

RAMAKRISHNA-VIVEKANANDA THOUGHT AND GUJARATI LITERATURE

Swami Sarvasthananda

One day Sri Keshab Chandra Sen, the famous Brahmo leader approached Sri Ramakrishna and said to him:

“Sir, if you permit, I want to make known your message to the public. It will definitely do people good and bring peace to the world.”

Sri Ramakrishna replied in a ecstatic mood:

“It is not the time to spread the message of this place [i.e. his message] through lectures and newspapers. The power and ideas that are within this body will automatically spread all around in course of time. Hundreds of Himalayas will not be able to suppress that power.”¹

Unlike worldly material power, the spiritual power of an incarnation manifests or unfolds in a subtle manner, almost imperceptible to gross human intellect and understanding. Like the proverbial tip of the iceberg, the vast literature associated with great spiritual movements like Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement gives us only a faint glimpse of its immense magnitude, vitality and future possibilities. However, literature plays a major role in introducing a vast majority of the people to the Movement, at least on the mental and intellectual plane. Spiritual transformation of individuals and society takes place in various subtle ways resulting in change in values, ideals, attitudes and ultimately actions. The role of good literature surcharged with the spiritual power of World Teachers cannot be underestimated in effecting such transformations.

Literature is used chiefly of writings distinguished by artistic form or emotional appeal. According to the famous English

statesman and writer J. Morley, ‘Literature consists of all the books... where moral truth and human passion are touched with a certain largeness, sanity and attraction of form.’

Swami Vivekananda was of the opinion that no literature could be termed as classical literature unless it was written with good taste or it set a high ideal. He said that ordinary people, who consider sensory enjoyment to be permanent and real, try to idealize what is apparently real; and such people can never create classical literature. However, there are a select few who are not satisfied with sensory enjoyments that appear to be real, and they strive to realize the ideal in and through all their thoughts and actions. Only such people can create true literature. Swamiji also said that such people generally have to renounce worldly life and ‘he had only seen Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa of Dakshineswar who fully embodied the highest ideal in his life, and that’s why he revered him.’²

Swamiji once told his disciple Priyanath Sinha:

“I think, language and thought also, like all other things, become lifeless and monotonous in course of time. Such a state seems to have happened now in this country. On the advent of Sri Ramakrishna, however, a new current has set in, in thought and language. Everything has now to be recast in new moulds. Everything has to be propagated with the stamp of new genius.”³

Sri Ramakrishna’s phenomenal life of intense spirituality infused enormous strength and vitality into all the branches of Hindu religion; its art, literature and

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culture, when Indian civilization had been at the lowest ebb for over a hundred years from about the middle of the eighteenth century. In this dark period of Indian history devoid of all creativity, no literature or art of any great significance was produced in almost any Indian language. Even the devastating invasions and conquests across the border in the past had not produced a result of this kind, and the Indian mind was thrown off its balance, as it were, during this period.

Calcutta, being the chief metropolis of the British empire in India, renaissance in religion, literature, arts and other aspects of culture, which began in Bengal in the nineteenth century, gradually spread to the other parts of India. The cultural and intellectual stirrings, which had begun in Bengal in the beginning of that century, received a fresh impetus through the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, whose 'simple, sweet, colloquial language breathed a superhuman purity', as described by the famous Brahmo leader, Keshab Chandra Sen. Sri Ramakrishna was introduced to the educated class of Calcutta in 1875 by Keshab Sen through the journal *Indian Mirror*. Most of the early literature on Sri Ramakrishna was published in Bengali. The first major collection of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings in book form, *Paramahansa Ramakrishner Ukti*, was published by Suresh Chandra Dutta in December 1884 followed by Ram Chandra Dutta's *Tattwasara* (in 3 vols), published during 1885-87. Ram Chandra Dutta also wrote the first biography of Sri Ramakrishna, *Sri Sri Ramakrishnadever Jivanvrittanta* in 1890. The first volume of the monumental literary work in Bengali, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, was published only in 1902,

though it was being published in instalments in seventeen popular Bengali journals like *Udbodhan*, *Tattwamanjari*, *Navabharat*, *Sahitya* etc., from 1897 onwards. However, it was Swami Vivekananda's inspiring and life-giving message delivered on the world-stage in English language, beginning with the historic Chicago address (September 1893), which rapidly spread all over India through the different vernaculars.

Gujarat was privileged to have been exposed to Ramakrishna-Vivekananda thought during Swamiji's Bharat Parikrama in 1891-92, long before his appearance on the world-stage at Chicago. During his tour of Gujarat, Swamiji came in contact with some of the most prominent literary personalities of those days and exerted a great influence on many of them. Perhaps, this is the reason why one of the earliest biographical sketches of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda to be published in any vernacular, came out in Gujarati as



Photo of Maganlal Patel printed in the appendix of *Mahajan Mandal*

early as in the year 1896. The author of the encyclopedic work, *Mahajan Mandal* (a book of more than 1325 pages of 1/8 demy size), Maganlal N. Patel, (b. 1859) was a native of Baroda State. In this book he has given a short but comprehensive biographical sketch of Sri Ramakrishna

and Swamiji in more than ten pages. This huge volume gave the life sketches of a large number of saints, rulers, dewans, littera-

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teurs and other eminent personalities like Mirabai, Narasimha Mehta, Tukaram, Keshab Chandra Sen, Max Muller, Sayajirao Gaekwad, Haridas V.Desai, many of whom, like Swamiji, were still alive. When this book was published in 1896, Swamiji was only 33 years old and was in England preaching Vedanta, a year before his historic return to India as a prophet. And yet we find the author, already proclaiming him as a Saviour who has incarnated to reestablish the truths of Vedanta.

