

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This month's EDITORIAL is based on a trip made by the Joint Editor of this journal to the places associated with Swami Vivekananda's visit to Almora, and its adjoining areas.

In SRI RAMAKRISHNA : THE ESTABLISHER OF DHARMA Swami Satyarupananda of the Ramakrishna Mission, Samaj Sevak Sikshamandira, Belur Math, dwells on *dharmaglāni* and how Sri Ramakrishna established Dharma in modern times.

Dr. M. Lakshmikumari, President of the Vivekananda Kendra, Kanyakumari, and an ardent Vivekanandist, discusses in SCIENCE AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT how Vedanta philosophy as interpreted by Vivekananda, is the most rational way to develop our higher potentialities and innate perfection.

A PILGRIMAGE TO MT. LOWE by Brahma-Charini Bhavani of Vedanta Society, Hollywood, is a short note based on a trip made by the devotees and monks of the Hollywood Centre to this mountain.

ALMORA : ALONG THE FOOTPRINTS OF THE HIMALAYAN MONK

(EDITORIAL)

On a sunny winter morning of late December we were climbing up the same mountains of Almora that the wandering monk Vivekananda had climbed 94 years before, in 1890. Mad after a great realization, he came, like a 'God intoxicated beggar of the East,'¹ in these caves of Kasar Devi, a Mother's temple on the top of the highest mountain range of Almora. In the golden sunlight peeping through the branches of magnificent pines and crowding Rhododendrons we were walking on the same footprints of the Himalayan monk, Vivekananda.

It was in 1890. Since last one year the caged lion was struggling to unloose his fetters. His biggest bondage was the host of silent faces, the literally starving and the half-naked children of his master. They now gathered round him, in whom they

felt the new presence of their departed teacher. On the other hand, the 'great mission' of his master was tormenting his mind. He could not see the mission in all its clarity. Yet he was vaguely aware of its vast immensity. And with this awareness came an acute realization of the paucity of his own power. To fulfil such a mission one required a colossal accumulation of spiritual energy. And this could be achieved only by a life of intense renunciation and austerities. Torn in this dichotomy he wrote, 'I am longing for a flight to the Himalayas'.² The few visits to Pavhari Baba finally left him disappointed. He must do it all himself. There was none to share his visions. 'I have my plans for the future and they shall be a secret',³ he said. Only one ideal stood before him—Śuka.

1. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita* (Calcutta: Sister Nivedita Girls' School, 1972) Vol. 1, p. 33.

2. Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1979) Vol. 1, p. 241.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 241.

A few months earlier he wrote, 'Alas for the irony of fate that in this land of Bhagavan Shuka's birth, renunciation 'is looked down upon as madness and sin'. He must go to the Himalayas and reach Suka's transcendence. A couple of months before, while at Rishikesh he was determined to visit Kedarnath and Badrinath. But his first disciple Sadananda's health failed. In desperation Vivekananda left him, and started walking on his way to the upper Himalayas. But soon he returned. He had to.

The monk in him now spoke out to the disciple: 'You have really become like a chain round my feet. I had gone a long way, but then I remembered that you were alone here and were such a fool. I could not be sure what you might do. Look, it was for you I had to return'.⁴

Desperate struggle succeeded. Vivekananda finally decided to set out for the Himalayas. He allowed only one to accompany him, his adventurous brother disciple, Akhandananda. 'You are my man. You have faith! Come, let's be off together',⁵ he said. Before starting, the intrepid heart, however strong, trembled! Who knows when the success would come! Is failure an impossibility? For a final blessing he rushed to Holy Mother, in whom he found the power of Ramakrishna, and of Ramakrishna's Divine Mother. 'Mother', he said, 'I shall not return until I have attained the highest Jnana.' Mother blessed him in the name of the Master. When she asked him to see his own mother before this great departure, the dedicated one answered: 'Mother, you alone are my Mother'. He hardly knew what cosmic power would now be protecting and guiding him in a thousand ways. In the height of his spirit, to his brother disciples he held up his great dream, 'I shall not return until

