Narottam Nagar and Itanagar, the first two being educational and the third, a hospital centre. The Mission is doing commendable work there.

With this valuable experience, the Ramakrishna Mission now ventured into a new field of tribal work. In the Narainpur district of Madhya Pradesh, Abujhmarh (meaning unknown hills) is a hilly tract spread over an area of 25,000 square kilometres. Here lives a particular tribe over the last 800 years, totally unaware of civilisation. When the government felt helpless in trying to reach there through their government machinery, they requested Ramakrishna Mission to take up this challenging work. The area is infested with Maoists. The Mission is carrying on education, medical and agricultural work in the area, which has won many awards for us.

For rural and tribal people, the Math and Mission run 2 institutes of agriculture and 8 rural development institutes. Besides, farmers are taught improved methods of

cultivation and also provided with agricultural inputs and financial help. Projects such as construction of toilets and pucca (high quality construction) houses, wasteland development, holding farmers' fairs; soil testing, planting of fruit and forest trees, etc., are undertaken. Drinking water is provided by digging borewells and tube wells.

Welfare Work

Both the headquarters and its branches provide scholarships and stipends to a large number of students, medical aid to poor patients and monetary help to aged and destitute men and women. In 2014-15 a sum of Rs. 16.6 crore was spent for these purposes. This was in addition to the huge sums spent by our educational institutions for the benefit of poor students and by the hospitals and dispensaries for the treatment of poor patients. The twin organisations serve women through the maternity sections of their hospitals, old age homes for women, schools of nursing, self-help groups and vocational training centres for rural women and providing monthly allowance to widows.

If the Ramakrishna Math and Mission have attained to its present stature, it is needless to say, it is because of love, sympathy and benevolence of lakhs of devotees. The large-hearted public and also benevolent institutions at home and abroad form the major sources of finance for the Mission's service activities. Both Central and State Governments also help us to some extent in running some educational institutions by way of giving grants. I am sure we will continue to serve the needy people for centuries with your help and good wishes.

Thank you. •



Embassy Gate Announcement



Foyer Reception and Bookstore



Relief Works Exhibition



Kumamoto Victims Remembered



'Meditation & Spiritual Life' Release



In the Green Room



Serving Refreshments



Enjoying Recess



Swamis Seeing Off Mr. Konoe



Devotees Sing



Kailas Yoga Group Sings



Combined Group Sings



Nurpurnad Group Dances



• A Story to Remember •

The Old Carpenter

An elderly carpenter was ready to retire. He told his employer-contractor of his plans to leave the house building business and live a more leisurely life with his wife enjoying his extended family. He would miss the paycheck, but he needed to retire. They could get by. The contractor was sorry to see his good worker go and asked if he could build just one more house as a personal favor.

The carpenter said yes, but in time it was easy to see that his heart was not in his work. He resorted to shoddy workmanship and used inferior materials. It was an unfortunate way to end his career.

When the carpenter finished his work and the builder came to inspect the house, the contractor handed the front-door key to the carpenter. "This is your house," he said, "my gift to you."

What a shock! What a shame! If he had only known he was building his own house, he would have done it all so differently. Now he had to live in the home he had built none too well.

So it is with us. We build our lives in a distracted way, reacting rather than acting, willing to put up less than the best. At important points we do not give the job our best effort. Then with a shock we look at the situation we have created and find that we are now living in the house we have built. If we had realized that we would have done it differently.

Think of yourself as the carpenter. Think about your house. Each day you hammer a nail, place a board, or erect a wall. Build wisely. It is the only life you will ever build. Even if you live it for only one day more, that day deserves to be lived graciously and with dignity. The plaque on a wall says, "Life is a do-it-yourself project." Your life tomorrow will be the result of your attitudes and the choices you make today.

- Vivekananda Study Circle

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