The first Gujarati literary figure to meet Swamiji before he entered Gujarat in 1891 was Shyamji Krishna Verma (b.1857, d.1930), who later became a nationalist leader. Swamiji was Shyamji Verma's guest in Ajmer for over two weeks, where they spent a lot of time together discussing Sanskrit, literary and philosophic matters. Born in Mandvi (Kutch), Shyamji Verma attained remarkable proficiency in English and Sanskrit at an early age. He came in contact with Dayananda Saraswati, the founder of Arya Samaj and learnt the Vedas and other scriptures under his tutelage. He also taught Sanskrit at Oxford University and assisted Monier Williams in producing his famous Sanskrit dictionary. He was a close friend of Herbert Spencer. He was the founder of the *Home Rule Society*, the *India House* near London and the famous paper *Indian Sociologist*, which were all instrumental in inspiring many people to fight for India's freedom. His meeting with Swamiji must have definitely influenced Shyamji and awakened in him a deep love for India, though the means they adopted for her regenera-



Shyamji Verma

tion were different.

Lalshankar Umiashankar Trivedi (b.1845, d.1912) was the next great personality and literary figure whom Swamiji met. He was



Lalshankar U. Trivedi

Swamiji's host in Ahmedabad in 1891. A disciple of the famous Mahipatram Ruparam the founder of the Gujarat unit of *Prarthana Samaj* in

1871, Lalshankar was the guiding force behind many associations founded in Gujarat during the renaissance period like the *Gujarat Vernacular Society*, *Buddhivardhak Sabha*, and several other social and educational institutions connected with women's education and the uplift of untouchables. He also started a monthly journal, *Tikakar*, for popularizing Gujarati literature. The Government decorated him with the titles of *Kaiser-e-Hind* and *Rao Bahadur* for his pioneering work. During the eleven days he spent in the holy company of Swamiji in Ahmedabad it is obvious that Lalshankar must have discussed with him many issues concerning literature, education and social service apart from religion and philosophy.

Swamiji then met Thakore Saheb of Limbdi, Sir Yashwantsinhji, K.C.I.E, (b.1859, d.1907). Apart from being an able administrator, Yashwantsinhji was a highly learned and cultured prince with deep interest in literature, religion and philosophy. He was deeply spiritual in nature and was well versed in scriptures like the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Yoga Vashishta* etc., and also works of famous western writers like Mill, Spencer, Shakespeare and Milton. His contact with Swamiji brought about a great

transformation in Yashwantsinhji and he became his disciple. He also had an opportunity to be in Swamiji's holy company for several days during the summer of 1892 at Mahabaleshwar. Here he had several discussions on Shastras with Swamiji which he has recorded in his '*Nondh Pothi*' (diary). On May 9, 1892 Thakore Saheb has noted:



Sir Yashwantsinhji

"I am pleasantly surprised at Swami Vivekananda's deep knowledge of the Shastras. My knowledge of the Shastras has been much increased through discussions with him."⁴

From Limbdi, Swamiji proceeded towards Junagadh via Bhavnagar and Shihor. Here he met Maharaja Takhtasinhji (b.1858, d.1896), who was one of the most progressive and enlightened rulers of India. He was a great patron of learning and spent huge sums of money for building colleges, libraries and other educational institutions.

In Junagadh, Swamiji came in contact with Haridas Viharidas Desai, the Dewan of the State, who was to be instrumental in introducing him to at least three of Gujarat's leading literary figures of those days, Manahsukhram Tripathi, Chaganlal H. Pandya, and Manilal Nabubhai Dwivedi. Haridas Desai was a keen student of Advaita Vedanta, a man of principles and an exalted character. Swamiji developed a deep



Haridas V. Desai

friendship with Haridas and wrote several inspiring letters to him. In one of the letters dated June 20, 1894, Swamiji gives Haridas his plan of work for the regeneration of India and Hinduism.

Manahsukhram Tripathi (b.1840, d.1907), was born in Nadiad, the hometown of Haridas Desai. He was a great scholar, essayist, biographer and translator. He had a lot of reservations about the new reformist wave inspired by Brahmo Samaj and others.



Manahsukhram Tripathi

He became the protagonist of Sanskrit revival in Gujarati literature by starting with the help of like-minded scholars, an association named as *Dharmasabha* in 1870.

He also became the editor of *Dharma Prakasha*, which became the mouthpiece for the revival of the religious glory of ancient India in Gujarat. Swamiji must have enjoyed the company of Manahsukhram, who was his host for a few days at Junagadh, as their common interests were Vedanta philosophy. Swami Abhedananda in his autobiography also confirms the above fact, as he too chanced to visit Tripathi's house and stay with his beloved gurubhai during those days.