I acquire such realization that my very touch will transform a man.'⁶

Within a few days he set out for Almora along with Akhandananda. An intense desire for total renunciation consumed him. He had now nothing with him except a walking stick, a piece of cloth, a rag and two small books, the Gita and the Imitation of Christ, his unfailing companions for these days. He dispossessed himself of everything except a burning desire for God's grace. The guiding principle during these days, as he said afterwards, was the favourite incantation of Buddha, 'Even as the lion not trembling at noises, even as the wind not caught in a net, even as the lotus-leaf untouched by water, so do thou wander alone, like the rhinoceros.' His constant refrain were the lines from the Imitation of Christ, 'Silence, all ye teachers! And silence, ye prophets! Speak Thou alone O Lord, unto my soul.'⁷

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From the moment he started walking from Kathgodam towards Almora, the Himalayan sublimity slowly began to engulf him. His naturally meditative mind began to see new horizons. The first great spiritual experience came at a quiet confluence of two hilly rivers, some twenty miles below Almora. It was at a quiet riverside village, Kankrighat.

On a winter afternoon we reached this village, Kankrighat. With difficulty we crossed on foot the hilly river Kosi. Some of us had even lost balance on the mossy stones and slipped into the knee-deep ice-cold water flowing down with a frightening speed. Finally, we reached the hallowed place. It was a tiny spot, a bowl-like triangle covered on three sides by high mountains. The river Kosi, meets the river Shrota (or Sirota) after creating a small

6. Ibid., pp. 241-42.

7. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 58.

4. Ibid., p. 224.

5. Ibid., p. 241.

island in the confluence, where a huge peepal tree with outspreading roots and branches stood like a giant shelter. Below the tree was an old Siva temple. In front of the temple stretched the small river bed. It is a confluence with innumerable, huge boulders scattered up to the end of the river horizon. On all the three sides stood the steep and dark mountains. It was all so quiet except for the murmuring sound of the rivers, the only sound in the whole panorama.

Here under this peepal tree the first enlightenment came when the monk got buried in a deep meditation. The moment was ripe with infinite potentiality. It saw the birth of a new outlook, a new philosophy which was to be the foundation stone of the monk's global movement. All these years of renunciation he only struggled to realize this truth, to understand the true nature of the Cosmic Reality, the Brahman, that the scriptures had taught him. The way was meditation, the long inward journey, at the end of which the restless seeker reached the great illumination. It all came here. He realized the Truth for which he had left behind everything, and practised intense austerities. The Ultimate, all-pervading Reality was imbedded in the core of every little atom of this universe. The macrocosm was indeed there inside the heart of the microcosm. The phenomenal world is nothing but the noumenon, the One Reality. The knot in his heart got opened. A long-drawn inner conflict got resolved. Intense renunciation brought him the vision of God in all things and brought forth in later years the celebrated philosophy of Vivekananda—God in everything.

Thenceforward only God remained; the world disappeared altogether. To his brother disciple Akhandananda (his premonastic name, Gangadhar) he said in the fullness of this great spiritual breakthrough, 'Oh, Gangadhar! I have just passed

through one of the greatest moments of my life. Here under the peepal tree one of the greatest problems of my life has been solved. I have found the oneness of the macrocosm with microcosm. In this microcosm of the body everything that is there (in the macrocosm) exists. I have seen the whole universe within an atom'. We remember the realization of the ancient *r̥ṣis—ānoranīyan mahato mahīyan*—the ultimate Reality is smaller than the small and greater than the great. (*Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 1.2.20). In the exuberance of the mystic vision he wrote in his notebook, 'The microcosm and macrocosm are built on the same plan. Just as the individual soul is encased in the living body, so is the Universal Soul in the Living Prakriti (Nature)—the objective universe. Shivā (i.e. Kali) embracing Shiva: this is not a fancy.... This dual aspect of the Universal Soul is eternal. So what we perceive or feel is this combination of the Eternally formed and the Eternally formless.'⁸

This realization at Kankrihat was the foundation of the new Vedanta of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. The orthodox Hinduism regarded the One as the Real, and the many as unreal. But Vivekananda added, 'And what Ramakrishna Paramahansa and I have added to this is, that the Many and the One are the same Reality, perceived by the same mind at different times and in different attitudes.'⁹

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'Get up musafir. Bundle your things. You have still to go a long way.' The wandering monk along with his companion stood up for the next movement.

From Kankrihat began the final part of their journey to Almora. The taste of the first great realization now filled him with

8. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 250.

9. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 29.

an intensified impulse of renunciation. It was now, as his disciples heard from him afterwards, 'a passionate longing to lose one's identity, to be united with the lowliest and most hidden things, to go forth from amongst men, and be no more remembered by them.'¹⁰ He was now under the vow to ask for nothing and even fast unto death if no food was voluntarily offered to him. The 'longest time he had ever gone without food, under this austerity, was five days',¹¹ as he revealed afterwards. Only a robust athlete like Vivekananda could stand such incredible austerities. It was superhuman.

But the body revolted despite all the strength of the spirit. On the outskirts of Almora Vivekananda fainted in hunger and weariness. It was in a muslim graveyard. The helpless companion Akhandananda rushed in search of water in the stony hillside. Meanwhile came forward a fakir, the custodian of the cemetery, and seeing the monk's plight, offered him a cucumber. Too tired, even to eat it, the monk now asked the fakir to put it in his mouth. With due reverence the fakir held back, saying that he was a mussalman. Softly came the reply, 'What does that matter? Are we not all brothers?'

The wandering monk could never forget this life-saver, the muslim fakir. Seven years after, when the world-famous Vivekananda returned to Almora, he spied out, unmistakably, the face of the fakir from among the crowd in the procession organized in his honour. With gratitude Vivekananda stopped, called him near and gave him some reward. To the assembled crowd he introduced the fakir, 'This man really saved my life. Never had I felt so exhausted.'

In the golden sunlight of the morning we stood on the stone where Vivekananda fainted nearly a century ago. Two great Almora devotees of Vivekananda, had built

up a small memorial rest-house there for visitors to stop and remember Swamiji even for a while. The deserted stone cottage of the fakir with its broken roofs still stood there. Jungle creepers had covered it. Our heart filled with gratitude for the fakir who once saved the unknown prophet.

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We climbed down from the main road and reached a small temple of Divine Mother, Patal Bhairavi. Our guide reminded us that here nearly a century ago Lala Badri Shah, one of the richest men in Almora and a retired Army Captain used to visit this temple every morning. It was his daily habit, as his relatives told us, to see a sadhu first and then take food. Here one blessed morning Shahji met two disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Shivananda and Sri Vaikuntha Nath Sanyal. He had already known Swami Akhandanandaji, another disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. It is this Swami, the 'Bengali Gangadhar' or the 'Babaji, who returned from Tibet', who first announced to Badri Shah about the proposed visit of Swamiji to Almora. From Badrinath he wrote to Shahji: 'A Gurubhai of mine is proceeding to Almora He is one of my advanced Gurubhais, a highly educated gentleman leading a perfect ascetic life since ten or twelve years. He has sacrificed all his worldly prosperities for the sake of Almighty. Now he is in the stage of Paramahansa¹²'

Badri Shah who was already a benevolent host to the disciples of Ramakrishna, now felt blessed to receive the Paramahansa, who arrived finally at Almora.

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In the glittering sunlight of a winter morning we stood in awe and silence, in the unspeakable beauty of Kasar Devi. A lover of sublimity he had chosen these

¹⁰. Ibid., p. 55.

¹¹. Ibid., p. 60.

¹². Swami Vivekananda's *Three Visits to Almora* (Almora: The Ramakrishna Kutir) p. 3.

remote caves of Kasar Devi as the place of his meditation. 'The saints live on mountain tops', he used to say, 'to enjoy the scenery'.¹³ Even after nearly a century, this place remains as the sublimest part of Almora. The spot is indeed chosen for gods. Standing far above the valley of men, and the undulating surface of the sea of clouds beneath, this holy mountain top is even now protected by tall pine trees guarding the holy spot like silent sentinels. Through their branches one can have the closest view of the snow white body of Trishul and Nandadevi.

It is indeed the spot from where mother nature, Prakriti, could feel her nearness to the Purusha—the all-white Shiva. One can feel, even by a casual visit, that it is a secluded and sacred spot from where one feels nearness and even oneness with the Shiva within—the Self, the Existence, Knowledge and Bliss Absolute.