Manahsukhram was the uncle of one the greatest literary figures that Gujarat produced in the last century, Govardhanram M. Tripathi (b.1855, d.1907). It was Manahsukhram who moulded the mind of his beloved nephew through all the vicissitudes of life. Govardhanram was not only a great novelist, but also a poet of considerable merit and a distinguished writer of Gujarati prose. His magnum opus

Saraswatichandra, published in four parts, is a landmark in the history of Gujarati literature. It is essentially an offering of devotion unto the motherland and the spiritual culture she stands for. It



Govardhanram Tripathi

is not known whether Govardhanram met Swamiji during his visit to Nadiad. But the fact that he had read Swamiji's works and was deeply inspired by his message is evident from his *Scrap Book* (3 vols, 7 parts), published after his demise in 1959. According to Ushnas, one of the famous poets of contemporary Gujarati literature, the third and fourth parts of *Saraswatichandra*, which were published in 1894 and 1901 respectively, after Swamiji's visit to Nadiad, clearly shows the influence of Swamiji's Practical Vedanta on the writer. Govardhanram was very much impressed by the prospectus of Advaita Ashrama, established by Swamiji in the Himalayas (Mayavati) and he expressed his desire to go and live there. ⁵

In Junagadh, Swamiji also came in contact with Chhaganlal.H.Pandya (b.1859, d.1936) of Nadiad, a great scholar, educationist and well known in Gujarat's literary world as translator of Sanskrit classics like *Kadambari*. He also happened to be the brother-in-law of Govardhanram Tripathi and was the Director of Education of Junagadh State and Swamiji's host during his several visits to the state in 1891. He was deeply impressed by Swamiji's personality and in the introduction to his book *Christnu*



Chhaganlal Pandya

Anukaran, a Gujarati translation of *The Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas a.Kempis, published in 1915 (which includes as footnotes Sanskrit quotations from Hindu scriptures that resemble Kempis's thoughts), Pandya gives a wonderful

account of the days he spent in his holy company. Swamiji spoke in glorious terms about the wonderful life of Jesus Christ, which inspired Chhaganlal Pandya to write the above book. In his two letters dated 2.3.1918 and 9.10.1921 addressed to Dahyabhai Ramchandra Mehta, the author and the publisher of the biographies of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, Chhaganlal Pandya writes about the blessed privilege he had of coming in contact with Swamiji and hearing

Title Page of
Christnu Anukaran

directly from his mouth the nectar like words of his Master Shri Ramakrishna. Swamiji also told him about Sri Ramakrishna's overwhelming love and faith in him and how by his Guru's grace he was able to acquire Brahmavidya. ⁶ Chhaganlal Pandya also gave a vivid description of how Swamiji charmed and influenced everybody by his spirituality, his catholicity of views, his simplicity of life, his proficiency in music and profound knowledge of various arts and sciences, his stirring eloquence and not the least by his proficiency in the art of cuisine.

Swamiji also met in Nadiad, in April 1892, the famous Vedantist and a prominent literary figure Manilal Nabhubhai

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Dwivedi. (b.1858, d.1898). Throughout the short span of forty years of his life, Manilal tried to interpret all aspects of human life and civilization in the light of Advaita Vedanta of Shankaracharya and left behind a rich treasure of writings in



Manilal Dwivedi

Gujarati and English, which comprises of essays, plays, poems, novels, translations, edited works, compilations, literary criticisms and book reviews. He was a powerful prose writer and the editor of literary journals such as *Priyamvada* (1885-1890) and *Sudarshan* (1890-1898), through which he tried to expound the essence of Hindu religion and philosophy and their practical implications. This brought about a renaissance in Gujarati literature when the influence of western culture and thought seemed to have an overpowering effect on it. His paper on Hinduism was read out in the Parliament of Religions, Chicago in 1893. He also wrote several books in English and his *Raja Yoga* was highly praised by Edwin Arnold. His books on Advaita Vedanta created a lot of interest among the western scholars. Swamiji also immensely enjoyed his company during his stay at Nadiad and spoke highly of him in his letter dated April 26, 1892 to Haridas V.Desai.⁷ Apart from writing more than sixty books during his lifetime, Manilal also left behind a few unpublished manuscripts including a work on Swamiji, *Swami Vivekanandani Americani Mulakato*, which he wrote before his death in 1898.⁸ This gives us an idea of the reverence with which he looked upon

Swamiji.

In Porbandar Swamiji also met Pandit Shankar Pandurang (1840-1894) of Konkan, Maharashtra who was the administrator of the State at that time. Swamiji stayed as Panditji's guest at his *Bhojeswar bunglow* for about four months or so, probably attracted by his large library and his loving and scholarly nature. Swamiji also finished his reading of Panini's 'Mahabhasya' and also learnt French at the instance of Panditji. Though not a Gujarati literary figure, Panditji was not only a Sanskrit scholar of great eminence, but was proficient in nine languages and was earlier an Oriental Translator of Bombay State. His numerous Sanskrit works were appreciated by great scholars all over the world including Prof. Max Muller. Swamiji also helped him in editing the standard edition of the *Atharva Veda*, during his stay at Porbandar. It is likely that during his long stay at Porbandar Swamiji might have been introduced to many Gujarati scholars by Shankar Pandurang.

The next great literary figure from Gujarat whom Swamiji met was the formidable Jain scholar Virchand Raghavji Gandhi (b.1864, d.1901), who participated in the Parliament of Religions, Chicago, in 1893. Though he was a brilliant exponent of Jaina Philosophy, he was well versed in the



Pandit Shankar Pandurang with Vedic pandits

different systems of Indian philosophy and a fervent lover and propagator of Indian culture. Born at Mahuva near Bhavnagar (Gujarat) in 1864, he mastered about fourteen