The unspeakable sublimity and the calmness of the place make one wonder that Vivekananda could ever leave this place. But he had to. It happened one day when he got down to the town and went to his friend Lala Badri Shah. Destiny was waiting for him with the rudest shock to his naturally loving heart—a telegram with the news of his sister's suicide in extremely pitiful circumstances. And the wire was soon followed by a letter which told, in all its horrid details, of the inevitable step which his helpless widow sister was forced to take.¹⁴ At once the dream of a meditative life in the Himalayas was shattered to pieces. Restless and disconsolate, he retreated into the caves of Kasar Devi, far away from the last sign of human habitation. But peace was gone. And the unquenching fire of agony for his beloved sister, one day

drove him out, as it were, from these solitary caves. He realized that his mission was waiting for him on the burning plains of India, and not in the luxury of lonely living amidst these caves. 'Nothing in my whole life ever so filled me with the sense of work to be done. It was as if I were thrown out from that life of solitude, to wander to and from in the plains below', he said. Vivekananda left Almora with a burning passion in his heart—a passion to lift Hindu women, especially the widows, to the glory of a new life of total independence—social, intellectual and spiritual.

That was the beginning of his prophetic dedication to the cause of 'the women and the masses'. These became henceforward the two missions nearest to his heart. In the West once when he felt himself dying, he called his disciple Nivedita and confided to her, 'Never forget! The word is, *Women and the People*'.¹⁵

This was a boon and benediction for India and humanity as a whole. Nothing but this terrible thunderbolt could make him move out of this most lovable spot of sublimity. Shiva returned to drink the death-dealing poison of human suffering. But did he not look all the more beautiful now? To this Nilakantha Shiva, whose throat turned blue with poisons of existential suffering of humanity, Indians pray in their supplications, 'Oh Shiva! Thou indeed look all the more beautiful, despite your deformity. For, therein lies the refuge for all beings—the refuge of fearlessness.'

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But wanderlust is a sort of divine madness. It hardly gets satisfied. With his brother disciples Vivekananda now started walking right from Almora to Badri. At Karnaprayag the journey had to be abandoned because of famine in the region. In Rishikesh, at the foothills of the Himalayas

13. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 32.

14. *Swami Vivekananda's Three Visits to Almora*, op. cit., p. 8.

15. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 192.

he again plunged into severe asceticism and spiritual practice. Suddenly he fell sick to the point of death. When the brother disciples began to cry in despair a strange monk came, as if from nowhere, and saved his life. Vivekananda opened his eyes, and said, 'Cheer up my boys. I shall not die.' Once again in this apparently unconscious state he saw that he had a mission in the world to fulfil, and that he could not leave his body before the mission was fulfilled.¹⁶

Little recovered, Vivekananda now moved again. But his brother disciples, too, now followed him like famished gulls round the only ship in the ocean. Finally at Meerut he got determined to be freed from this last holy bondage. To the brother disciples he now clearly told: 'It is not possible to perform any spiritual disciplines, unless the Maya (bondage) of the brother disciples is given up. Whenever I plan to practise disciplines, the Master puts some obstacle on my way. Now I shall go alone. I shall not tell anyone where I am staying.'¹⁷ One morning in the late January of 1891 Vivekananda left them, and started walking alone with God.

The wandering friar now got engulfed in the vast ocean of Indian humanity. His days now alternated between the kings' palaces and pariahs' huts, between pundits' houses and philosophers' chambers, between orthodox Hindu householders and Mohammedan hosts. None failed to notice an unmistakable divinity and a prophetic power enveloping him. But neither discussions nor devotions could satisfy his longings. From Delhi to Rajputana, from Madras to Kanyakumari, from Bombay to Mysore, he moved in order to find ways to fulfil his master's mission. Sri Ramakrishna once said: 'Naren will teach the world.' But whom to teach? Centuries of ignorance

and poverty and upper class exploitation had driven the millions of Indian masses to become only next-door neighbour to brutes. Did not his master teach him 'There is no religion for empty stomachs?'

The suffering of teeming millions gradually loomed larger and larger in all its horrid dimensions. There was no hope from the so-called educated and the upper classes. He felt himself responsible. With this rude realization came a strange change in him. Without his knowing it, the desire for personal salvation got slowly drowned under an overwhelming desire to save the suffering millions of India. The asceticism of Suka and the intellectual brilliance of Shankara now gave way to the bleeding passion of a Christ and Buddha. Finally, he decided to go to the West, in order to help his countrymen.

At Mt. Abu Road, at this moment, two of his brother disciples suddenly spied him. They saw in him a transfigured presence, a radiant figure. They begged him to return to the monastery at the height of this divine radiance. Vivekananda literally cried out, 'I cannot understand your so-called religion! But my heart has grown much, much larger, and I have learnt to feel (the sufferings of others). Believe me, I feel it very sadly!'¹⁸ His voice was choked with emotion, and tears began to roll down his cheeks. Instantly he tore himself away from the brother disciples. He was gone. He lost himself again in the vast sea of suffering humanity.

A brother disciple Swami Turiyananda who heard these words, said: 'I could clearly see that the whole suffering of humanity had penetrated his palpitating heart.' They heard in his voice the compassionate cry of the Avalokiteswara, the Buddha who turns in all directions in order to respond to human suffering. They found

16. *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 257.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 261.

18. Romain Rolland, *Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama) p. 31.

in their master's life a repetition of the 'tale of Bodhisattwa who had held himself back from Nirvana till the last grain of dust in the universe should have gone in before him to salvation'.¹⁹ The wandering friar did not know that in his begging bowl destiny had already dropped the priceless jewel, the radiance of a prophet's divinity, which he was still seeking in silence and solitude. His disciples understood later on that 'there may in a great life be elements which, he who lives it may not himself understand.'²⁰

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In early May of 1898, Vivekananda returned, after his western conquest, to his beloved Almora. It was now a return of the prophet of the masses and moribund Hinduism. Along with his dear English disciple, Goodwin and hundreds of admirers he entered Almora and found, 'it was roses, roses all the way'. Just before entering Almora, Vivekananda was made to mount a gaily decorated horse and a huge procession followed him. Three thousand people gathered in the bazaar in front of Badri Shah's house. All along the way women stood on the roof-tops and showered him with flowers and auspicious rice. A big pandal was set up and houses were lit with candles. The slumbering Almora suddenly woke up to receive its beloved monk, now a world-teacher, a *jagad-guru*.

It was in the house of Badri Shah that he was now received again and there he stayed for nearly two months and a half. The housemaster showed us the room where he stayed. It was a beautiful room with low doors, in the hill fashion, and heavily carved with designs on wood. Right outside the room was the main bazaar road. Sitting there on a wooden chair, Swamiji used to meet people and speak to the

assembled listeners. It is there that he gave his celebrated Almora-speech. Two addresses, one in English and the other in Sanskrit were read out in this reception. Vivekananda made a short speech. Almora heard only the voice of the old wandering monk.

This is the land of dreams of our forefathers, in which was born Parvati, the Mother of India. This is the holy land where every ardent soul in India wants to come at the end of its life, and to close the last chapter of its mortal career. ...As peak after peak of this Father of Mountains began to appear before my sight, all the propensities to work, ...seemed to quiet down, and instead of talking about what had been done and what was going to be done, the mind reverted to that one eternal theme which the Himalayas always teach us...—renunciation.²¹

To the request made by the Almora people 'to start a centre in the Himalayas', in the tradition of Acharya Shankara, Vivekananda replied, 'this is the spot which I want to select as one of the great centres to teach this universal religion.' This dream was realized within two years in a remote corner of Almora, and this centre was known as the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati.

In spite of all these ovations, Vivekananda would find little peace. He now felt that even Almora was not quiet enough. Twice he retreated to Dewaldhar, an estate some twenty miles to north. There he rode on horseback like a child, in the midst of the lonely Himalayan valley. His health recouped, he now decided to return to plains for his work. Before he left he gave a lecture at the English club, at their invitation, on 'the Eastern and Western approach to soul. At the Almora Inter College, he gave two more lectures, in response to the public request. Here he gave

19. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 34.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1964) Vol. 3, pp. 352-54.

his first lecture in Hindi, the subject being 'Vedic Teaching in Theory and Practice'.