Virchand Gandhi

languages, which included Gujarati, Hindi, English, Bengali, Sanskrit and French and at the age of 21 became the first honorary secretary of the Jain association of India. He remained in U.S.A for some more time after the Parliament of Religions was over, and again visited U.S.A twice in 1896 and 1899, delivering altogether some 600 lectures on Jainism over there.⁹ Virchand Gandhi passed away in 1901 at a very young age of only thirty-seven, but not before rendering yeoman service to his motherland by his short but extremely active life, preaching the glory of India's religious and cultural heritage. Swamiji's message of universal harmony at the Parliament of Religions was charged with irresistible spiritual power. Virchand Gandhi must have definitely caught a little of Swamiji's fire which inspired him to undertake his noble mission. Swamiji too was impressed by his wonderful personality and wrote to Haridas V.Desai in November 1894:

"..here is Virchand Gandhi, the Jain, whom you well knew in Bombay. This man never takes anything but pure vegetables even in this terribly cold climate, and tooth and nail tries to defend his countrymen and religion. The people of this country like him very well,"¹⁰

Swamiji's appearance on the world scenario in 1893 and the historic reception accorded to him on his return from the west in 1897 were the first signs of the

awakening of India from the stupor into which it had fallen as a result of several hundred years of foreign domination. As a result, the whole country, irrespective of the language or region, saw in him a common leader who represented their ideals and aspirations. Apart from English newspapers like *The Statesman* and *The Indian Mirror*, and the periodicals started by Swamiji, *The Brahmavadin* (in 1895), *The Prabuddha Bharata* (in 1896) and *Udbodhan* (in 1899), several vernacular newspapers and periodicals all over the country began to publish with great enthusiasm, reports and extracts from Swamiji's speeches, writings, and his letters in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The leading Gujarati daily *Bombay Samachar*, which was started as a weekly in 1822, published several such reports, the most notable among them being a report of the welcome accorded to Swamiji at Calcutta, in its February 20, 1897 issue and a biographical sketch which appeared after his mahasamadhi in its July 8, 1902 issue.

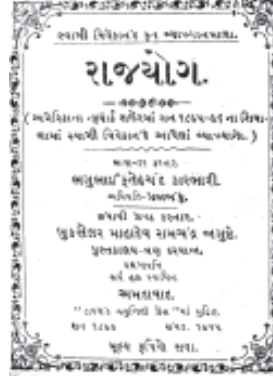
As we have already stated earlier, some books on Sri Ramakrishna and his message in Bengali were published in the early 1880's but it was only in the late 1890's that the first books on Swamiji began to appear in English. On February 23, 1896 Swamiji's first book, *Karma Yoga*, was published in New York followed by *Raja Yoga* in July 1896 from London. Some more books and several small pamphlets were also published. However, it is only after the first journal of the Ramakrishna Movement in any vernacular, *Udbodhan*, was brought out in January 1899 that serious attempts were made to translate and publish books in Bengali on a regular basis. Gujarati literature was privileged to rank among the earliest vernacular literatures to be exposed

to Ramakrishna-Vivekananda thought due to the pioneering efforts of several literary personalities.

Although printing and publishing of books in Gujarati script began in 1812 due to the efforts of some Parsi gentlemen, it is only in 1870 that the first attempt was made in Ahmedabad by Mahadev Ramachandra Jagushte to publish useful and standard religious literature in Gujarati. It was from this press that the first Gujarati translation of Swamiji's *Raja Yoga* was published in 1899 followed by two other books, *Karma Yoga* and *Hinduism*. Bhagubhai F. Karbhari, the founder-editor of the famous Gujarati weekly journal *Prajabandhu*, which was started in March 1898, translated all these three books. That he was inspired by Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature, especially journals like *The Brahmavadin* and *The Prabuddha Bharata*, is evident from the contents of his first editorial of *Prajabandhu*.¹¹ These three books were sent for review to *The Prabuddha Bharata*, which published the following note in its July 1901 issue:

"We have received with thanks a copy each of Swami Vivekananda's *Karma Yoga*, *Raja Yoga* and *Hinduism* translated into Gujarati by Mr. Bhagu F. Karbhari, the founder and first editor of the *Prajabandhu* newspaper. Every able man of our country who undertakes the translation of Swamiji's works into his vernacular renders a service to his people, - since a very small portion of our countrymen are yet able to read them in the original."

Bhagubhai also published *Swami Vivekanandana Patro*, a translation of seventy inspiring letters of Swamiji and *Swami Shishya Samvada* in 1912 and 1920 respectively. In 1912, Mohanlal Dalichand Desai, the great Jain scholar also translated a large collection of Swamiji's letters. This



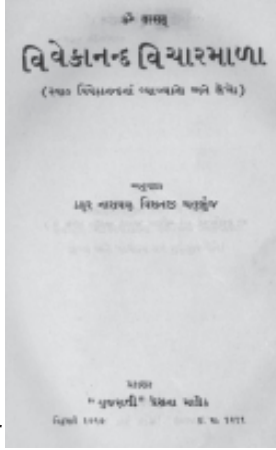
Title page of *Raja Yoga* published in 1899

highly subsidized book was printed by *Sastu Sahitya Karya-laya*, the famous publication house of religious literature, which brought out low priced editions of many important books.

The most significant contribution to Gujarati literature, however, was the publication of *Vivekananda Vicharmala* in six volumes by Ichcharam Suryaram Desai's *Gujarati Printing Press*, Bombay during 1911-1916. A great scholar and translator of religious classics, Ichcharam Desai (b.1853, d.1912) wrote or translated more than 40 books during his lifetime. He also founded the weekly journal *Gujarati* for propagating Gujarati literature. The translation of *Vivekananda Vicharmala* was done by Narayan Vissanji Thakkur (b.1880, d.1938), popularly known as the 'Sir Walter Scott' of Gujarati literature. A famous novelist and a poet, Narayan V. Thakkur wrote his first novel in 1911 at the age of 26. He knew English, Sanskrit, Bengali, Persian, Urdu and Marathi in addition to Gujarati. During his lifetime he wrote or translated more than a hundred books, the most famous among them being, *Hindu Gaurav Granthamala*, *Bharatni Lokkatha* (10 volumes) and the monumental work *Vivekananda Vicharmala*. The translation of Swamiji's works evidently inspired him. He developed vairagya, as a result of which, in later life, he embraced Sannyasa and lived in Puri. In his introduction to the second volume of *Vivekananda Vicharmala*, Narayan Thakkur mentions the

fact that after the publication of the first volume of *Vivekananda Vicharmala* in 1911, some attempts were made to publish *Vivekananda Lekhamalika* from Allahabad in Hindi and *Swami Vivekananda yanche Samagra Grantha* by Mumbai Karnataka Press in Marathi. But he emphatically adds that this Gujarati translation is the first serious attempt in any vernacular to publish *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. It also interesting to note that *Gujarati Printing Press* conceived of this project before the first *Mayavati Memorial Edition* (1907) of *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (in four volumes with Sister Nivedita's foreword) came to their notice. Narayan Thakkur painstakingly collected materials from the various books, journals and pamphlets which were available at that time, translated them into excellent Gujarati prose and published the first volume, when the first *Mayavati Memorial Edition* in English came to his hands. He made use of them to publish the subsequent volumes.

Another important milestone in the history of Gujarati literature was the publication of the first subsidized edition of *the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* in thirteen volumes from 1914 onwards by *Sastu Sahitya Vardhak Karyalaya*, Ahmedabad. Being a commercial publication house, the books published by *Gujarati Printing Press* were out of reach of the common man. Bhikshu



Title page of
Vivekananda Vicharmala
Vol-1 (1911)



Cover page of *Vividh Granthamala* Vol-1
(1914)

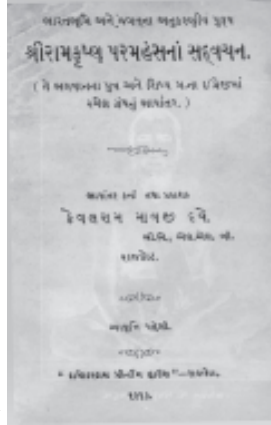
Akhandananda founded the *Sastu Sahitya Vardhak Karyalaya* in 1907 to publish books of great utility at a very nominal price. They launched a scheme to provide books on an annual subscription basis under the name of *Vividh Granthamala* and thereby sold more than 5000 sets of books even before they were actually published. It was under this scheme that Swamiji's Complete Works, including his exhaustive biography, was first published in 13 volumes from 1914 to 1930.

The first volume of *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, in Bengali was published in 1902 followed by the second, third, fourth and fifth volumes in 1904, 1908, 1910 and 1932 respectively. To meet the growing demand of the readers Vol.I of *The Gospel*, translated by the author Mahendranath Gupta 'M' himself, was published in 1907 by the *Brahmavadin Office*, Madras. Its second edition, revised by M. himself, was brought out by Ramakrishna Math, Madras in 1911.

Kevalram Mavji Dave of Rajkot, a close friend of Mahatma Gandhi, was so much fascinated by this book that he went all the way to Calcutta in February 1911 to seek M.'s permission to translate the Gospel into Gujarati. Through his letter dated 14 May 1911, which is partly published in the foreword to the Gujarati translation, M. gave him permission to do so subject to certain conditions. One of the conditions was that

whatever profit that accrued from the sale of the book should be sent to Belur Math for Sri Thakur Seva at Advaita Ashrama, Varanasi. The Gujarati translation, *Sri Ramakrishna Paramhamsana Sadvachana*, was finally published by Kevalram Dave in 1913 at Damodardas Printing House, Rajkot.

The first three volumes of *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* in Bengali were translated into Gujarati and published in two parts by *Sastu Sahitya Vardhak Karyalaya* in 1918 and 1919 respectively. More than 4000 copies of this highly subsidized publication were sold out within a year so a second combined edition was published in 1924. The Gujarati translation was done by Narmadashankar B.Pandya who became a sannyasin in later life assuming the name Swami Sevananda. Subsequently, the translation of Vol.4 of *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* was published in two parts under the title *Sri Ramakrishna Vartalapa* in the year 1947. Again during the years 1949-51, Sri Ramakrishna Seva Samiti, Ahmedabad, founded in 1918 by Dahyabhai Ramachandra Mehta and his friend Nanabhai Desai, published fresh Gujarati translations of the first three volumes of *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* made by Swami Chaitanyananda of Nasik. Swami Chaitanyananda subsequently translated the remaining two volumes. Finally, in 1965 Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot published a standard edition of *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* in two volumes using Swami Chaitanyananda's translations. The text, which was the Gujarati translation of all the five volumes of the original Bengali version,



Cover page of *Sri Ramakrishna Paramhamsana Sadvachana* (1913)

was also rearranged chronologically.