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In 1898 Vivekananda returned again to Almora. This time he came for rest. The last few years of incessant struggle both in the West and in India, left him physically shattered. His mission was not yet over. There were miles to go before he desired sleep. The tired athlete needed a few days of quiet breathing. Vivekananda came this time along with his two other brother-disciples, Swamis Turiyananda and Niranjanananda, and two of his own disciples, Swamis Sadananda and Swarupananda. On the way to Almora, at Nainital, people spread flowers and palm tree leaves on the road. It was an Oriental custom, as his western disciples felt, in which they received Jesus at Jerusalem, after his divine ordination. Along with all these monks Swamiji stayed in a large house rented by Capt. and Mrs. Sevier. These two English disciples of the Swami had already come earlier to Almora in order to start the Himalayan centre for their master in the house known as 'Thompson House'. Here in this house, on 11 June 1898, Vivekananda started once again his beloved journal *Prabuddha Bharata* or 'Awakened India', under the editorship of Swami Swarupananda. It was originally started two years before in Madras, but with the sudden death of its brilliant editor Rajam Ayer it suddenly stopped publication. Swamiji decided to make its home now in the Himalayas. The other western friends and disciples, Sister Nivedita, Mrs. Ole Bull and Josephine MacLeod lived now at 'Oakley House', another bungalow not very far from the 'Thompson House'. Today 'Thompson House' stands almost exactly in the same shape, and is used for a different purpose. The 'Oakley House' still belongs to the relatives of Badri Shah's family. Standing on these once-hallowed houses, people still hope that some day they will

shine as monuments in the name of Vivekananda.

Here every morning on the 'rose covered verandah' of 'Oakley House' he used to have his breakfast and converse with his western disciples. The magnificent deodars (the tree of the gods) stood all around with their odour of black-berry fragrance, and added to the 'unutterable depth' of the environment. And above all there was 'the great white range like a presence that cannot be set aside.'²²

In this Himalayan sublimity Vivekananda was at the height of his thoughts. Only great figures and sweeping movements in Indian history passed through his mind. It was at Almora that he got a letter with the news of self-immolation and death of his ascetic, Pavhari Baba. With a sense of great loss, Swamiji read out the letter to all, and said 'Pavhari Baba has completed all his sacrifices with the sacrifice of his own body. He has burnt himself in the sacrificial fire.'²³

With a deep reverence he spoke of Vidyasagar's astounding sense of dignity and self-respect. Defying all English traditions he went, when invited, to meet the Viceroy, in his typical half-naked pundit's dress of a dhoti, a chaddar and a simple slipper. He spoke again, of the nun who was asked how long the carnal desires invade the sadhaka. She only sent out a dish of ashes to the inquirer outside, who now realized that these desires will exist in some form or other so long as the body is not consigned to flames.

In the Himalayan solitude, the mood of renunciation and self-imposed solitude reared its head again. Vivekananda soon left alone for Shya Devi, a forested peak

22. *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, Ed. by Sankari Prasad Basu (Calcutta: Nababharat Publishers, 1982) Vol. 1, p. 11.

23. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 300.

some miles west of Almora. For three days he stayed there. When he returned he felt happy that he was still the 'old-time sannyasin, able to go barefoot and endure heat or cold and scanty fare, unspoiled by the West'. The sannyasin returned from this retreat only to receive another painful news of his life. A wire brought the news that Goodwin, his faithful and child-like disciple, had died at Ootacamund. For a few days Vivekananda was stunned with an unspeakable grief. Then one day he came out, and as he looked at the distant snow peaks he quietly uttered: 'The days of my public utterance are over.' That night he composed a poem *REQUIESCAT IN PACE* and sent it to Goodwin's mother in London. Vivekananda seldom spoke in public thereafter.

Of all the blessed souls who followed Swamiji this time at Almora it is Nivedita who reaped the golden harvest of this Himalayan summer. Vivekananda had already accepted her as his daughter. There he spoke in London to her of the great purity and sacrifice of Holy Mother Sarada Devi. And then, in a dream-like mood of mystic calmness Vivekananda told her, 'Yes, yes! these things have been, and they will again be. Go in peace, my daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole.'²⁴ At Almora the fire of Swamiji's spiritual moods flickered again. In the sight of the mountains he was never tired of speaking of Shiva.²⁵ And they were meant for her. She must come out of the bondages, from the 'inevitable suffering that comes of the different national habits of the body and mind.'²⁶ Untrained to this kind of thinking her old thoughts revolted. Her English patriotism now came to the surface. The