Dahyabhai Ramachandra Mehta, (b,1870, d.1952) wrote the first exhaustive biography of Sri Ramakrishna in Gujarati titled *Ramakrishna Paramahamsa* in 1918. 3000 copies of this demy sized book of more than 750 pages were distributed free of cost by the author within a few months. He also asked several prominent literary figures like Chaganlal Pandya to review this book as a result of which Sri Ramakrishna's life and message became well known in Gujarat's literary circles. An author of several books on religion Dahyabhai has written or translated at least fifteen books connected with Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement like *Swami Vivekananda-Jivan Charitra*, *Raja Yoga* (in 2 parts), *Sri Ramakrishna Vachanamrita*, biographies of householder disciples of Sri Ramakrishna like *Nag Mahashaya* and *Ramachandra Dutta*. An initiated devotee of the Ramakrishna Math, his obituary, which appeared in the March 1953 (*Phalgun 1360*) issue of the *Udbodhan*, acknowledged his invaluable contribution towards the propagation of Ramakrishna Vivekananda ideology among the Gujarati reading public.

Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot, started in 1927, brought out for the first time, the Gujarati translation of Swami Saradananda's monumental work *Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga* in 1930. All the five volumes were translated by Harishankar N. Pandya, a disciple of Swami Shivananda, and published by the Ashrama in 1930, 1931, 1942, 1945, and 1961 respectively. Since 1927 the Ashrama has published

more than 150 titles on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature and Vedanta, which is a major contribution to Gujarati literature. *Sri Ramakrishnadeva-Jivan Charitra* published by the Ashrama in January 1964 was adjudged the best book to published in Gujarati during the year 1964 by the State Government.

The Publication of books in Gujarati by the Ashrama and its extensive propagation among the masses received an impetus during the period 1960-67 which included the Birth Centenary Year of Swami Vivekananda. A massive project of publication and distribution of *Swami Vivekananda Granthamala Series - I, II and III* was undertaken. *Granthamala-I* consisted of 12 volumes of about 500 pages each. The first two volumes were the lives of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Volume 3 to 12 constituted the Gujarati translation of the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, *Swami Vivekananda Granthamala*. *Granthamala-II* consisted of small books like *Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Raja Yoga, Jnana Yoga*, etc. *Granthamala-III* consisted of 12 small booklets like the short lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Ma, Swamiji, etc. The *Granthamala Series I, II, III* was made available at a highly subsidised price of Rs. 60/- for distribution among more than fifteen thousand *gram panchayats* of Gujarat, thanks to the grant of Rs. 50,000 received from the Central Govt. and Rs. 25,000 from the State Govt. Thus Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature reached all the corners of Gujarat.

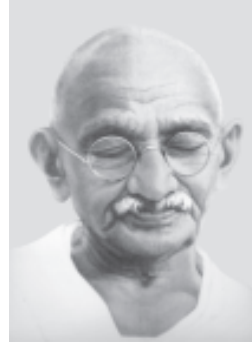


Swami Vivekananda Granthamala-I

The arrival of Mahatma Gandhi on the national scene after a victorious struggle in Africa marked the beginning of a new phase not only in the socio-political field but also in the field of Gujarati literature.

Though not essentially a man of literature, Gandhiji inspired a whole generation of literary personalities not only in Gujarat but also throughout the country. His works in Gujarati consists chiefly of his articles in *Navajivana*, his innumerable letters and some other books like *Atmakatha*. Speaking about his literary style K.M.Munshi says:

'Mahatma Gandhi has given to Gujarati prose a new sense of power. With him, beauty



Mahatma Gandhi

of expression has to be a humble housemaid to Truth. And the reader invariably falls under the spell of 'the bare, sheer, penetrating power of every line,' of his, which, under the stress of some great emotion, attains biblical strength.'

¹²

The tremendous influence exerted by the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna on Mahatma Gandhi is beautifully expressed by Vincent Sheean in his book *Lead Kindly Light*. He writes:

"He [Gandhi] was always ready to acknowledge his masters, who were indeed, each in his field, more highly developed than he. there were in sanctity of personal life a large number of Hindu exemplars; and, above all, in sheer mysticism, that is, in the quality Indians call 'spirituality', the Mahatma very

humbly recognized himself to be a follower. But certainly his reverence for Ramakrishna was strong and unfeigned, and a more extreme mystical phenomenon than Ramakrishna has yet to be observed on earth. Gandhi's reserve on the subject of religious 'realizations' was seldom broken - never with respect to himself - but he wrote a foreword to the ..Life of Ramakrishna in 1924 which is worth quoting: "The story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa's life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face. No one can read the story of his life without being convinced that God alone is real and all else is an illusion. Ramakrishna was a living embodiment of godliness. His sayings are not those of a mere learned man but they are pages from the Book of Life. They are revelations of his own experiences. They therefore leave on the reader an impression which he cannot resist." ¹³

By introducing the method of objective verification in the field of religious experience, Shri Ramakrishna laid the foundation of what may be termed as a *Scientific Religion* to suit the modern scientific spirit. His experiments in religion might have provided the inspiration for Gandhiji's *Experiments With Truth*. Sri Ramakrishna's ideal of *Sarva Dharma Samanvaya* found an echo in Gandhiji's 'equal respect for all religions'.

While paying his homage to the revered memory of Swamiji in 1921, at Belur Math Gandhiji spoke the following words:

"I have gone through his [Swamiji's] works very thoroughly and after having gone through them, the love I had for my country became a thousandfold." ¹⁴

God to Shri Ramakrishna was no abstraction or a hypothesis but a reality to be seen, felt, spoken to, consulted with every moment. Gandhiji said:

"I am surer of His existence than of the

fact that you and I are sitting in this room. I may live without air and water, but not without Him."

No important decision of his was taken without consulting the "inner voice". ¹⁵

Shri Ramakrishna once told Keshab Sen:

"If God makes a man great, then everybody knows about him even though he lives in a forest. When flower bloom in the deep woods, the bees find them, but the flies do not." ¹⁶

In in a similar language, Gandhiji said:

"Life is its own expression. The rose does not need to write a book or deliver a sermon on the scent it sheds all around, nor on the beauty, which everyone who has eyes can see. Spiritual life is infinitely superior to the beautiful and fragrant rose... The moment there is a spiritual expression in life, the surrounding will readily respond." ¹⁷

Elaborating his Master's idea regarding the power of concentrated thought, Shri Ramakrishna's disciple Swami Vivekananda said:

"The highest men are calm, silent and unknown. They are the men who really know the power of thought, they are sure that even if they go into a cave and close the door and simply think five true thoughts and then pass away, these five thoughts of theirs will live throughout eternity." ¹⁸

Gandhiji wrote in a similar language:

"There are two kinds of thought, idle and active. There may be myriads of the former. They do not count. But one pure, active thought proceeding from the depth and endowed with all the undivided intensity of one's being, becomes dynamic." ¹⁹

Pyarelal, in his biography of Mahatma Gandhi shows how Gandhiji internalised some of Swamiji's revolutionary ideas in the field of religion. He writes:

"In the brief span of barely a decade, he[Swamiji] accomplished work enough for

a life-time. He gave India the expression 'Daridranarayana' - God incarnated as oppressed humanity. First adopted by Deshabandhu C. R. Das... it became the watch-word of India's non-violent struggle when Gandhiji inscribed it on his banner in his crusade for the resuscitation of India's seven hundred thousand villages." ²⁰

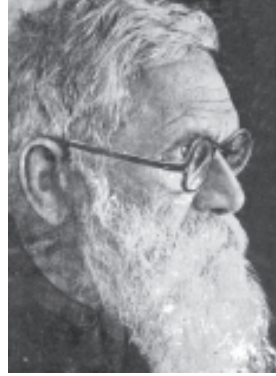
Pyarelal continues:

"Vivekananda's declaration about the futility of preaching religion to hungry stomachs, or his utterance: "He alone serves God who serves all other beings. There is no other God to seek." How identical with Gandhiji's: "I recognise no God except the God that is to be found in the hearts of the dumb millions. And I worship the God that is Truth or Truth which is God, through the service of these millions."

"Instances of parallelism in their thought and expression can be multiplied. Gandhiji never wearied of proclaiming that his life was made up of little things. Swami Vivekananda confided to his English disciple, Sister Nivedita: "As I grow older, I find that I look more and more for greatness in little things." ²¹

We thus get an idea of the great influence exerted by Ramakrishna-Vivekananda thought on Gandhiji's life and his writings.

A close associate of Mahatma Gandhi, the great prose-writer, personal essayist of the highest order, beautiful travelogue writer, freedom fighter and above all an apostle of Indian culture, Dattatreya Balakrishna Kalelkar (b.1885, d.1981) was lovingly known as Kakasaheb Kalelkar in Gujarat and all over India. Though a Maharashtrian by birth, Kakasaheb was, in the words of Gandhiji, a *Savai Gujarati*. His mastery over the Gujarati language was unique and he is considered to be among the ten great prose-writers of Gujarati. He



Kakasaheb Kalelkar

taught in Shantiniketan, and after Mahatma Gandhi established the Gujarat Vidyapitha, he was appointed its Vice Chancellor in 1928. He became the President of the Gujarat Sahitya Parishad in 1960. In his collected works, *Kalelkar Granthavali*, published during his birth centenary, we find many articles and quotations on Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and the activities of the Ramakrishna Mission. In his *Atmaorittanta* he writes how he was inspired by the works of Swamiji in his early youth. ²² In the section *Charitra Sankirtan* he gives a biographical sketch of Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji. Elsewhere in the same section he glorifies the contribution of Master Mahashaya, the recorder of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. ²³ In his travelogue *Himalayano Pravasa* he describes in graphic detail his pilgrimage to Belur Math, Kankhal Sevashrama and many other places associated with Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. ²⁴ In many other works he echoes Swamiji's thoughts. For instance, speaking about Indian history he says:

"The ideal of Indian people is religion. Hence, in spite of diversity of creeds, there is a unity of the ultimate ideal of the individual and society. The direction of attaining this ideal is the same. This provides a unity to the view-point and conduct of the whole people." ²⁵

In another place he attributes the greatness and permanence of Hindu Culture to:

"the ascetic who has given up all worldly contact; who has converted the fruit over-

hanging his hut into a beggars bowl; who has coloured his cloth with red earth; who has offered to the world the cup of immortality and religion with the words, 'Not with wealth, not with progeny, but with self-abnegation alone can immortality be attained'" ²⁶

In a lecture delivered in 1963, which was printed in a souvenir published by Shri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot during Swamiji's Centenary, Kakasaheb spoke in glowing terms about the tremendous impact Swamiji's powerful personality and his message created on the national leaders of those days like Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, Tagore, Tilak and others.