'scepticism of mine'²⁷ as she said, refused to accept all the words of her master. The desire for external dynamism now stood face to face with the need of a complete and ascetic renunciation of all selfish motives, and the subtlest remnants of the 'determinedly insular' ideals that she had been obstinately clinging to. It was time to learn the 'Indian point of view' if she indeed wished to be dedicated to India. The need now was a purgatorial journey of self-denial, solitude, and constant striving for self-purification. 'Patriotism like yours is a sin', Swamiji scolded her. 'The old cat must die', Vivekananda used to say. Nivedita realized the pains of this frightening journey. It must be a death of the old self and then, a complete rebirth into an altogether new life of total renunciation. Inner conflict expressed now as outer restlessness. For days, her mind was in an upheaval, 'the inner strife grew high.'²⁸ The boat was now in the choppy sea. Then one morning in a mood of desperate restlessness she stood under the huge deodar tree of the Oakley House. She was now in a frightening void. It was darkness outside and chaos inside. One of the older ladies of the party approached Vivekananda in order to put an end to this unbearable conflict which 'might easily go too far'.

In the evening Vivekananda returned. He felt he himself must go out somewhere to bring that ineffable peace for his daughter caught in this terrible torment of the soul. 'You were right,' he said. 'There must be a change. I am going away into the forests to be alone and when I come back I shall bring peace.' The great disciple of Ramakrishna did not know that the beatitude of peace was already with him. He was never conscious that Ramakrishna's prophecy that 'Naren would manifest his own gift

24. Ibid., p. 35.

25. Ibid., p. 72.

26. *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 19.

27. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 22.

28. Ibid., p. 298.

of bestowing knowledge with a touch' had already come true. That evening at Almora Nivedita 'proved the truth of that prophecy'. No, Vivekananda had not to go to a forest any more. His very presence was now fraught with the power of a Christ and Buddha. His holy 'touch', like Ramakrishna's, now had the power of bringing great transfiguration. No words can better describe this blessed moment of theophany, of the revelation of God within and without, than Nivedita's own words :

...Then he turned and saw that above us the moon was new, and a new sudden exclamation came into his voice as he said, 'See the Mohammedans think much of the new moon. Let us also with a new moon begin a new life!' As the words ended, he lifted his hands and blessed with silent depths of blessing, his most rebellious disciple, by this time kneeling before him.... It was assuredly a moment of wonderful sweetness of reconciliation.... For alone in meditation, I found myself gazing deep into an Infinite good, to the recognition of which no egoistic reasoning had led me... And I understood, for the first time, that the greatest teachers may destroy in us a personal relation only in order to bestow the Impersonal vision in its place.²⁹

The dark night of the soul was over. It was a new dawn. For the first time she realized that 'there is a certain definite quality which may be called spirituality', that 'the soul may long for God as the heart for human love', that even so-called 'nobility or unselfishness' was but the 'feeblest and most sordid qualities compared to the fierce white light of selflessness.'³⁰ She felt 'blessed' and wrote to her friend

in London, 'India is indeed the holy land.'³¹ Of these memorable days she again wrote, 'we have been living and breathing in the sunshine of the great religious ideals all these months, and God has been more real to us than common man'.³²

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The old mother of the Shah family took us under that blessed deodar. Through traditions they knew the place and the tree, the silent witness of the memorable moment where Vivekananda's great dream on the eve of his Himalayan life was fulfilled. On the precincts of the Oakley House we stood, buried in the thoughts of how the Shiva-guru Vivekananda brought the instant conflagration of divinity in his daughter by a holy touch. Each stone in the house began to speak to us of that blessed evening in this holy abode of Shiva. Relations of Shahji now own this old house of hallowed memory. They preserve the letter of Swamiji written to Shahji. It is their talisman. The three magnificent kerosene lamps of Chinese design, used by Nivedita and others, are still preserved as holy mementoes. In the winter morning of late December we stood under the blessed deodar in the sun-blanching lawn and looked straight at the magnificent snow-peaks right across the deep brown gorge below. Some of the household members by this time had gathered round us. In that vibrant silence and all-pervading peace, the tall deodar breathed. A gust of wind brought a sudden stir in its leaves. Some of us felt the 'living presence'. We realized our journey on the footprints of the Himalayan monk had seen a consummation.

²⁹. Ibid., pp. 80-81.

³⁰. *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 13.

³¹. Ibid., p. 18.

³². Ibid., p. 25.