Another close associate of Gandhi at one time Kanhaiyalal M. Munshi (b.1887, d.1971) dominated the Gujarati literary scene for many years. He wrote novels, short stories, plays, biographies, essays, articles, literary criticisms and history of literature. He has left behind 56 books in Gujarati and 36 in English. During his long literary career he was associated with many periodicals and institutions. He started a quarterly journal *Bhargava Traimasika* in 1912 and *Gujarata*, a leading literary journal in 1922. After establishing the *Gurjara Sabha* in 1913 and the *Gujarata Sahitya Samsada* in 1922 he almost single handedly managed the affairs of *Gujarati Sahitya Parishad* from 1937 to 1955. The last few years of his life were devoted to the consolidation and strengthening of the *Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan*, which he had founded in 1938. During a life span of 84 years he left a stamp of his genius on varied fields such as religion, philosophy, literature, arts, culture, journalism, education, and administration. This was definitely a result of the tremendous influence



K. M. Munshi

exerted by Swami Vivekananda on his life which Munshi has himself acknowledged in the following glowing words:

"Few can understand, unless they belong to my age-group, the great influence which Swami Vivekananda had on us,

in the first decade of the 20th century, when we were at College. We were then subject not only to political but also to cultural and religious humiliation... But it was only when we began to read the books of Swami Vivekananda that our eyes were opened. Reading these books, we derived considerable knowledge of Hindu culture and religion from the modern point of view. .. Indian Renaissance was not merely an artistic and literary movement like the European Renaissance. Nor was it only a religious movement. It was essentially cultural and spiritual... it was Swami Vivekananda who brought to us, the younger generations, the message of the renaissance. ...We knew about *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* but we found in them fresh inspiration only when we read Swamiji's summaries in his works. Yoga was a word of mystic implication, but it was only when we read his *Raja Yoga* and *Karma Yoga* that we realized what it was. ...it was Prof. Aurobindo Ghosh (at the Baroda College) who suggested to me to read Yoga Sutras and the works of Swami Vivekananda. .. Swami Vivekananda took us back to the fundamental values of our culture and brought God into our life. We offer him our tribute not merely for what he has done, but because it provides us with an opportunity to mobilize our own spiritual aspirations by dwelling on him, his works and his ideas. This way we light our little

lamp from the flaming torch that he was.”²⁷

Swami Ananda (b.1887, d.1976) was another famous literary figure who was inspired by Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology. Educated in Bombay, he had a good command over Gujarati, Hindi, Marathi, Urdu, Sanskrit and English. His writings include several original works as well as translations and adaptations of a large number of books on religion, science and social issues. His close contact with Mahatma Gandhi also enriched his mind and was reflected in his view of life, which showed his devotion to Truth, simplicity and spiritual pursuits. In his famous work *Dhartini Arati* (p.411, 439) he writes in great detail about his study of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature;

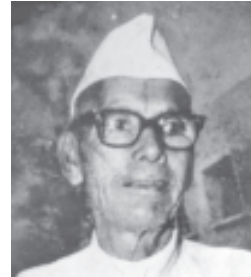


Swami Ananda

his stay at Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Kankhal; the dedicated service of the monks there that convinced him about the uniqueness of Ramakrishna Mission monasticism, inspired by which he had tried to build up his own life. In his collection of essays, *Ananta Kala* (p.114) he speaks in glowing terms about those dedicated monks of the Ramakrishna Mission, in whose holy company he had the privilege to live for some years, and from whom he had learnt the true meaning of *daridranarayana seva* and *sarvadharmasamanvaya*. In his travelogue *Uttarapathni Yatra*, (p.198) he writes about Sri Ramakrishna's wonderful renunciation. In two of his works *Samaj chintan* and *Himalayna Tirthasthanano* he highlights in several places, Swamiji's influence on national leaders right from Aurobindo to Radhakrishnan. He also writes about Sis-

ter Nivedita, with whom he had regular interactions, and her contribution to the nation.

Ramnarayan N. Pathak (b.1905, d.1988) was another close associate of Gandhiji and Vinoba Bhave and a well known novelist who wrote mainly on nationalistic themes. His invaluable contribution to Gujarati literature is his translation of *the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (in 10 volumes) published by Shri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot during 1962-63 as stated earlier. In a letter of condolence dated April 30, 1990



Ramnarayan Pathak

Swami Bhuteshananda, the twelfth president of the Ramakrishna Order writes:

“I found in Ramnarayanbhai not only a gifted writer, whose simple and clear style of translation made the *SwamiVivekananda*

Granthamala popular among the Gujarati readers in all parts of Gujarat and elsewhere, but I found in him a sincere follower of the ideal of Gandhiji, which made him a lover of all sections of people without any prejudice for their social barriers and difference of view-points.”²⁸

Among the contemporary literary personalities there are quite a few who have been deeply influenced by Ramakrishna-Vivekananda thought. Ramanlal Soni (b.1908) is one of the most prolific writers of childrens books in Gujarati. He has published an amazing number of titles - short stories, poems, plays, rhymes, biographies including those on Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Sister Nivedita. He has also translated a large number of Bengali books written by

Tagore, Sharatchandra Chattopadhyaya, Iswarchandra Vidyasagar and others into Gujarati. There is a touch of refinement and a stamp of higher values of life in his writings. In a letter dated 7 June 1905 and an article on Sri Ramakrishna written by the 97 year old Ramanlal, both of which have been published in the July 2005 issue of *Shri Ramakrishna Jyot* (Gujarati monthly), we get a glimpse of the great veneration, love and devotion he has for Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji.

Natwarlal Pandya (b.1920), a highly creative poet and winner of the Rashtriya Sahitya Academy Award (1976), better known by his pen name *Ushmas*, has com-

posed a poetical masterpiece *Ramakrishna Darshandohana*, which is a beautiful rendering, in 818 verses, of the important teachings of Sri Ramakrishna.

There are several other literary personalities who have been directly or indirectly influenced by Ramakrishna-Vivekananda thought. They have tried in their own humble way to produce good classical literature of the type we have discussed earlier, and have thus enriched the field of Gujarati literature by their contribution.

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